

JANE AUSTEN AND THE THEATRE

PAULA JAYNE BYRNE

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Abstract: Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*

Jane Austen has long been associated with a deep distrust of the theatre. Her supposed anti-theatricalism in *Mansfield Park* has been taken to exemplify her own antagonism towards the drama. However, the evidence of the letters, and the numerous theatrical allusions in her works, suggest a thriving and long-standing interest in the drama. To my knowledge, no-one has undertaken a systematic investigation of this. Nor has anyone considered the effect on her writing of the plays that she knew intimately, either those plays she saw performed when she was a child at Steventon rectory, or those she saw at the professional theatre. My thesis sets out to explore an area of Austen's work that is of indubitable importance, yet which has been generally neglected.

In part 1 of the thesis, I argue that the private theatricals which took place during Austen's childhood at Steventon were an important creative influence, introducing her to some of the most popular plays of the period (e.g. the comedies of Fielding, Sheridan, Cowley and Centlivre). In this atmosphere of theatrical activity, Austen experimented with writing her own plays and with theatrical devices of farce, burlesque and satire. Chapter 2 explores Austen's interest in the professional theatre, a passion that lasted for most of her life. I provide a comprehensive account of the comedies, farces and tragedies that she saw at the public theatres. My research focuses upon the Bath, Southampton and London theatres where Austen saw, and commented on, many of the most popular plays and actors of the period.

Having proved a thriving and comprehensive interest in the drama, the rest of the thesis demonstrates its effect on Austen's narrative art. Firstly, in Chapter 3, I argue that Austen's juvenilia provides evidence of her fascination with the comic theatre. The burlesque plays of Henry Fielding and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, for example, were an important influence on her work. In Chapter 4, I consider Austen's transitional development from the drama to the novel. I believe that the novels of Fielding and Inchbald (both of them playwrights who became novelists) were an important influence on Austen's style and enabled her to find a medium of writing which incorporated quasi-theatrical techniques with third person narration. I also explore the bifurcation of the sentimental movement from the drama to the novel.

Austen's own cross-fertilization of sentimental techniques absorbed from the drama and the novel is given fullest expression in her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*. The influence of Sheridan can be firmly traced in *Sense and Sensibility*. I argue that Austen's principle of pairings is derived from Sheridan and her satirical treatment of the traditional comic motif of the antagonism between old and young is strikingly similar to his radical treatment of this in *The Rivals*.

The final section is concerned with the novel that is most obviously connected with the eighteenth century theatre, *Mansfield Park*. This demonstrates how Austen's interest in the drama is fully realized throughout the whole of the novel, not solely the *Lovers' Vows* saga of the first volume. For example, the Sotherton episode is read alongside Colman's and Garrick's play, *The Clandestine Marriage*. I also explore the character of Tom Bertram and his relationship to the comic theatre, and demonstrate a whole network of allusions to plays of the time, which Austen expects her readers to recognise. For example the comedy that Tom wishes to stage at Mansfield, Colman's *The Heir at Law*, provides key insights into his character.

This dissertation does not exceed the regulation length. It is the result of my own research and has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification. A brief section of Chapter 6 has previously been published in *Women's Writing*, 5 (1998).

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Abbreviations

<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	(1811)	S&S
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	(1813)	P&P
<i>Mansfield Park</i>	(1814)	MP
<i>Emma</i>	(1816--but publ Dec 1815)	E
<i>Northanger Abbey</i>	(1818)	NA
<i>Persuasion</i>	(1818)	P

All quotations of the above are from *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 5 vols (3rd edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932-4).

Minor Works **MW**

Quotations are from *The Works of Jane Austen Vol 6 Minor Works*, ed. R. W. Chapman, rev. B. C Southam (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

Jane Austen's Letters, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (3rd edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) is cited throughout as *Letters*.

A love of the theatre is so general . . .

Mansfield Park

Introduction

Jane Austen was steeped in theatre. There is ample evidence in her letters of her long-standing interest in the drama. She wrote short plays in her juvenilia. She even turned her favourite novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*, into a five act comedy.

Yet since Lionel Trilling's famous essay on the insincerity of role-playing, there has been a very strong tendency in Austen criticism to assume that the debacle of *Lovers' Vows* reflects the author's own distaste for theatre.¹ There are in fact a range of judgements upon 'home representation' in *Mansfield Park*, not all of them hostile. It is an error to assume that Fanny Price's astringent judgement on the theatricals is Austen's own; after all, Fanny is by no means a disinterested commentator. Unlike her demure creation, who has never seen the inside of a theatre and is manifestly afraid of 'exposing herself' on stage, Austen herself was fascinated by professional theatre, visited it frequently, and, far from condemning private theatricals, participated in them herself, probably when she was a child and certainly when she was a young woman in her thirties. Strikingly, only two years before writing *Mansfield Park*, she took part in a private performance of perhaps the most popular contemporary play of the Georgian period, Sheridan's *School for Scandal*.

Austen's debt to the drama is far more comprehensive than has hitherto been assumed. Her interest in the theatre, both amateur and professional, and her lifelong preoccupation with the drama undoubtedly influenced her writing. Yet critics of Austen have barely touched upon this rich source, save in occasional nods to her extraordinary gift for theatrical-like dialogue and the creation of sustained comic characterization.

¹Lionel Trilling, 'Mansfield Park', in *The Opposing Self* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1955), pp. 206-230.

In 1821, four years after her death, Richard Whately compared Austen's art to Shakespeare's:

describing without scruple private conversations and uncommunicated feelings...saying as little as possible in her own person and giving a dramatic air to the narrative by introducing frequent conversations; which she conducts with a regard to character hardly exceeded even by Shakespeare himself.²

Some time after Whately's review, Austen was dubbed 'the Prose Shakespeare'.³ In 1859, George Henry Lewes compared her to Shakespeare in his famous article, 'The Novels of Jane Austen':

But instead of *description*, the common and easy resource of novelists, she has the rare and difficult art of *dramatic presentation*: instead of telling us what her characters are, and what they feel, she presents the people, and they reveal themselves. In this she has never perhaps been surpassed, not even by Shakespeare himself.⁴

Yet another nineteenth-century writer, the novelist Thomas Lister, pinpointed her genius to revelation of character through dramatic dialogue: 'She possessed the rare and difficult art of making her readers intimately acquainted with the character of all whom she describes...She scarcely does more than make them act and talk, and we know them directly'.⁵

Austen herself had a strong sense of the importance of dramatic dialogue in her novels, for she was an adherent of the practice of reading aloud as an intrinsic part of family entertainment.⁶ Novels which had been read by the Austen women over the

² [Richard Whately] 'Modern Novels: *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*', *Quarterly Review*, 24 (1821), 352-376 (p. 362).

³In reviews of 1847 and 1851, George Henry Lewes cites an 1843 essay by Thomas Macaulay for the phrase. Macaulay does not use the precise wording, but does describe Austen as second only to Shakespeare. See *Jane Austen; The Critical Heritage*, ed. B. C. Southam, 2 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968-1987), I, pp. 122-125, and p. 130.

⁴George Lewes, 'The Novels of Jane Austen', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 86 (1859), 99-113 [p. 105].

⁵[Thomas Lister] *Edinburgh Review*, 53 (1830), 444-463 [p. 449].

⁶John Brewer has shown how the journal of Anna Larpent finds her reading plays and novels to the

years were ranked by how well they stood up to repeated group readings. Thus Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* remained a firm favourite (*Letters*, p. 116), whereas Sarah Burney's *Clarentine* failed the test: 'We are reading Clarentine, & are surprised to find how foolish it is. I remember liking it much less on a 2nd reading than at the 1st & it does not bear a 3rd at all' (*Letters*, p. 120).

Furthermore, Austen had strict notions about how characters in her own novels should be dramatically rendered. Her chagrin to find her mother reading one of her characters in *Pride and Prejudice* badly is expressed in the following letter: '[O]ur 2nd evening's reading to Miss Benn had not pleased me so well, but I beleive [sic] something must be attributed to my Mother's too rapid way of getting on--& tho' she perfectly understands the Characters herself, she cannot speak as they ought' (*Letters*, p. 203).

Perhaps Austen's frustration stems from her own aptitude for dramatic renditions. Her brother Henry noted as much in his biographical notice: 'She read aloud with very great taste and effect. Her own works, probably, were never heard to so much advantage as from her own mouth; for she partook largely in all the best gifts of the comic muse' (Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice', *NA*, p. 7). Her niece, Caroline Austen, records in her *Memoir*: 'She was considered to read aloud remarkably well. I did not often hear her but *once* I knew her take up a volume of *Evelina* and read a few pages of *Mr. Smith and the Brangtons* and I thought it was like a play'.⁷

In *Mansfield Park*, it is typically tongue-in-cheek that she should endow her villain Henry Crawford with her own gift for reading aloud. Edmund's commendation of Henry's reading of Shakespeare, 'To read him well aloud, is no every-day talent'

family circle of children and servants. At a country-house party in the summer of 1780 Anna Larpent and other guests read aloud extracts from Marivaux's *Marianne* and Hugh Kelly's *The School for Wives*. See John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 196. The kind of novel and play-reading circles exemplified by the Larpents were fictionalized by Maria Edgeworth in *Belinda*.

⁷ Caroline Austen, *My Aunt Jane Austen: A Memoir* (Winchester: Sarsen Press, 1991), p. 10.

(*MP*, p. 338), is seconded by Lady Bertram's approving comment, which curiously prefigures Caroline Austen's: 'It was really like being at a play' (*MP*, p. 338).

Austen's nineteenth-century critics define her genius in terms of her dramatic powers. Her great achievement is in character study. Like Shakespeare, her fools are as distinctive and perfectly discriminated as are her heroes, and they reveal themselves, unhampered by an obtrusive authorial presence, through dramatic presentation and conversations, or by a kind of 'dramatic ventriloquism' (Lewes, p. 105).

More recent critics have also noted the importance of dramatic dialogue and conversations in Austen's novels. Norman Page, in his study *The Language of Jane Austen*, has suggested that Austen's interest in dramatic literature has left its mark on the novels in her use of dialogue and characterization. *Pride and Prejudice* is regarded as the most dramatic novel mainly because of its reliance on direct speech: 'the opening chapter ... is one of the most celebrated of many examples of what are virtually ready-made dramatic scripts'.⁸

It is perhaps unsurprising that *Pride and Prejudice* immediately surfaces as the most theatrical of Austen's novels for there are many great set-pieces that successfully adapt to dramatic presentation. In his Austen bibliography, David Gilson has noted that of all dramatic adaptations of the novels (that is dramatic adaptations of which a published text exists) *Pride and Prejudice* tops the bill with at least twenty-eight examples. 'Mr Collins's proposes', 'Lady Catherine is annoyed with Elizabeth Bennet' and 'Elizabeth refuses' give some idea of the scenes from the novel which are most successfully rendered in dramatic form.⁹

D. W. Harding in his essay, 'Character and Caricature in Jane Austen', also places *Pride and Prejudice* apart from the rest of the novels on account of its rich dramatic texture.¹⁰ He emphasises the importance of dialogue suggesting that *Pride*

⁸See Norman Page, *The Language of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), p. 115.

⁹See David Gilson, *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 407-414.

¹⁰*Critical Essays on Jane Austen*, ed. B.C. Southam (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), pp.

and Prejudice is 'often crisply theatrical in quality'. Many encounters, he adds, could well be stage dialogue, such as the one between Elizabeth Bennet and her parents following Mr Collins's proposal of marriage:

'Come here, child,' cried her father, as she appeared. 'I have sent for you on an affair of importance. I understand that Mr. Collins has made you an offer of marriage. Is it true?' Elizabeth replied that it was. 'Very well--and this offer of marriage you have refused?'

'I have, Sir.'

'Very well. We now come to the point. Your mother insists upon your accepting it.--Is not it so, Mrs. Bennet?'

'Yes, or I will never see her again.'

'An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*' (*P&P*, pp. 111-112).

As Harding notes, 'Laughter from the auditorium would carry the scene forward' (p. 96-7).

But it is not only in dialogue where the influence of the theatre can be felt. Nor is the use of direct speech the criterion of dramatic quality. In Harding's example of 'stage dialogue' between Elizabeth and her father there is also a timeless theatrical tradition that is being mocked. Comedy, since the age of Plautus, has depended upon the dramatization of a conflict between the old and the young, and in particular the grievance against parents and children, especially when it comes to marriage. Readers in Austen's time would have been attuned to the conventional comic motif of parental conflict, a motif that Sheridan exploited to great effect in his play, *The Rivals*. Austen knew Sheridan's plays well and he was an important influence on her comic style, yet this has gone hitherto unnoticed. In Chapters 3 and 5, I suggest the pervasive influence of Sheridan on Austen's juvenilia and her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*.

Although critics have acknowledged the importance of dialogue, there has been little sense of the specific kinds of dramatic influence to which Austen was exposed.

Part of the problem has been that she has always been firmly placed in the context of the novel tradition. Though her earliest nineteenth-century critics nodded to the drama, they were more concerned with the defence of the novel, and to this end the influence of the drama on Austen's art was rather taken for granted. This has remained the case throughout Austen criticism. In the last twenty years Austen has re-surfaced as a writer of conservative values, and feminist politics.¹¹ Nevertheless, in the sphere of women's writing, she is still seen very much in the tradition of the novelist, even though writers like Elizabeth Inchbald and Hannah Cowley were successful female playwrights with whose works she was familiar. Research into fiction and conduct book literature of Austen's era has not been matched by an equal interest in the contemporary theatre.

Recent scholars who have explored Austen's literary influences pay only cursory attention to the drama. Frank W. Bradbrook in his study, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* notes that C. L. Thomson suggested that Austen 'derived her first impulses to authorship from reading plays' and that Mary Lascelles has also noted the rhythms of stage comedy in some of the dialogues of *Pride and Prejudice*.¹² But Bradbrook himself devotes disappointingly little space to the importance of the dramatic tradition, whilst Lascelles only briefly notes that Austen 'learnt from the dramatists the turn of phrase proper to comedy'.¹³ Neither explores this influence in any detail.

¹¹Marilyn Butler placed Austen in the tradition of the anti-Jacobin writers whose politics were unstintingly conservative. Her pioneering *Jane Austen and The War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), was the first to reveal Austen in the context of her cultural and political history, and show her involvement in the war of political ideas. More recently, Claudia L. Johnson in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), has argued persuasively that Austen's novels arose out of a thriving tradition of subtly politicized women's writing of the 1790s. However, Butler and Johnson overlook the influence of the drama in their desire to emphasize the importance of the novel tradition.

¹² See Frank W. Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 48, and 'Style and Judgement in Jane Austen's Novels', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 4 (1951), 515-537 (pp. 521-23). See also, C. Linklater Thomson, *Jane Austen: A Survey* (London: Horace Marshall, 1929).

¹³Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 107.

Undoubtedly, there is a critical reluctance to unearth Austen's relationship with the theatre. Trilling's critique of *Mansfield Park* has left a long legacy of suspicion, which has been replaced in recent years by Marilyn Butler's influential study *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*. Butler's view of Austen's political conservatism, her supposed anti-Jacobin contempt for Kotzebue's plays and her apparent evangelical distrust of theatre, has, alongside Trilling, been responsible for a considerable amount of misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Austen's interest in the theatre. A more detailed discussion of this will follow in Chapter 6.

Dubious speculation about Austen renouncing her early love for the theatre in her middle age also conflicts with the evidence of the letters.¹⁴ Austen's letters are a neglected historical source for her interest in and knowledge of the late Georgian theatre. Similarly, the journals of Fanny Knight and the dramatic verses of James Austen shed precious light on Austen's immersion in private theatricals. The underplaying of Austen's time spent in London, Bath and Southampton and the fact that the dramatists of the period have been so little regarded perhaps account for the lack of interest in Austen and the contemporary theatre.

Part One of the thesis thus demonstrates Austen's extensive knowledge of the drama. The wide-ranging craze for private theatricals which swept England in the latter part of the eighteenth century was an important influence on Austen's formative years at Steventon--the subject of Chapter 1. Within this atmosphere of theatrical fervour, Austen composed short plays amongst her juvenile writing, and wrote burlesques in the style of Fielding and Sheridan. The Steventon theatricals in Austen's childhood are well-known, but Austen's continuing interest in private theatricals is less well-known. Fanny Knight's unpublished journals provide an additional insight into

¹⁴See Michael Williams, *Jane Austen: Six Novels and their Methods* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1986), p. 81.

Austen's interest in private theatricals of the kind that are immortalized in *Mansfield Park*.

Austen's interest in the professional theatre is the focus of Chapter Two. Austen was not merely a visitor to the London patent theatres, but was also a champion of the illegitimate, minor theatres of the town. Amongst her visits to Drury Lane and Covent Garden she watched with relish the performances of the renowned actor Edmund Kean and the celebrated comic actress, Dora Jordan. She was also an ardent admirer of the actor Robert Elliston, the star of the Bath Theatre Royal, whose fortunes she followed when he became a star of the London stage.

The importance of Samuel Richardson to Austen has been expounded ever since Henry Austen's biographical notice claimed him as Austen's favourite novelist. One dimension of his influence is his use of strong theatrical elements in the novel. A less frequently remarked upon influence is that of the dramatist-turned-novelist Henry Fielding. In chapters 3 and 4 the influence of Fielding and Richardson is explored, with special reference to Austen's juvenilia and her transition from epistolary to third person narration. Similarly, whilst most previous critical attention to Austen and the drama has focused upon the *Lovers' Vows* saga of *Mansfield Park*, Chapter 6 explores other aspects of theatricality in *Mansfield Park*. This novel is much more deeply involved with the theatre than has hitherto been assumed.

Because work has already been undertaken on the importance of dialogue in the novels,¹⁵ I have concentrated upon other areas of theatricality. Thus, although I have chosen to omit a full analysis of *Pride and Prejudice*, mainly because it remains the most obviously 'dramatic' in terms of its reliance on direct speech, I do make reference to it from time to time. Austen's use of entrances and exits, comic misunderstandings, ironic reversals, tableaux, and the 'set-piece' are among some of the stage traditions analysed throughout Part Two.

¹⁵As well as those cited above, see Howard Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1962).

Throughout the Austen canon, not merely in *Pride and Prejudice*, chapters or episodes framed as set-pieces are often analogous in shape and length to a scene in a play. Thus any reference made in the thesis to the 'set-piece' or the 'scene' is meant in a specific and deliberate sense of narrative built around units of action. It may be helpful to consider the comments of Henry James, another nineteenth-century novelist much interested in scenic construction--and indeed in the writing of plays. His novel *The Awkward Age* was entirely organized on scenic principles. In his author's preface James pictured each of his episodes as a lamp:

Each of my 'lamps' would be the light of a single 'social occasion' in the history and intercourse of the characters concerned, and would bring out to the full the latent colour of the scene in question and cause it to illustrate, to the last drop, its bearing on my theme. I revelled in this notion of the occasion as a thing by itself, really and completely a scenic thing.¹⁶

The building bricks of Austen's novels are also dramatic scenes, which is certainly one reason why her novels adapt so well to theatrical representation. George Lewes compared Austen to Shakespeare, and he also compared her 'economy of art' to that of Sophocles and Moliere. In an essay on Jane Austen's comedy, Rachel Trickett describes Austen as a true comic writer of the eighteenth century. Trickett laments the nineteenth-century refashioning of Austen's art, which, beginning with Walter Scott's review of *Emma* in 1815, neglected her comic genius in favour of her naturalism. Trickett sets Austen in her true context by suggesting that we should 'think of her in company with Goldsmith and Sheridan' rather than George Eliot and the later traditions of the novel.¹⁷

¹⁶See Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, ed. R. P Blackmur (New York & London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. 110.

¹⁷Trickett, 'Jane Austen's comedy and the Nineteenth Century', *Critical Essays on Jane Austen*, pp.162-181, p. 180.

Part One

JANE AUSTEN AND THE THEATRE: PRIVATE AND PUBLIC

Chapter One

PRIVATE THEATRICALS

Steventon

The rage for private theatricals which obsessed genteel British society from the 1770s until the first part of the nineteenth century is now immortalized in *Mansfield Park*.

Austen was not the only novelist to nod towards the continuing popularity of private theatricals as a form of domestic entertainment as late as 1814. In the same year that *Mansfield Park* was published, two of Jane Austen's favourite writers, Maria Edgeworth and Fanny Burney, also included accounts of private theatricals in their novels.¹ When Austen's niece Anna decided to include a play sequence in her own novel, her aunt sagely advised against it: 'The last Chapter does not please us quite so well, we do not thoroughly like the *Play*; perhaps from having had too much of Plays in that way lately' (*Letters*, p. 269).

Sybil Rosenfeld, in her study of private theatres and theatricals in England and Wales from 1700 to 1820, dates the beginning of the acting craze from Garrick's retirement in 1776.² The itch to act was widespread, ranging from fashionable

¹The 'Incognito' in Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814) gives a dignified performance of Lady Townley in a private performance of Cibber's *The Provok'd Husband* (1728). See Fanny Burney, *The Wanderer, or Female Difficulties*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 70-96. Burney had intended to include this account of private theatricals in *Camilla* (1796), but had instead included a section about unregulated acting. See Fanny Burney, *Camilla, or A Picture of Youth*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 257-265. In the British library, there is a manuscript account of an episode for *Camilla* which involved a private performance of *The Provok'd Husband*. Burney eventually rejected this episode and wove it into the narrative of *The Wanderer*: see appendix to the Oxford edition, pp. 901-5. In *Patronage* (1814), the virtuous Caroline Percy refuses to take part in the amateur performance of *Zara*. See Maria Edgeworth, *Patronage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 346-369.

²The most important single source of the period is Charles Burney's volume of playbills and clippings of private theatricals in the British Library, which suggests the ubiquity of the trend. See Sybil Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis: Some Private Theatres and Theatricals in England and Wales, 1700-1820* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1978), p. 11.

aristocratic circles to the professional middle classes and minor gentry, from children's and apprentices's theatricals to military and naval amateur dramatics.³

From the 1770s, temporary arrangements for acting mushroomed all over England, in places ranging from converted domestic outbuildings to large rooms in private dwellings. Some aristocrats went so far as to have purpose-built theatres erected in the grounds of family mansions, such as the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim. At the more extreme end of the theatrical craze, members of the gentrified classes and the aristocracy built their own scaled-down imitations of the London play-houses. The most famous was that erected at Wargrave in Berkshire in the late 1770s by the spendthrift Earl of Barrymore at a reputed cost of sixty thousand pounds. Barrymore's elaborate private theatre was modelled on Vanbrugh's King's Theatre in the Haymarket. It supposedly seated seven hundred.⁴

Private theatricals performed by the fashionable elite drew much public interest, and had profound implications for the public theatres.⁵ Famously, a motion in the House of Commons was deferred on account of the fact that too many parliamentarians were in attendance at a private performance of Arthur Murphy's *The Way to Keep Him* (1760) which took place at Richmond house in 1787.⁶ As Gillian Russell has noted, such private performances often drew more attention than the

³See *Temples of Thespis*, p. 11.

⁴ Barrymore had employed Cox, the carpenter to Covent Garden, to erect his theatre, which was described by the *London Chronicle* as a model of Vanbrugh's King's Theatre in the Haymarket. Its seating capacity was more likely 400. See Anthony Pasquin, *The Life of the late Earl of Barrymore Including a History of the Wargrave Theatricals* (London, 1793), p. 15-16, *Temples of Thespis*, pp. 16-33 [24]. See also Evelyn Howe, 'Amateur Theatre In Georgian England', *History Today* 20 (1970), 695-703, and George Holbert Tucker, *Jane Austen: The Woman* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 87-88.

⁵See Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793-1815*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 122-130. Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 235-236.

⁶See Gillian Russell, *Theatres of War*, pp. 122-128.

patent theatres. As early as 1777, Richard Brinsley Sheridan showed concern for 'the number of private plays at Gentlemen's seats' (*Theatres of War*, p. 122).

Hostility between theatre professionals and aristocratic amateurs came to a head in 1802 when the Pic Nic Society was formed, a group of aristocratic amateurs, who, much to the chagrin of the patent theatres, established their own theatre in the concert rooms of Tottenham Street.⁷ Charges of profanity, debauchery and corruption were duly hurled at the amateurs: 'the open embraces of the Actor are exchanged without difficulty for the private of the Seducer' (*Temples of Thespis*, p. 12).

Rosenfeld observes that in immoral eighteenth-century society the picture of innocence corrupted seemed a contradiction in terms: 'for all this smoke there was singularly little fire' (*Temples of Thespis*, p. 13). However, scandal erupted in the early 1760s when Lady Susan Fox-Strangways eloped with the Irish actor William O' Brien after private theatricals at Holland House. Though O'Brien's marriage to Lady Susan ensured that he became the gentleman that he had played so successfully on stage, the couple were ostracized by polite society and banished to America.⁸ What distinguished this scandal from others, such as the Honorable Thomas Twisleton's elopement with a Miss Wattell after they had acted together at the Freemason's Hall, was Lady Susan's initiation of the relationship. As Tillyard notes: 'Instead of a gentleman picking up an actress, as was the accepted custom in the theatres, a woman of fashion was seducing an actor' (*Aristocrats*, p. 185).

From an early age Austen showed her own mocking awareness of what the newspapers dubbed 'the Theatrical Ton'.⁹ In a sketch 'The Three Sisters', dating from around 1792, Austen portrays a greedy, self-seeking young woman who demands a

⁷See Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, p. 12, and *Theatres of War*, p. 125.

⁸See Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox 1740-1832* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), pp. 183-188. See also Chapter 6.

⁹Newspapers and Journals printed accounts of *bon ton* theatricals and caricaturists lampooned the craze amongst the fashionable elite. See *Theatres of War*, p. 125.

purpose-built private theatre as part of her marriage settlement (*MW*, p. 65). In *Mansfield Park*, Austen ironizes the public interest in aristocratic private theatricals: 'To be so near happiness, so near fame, so near the long paragraph in praise of the private theatricals at Ecclesford, the seat of the Right Hon. Lord Ravenshaw, in Cornwall, which would of course have immortalized the whole party for at least a twelvemonth!' (*MP*, p. 121). She carefully distinguishes between the fashionable elitist theatricals of the aristocracy, of the kind that were mercilessly lampooned by the newspapers, and those of the squirearchy.¹⁰ Whilst Mr Yates boasts that Lord Ravenshaw's private theatre has been built on a grand and lavish scale, in keeping with aristocratic pretensions, Edmund Bertram shows his contempt for what he considers to be the latest fad of the nobility:

'Let us do nothing by halves. If we are to act, let it be in a theatre completely fitted up with pit, box and gallery, and let us have a play entire from beginning to end; so as it be a German play, no matter what, with a good tricking, shifting after-piece, and a figure dance, and a hornpipe, and a song between the acts. If we do not out do Ecclesford, we do nothing' (*MP*, p. 124).

Edmund's mocking comments are directed to his elder brother. But despite Tom Bertram's efforts to professionalize his theatre, the Mansfield theatricals eventually fall back on the measure of converting a large room of the family home into a temporary theatre for their production of *Lovers' Vows*. In reality, this was far more typical of the arrangements made by the professional classes and the minor gentry who had also adopted the craze for private theatricals. Thus, the private theatricals of Fanny Burney's uncle at Barbone Lodge near Worcester took place in a room seating not more than twenty people, and was provided with a curtained-off stage at one end, while the musicians who played for the performance took up their positions in an outside passage.¹¹

¹⁰See Sybil Rosenfeld, 'Jane Austen and Private Theatricals', *Essays and Studies*, 15 (1962), 40-51.

¹¹In 1770, Fanny Burney had objected to performing in the 'shocking' farce *Miss in her Teens*, but in 1771, was happy to perform scenes from Colley Cibber's *The Careless Husband* in front of a small audience, see Fanny Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. Lars E. Troide 3

In 1782, when the craze for private theatricals first reached Steventon rectory, Jane Austen was seven. The dining parlour was probably used as a makeshift theatre for the earlier productions.¹² The first play known to have been acted at Steventon was *Matilda*, a tragedy in five acts by Dr Thomas Francklin, a friend of Dr Samuel Johnson and a fashionable London preacher. The part of the tragic heroine Matilda was later popularized by Mrs Siddons on the London stage. At Steventon the tragedy was acted some time during 1782, and James Austen wrote a prologue and an epilogue for the performance.¹³ Edward Austen spoke the prologue and Tom Fowle, one of Mr Austen's Steventon pupils who later became engaged to Cassandra Austen, the epilogue.¹⁴

Francklin's dreary play, set at the time of the Norman Conquest, dramatizes a feud between two brothers. Morcar, Earl of Mercia, and his brother Edwin are both in love with Matilda, the daughter of a Norman lord. Morcar separates the lovers, sets up plans to murder his brother and tries, unsuccessfully, to win over and marry Matilda. The tragedy takes an unexpected twist with the unlikely reformation of the Morcar, who is persuaded to repent of his crimes, reunite the lovers and be reconciled to his brother.

Matilda is a surprising choice for the satirically-minded Austen family. Its long, rambling speeches and dramatic clichés of language and situation make it

vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), I. pp. 116, 161-63, 171, and II, pp. 238-248.

¹²Family tradition records that the plays were presented either in the dining room, or the outside barn. See *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, by William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, revised and enlarged by Deirdre Le Faye (London: The British Library, 1989, repr. 1993), p. 43. See also George Holbert Tucker, 'Amateur Theatricals at Steventon', in the *Jane Austen Handbook with a Dictionary of Jane Austen's Life and Works*, ed. J David Grey (London: Athlone, 1986), pp. 1-5.

¹³The collected verses of James Austen including his prologues and epilogues were copied out by James-Edward Austen-Leigh, ca. 1834-40. Two copies exist, with some slight differences in content and wording, in the Austen-Leigh archive at the Hampshire Record Office and at Chawton House.

¹⁴Hampshire Record Office, Austen-Leigh Archive, James Austen's verses, copied by James Edward Austen-Leigh, 23 M93/60/3/2.

precisely the kind of historical tragedy that Sheridan burlesques in *The Critic*.

However, the tragedy has only six speaking parts, and was perhaps manageable in the dining room.¹⁵ Jane Austen was surely only a spectator at this very first Steventon performance, but it is probable that she disliked the play, given the disparaging comment she makes in her juvenilia about another historical drama, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*: 'a tragedy and therefore not worth reading' (*MW*, p. 140). Perhaps the manager/actor James felt the same, for after *Matilda* there were no more tragedies performed at Steventon.

Matilda was followed two years later by a far more ambitious project. In 1784, when Jane was nine, Sheridan's *The Rivals* was acted at Steventon. Once again James Austen wrote the prologue and an epilogue for the play performed in July 'by some young Ladies & Gentlemen at Steventon'.¹⁶ Henry spoke the prologue and the actor playing Bob Acres (possibly James himself) the epilogue.

James's prologue suggests that there was an audience at the Steventon production of *The Rivals*.¹⁷ The play has a cast of twelve, and it seems that the Austens had no qualms about inviting neighbours and friends to take part in their productions. The Cooper cousins, and the Digweed family probably made up the numbers (*A Family Record*, p. 46). Biographers speculate that Jane Austen may have

¹⁵Strikingly, the phrase 'Love and Friendship' (the title of one of Austen's early burlesques) appears in one of Siward's speeches:

Alas! it rives my soul
To see the tender bonds of amity
Thus torn asunder by the very means
I fondly thought for ever would unite them;
And the fair structure, which my hopes had raised,
Of love and friendship, in a moment shrunk
From its weak base, and buried all in ruin'

See Elizabeth Inchbald, *The Modern Theatre*, 10 vols (London, 1811), VI, p. 43.

¹⁶HRO, James Austen's verses, 23M93/60/3/2

¹⁷The prologue begins with James's imploring indulgence from his friends', and ends with a similar plea to the 'blooming fair' members of the audience.

taken the minor role of Lydia Languish's pert maid, Lucy.¹⁸ Whether or not she did act in this production, James' prologue makes an impassioned appeal to the children in the audience, so we may safely assume that she was at least a spectator.

James's prologue is unequivocal in its praise of satirical, rather than sentimental, comedy:

The Loftier members of the tragic Lyre;
 Court the soft pleasures that from pity flow;
 Seek joy in tears and luxury in woe.
 'Tis our's, less noble, but less pleasing task,
 To draw from Folly's features fashion's mask;
 To paint the scene where wit and sense unite
 To yield at once instruction and delight (HRO, 23M93/60/3/2).

Jane Austen was undoubtedly influenced by her Thespian brothers, and it is therefore unsurprising that one of their favourite comic writers was to have a major impact on her own writing. Whilst Sheridan's influence is discernible in Austen's earliest works, his presence can be felt most strongly in her mature works, which, unlike the juvenilia, also set out to instruct and to delight and sought to combine 'wit and sense'. In particular, the influence of *The Rivals* can be most keenly felt in Austen's own satire on sentimentalism: her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*. It is all the more bewildering that this aspect of her comic genius has been so sorely neglected.

It was shortly after the performance of *The Rivals* that Cassandra and Jane were sent off once again to boarding school in Reading. The eccentric headmistress of the school was a Mrs La Tournelle née Sarah Hackitt, who, much to the amusement of her pupils, could not speak a word of French. She was notorious for having a cork leg, for meticulously dressing in the exactly the same clothes every day, and for her obsession with every aspect of the theatre. A later fellow pupil of the school recorded fond memories of their headmistress: 'She could not speak a word of French, but whenever she had an opportunity of holding forth, she spoke of plays and play-acting,

¹⁸Claire Tomalin speculates that Jane Austen performed the part of Lucy: see *Jane Austen : A Life* (London: Viking, 1997), p. 40.

and green-room anecdotes, and the private lives of actors.¹⁹ Plays were also performed as an integral part of the girls' education. Austen's interest in the drama was fostered at this school and she later recalled her schooldays with memories of fun and laughter, reminding her sister of a schoolgirl expression: 'I could die of laughter... as they used to say at school' (*Letters*, p. 5).

When the girls returned home from school for good in 1786, they were greeted by the prospect of a Christmas visit from a real French-speaking person, their exotic cousin the French countess, Eliza de Feuillide. In 1783, the arrival of the sophisticated Lefroys at Ashe, the neighbouring rectory, had already broadened the cultural horizons of the Steventon area. But the 1787 theatricals at Steventon were made most memorable by the presence of Eliza who had taken part in theatrical activities since she was a child and had also acted in private theatricals staged by her aristocratic French friends. In a letter to Philadelphia Walter (also a cousin of Jane Austen) Eliza regales her cousin with tales of private theatricals: 'I have promised to spend the Carnival, which in France is the gayest Season of the year, in a very agreeable Society who have erected an elegant theatre for the purposes of acting Plays amongst ourselves, & who intend having Balls at least twice a week.'²⁰

Family Tradition records that the Steventon barn was used on occasions as a temporary theatre, but probably not until the Christmas theatricals of 1787 when Eliza was a guest at the rectory (*A Family Record*, p. 63-64). In a letter written in September of that year, Philadelphia Walter wrote: 'My uncle's barn is fitting up quite like a theatre & all the young folks are to take their part.'²¹

¹⁹See *A Family Record*, p. 48 and Tomalin, *A Life*, p. 42.

²⁰HRO, Austen-Leigh Archive, Eliza de Feuillide's Letters 1790s-1830s, 23M93/M1, Letter 21, from Eliza de Feuillide to Philadelphia Walter, 17th Jan, 1786, on Microfiche. Letters are sequentially numbered and subsequent references will be numbered and dated.

²¹R. A. Austen-Leigh, *Austen Papers, 1704-1856* (London: Spottiswoode, 1942), p. 126.

The main sources of information regarding the 1787-88 theatricals come from the letters of Eliza de Feuillide and Philadelphia Walter. During September 1787, Eliza had asked her cousin to join her for the Tunbridge Wells summer season, and had requested that the comedies *Which is the Man?* by Hannah Cowley, and *Bon Ton, or High Life Above Stairs* by Garrick, be presented at the local theatre. Much to Eliza's delight, the house was full on both occasions (*A Family Record*, p. 57). These two modern comedies were clearly great favourites with Eliza. *Bon Ton* was an amusing satire on fashionable French manners, and *Which is the Man?* had a fascinating young widow in the leading role of Lady Bell Bloomer. Eliza clearly longed for an opportunity to perform these plays at Steventon. Later, Philadelphia Walter informed her brother in a letter that these plays were to be given at Steventon that Christmas: 'They go at Xmas to Steventon & mean to act a play Which is the Man? and Bon Ton' (*A Family Record*, p. 58).

Eliza had already made plans with the Austen family for the Christmas festivities. James was home from his foreign travels and keen to begin organizing theatricals on a grander scale than before, egged on by Eliza. Both she and the Austen family wished Philadelphia to be part of the theatrical ensemble, but, like Fanny Price, the meek and timid Phila resolutely declined the offer: 'I should like to be a spectator, but am sure I should not have courage to act a part, nor do I wish to attain it' (*A Family Record*, p. 58). Eliza urged Phila, on behalf of the Austens, to take one of the 'two unengaged parts' that were waiting to be filled:

You know we have long projected acting this Christmas at Hampshire & this scheme would go on a vast deal better would you lend your assistance...& on finding there were two unengaged parts I immediately thought of you, & am particularly commissioned by My Aunt Austen & her whole family to make the earliest application possible, & assure you how very happy you will make them as well as myself if you could be prevailed on to undertake these parts & give us all your company.²²

²²HRO, Letter 26, November 16, 1787.

In the same letter, Eliza assures her cousin that the acting parts set aside for her are 'neither long nor difficult', and reminds her that the acting party are well-equipped: 'Do not let your dress neither disturb you, as I think I can manage it so that the *Green Room* should provide you with what is necessary for acting.' At the close of the letter she tries another means to persuade her shy cousin: 'You cannot possibly resist so many pleasures, especially when I tell you your old friend James is returned from France & is to be of the acting party' (HRO, Letter 26, November 16, 1787).

Eliza was clearly used to getting her own way. But Philadelphia's firm resolve not to act clearly surprised both Eliza and the Austen family:

I received your letter yesterday my dear friend & need not tell you how much I am concerned at your not being able to comply with a request which in all probability I shall never have it in my power to make again...I will only allow myself to take notice of the strong reluctance you express to what you call *appearing in Publick*. I assure you our performance is to be by no means a publick one, since only a selected party of friends will be present (HRO, Letter 27, November 28, 1787).

According to Eliza, Philadelphia's visit to Steventon is dependent on her compliance with joining the acting party: 'You wish to know the exact time which we should be *satisfied with*, & therefore I proceed to acquaint you that a fortnight from new Years Day *would do*, provided however you could bring yourself to act, for my Aunt Austen declares "she has not room for any *idle young people*"' (HRO, Letter 27, November 28th, 1787).

Despite Eliza's repeated assurances that the parts were very short, Philadelphia resisted her cousin's efforts and stayed away. Eliza appears to have attributed this to Mrs Walter's interference: 'Shall I be candid & tell you the thought which has struck me on this occasion?--The insuperable objection to my proposal is, some scruples of your mother's about your acting. If this is the case I can only say it is [a] pity so groundless a prejudice should be harboured in so enlightened [& so] enlarged a mind' (HRO, Letter 27, November 28th, 1787). Perhaps Mrs Walter's fears may be attributed to the risqué nature of Garrick's farce *Bon Ton*, as it depicts a couple on the brink of adultery. Watching the farce at Tunbridge Wells Theatre was one thing, but

acting it out was quite another and Philadelphia and her mother had strict notions of propriety. But the Austens showed no such prejudice against private theatricals and *Bon Ton* was performed some time during this period, as there is a surviving epilogue written by James.²³

However, the first play that was presented at Steventon in 1787 was not Garrick's farce, but Susanna Centlivre's lively comedy, *The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret* (1714). As usual James wrote a prologue and an epilogue. *The Wonder* was an excellent choice for Eliza; she played the part of the spirited heroine, Violante, who risks her own marriage and reputation by choosing to protect her friend, Donna Isabella, from an arranged marriage to a man she despises. The play's theme is female emancipation. Women are 'enslaved' to 'the Tyrant Man', and whether they be fathers, husbands or brothers, they 'usurp authority, and expect a blind obedience from us, so that maids, wives, or widows, we are little better than slaves'.²⁴

The play's most striking feature is a saucy proposal of marriage from Isabella, though made by Violante in disguise, to a man she barely knows. Twenty-seven years later, Jane Austen would incorporate private theatricals into her latest novel, and the play, *Lovers' Vows*, would contain a daring proposal of marriage from a vivacious young woman. Marilyn Butler describes *The Wonder* as 'the only unequivocally feminist work we know Austen knew', arguing that this was the play that Austen covertly used in *Mansfield Park*, because her choice of *Lovers' Vows* with its plot feature 'the woman's proposal of marriage' mirrored that of *The Wonder*. However, Butler's startling contention that Austen disapproved of this 'outright challenge to the

²³Claire Tomalin observes: 'It seems that Eliza finally got her chance to play Miss Titupp, and to say the lines which reflected well on her own unsatisfactory marriage: "We must marry, you know, because other people of fashion marry; but I should think very meanly of myself, if, after I was married, I should feel the least concern about my husband,"' p. 56. See also *Bon Ton or High Life Above Stairs*, in *The Plays of David Garrick*, ed. Gerald M. Berkowitz, 4 vols (Garland: New York and London, 1981), II, p. 2.

²⁴*The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret*, in *The Plays of Susanna Centlivre*, ed. Richard C. Frushell, 3 Vols (Garland: New York and London, 1982), III, p. 8.

masculine prerogative' flies in the face of everything that Austen was exposed to at Steventon.²⁵

The Austens clearly had no objection whatsoever to the depiction in *Centlivre's* comedy of strong, powerful women who defend each other from male domination, jealousy and ignorance, claim their rights to choose their own husbands, and show themselves capable of loyalty and firm friendship. James's epilogue 'spoken by a lady in the character of Violante' leaves us in no doubt of the Austens' awareness that the play is a tart thrust in the battle-of-the-sexes debate:

In Barbarous times, e'er learnings sacred light
 Rose to disperse the shades of Gothic night
 And bade fair science wide her beams display,
 Creation's fairest part neglected lay.
 In vain the form where grace and ease combined.
 In vain the bright eye spoke th' enlightened mind,
 Vain the sweet smiles which secret love reveal,
 Vain every charm, for there were none to feel.
 From tender childhood trained to rough alarms,
 Choosing no music but the clang of arms;
 Enthusiasts only in the listed field,
 Our youth there knew to fight, but not to yield.
 Nor higher deemed of beauty's utmost power,
 Than the light play thing of their idle hour.
 Such was poor woman's lot--whilst tyrant men
 At once possessors of the sword and pen
 All female claim with stern pedantic pride
 To prudence, truth and secrecy denied,
 Covered their tryanny with specious words
 And called themselves creation's might lords--
 But thank our happier Stars, those times are o'er;
 And woman holds a second place no more.
 Now forced to quit their long held usurpation,
 These Men all wise, these 'Lords of the Creation'
 To our superior sway themselves submit,
 Slaves to our charms, and vassals to our wit;
 We can with ease their ev'ry sense beguile,
 And melt their Resolutions with a smile. (HRO, 23M93/60/3/2)

²⁵See Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. James Kinsley, with a new introduction by Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. xxi-xxv.

Jane Austen's most expressive battle-of-the-sexes debate, that between Anne Elliot and Captian Harville in *Persuasion*, curiously echoes James Austen's epilogue. Denied the 'exertion' of the battlefield and a 'profession', women have been forced to live quietly. James's remonstrance that 'Tyrant men, at once possessors of the sword and pen' is more gently reiterated in Anne Elliot's claim that 'Men have had every advantage of us in telling their story ... the pen has been in their hands' (*P*, p. 234).

There were two performances of *The Wonder* after Christmas. The evident success of the play was followed up in the new year by a production of Garrick's adaptation of *The Chances* (1754), for which James, once again, wrote a prologue. This play was to be Eliza's final performance for some time.

Once again James and Henry choose a racy comedy: originally written by Beaumont and Fletcher, the play had been altered by the Duke of Buckingham and in 1754 'new-dressed' by Garrick. Although Garrick had made a concerted effort to tone it down, the play was still considered to contain strong dialogue. So thought Mrs Inchbald in her *Remarks*, which prefaced her edition of the play: 'That Garrick, to the delicacy of improved taste, was compelled to sacrifice much of their libertine dialogue, may well be suspected, by the remainder which he spared.'²⁶

The Austen family did not share such compunction. Like *The Wonder*, Garrick's play depicts jealous lovers, secret marriages and confused identities. The two heroines, both confusingly called Constantia, are mistaken for one another. The first Constantia is mistaken for a prostitute, although she is in fact secretly married to the Duke of Naples. It is likely that feisty Eliza played the role of the low-born 'second Constantia', a role that was a favourite for the great comic actress Mrs Jordan.

With the close of the play, Eliza had flirted her last for the time being. The return of Mr Austen's pupils in the new year signified her imminent removal from Steventon. Both James and Henry Austen were 'fascinated' by the flirtatious Eliza,

²⁶ See *The British Theatre; or, A Collection of Plays...with Biographical and Critical Remarks by Mrs Inchbald* (London, 1808), VI.

according to James's son, who wrote the first memoir of Jane Austen. Most critics and biographers accept that a flirtation between Henry and Eliza was begun around this time and resulted in their marriage ten years later. Some critics have conjectured that the flirtation which the young Jane Austen witnessed between Henry and Eliza during rehearsals may have given her the idea for the flirtation between Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram in *Mansfield Park*.²⁷ That the young girl was acutely aware of the flirtation seems clear from one of her short tales, 'Henry and Eliza', where there are a series of elopements including one by Henry and Eliza who run off together leaving only a curt note: 'Madam, we are married and gone' (*MW*, p 36).

By all accounts Austen was an intelligent observer of the intrigues, emotions, and excitement of private theatricals; rehearsals, the reading over of scripts, and the casting of parts. James-Edward's *Memoir* claims that his aunt Jane 'was an early observer, and it may be reasonably supposed that some of the incidents and feelings which are so vividly painted in the *Mansfield Park* theatricals are due to her recollection of these entertainments.'²⁸

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen certainly devotes her creative energies to the rehearsal process rather than the performance. Furthermore the singular strength of the theatrical sequence lies in its depiction through the eyes of an envious observer. Marilyn Butler has suggested that Austen distilled some of her own 'outsider's' experience in writing the *Lovers' Vows* sequence: 'Detail from real life has plainly been absorbed in *Mansfield Park*, and the vantage-point of the young sister, jealous and excluded by the cast's intrigues, has re-emerged as the novel's distinctive mode.'²⁹

²⁷Q.D Leavis first suggested that the intimacy between Henry and Eliza resulting from the theatricals may have given her the idea for Henry's and Maria's flirtation: 'A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's writing', *Scrutiny*, 10 (1941-2), 114-42.

²⁸James-Edward Austen-Leigh, *Memoir of Jane Austen*, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 49.

²⁹See Butler's Introduction to the Oxford edition, p. xxiii.

However, there is no evidence to suggest that Jane Austen was excluded from the family theatricals. Even if her youth prevented her from taking part in the plays performed, she began, at this time, to write her own short playlets which were probably performed as afterpieces to the main play.

Henry Fielding's outrageous burlesque *The Tragedy of Tom Thumb* was 'acted to a small circle of select friends' on 22 March 1788, and this was followed some time later by 'a private Theatrical Exhibition'. Regrettably, James's prologue to the latter gives no indication of the play performed, though it imitates Jacques's 'seven ages of man' speech. The prologue also satirizes the hypocrisy of the sentimental age where 'to talk affecting, when we do not feel' is described as a form of 'acting' (HRO, 23M93/60/3/2). Deirdre Le Faye has suggested that the family perhaps wrote the entertainment themselves, and that it was probably at this time Austen wrote and performed her own burlesque playlet, *The Mystery (A Family Record)*, p. 63).

The last plays that were performed at Steventon in 1788-9 were *The Sultan, or a Peep into the Seraglio*, a farce by Isaac Bickerstaffe, and another farce by James Townley, *High Life Below Stairs*. Bickerstaffe's play was first performed in London in 1775, but had only been recently published in 1784. *The Sultan* has claim to be classed as a Women's Rights protest of a primitive order. Roxalana, an Englishwoman captured for the Sultan's seraglio, displaces the favourite Elmira, enchants the Sultan and secures the freedom of all his wives by her cheerful impudence and English superiority: 'You are the great Sultan; I am your slave, but I am also a free-born woman, prouder of all that than all the pomp and splendour eastern monarchs can bestow.'³⁰ The Austens once more showed their approval of plays which challenged male prerogative and authority. James's epilogue was yet another provocative declaration of female superiority over men, opening with the words, 'Lord help us!

³⁰*The Sultan, or a Peep into the Seraglio*, in *The Plays of Isaac Bickerstaff*, ed. Peter A. Tasch, 3 vols (New York and London: Garland, 1981), III, p. 13.

what strange foolish things are these men,/One good clever woman is fairly worth ten'
(HRO, 23M93/60/3/2).

Two of the most popular choices for private representation were Fielding's *Tom Thumb* and Townley's *High Life Below Stairs*. The Burneys acted *Tom Thumb* at Worcestershire in 1777, ten years before the Austens choose it for performance. The part of the diminutive hero Tom Thumb was often played by a child whose high-pitched voice added to the comic incongruity.³¹ Gillray's caricature of the Pic-Nic controversy depicted the amateurs performing *Tom Thumb*, with the Countess of Buckinghamshire in the role of Dollalolla.³²

James Townley's satire on plebeian manners, *High Life Below Stairs* (1759), depicts a household of lazy servants who behave as badly as their masters. They ape their masters' manners, assume their titles, drink their expensive wine, gamble and visit the theatre. Like Gay's *Beggar's Opera* and Foote's *Mayor of Garrett*, Townley's farce was a comedy which used low life to criticize high society. It was also an extremely popular choice for amateur theatricals. In part, this was because it was more prudent to poke fun at the lower orders in the safety of your own home than in the professional theatre house. In 1793, a performance of *High Life Below Stairs* in an Edinburgh public theatre incited a row between a group of highly offended footmen and their masters.³³ At the Haymarket Theatre in 1805, the comic actor William Dowton, whom Austen admired, revived the burlesque of *The Tailors*. Seven hundred tailors

³¹The private theatricals staged by the Burneys were *Tom Thumb* and *The Way to Keep Him*. Burney's niece took the part of Tom Thumb: 'The meaning & energy with which this sweet Child spoke, was really wonderful; we had all done our best in giving her instructions, & she had profitted with a facility & good sense that, at her age, I do believe to be unequalled'. See *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, II, p. 246. In the public theatres the part of Tom Thumb was often played by child actors, 'sometimes girls and sometimes as young as five, who would have spoken the heroic bombast with high-pitched voices', see Peter Lewis, *Fielding's Burlesque Drama: Its Place in the Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987), p. 119. Jane Austen would have been 13 when it was performed at Steventon.

³²See *Theatres of War*, pp. 127-30.

³³See *Theatres of War*, p. 124, and John Jackson, *The History of the Scottish Stage* (Edinburgh, 1793), pp. 377-378.

rioted and one of them flung a pair of scissors at Dowton from the one shilling gallery.³⁴

As Gillian Russell observes: 'the retreat from the public theatre to the "private" domain of the great house thus enabled the elite to savour fully the pleasure of aping the lower orders' (*Theatres of War*, p. 124). Lord Barrymore often hired professional actors to act the parts of ladies and gentlemen for his Wargrave productions, preferring the 'low' parts for himself. According to Anthony Pasquin's account of the Wargrave private theatricals, Barrymore performed very ably in such characters as Scrub, Hob, Bobadil, and Gregory Gubbins (Pasquin, p. 23).

George Colman the Younger's comedy about social transformations, *The Heir at Law*, was also a popular choice for the gentry to indulge themselves in stereotypical 'low' roles. Austen was to explore this contentious issue in *Mansfield Park* when the heir of Mansfield insists on staging *The Heir at Law* so that he can play the stage Irishman, Duberley.³⁵

Austen's playlet 'The Visit', dedicated to James, contains a quotation from *High Life Below Stairs*, which suggests that she composed it around the same time as the Austens' performance of Townley's farce, perhaps as a burlesque afterpiece.³⁶ Austen repeats Townley's phrase, 'The more free, the more welcome', in her play, which was no doubt a nod to the main play performed that day at Steventon. Austen's habit of repeating phrases from the plays performed or even considered for performance at Steventon remained with her for a long time. Though Hannah Cowley's play, *Which is the Man?* was considered for performance, it was finally rejected. Yet Austen quoted a phrase from the play in a letter dated 1810, twenty-nine years after it had been read

³⁴Oxberry's *Dramatic Biography and Histrionic Anecdotes, or the Green-Room Spy*, 6 vols (London, 1825-27), IV, pp. 256-7.

³⁵See Chapter 6.

³⁶See below for an account of Austen's burlesque of Townley's play.

over at Steventon.³⁷ *Which is the Man?* appears in Austen's *The Three Sisters*, written around 1788-90 (*MW*, p.65). In this story, a spoilt young woman demands to play the part of Lady Bell Bloomer, just as Eliza had wished for the 1787-8 Christmas theatricals. Again, a quotation from Cowley's popular comedy, *The Belles' Stratagem* appears in a letter of 1801: 'Mr Doricourt has travelled; he knows best' (*Letters*, p. 73).

Though Eliza was now in Paris and unable to partake in the Steventon theatricals, the Cooper cousins came to Steventon for Christmas 1788-9 and Jane Cooper filled the gap left by Eliza. In a letter to Philadelphia, Eliza had hastily, though wistfully, scribbled a last message: 'I suppose you have had pressing accounts from Steventon, & that they have informed you of their theatrical performances, *The Sultan & High Life below Stairs*, Miss Cooper performed the part of Roxelana [sic] & Henry the Sultan, I hear that Henry is taller than ever' (HRO, 23M93/M1, Letter 30, 11th Feb, 1789). No prologue or epilogue by James has survived for *High Life Below Stairs*, but the prologue he provides for Bickerstaffe's comedy is (confusingly) dated 1790 and states it was 'spoken by Miss Cooper as Roxalana'.³⁸

The Sultan and High Life Below Stairs ended the theatricals at Steventon, although there is a family tradition which claims that they were resumed in the late 1790s.³⁹ The main reason why actor-manager James abandoned private theatricals seems to be that he was turning his mind to other literary interests, namely the publication of a weekly magazine, *The Loiterer*. This periodical, like the theatricals at Steventon, was also to prove an important influence on Jane Austen's early writings.

³⁷In a letter to her nephew, James Edward, Austen asks him to thank his father for a present of pickled cucumbers and quotes Lady Bell Bloomer's phrase, 'tell him what you will'. See *Letters*, p. 323.

³⁸There is a discrepancy in the dating of James's epilogue for *The Sultan*, which he dates January 1790, though the evidence points to 1789. The Cooper cousins came to Steventon for the Christmas of 1788-9, and in February 1789 Eliza wrote to Philadelphia Walter with news of the performances of *The Sultan and High Life Below Stairs*.

³⁹ See below.

Reading and writing plays

Henry Austen tells us in his 'Biographical notice', published in the first edition of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, that Austen was acquainted with all the best authors at a very early age (*NA*, p. 7). The literary tastes of Catherine Morland have often been read as a parody of the author's own literary preferences.⁴⁰ Catherine likes to read 'poetry and plays, and things of that sort', and whilst 'in training for a heroine', she reads 'all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives' (*NA*, p. 15): dramatic works, those of Shakespeare especially, are prominent among these.

In *Mansfield Park*, the consummate actor Henry Crawford gives a rendering of *Henry VIII*, described by Fanny Price, a lover of Shakespeare, as 'truly dramatic' (*MP*, p. 337). Henry's memorable remark that Shakespeare is 'part of an Englishman's constitution' is compounded by Edmund's claim that 'we all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and describe with his descriptions' (*MP*, p. 388).

In her earliest works, Austen shows less reverence for the eighteenth-century's best loved dramatist. Shakespeare's history plays are used to great satirical effect in *The History of England*, a lampoon of Oliver Goldsmith's abridged *History of England*. Austen mercilessly parodied Goldsmith's arbitrary and indiscriminate merging of fact and fiction, in particular, the way it drew upon Shakespeare's history plays for authentic historical fact. In contrast to Goldsmith, Austen makes a deliberate and disingenuous point of referring her readers to Shakespeare's English history plays for 'factual' information about the lives of its monarchs.⁴¹ And, just as solemnly, she

⁴⁰See Margaret Anne Doody, 'Jane Austen's Reading', in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. J. David Grey (London: Athlone Press, 1986), p. 351.

⁴¹ In writing about the life of Henry the 4th, Austen parodies Goldsmith's boulderizing style: 'his son the Prince of Wales came and took away the crown; whereupon the King made a long speech, for which I must refer the Reader to Shakespear's Plays, & the Prince made a still longer' (*MW*, p. 139).

refers her readers to other popular historical plays; Nicholas Rowe's play *Jane Shore* and Sheridan's *The Critic* (*MW*, pp. 140, & 147). The tongue-in-cheek reference to Sheridan compounds the irony, as *The Critic* is itself a burlesque of historical tragedy, which firmly eschews any intention of historical authenticity.

From such allusions in the juvenilia it is clear that Austen was familiar with a wide range of plays, although these are probably only a fraction of the numerous plays that would have been read over as possible choices for the private theatricals, read aloud for family entertainment, and read for private enjoyment. Whilst it is impossible to calculate the number of plays that she read as a young girl, since there is no extant record of Mr Austen's ample library, Chapman has provided valuable indexes of literary allusions giving us some idea of her extensive reading, and includes plays in his lists.⁴²

Austen owned a set of William Hayley's *Poems and Plays*. Volumes one to five are inscribed *Jane Austen 1791*; volume six has a fuller inscription *Jane Austen, Steventon Sunday April the 3d 1791*.⁴³ Hayley was well known as the 'friend and biographer' of William Cowper, Austen's favourite poet, though he fancied himself as a successful playwright. Although most of Mr Austen's library was sold in 1801, in preparation for the family's removal to Bath, Jane Austen kept her much loved edition of Hayley's *Poems and Plays* and eventually bequeathed it to her favourite nephew,

⁴²After the family move to Bath in 1801, Mr Austen's library of 500 volumes was sold, although James Austen bought some of the books. Virtually nothing is known about the fate of the books, or what they included. Books referred to in Jane Austen's letters after 1800 seem by implication to derive from circulating libraries or the Chawton Reading Society (when staying in London in 1815 she borrowed books from her new publisher John Murray). Jane Austen subscribed to Fanny Burney's *Camilla* in 1796. One other subscription is recorded; in letter 53, 26 June 1808, she says 'I wish to have my name put down as a subscriber to Mr Jefferson's works'. See David Gilson, *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 433, and Chapman, in 'Jane Austen's Library', *Book-Collector's Quarterly*, 11 (1933), 28-32. Chapman writes of her library at Steventon: 'It is perhaps unlikely that Jane Austen ever again had so substantial a library as she seems to have relinquished at five-and-twenty' (p. 32).

⁴³ See Gilson's *Bibliography*, p. 438-9.

Edward.⁴⁴ In 1932, Hayley's works were inadvertently sold to a bookseller following the death of a family member, and volumes one to five were bought by the Austen scholar, R. W. Chapman.

Strikingly, Chapman observed that only volume five, containing Hayley's plays,⁴⁵ appeared to have been well read:

The volumes, which are in their original boards, were indeed opened throughout, but carelessly, so that as much as a quarter of an inch is sometimes left uncut in the upper inner margin. Now a book so imperfectly cut tears at once if it is opened wide; but as I turned the pages (and completed the cuts) I found no tears. On the other hand, the plays in Vol. V (Vol. VI also contains plays, but I have not seen it), bore obvious signs of having been well read. This may be not unconnected with the private theatricals at Steventon, of which the last records (*Life*, p.66) belong to 1790 (*Jane Austen's Library*, p. 32-33).

Chapman's conjecture that the plays may have been connected to the Steventon private theatricals is important. Hayley's first edition of the plays in 1784, dedicated to the Duchess of Devonshire, was titled *Plays for a Private Theatre*. The preface states that the plays were intended only for a private theatre, as Hayley had long tried, unsuccessfully, to get his plays produced at the London theatres.⁴⁶ He finally decided that printing them for a private theatre was a way of 'deriving all the fair emolument he could from his extensive dramatic labours, without submitting any one of his five plays to the arrogance of a manager'.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Edward signed his name and the date 1817 (the year of his aunt's death) on volume six. See Gilson's *Bibliography*, p. 438-439.

⁴⁵ Volume five also contains Hayley's most popular work, *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781). The poem, modelled after Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, advises young women to reject spleen and embrace sensibility.

⁴⁶Hayley's preface reads: 'As the following Plays were intended only for a private theatre, I have been tempted by that circumstance to introduce a kind of novelty into our language, by writing three comedies in rhyme, though the Comic Muse of our country has been long accustomed to express herself in prose, and her custom has the sanction of settled precepts, and successful example.' William Hayley, *Plays for a Private Theatre* (London, 1784).

⁴⁷*Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley, the Friend and Biographer of Cowper*, ed. John Johnson, 2 vols (London, 1823).

The edition in Jane Austen's possession was *Poems and Plays*, containing five plays in all; two tragedies, *Marcella*, and *Lord Russel*, and three comedies in verse, *The Happy Prescription, or the Lady Relieved from her Lovers; The Two Connoisseurs* and *The Mausoleum*.⁴⁸ In the author's preface, Hayley explains his reasons for writing his verse comedies and gives a brief description of the inspiration for the comedies:

The first of the three comedies...was founded on a real anecdote related to me by an intimate friend, who, concealing the names of the parties, mentioned their ludicrous adventure as a new and tempting subject for the Comic Muse.--The plan of the second arose in the mind of its author, from his remarking the various effects of Connoisseurship in different characters...The aim of the third comedy in this collection is to laugh at two distinct species of affectation, very prevalent in our age and country; the affectation of refined sentiment, and the affectation of pompous and pedantic expression.

Like the Sheridan plays beloved by the Austens, Hayley's comedies depict the folly of vanity and affectation in polite society. *The Happy Prescription*, supposedly based on a true story, is set in a country estate. The plot is woven around the machinations of Sir Nicholas, who, in a desperate attempt to produce an heir, invites two prospective lovers to his estate to woo his niece Selina. The attempt of one of the lovers, Sapphic, to seduce a young married woman whilst her husband is away in the Indies, incurs Sir Nicholas's contempt and incites him to threaten Sapphic with a ducking in the nearest horsepond. In *The Two Connoisseurs*, Hayley contrasts a gentleman of true taste and a genuine art connoisseur with a vulgar dilettante who recklessly squanders her husband's money on dusty nick-knacks, and whose ignorance and affectation is exposed when she is tricked into buying a fake Titian.

By far the best of the comedies is *The Mausoleum*, which dramatizes excessive sensibility and 'false refinement' in the characters of a beautiful young widow, Sophia Sentiment, and a pompous versifier, Mr Rumble, a caricature of Dr. Johnson. Lady

⁴⁸William Hayley, *Poems and Plays*, 6 vols (London, 1785).

Sophia Sentiment erects a mausoleum to house her husband's ashes and employs versifiers to compose tributes for the inscription on the monument. The comedy explores the self-destructive effects of sensibility on the mind of a lovely young widow, who refuses to overcome her grief because of a distorted conception of refined sentiment. The tell-tale sign of misplaced sensibility is Lady Sophia's obsession with black: 'If cards should be call'd for to-night, / Place the new japann'd tables alone in my sight;/ For the pool of Quadrille set the black-bugle dish,/and remember you bring us the ebony fish' (*Poems and Plays*, VI, p. 256). But this sentiment is amusingly undercut by its correlation to hypocrisy and false delicacy: 'Her crisis is coming, without much delay;/ There might have been doubts had she fix'd upon grey:/ But a vow to wear black all the rest of her life/ Is a strong inclination she'll soon be a wife' (*Poems and Plays*, VI, p. 254).

This comedy is of particular interest as the main character has the name that Jane Austen adopted in 1789 when she wrote a satirical letter to the editor of *The Loiterer*, her brother James, complaining of the periodical's lack of feminine interest:

Sir, I write this to inform you that you are very much out of my good graces, and that, if you do not mend your manners, I shall soon drop your acquaintance. You must know, Sir, that I am a great reader, and not to mention some hundred volumes of Novels and Plays, have in the two last summers, actually got through all the entertaining papers of our most celebrated periodical writers.⁴⁹

The letter goes on to complain of the lack of sentimental interest and offers recommendations to improve its style:

Let the lover be killed in a duel, or lost at sea, or you make him shoot himself, just as you please; and as for his mistress, she will of course go mad; or if you will, you may kill the lady, and let the lover run mad; only remember, whatever you do, that your hero and heroine must possess a great deal of feeling, and have very pretty names (*The Loiterer*, p. 6-7).

⁴⁹James Austen, *The Loiterer*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1789-90), IX, 4-7.

The letter ends by stating that if the author's wishes are not complied with 'may your work be condemned to the pastry-cooke's shop, and may you always continue a bachelor, and be plagued with a maiden sister to keep house for you'. The letter is signed Sophia Sentiment.

Zachary Cope first suggested that Austen wrote this burlesque letter, so close in spirit to her juvenilia of the same period. *Love and Freindship* also has a sentimental heroine named Sophia. Deirdre le Faye subsequently noted that the main character of Hayley's *The Mausoleum* is a silly widow called Sophia Sentiment. Le Faye points out that Jane Austen's own set of Hayley's work was not acquired until 1791, but that she must have first read Hayley's comedy between 1785 and 1789.⁵⁰ *Plays for a Private Theatre* was first published in 1784, so it seems plausible that it was among the volumes considered for performance by the Austens when they were looking at material for home dramatics in 1788. This may have been the time that Jane first became acquainted with the name Sophia Sentiment; perhaps the purchase of the later edition in 1791 was inspired by her adoption of the name in 1789. If Austen is indeed Sophia Sentiment, by her own admission, she is a great reader of some hundred volumes of novels and plays.

Austen also owned a copy of Arnaud Berquin's *L'ami des enfants* (1782-3) and the companion series *L'ami de l'adolescence* (1784-5).⁵¹ Berquin's little stories,

⁵⁰See Zachary Cope, 'Who Was Sophia Sentiment? Was She Jane Austen?', *The Book Collector*, 15 (1966), 143-151, and Deirdre Le Faye, 'Jane Austen and William Hayley', *Notes & Queries*, 232, no.1 (1987), 25-26.

⁵¹Arnaud Berquin, *L'ami des enfans*, 12 vols (London, 1782-83). They are now at The Houghton Library, Harvard University. Vols. 1-9 and 12 were formerly Jane Austen's. Vols 1-6 are a London 1783 repr. of the original Paris 1782 edition. Vol. 1 bears the inscription *J. Austen December 18th 1786*; vols 2-9 and 12 are similarly inscribed, except for slight differences in the forms of the date. Below the inscription in Vol. 5 another hand has written *Pour dear Jane Austen*. R.W. Chapman asks 'Was it a present from her cousin Eliza de Feuillide?' in 'Jane Austen's Library', *Book-Collectors Quarterly*, pp. 28-32. Eliza was in England in that year. Jane Austen's birthday was 16 Dec. It might have been an eleventh birthday present. Contemporaries such as Maria Edgeworth and Fanny Burney knew this work (see Gilson, p. 438).

L'ami de l'adolescence in the library of the Swansea Training College is inscribed *Jane Austen 1797* in the third volume (wrongly lettered 1), and *Cass. Elizth. Austen* in the other two vols. Gilson suggests that Cassandra's signature in the first two volumes may be a mark of ownership added after her sister's death (Gilson, p. 439).

dialogues and dramas were much used in English schools for young ladies towards the end of the eighteenth century, being read in the original for the language or in translation for the moral.⁵² Berquin states in his preface to *L'ami des enfants* that his 'little dramas' are designed to bring children of the opposite sex together 'in order to produce that union and intimacy which we are so pleased to see subsist between brothers and sisters'.⁵³ The whole of the family are encouraged to partake in the plays to promote family values:

Each volume of this work will contain little dramas, in which children are the principal characters, in order that they may learn to acquire a free unembarrassed countenance, a gracefulness of attitude and deportment, and an easy manner of delivering themselves before company. Besides, the performance of these dramas will be a domestic recreation and amusement.

Berquin's morally instructive playlets were meant to be performed by families as 'domestic festivals', to teach moral values, and to improve 'deportment and conversation'. His moral fables are presented in the format of short plays and dramatic dialogues. They instruct parents and children on manners and morals, on how to conduct themselves in domestic life, how to behave to one another, to the servants, to the poor, and how to cope with everyday problems in the home.

Some plays are directed towards young women, and warn against finery and vanity. *Fashionable Education*, as its name suggests, depicts a young woman (Leonora) who has been given a fashionable town education, 'those charming sciences called drawing, music, dancing', but has also learnt to be selfish, vain and affected (*The Children's Friend*, V, p. 18). The blind affection of Leonora's aunt has compounded her ruin. The moral of this play is that accomplishments should embellish a useful

⁵²Mr. Salmon's letter in *TLS*, 16 February 1922, p. 109.

⁵³*The Children's Friend*, translated from the French of Mr. Berquin, by Lucas Williams, 6 vols (London, 1793), preface in vol. 1 (subsequent quotations from preface).

education and knowledge, not act as a substitute for them. A similar play, *Vanity Punished*, teaches the evils of coquetry, vanity, selfishness, and spoilt behaviour.

Other plays are aimed at young men. *The Sword* depicts a young man who abuses the dangerous sword that he is given as a present for his birthday. Another play, *The Fathers Reconciled by their Children*, depicts a family at odds over 'improvements' to the family estate. *The School for Step-Mothers* is a short one-act play, which sets out to instruct children how to behave when they have a new step-mother.

Intriguingly, one of the playlets in the collection carries the same plot-line as Austen's *Emma*. In *Cecilia and Marian*, a young, wealthy girl befriends a poor labourer's daughter and 'tastes the happiness of doing good' when she feeds her new playmate plum cake and currant jelly:

Cecilia had now tasted the happiness of doing good. She walked a little longer in the garden, thinking how happy she had made Marian, how grateful Marian had shewed herself, and how her little sister would be pleased to taste currant jelly. What will it be, said she, when I give her some ribbands and a necklace! Mama gave me some the other day that were pretty enough; but I am tired of them now. Then I'll look in my drawers for some old things to give her. We are just of a size, and my slips would fit her charmingly. Oh! how I long to see her well drest (*The Children's Friend*, V, p. 32).

Cecilia continues to enjoy her patronage until she is roundly scolded by her mother for her harmful and irresponsible conduct. By indulging and spoiling her favourite, Cecilia has made her friend dissatisfied with her previous life:

MRS. A. But how comes it, then, that you cannot eat dry bread, nor walk barefoot as she does?

CEC. The thing is, perhaps, that I am not used to it

MRS. A. Why, then, if she uses herself, like you, to eat sweet things, and to wear shoes and stockings, and afterwards if the brown bread should go against her, and she should not be able to walk barefoot, do you think that you would have done her any service? (*The Children's Friend*, V, p. 36).

Cecilia is an enemy to her own happiness and that of her 'low' friend Marian, and is only saved by the intervention and guidance of her judicious mother. In *L'ami des*

enfants, mothers are often shown instructing, advising and educating their daughters: the plays were aimed at parents as well as children. In *Emma*, the variant on Berquin's plot-line is a similarly meddling, though well-meaning, young woman who painfully lacks a mother figure.

Like Berquin, Austen wrote her own short plays and stories for domestic entertainment.⁵⁴ But rather than teaching morals and manners, Austen's playlets parody the moral didacticism of Berquin's thinly disguised conduct books. There are three attempts at playwriting in Austen's juvenilia. The first two, 'The Visit' and 'The Mystery' in *Volume the First*, were written between 1787 and 1790.⁵⁵ The third, 'The First Act of a Comedy', is one of the 'Scraps' in *Volume the Second* and dates from around 1793.

As mentioned earlier, 'The Visit' was probably written in 1789, the same time as the Steventon performance of Townley's *High Life Below Stairs*. The play depicts a dinner engagement at Lord Fitzgerald's house with a party of young people. Dining room etiquette is satirized in this piece, as the characters pompously make formal introductions to one another, then promptly discover that there are not sufficient chairs to be seated:

MISS F. Bless me! there ought to be 8 Chairs & there are but 6. However, if your Ladyship will but take Sir Arthur in your Lap, & Sophy my Brother in hers, I beleive we shall do pretty well.
SOPHY. I beg you will make no apologies. Your Brother is very light
(*MW*, p. 52).

⁵⁴ Austen's juvenile stories and plays were written for family amusement, and were handed down to family members as treasured heirlooms. Southam suggests that the transcription of the juvenilia into the three volume notebooks was probably for the purpose of reading aloud to the rest of the family. See B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts: A Study of the Novelist's Development through the Surviving Papers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 14.

⁵⁵ Southam dates *The Mystery* and *The Visit* around 1787-90 (*Literary Manuscripts*, p. 16). As mentioned earlier, Deirdre Le Faye has suggested that they were probably performed as comic afterpieces to the main play at the Steventon theatricals.

The conversation between the guests is almost wholly preoccupied with the main fare of 'fried Cowheel and Onion', 'Tripe' and 'Liver and Crow'. The vulgarity of the food on offer is contrasted with the polite formality of the guests:

CLOE. I shall trouble Mr Stanley for a Little of the fried Cowheel & Onion.

STANLEY. Oh Madam, there is a secret pleasure in helping so amiable a Lady--.

LADY H. I assure you my Lord, Sir Arthur never touches wine; but Sophy will toss off a bumper I am sure to oblige your Lordship (*MW*, p. 53).

Banal remarks about food and wine lead irrationally to unexpected marriage proposals for the three young women at the table, who eagerly accept without a second's hesitation.

On the surface, Austen's parody of a dull social visit derives its comic impact from the farcical touches and the juxtapositions of polite formalities with vulgar expressions. The young heroine, Sophy, like so many of Austen's early creations, is portrayed as a drunk who can 'toss off a bumper' at will. Above all, there is an irrepressible delight in the sheer absurdity of table manners. The Austens performing this play would, of course, be expected to maintain their composure when solemnly requesting 'fried Cowheel & Onion' and 'Liver & Crow' (*MW*, p. 53).

Austen's playlet, deriding the absurdity and pomposity of table etiquette, provides a mocking contrast to the morally earnest tone of Berquin's instructive playlets. *The Little Fiddler* also dramatizes a social visit, where the exceptionally rude behaviour of a young man to his sister (Sophia) and to her visitors, the Miss Richmonds, leads to expulsion from the family circle. Charles, the ill-mannered brother and deceitful, greedy son, is eventually turned out of his father's house for his treachery and lies, and for his cruel treatment of a poor fiddler. In Berquin's play, the virtues of polite conduct are piously upheld:

SOPHIA. Ah! how do you do, my dear friends! (*They salute each other, and curtsy to Godfrey, who bows to them.*)

CHARLOTTE. It seems an age since I saw you last.

AMELIA. Indeed it is a long time.

SOPHIA. I believe it is more than three weeks. (*Godfrey draws out the table, and gives them chairs.*)

CHARLOTTE. Do not give yourself so much trouble, Master Godfrey.

GODFREY. Indeed, I think it no trouble.

SOPHIA. Oh, I am very sure Godfrey does it with pleasure, (*gives him her hand.*) I wish my brother had a little of his complaisance.

The stilted, artificiality of such social visits is precisely the target of Austen's satire in 'The Visit'. She seemed to have little time for plays which dictated appropriate formal conduct, preferring comedies which satirized social behaviour. Austen mocks Berquin and simultaneously begins to explore the incongruities and absurdities of restrictive social mores.⁵⁶

As noted, a more direct source for 'The Visit' derives from Townley's *High Live Below Stairs*. Austen's quotation 'The more free, the more welcome' (*MW*, p. 50) nods to Townley's farce, where fashionable bad table manners are cultivated by the servants in an attempt to ape their masters. Berquin wrote didactic plays instructing the correct ways to treat servants, both honest and dishonest.⁵⁷ Townley's hilarious farce of social disruption dramatizes a lord who disguises himself as a servant to spy on his lazy servants, so that he can punish them appropriately for taking over his house.

David Nokes also views 'The Visit' as a comic counterpart to Townley's topsy-turvy world where servants feed on 'claret, burgundy and champagne' and eat French delicacies:

In her own short play, *The Visit*, Jane imagined the exact opposite, a dinner-party of elegant aristocrats consuming the meanest labourer's food: cowheel, tripe and suet pudding, washed down with home-made elderberry and gooseberry wines. Something about the anarchy of such

⁵⁶Claire Tomalin has also noted Austen's connection with Berquin: 'Where he sought to teach and elevate, she plunged into farce, burlesque and self-mockery, and created a world of moral anarchy, bursting with the life and energy Berquin's good intentions managed to squeeze out' (Tomalin, p. 45).

⁵⁷For example in *The Little Miss Deceived by her Maid*, a wily old servant blackmails and extorts money and presents from her young mistress.

incongruous social reversals appealed to her sense of fictional adventure.⁵⁸

Austen dedicates 'The Visit' to her brother James. Intriguingly, in her dedication, she recalls two other Steventon plays. These 'celebrated comedies' were probably written by James, as she describes her own 'drama' as 'inferior':

Sir, The Following Drama, which I humbly recommend to your Protection & Patronage, tho' inferior to those celebrated comedies called 'The School for Jealousy' & 'The travelled Man', will I hope afford some amusement to so respectable a *Curate* as yourself, which was the end in veiw [sic] when it was first composed by your Humble Servant the Author (*MW*, p. 49).

James had recently returned from his travels abroad, so 'the travelled Man' may have been based on his adventures. The titles also recall many eighteenth century plays, such as Arthur Murphy's *The School For Guardians* (1769), Sheridan's *School For Scandal* (1777) and Hannah Cowley's *School for Elegance* (1780). *The Travelled Man* suggests Goldsmith's *The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768) and Richard Cumberland's *The Cholerick Man* (1774).

'The Mystery' was probably performed as an afterpiece to the Steventon 1788 'Private Theatrical Exhibition' (*A Family Record*, p. 63). Austen dedicated it to her father, and it may well have been a mocking tribute to one of his favourite plays. Southam suggests that the whispering scenes in 'the Mystery' were based on a similar scene in Sheridan's *The Critic*.⁵⁹ However, Austen's parody is closer to Buckingham's burlesque, *The Rehearsal*, which Sheridan was self-consciously reworking in *The Critic*.⁶⁰ It is clear that Austen was parodying the whispering scene in *The Rehearsal*, where Bayes insists that his play is entirely new: 'Now, Sir, because I'll do nothing here

⁵⁸David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), p. 113.

⁵⁹See Southam's notes to *Minor Works*, p. 458.

⁶⁰There are no 'whispering scenes' in *The Critic*, although there are ludicrously ambiguous 'asides' spoken to great comic effect by two of the characters.

that ever was done before, instead of beginning with a Scene that discovers something of the Plot I begin this play with a whisper':

PHYS. But yet some rumours great are stirring; and if LORENZO should prove false (which none but the great Gods can tell) you then perhaps would find that-- [Whispers.
 BAYES. Now he whispers.
 USH. Alone, do you say?
 PHYS. No; attended with the noble-- [Whispers.
 BAYES. Again.
 USH. Who, he in gray?
 PHYS. Yes; and at the head of-- [Whispers.
 BAYES. Pray, mark.
 USH. Then, Sir, most certain, twill in time appear. These are the reasons that have mov'd him to't; First, he-- [Whispers.
 BAYES. Now the other whispers.
 USH. Secondly, they-- [Whispers.
 BAYES. At it still.
 USH. Thirdly, and lastly, both he, and they-- [Whispers.
 BAYES. Now they both whisper. [Exeunt Whispering.⁶¹

'The Mystery' is closely modelled on this whispering scene. Austen's playlet is comprised of a series of interruptions and non-communications. It opens with a mock mysterious line, 'But hush! I am interrupted!' and continues in a similarly absurd and nonsensical manner:

DAPHNE. My dear Mrs Humbug how dy'e do? Oh! Fanny, t'is all over.
 FANNY. Is it indeed!
 MRS HUM. I'm very sorry to hear it.
 FANNY. Then t'was to no purpose that I ...
 DAPHNE. None upon Earth.
 MRS HUM. And what is to become of?...
 DAPHNE. Oh! thats all settled. (*whispers* MRS HUMBUG)
 FANNY. And how is it determined?
 DAPHNE. I'll tell you. (*whispers* FANNY)
 MRS HUM. And is he to?...
 DAPHNE. I'll tell you all I know of the matter. (*whispers* MRS HUMBUG & FANNY)
 FANNY. Well! now I know everything about it, I'll go away.
 MRS HUM. & DAPHNE. And so will I. [Exeunt. (*MW*, p.56).

⁶¹George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, *The Rehearsal*, ed. Montague Summers (Stratford: Shakespeare Head, 1914), p. 16.

The play ends with a further whispering scene, where the secret is finally whispered in the ear of the sleeping Sir Edward: 'Shall I tell him the secret?...No, he'll certainly blab it...But he is asleep and won't hear me...So I'll e'en venture' (*MW*, p. 57). In 'The Mystery', we are never told any information about the conversations between the characters, and it becomes as incongruous as Bayes's own 'new' play, which he proudly insists has no plot.

Austen's third playlet 'The First Act of a Comedy', parodies musical comedy, an extremely popular mode of dramatic entertainment in the latter part of the eighteenth century.⁶² A satirical passage from George Colman's *New Brooms* (1776) targets the vogue for comic opera :

Operas are the only real entertainment. The plain unornamented drama is too flat, Sir. Common dialogue is a dry imitation of nature, as insipid as real conversation; but in an opera the dialogue is refreshed by an air every instant.--Two gentlemen meet in the Park, for example, admire the place and the weather; and after a speech or two the orchestra take their cue, the musick strikes up, one of the characters takes a genteel turn or two on the stage, during the symphony, and then breaks out--

When the breezes
Fan the trees-es,
Fragrant gales
The breath inhales,
Warm the heart that sorrow freezes.⁶³

Austen, like Colman, satirizes the artificiality of the comic opera; its spontaneous outbursts of songs, and distinctive lack of plot.⁶⁴ Austen's playlet concerns the

⁶²The ballad-opera, such as Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) was popular in the first part of the eighteenth century, but after 1750 the comic opera, the operatic farce, the burletta and the musical interlude took over. For the subtle differences between these miscellaneous forms see Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*, 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955-59), III, pp. 191-208.

⁶³*New Brooms*, in *The Plays of George Colman the Elder*, ed. Kalman A. Burnim, 6 vols (New York & London: Garland, 1983), IV, p. 21.

⁶⁴The most successful comic opera of the time was perhaps Sheridan's *The Duenna* (1775); unusually for comic opera, it was particularly commended for the richness of its plot. *The Duenna* ran for seventy five performances, see Nicoll, III, p. 205. Reviews from *The Morning Post*, and the *London Chronicle* praised its richness of plot, as did Hazlitt in his *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*.

adventures of a family en route to London, and is set in a roadside inn, a familiar trope of the picaresque adventurer popularized in Fielding's novels *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*.⁶⁵ Austen's play clearly nods towards Shakespeare's comic scenes set in 'The Boar's Head' in *Henry IV, parts one and two*. Three of the female characters are called 'Pistoletta', 'Maria' and 'Hostess.'

Chloe, who is to be married to the same man as Pistoletta, enters with a 'chorus of ploughboys', reads over a bill of fare and discovers that the only food available is '2 ducks, a leg of beef, a stinking partridge, & a tart'. Chloe's propensity for bursting into song at any given moment echoes Colman's burlesque of the inanities of comic opera: 'And now I will sing another song'.

SONG

I am going to have my dinner,
 After which I shan't be thinner,
 I wish I had here Strephon
 For he would carve the partridge
 if it should be a tough one.

CHORUS

Tough one, tough one, tough one,
 For he would carve the partridge if it should be a tough one (*MW*, p. 174).⁶⁶

Austen clearly enjoyed musical comedy, even if, like Colman, she was conscious of its deficiencies as an 'imitation of nature'.⁶⁷

The three playlets in the juvenilia are parodic and satirical, and a strong sense prevails that Austen was writing to amuse her sophisticated, theatre-loving brothers. Whether she was composing a mocking counterpart to Berquin's instructive dramatic

⁶⁵Oliver Goldsmith's comedy *She Stoops to Conquer* is set in a house that is mistaken for an Inn, and contains comical scenes with Tony Lumpkin in a roadside tavern called 'The Three Pigeons'.

⁶⁶The 'Chorus of Ploughboys' is probably a parody of the choruses in Frances Brooke's ballad-opera *Rosina* (1782), which contains a semi-pastoral element, although there is also a chorus of rustic harvesters in Dryden and Purcell's *King Arthur* (1691).

⁶⁷Her letters make reference to numerous comic operas that she saw at the professional theatres, either the musical farces she saw as the afterpiece to the main house programme at Covent Garden or Drury Lane, or the comic operas she saw at *The Lyceum*--see below.

dialogues, or writing burlesques in the style of plays like *The Rehearsal* and *The Critic*, she endeavoured to impress her siblings with her knowledge of the drama. Her playlets, 'The Mystery' and 'The First Act of a Comedy', allude specifically to what was popular on the London stage, and mock it by drawing attention to its limitations and artificiality. 'The Visit' nods to the popular comedy *High Life Below Stairs*, so often dramatized for the private theatre, and begins to explore the incongruities and absurdities of genteel social behaviour.

In contrast with Berquin and William Hayley who self-consciously used their plays to instruct, Austen entertains. Furthermore, though her playlets are crude burlesques, her forays into fiction at this time initiated an apprenticeship in the art of dramatic dialogue and quasi-theatrical techniques which was to distinguish her mature fiction. Austen's juvenilia reveals a deep familiarity with the most popular plays of the period: the works of Garrick, Fielding, Sheridan and Cowley. Chapter three explores the influence of the drama on her early works of fiction.

The Steventon theatricals took place between 1782 and 1790, coinciding with the period in which Austen's juvenilia was written. Given the abundance of dramatic entertainment that she was exposed to at this time, it is not at all surprising that there were attempts at playwriting among her youthful literary efforts. However, contrary to popular belief, it was not only in her childhood at Steventon that Austen developed her interest in the drama. In the period between the composition of the early versions of *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Sense and Sensibility* and the completion of the mature novels, Austen was taking part in private theatricals, writing dramatic dialogues and turning her favourite novel into a five act comedy.

Amateur theatricals in 1805

Jane Austen took part in private theatricals in 1805 when she was thirty. The death of her father early in the same year had a profound affect on the lives of the three dependent women whom he left behind, who were not to find a permanent home until they were to settle at Chawton in 1809. Some time after her father's death Austen may have redrafted and put the finishing touches to a short epistolary novel, *Lady Susan*. The vivacious widow Lady Susan was based on the wicked Restoration heroines that Austen knew of. In June, the Austen women left Gay Street in Bath, collecting their niece Anna on the way, and set out for Edward (Austen) Knight's Godmersham home. During her time at Kent, Austen spent many hours amusing her favourite nieces, Fanny and Anna, with play-acting. It was here that Anne Sharp, the children's governess, formed a friendship with Austen that was to last for the rest of her life. In the Godmersham private theatricals, Miss Sharp played the male roles and was clearly a great success.

Fanny Knight's unpublished diaries reveal that her aunt had no scruples about play-acting. Fanny records a game of 'school' where her aunts, grandmother and governess dressed up and took part:

Wed. 26 June. We had a whole holiday. Aunts & Gmama played at school with us. Aunt C was Mrs Teachum the Governess Aunt Jane, Miss Popham the teacher Aunt Harriet, Sally the Housemaid, Miss Sharpe the Dancing Master the Apothecary & the Serjeant, Grandmama Betty Jones the pie woman & Mama the bathing woman. They dressed in Character & we had a most delightful day.--After dessert we acted a play called *Virtue Rewarded*. Anna was the Duchess St Albans, I was the Fairy Serena & Fanny Cage a shepherdess "Mona". We had a bowl of Syllabub in the evening.⁶⁸

⁶⁸Kent County Archives, Centre for Kentish Studies, Knatchbull Manuscript, Fanny Knight's Journals, U951 F24, vols 1-10, on microfilm.

Although improvisational play was part of the fun, the small company of women also included their own plays in their repertoire. *Virtue Rewarded* may well have been composed by Anne Sharp with roles written specifically for the children.⁶⁹

The theatricals continued throughout June and July. Then on 30 July Fanny recorded two more amateur performances, including a play possibly written by Anne Sharp called *Pride Punished or Innocence Rewarded*⁷⁰: 'Aunt C and J, Anna Edw, George, Henry, William and myself acted "the Spoilt child" and "Innocence Rewarded", afterwards we danced and had a most delightful evening' (KCA, U951 F24/1). Bickerstaffe's *The Spoilt Child* was a great favourite on the London stage, popularized by Mrs Jordan who played the cross-dressed role of 'Little Pickle', the naughty child of the title. If Fanny played the part of Little Pickle and Anne Sharp his father, it is plausible that Jane Austen took the role of the spinster aunt, Miss Pickle. The most popular scene in the play is when the naughty child catches his aunt and her lover in the garden reciting love poetry and planning their elopement, and sews their clothes together.

It was during the 1805 Kent visit that Austen read Thomas Gisborne's dour *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*. She would have been amused to read Gisborne's assertion that play-acting was injurious to the female sex through encouraging vanity and destroying diffidence 'by the unrestrained familiarity with persons of the other sex, which inevitably results from being joined with them in the drama'.⁷¹ Austen wrote to Cassandra, 'I am glad that you recommended Gisborne for having begun, I am pleased with it, and I had quite determined not to read it' (*Letters*,

⁶⁹Although there is a play called *Irish Hospitality or Virtue Rewarded* by Charles Dibdin, the characters listed by Fanny Knight suggest that this play was specifically written for the children. *Virtue Rewarded* was the sub-title of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740).

⁷⁰Claire Tomalin claims that Anne Sharp wrote this play for the children to perform to amuse the servants. See *Jane Austen : A Life*, p. 136.

⁷¹Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London, 1797), p. 175.

p. 112). This remark suggests a softening towards Gisborne, but she was clearly unwilling to give up her involvement with private theatricals.

Marilyn Butler has led the way unchallenged in her conviction that Austen's supposed disapproval of private theatricals echoed Gisborne's. Butler's contention that the theatrical saga in *Mansfield Park* implicitly embraces Gisborne's moral conservatism sits oddly with Austen's evident disregard for Gisborne's strident criticism of private theatricals.⁷² For not only was Austen acting in plays at the same time that she was reading Gisborne, but she was also committing the grave offence of luring children into this dangerous activity, a practice that Gisborne particularly abhorred:

Most of these remarks fully apply to the practice of causing children to act plays, or parts of plays; a practice of which parents, while labouring to vindicate it, sometimes pronounce an emphatical condemnation, by avowing a future purpose of abandoning it so soon as their children shall be far advanced in youth.⁷³

Gisborne was merely re-hashing the usual prejudices that had been flung at the theatre for centuries.⁷⁴ Moreover, his concern for children acting in plays directly opposes, for example, Arnaud Berquin's championing of the moral efficacy of family theatricals. Austen appears to have been more sympathetic to Berquin's view judging by her enthusiasm for private theatricals amongst Edward Knight's young family at Kent. Perhaps she was rekindling memories of happier days at Steventon in her present uncertain state of home (she was to live at yet another brother's home in Southampton before eventually settling at Chawton).

⁷²Though Butler insists that Austen read Gisborne with approval in 1805, she makes no reference to the Kent private theatricals. See *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, repr. 1987), p. 231-232.

⁷³Claudia L. Johnson's edition of *Mansfield Park* includes excerpts from Gisborne's tract. See Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (New York & London: Norton, 1998), p. 401.

⁷⁴See Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

Around this time, the continuing debate surrounding private theatricals developed rather heatedly in Sheridan's press campaign against the Pic Nic society. Gillray's caricature of the controversy, 'Blowing up the Pic Nic's;--or--Harlequin Quixote attacking the Puppets', shows Sheridan leading a band of professional actors, including John Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons, against the amateurs. Strikingly, one of the banners carried by a professional actor is labelled Kotzebue, whilst the leading banner of Shakespeare is tattered and torn.⁷⁵ Gillray's ambivalence is thus suggested: 'an artistically and politically bankrupt institution--Drury Lane--is quixotically tilting against the windmills of a morally dubious aristocratic alternative' (*Theatres of War*, p. 127).

If Austen was aware of the controversy, she might well have been amused to see that the play depicted in Gillray's caricature, Fielding's satire *Tom Thumb*, was one of the plays performed at Steventon and one that had an important influence on her juvenilia. In the meantime she continued not only to act with the children, but to write yet another play. It could have been at this time that Austen, with the help of her niece Anna, put the finishing touches to her five-act play, *Sir Charles Grandison, or the Happy Man*, a burlesque dramatization of her favourite novel, Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*.⁷⁶ Southam, the editor of the play, dates it earlier than 1805 suggesting that the finishing touches were added around 1800, where it was performed by family theatricals at Steventon resumed after 1794.

J. H. Hubback, the grandson of Francis Austen, claimed that the theatricals were revived by Henry Austen and Eliza after her husband's death by guillotine in Paris 1794.⁷⁷ Neither *Austen Papers* nor *A Family Record* record private theatricals

⁷⁵See Gillian Russell, *Theatres of War*, pp.127-128.

⁷⁶Although for many years the play's authorship was attributed to the 7 year old Anna, Southam has set the record straight, arguing that the extent of Anna's collaboration was to make a few suggestions and alterations (there are pencil scribbles in a childish hand). *Jane Austen's 'Sir Charles Grandison'*, ed. Brian Southam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 11.

⁷⁷Hubback claims that it was during these later theatricals that Eliza and Henry resumed their flirtation: 'After Feullide was guillotined in 1794, Steventon became a place of refuge for Eliza ... It was not long before theatricals were resumed. Their elder brother, Henry, was again Eliza's chief

after 1794, but Southam argues that there is no reason to distrust Hubback, adding, 'it would be perfectly in character for Eliza to be taking the leading role ... just the person to revive the theatrical tradition and to take the part of Charlotte Grandison' (*Grandison*, p. 33).

Southam persuasively argues that the play was written over a period of time, and that the first act was probably written at the same time as Austen's other short plays, then laid down and picked up again at intervals, either to amuse Anna, or to provide a play for the later family theatricals in the late 1790s. But since Southam makes no reference to the 1805 theatricals,⁷⁸ it is equally possible that the play was taken up again and finished for the 1805 Godmersham family theatricals. The Knight diaries definitively show that Austen, her family, and the children were taking part in theatricals in 1805, whereas the revival of the Steventon theatricals in the late 1790s is a matter of speculation. The balance of evidence thus favours the later date for the family performance of *Grandison*. Anna's presence at Godmersham supports this later date. Furthermore the play has a number of minor roles that may have been written specifically for the children. As Southam observes, Austen's play was clearly written for performance: 'The stage directions are working directions, telling the actors what to do and where to go and leaving little to chance or the players' uncertainty...she was by no means ignorant of the dramatist's craft or of the capacities and incapacities of an amateur cast' (*Grandison*, p.12-13).⁷⁹

coadjutor in the play-acting, and the outcome was that he became her second husband in 1797'. See 'Pen Portraits in Jane Austen's Novels', *Cornhill Magazine* (July 1928), 24-33.

⁷⁸At the time that he was editing *Sir Charles Grandison* Southam had no knowledge of Fanny Knight's record of the 1805 theatricals (he informed me of this in a private conversation about private theatricals).

⁷⁹See Chapter 3.

Private Theatricals 1807-9

There are two more notable occurrences which reflect Austen's interest in the drama. There still exists in the Austen-Leigh family collection a short unidentified document, untitled and consisting of two dramatic dialogues on the business of child-rearing in the early nineteenth century. From 1806 to 1809 Mrs Austen, her two daughters and Martha Lloyd were living in Southampton for part of the time with Frank and his newly pregnant wife Mary Gibson. As usual it was left to Jane to provide the amusement. The ladies read novels and plays aloud and this provided Austen with another opportunity for the composition of two more amusing playlets on the subject of baby-care and motherhood.⁸⁰

'The Business of Mothering' was supposedly written by Mary Austen with Jane Austen's help but this has recently been disputed by Deirdre Le Faye who persuasively argues that the dialogues, though seemingly transcribed in Mary Austen's hand, are more likely to be Austen's work. Le Faye suggests that fair copies of Jane's work were made to her dictation so that they could be performed to a small audience: 'No doubt there were originally three copies of the dialogues, one for each participant; after the performance Mrs Austen and Jane would have had no reason to keep their copies, but Mary Lloyd, ever thrifty, took her copy home to Steventon and so to her descendants' ('The Business of Mothering', p. 311).

Le Faye argues that it is implausible that the unimaginative Mary Austen could have written the dramatic dialogues: 'On the other hand, all Jane's writings have a strong dramatic bent, not only as shown in the novels but also commencing with her juvenilia and continuing to her later adaptation of *Sir Charles Grandison* into a short mocking play for family entertainment' ('The Business of Mothering', p. 307). The dialogues are watermarked 1806 and contain amusing instructions on the latest ideas

⁸⁰ See Deirdre Le Faye, 'The Business of Mothering: Two Austenian Dialogues', in *The Book Collector* (1983), 296-314.

in childcare. Le Faye also notes that the home-made booklet resembles the one she made for *Sir Charles Grandison*.⁸¹

The dialogues are written in the style of 'conversations' such as Berquin's moral dialogues or Ann Murray's *Mentoria: or, the Young Ladies' Instructor* (1778). Austen owned a copy of the fourth edition of *Mentoria* and eventually passed it on to her eldest niece Anna. Le Faye notes that in the eighth dialogue there is a section on child-rearing which bears a similarity to Austen's dialogues on mothering, and suggests that in 1806 Anna might well have been discussing the *Mentoria* with her aunt, inciting her to try her own ironic imitations, as she had done as a child with Berquin.

In the dramatic dialogues the sensible Mrs Enfield's child-rearing practices are contrasted with those of the careless Mrs Denbigh and her incompetent Irish nurse. Mrs Denbigh gives little attention to her child, spending almost all of her time in the garden looking at her auriculas, and complaining when the dirty child is brought into the parlour. She pleads ignorance in child-rearing as 'I was just come from school when I was married, where you know we learnt nothing in the way of medicine or nursing'. The incompetence of Mrs Denbigh and her nanny is contrasted with the sensible advice and practical skills of Mrs Enfield:

MRS E.	(Endeavours to look at the back) Ah Nurse his shirt sticks! do bring me some warm water & a rag.
MRS D.	(rising) I shall faint if I stay.
MRS E.	I beg you will stay till we can see what can be done.
MRS D.	(takes out her smelling bottle) I will try-how unfeeling (aside)
MRS E.	(applies a mild plaister) Now nurse you must change the plaister night & morning, spread it very thin, & keep a few folds of soft linen over it--Will you bring me a clean shirt.
Nurse	(going out)Yes Ma'am, if I can find one-I wish she and her plaister were far enough (aside) ('The Business of Mothering', p.302).

⁸¹Le Faye notes the similarity between the booklet and quotes Southam's description of the *Grandison* text: 'a gathering of fourteen sheets, regularly trimmed, neatly folded together, and pinned, only once, to make a booklet of pages measuring 5 15/16 x 3 5/8 in. This was Jane Austen's favourite way of preparing her working paper to write on' ('The Business of Mothering', p. 307).

The dialogues are didactic, as they are meant to be, but the selfish Mrs Denbigh is comically drawn. Le Faye sees a foreshadowing of the monologues of Miss Bates and Mrs Elton in the rattling conversations of Miss Denbigh ('The Business of Mothering', p. 308).

Most striking of all, in 1809, only two years before starting *Mansfield Park*, Austen acted the part of Mrs Candour in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. In writing of Sir William Heathcote of Hursley Park, Hampshire, in 1898, the novelist Charlotte M. Yonge recalled: 'His mother was Elizabeth, daughter of Lovelace Bigg-Wither of Manydown Park in the same country...She lived chiefly in Winchester, and it may be interesting that her son remembered being at a Twelfth day party where Jane Austen drew the character of Mrs Candour, and assumed the part with great spirit.'⁸²

There is no reason to doubt this evidence. The Austens' friendship with the Manydown family lasted all her life. Both Jane and Cassandra often used to spend the night at Manydown when they attended the Basingstoke balls as girls. Ellen Jordan argues that this 'tiny piece of biographical information', often ignored by biographers, suggests that Austen's 'moral objections to acting a part (if indeed she had any) were not sufficiently profound to influence her own conduct'. Jordan suggests a plausible date for this Twelfth day party as some time between December 27, 1808, and January 10, 1809. Austen informed Cassandra of a twelfth-day party at Manydown in her letter to Cassandra of December 27, 1808:

I was happy to hear, chiefly [sic] for Anna's sake, that a Ball at Manydown was once more in agitation; it is called a Child's Ball, & given by Mrs. Heathcote to Wm-- such was its' beginning at least--but it will probably swell into something more...it is to take place between this & twelfth-day (*Letters*, p. 160).

The postscript to her next letter (January 10, 1809), suggests that she attended the festivities: 'The Manydown Ball was a smaller thing than I expected, but it seems to have made Anna very happy. At *her* age it would not have done for *me*' (*Letters*, p.

⁸² See Ellen Jordan, 'Mansfield Park', *TLS*, June 23, 1972, p. 719.

165). Jordan persuasively argues that if this was the same party that Sir William recollected 'we must accept the fact that only two years before she began *Mansfield Park* Jane was prepared to 'act a part' herself, and that any objections she had to amateur theatricals at this time were not likely to be on the grounds that it involved "imitation" or "role-playing". This would seem to be still stronger evidence against the notion that Austen condemns private theatricals in *Mansfield Park*.

Austen's formative development was clearly influenced by the vogue for private theatricals that swept Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Contrary to popular belief, it was not merely as a passive spectator that Austen was exposed to private theatricals as a young girl. Her plays show that she was actively engaged in the amateur dramatics at Steventon, and her involvement in private theatricals in Kent, Southampton and Winchester confirm an interest that was to be crystallized in the writing of *Mansfield Park*.

Chapter Two

AUSTEN AND THE PROFESSIONAL THEATRE

In 1790, Austen wrote *Love and Freindship*, a parody in the style of Fielding's *Shamela* of the popular heroine-centred, sentimental novel. She depicts two strolling actors, Philander and Gustavus, who eventually become stars of the London stage. As a final sly joke, she transforms her two fictional characters into real figures: 'Philander and Gustavus, after having raised their reputation by their performance in the theatrical line in Edinburgh, removed to Covent Garden, where they still exhibit under the assumed names of *Lewis & Quick*' (MW, p. 109).

William Thomas ('Gentleman') Lewis (1748-1811), and John Quick (1748-1831) were both well-known comic actors of the Covent Garden company. The roles of Faulkland and Bob Acres in Sheridan's *The Rivals* were created for them, and Quick was also the original Tony Lumpkin in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. 'Gentleman' Lewis earned his appellation for his rendering of refined roles. His contemporary, G. F. Cooke, called him 'the unrivalled favorite of the comic muse in all that was frolic, gay, humorous, whimsical, and at the same time elegant'.¹ Leigh Hunt considered that 'vulgarity seems impossible to an actor of his manners',² and Hazlitt's testimony ranked him high above the comedians of his day: 'gay, fluttering, hare-brained Lewis...all life and fashion, and volubility, and whim; the greatest comic *mannerist* that perhaps ever lived'.³

¹See William Dunlap, *The Life and Time of George Frederick Cooke*, 2 vols (London, 1815), I. p. 183.

²*Dramatic Essays by Leigh Hunt*, ed. William Archer and Robert W. Lowe (London, 1894), p. 41.

³*The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London: Dent, 1930-34), XVIII, p. 274.

Quick, conversely, was a fine 'low' actor, 'the prince of low comedians'.⁴ He was a diminutive man who breathed life into the roles of clowns, rustics and servants before he became famous with his performance of Tony Lumpkin. Quick was unsurpassed in playing old men, and was George III's favourite actor.⁵ Hazlitt records that he 'made an excellent self-important, busy, strutting, money-getting citizen; or a crusty old guardian, in a brown suit and a bob-wig' (*Works of Hazlitt*, XVIII, p. 274).

By the 1790s, both Lewis and Quick were among the highest paid actors in the Covent Garden Company.⁶ Austen's reference to this comic duo reflects her knowledge of the contemporary stars of the London stage, and suggests the young girl's eagerness to be included in the theatre-loving clan of her brothers and her cousin Eliza de Feuillide, to whom *Love and Freindship* was dedicated (*MW*, p. 76). However, Austen's joke is not merely a glancing and amusing allusion to an immensely popular pair of eighteenth-century comedians; it also reveals a striking and specific interest in the nuanced world of high and low comedy in the late Georgian theatre. This interest was to have a strong influence on her comic vision. As this thesis will demonstrate, Austen's sense of interplay between genteel characters and low is an important part of her awareness of how comedy works.

The first reference to the professional theatre in Austen's letters is a mention of Astley's theatre in London, in August 1796: 'We are to be at Astley's tonight, which I am glad of' (*Letters*, p. 5). The history of this theatre and its importance in the growth of the illegitimate stage, has been overlooked by Austen scholars. Astley's Amphitheatre was an equestrian theatre built on the south side of the river in Lambeth by Philip Astley in 1770.⁷ When it first opened, Astley's was merely an open air circus

⁴The testimony of Thomas Bellamy, in his *Miscellanies*, 2 vols (London, 1794), I, p. 23.

⁵See *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, ed. Philip H. Highfill, JR., Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans, 16 vols (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press, 1984), XII, p. 222.

⁶See *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, IX, pp. 219-222.

⁷See Thomas Frost, *Circus Life and Circus Celebrities* (London, 1875), p. 22, and Isaac J.

ring with covered seats. By 1780, Astley had roofed over the whole of his ring, which was now called the Amphitheatre Riding house. It was re-named The Royal Grove in 1784, when Astley obtained a Royal patent from the king, and in 1787, he added 'burletta' to his amphitheatre licence.⁸ It was popular not only for equestrian events, but for acrobatics, swordsmanship, musical interludes, songs and dancing. In 1794, the amphitheatre was burnt to the ground, and rebuilt in the following year under the new title, the Amphitheatre of Arts.⁹ In 1796, when the Austens visited Astley's, the entertainment was more elaborate than ever before. Thirty-five new acts were advertised, and a special engagement of two Catawba Indian chiefs performed dances and tomahawk exercises.¹⁰ Astley's Amphitheatre survived two fires and lasted until 1841.

As with many of the minor, unpatented London theatres, Astley's circumvented the licensing laws by exploiting the ambiguity of the term 'burletta' and slipping in straight plays amongst the main entertainments.¹¹ The Licensing Act of 1737 confined legitimate theatrical performances to two patent playhouses in London, Drury Lane and Covent Garden. The Act prohibited the performances of plays for 'hire, gain or

Greenwood, *The Circus: Its Origin and Growth prior to 1835* (New York: Dunlap, 1898), p. 19.

⁸ See Watson Nicholson, *The Struggle for a Free Stage in London* (London: Constable, 1906), p. 283. and Ernest Watson, *Sheridan to Robertson: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century London Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 71

⁹ See Edward Wedlake Brayley, *Historical and Descriptive Accounts of the Theatres of London* (London, 1826), p. 62. In 1798, it was styled Astley's Royal Amphitheatre. In 1808, it was known as Astley's Amphitheatre, specializing in 'equestrian melodrama and spectacle'. See Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama, 1800-1850*, 2 vols (London, Cambridge University Press, 1930), I, pp. 224-225.

¹⁰ See Frost, pp. 45-46.

¹¹ The term 'burletta' was used as an umbrella term for performances at the minor theatres which, for legal purposes, included 5 or 6 songs per act. For a full account of the circumvention of the law by the illegitimate theatres, see the following: Nicholson, *The Struggle for a Free Stage in London*, Ernest Watson, *Sheridan to Robertson: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century London Stage*, pp. 20-57, Joseph Donohue, 'Burletta and the Early Nineteenth Century English Theatre', *Nineteenth Century Theatre Research*, 1 (1973), pp. 29-51, and Dewey Ganzel, 'Patent Wrongs and Patent Theatres: Drama and the Law in the Early Nineteenth Century', *PMLA*, 76 (1961), 384-396.

reward' and gave the Lord Chamberlain statutory powers to examine all plays.¹² However, the monopoly of the patents was broken in 1740 by Henry Giffard who re-established his theatre in Goodman's Fields and avoided the 'hire, gain or reward' clause by claiming to charge only for the music and giving the play free. The authorities tolerated Giffard's theatre until Garrick joined the company in 1741. Both men were offered engagements at Drury Lane, and Goodman's Fields was closed once more (Thomas, p. 218).

However, Giffard had demonstrated that the law could be circumvented. Other theatre managers followed suit and found ways of evading the fifty pound fine and the threat of the loss of a licence. Samuel Foote sold tickets inviting the public to 'drink a dish of chocolate with him' at noon, and provided entertainments free of charge, thereby inventing the matinee. This led to his obtaining a summer patent for his Little Theatre in the Haymarket in 1766.¹³

Foote's patent was followed by a number of patents for provincial theatres. In London by the early nineteenth century, the proliferation of illegitimate theatres posed a formidable challenge to the patents. Joseph Donohue notes that by 1800, there were seven minor theatres offering regular entertainment: Sadler's Wells, Astley's, the Royal Circus, the Royalty in east London, Dibdin's Sans Souci, the King's, Pantheon and the first Lyceum.¹⁴ In 1826, Edward Brayley included eleven minor theatres in his *Historic and Descriptive Accounts of the Theatres of London*, and F. G. Tomlins, in

¹² *Restoration and Georgian England: Theatre in Europe: A Documentary History*, ed. David Thomas and Arnold Hare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 208. See also Joseph Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), pp. 2-3, and John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1997) pp. 385-389.

¹³ See Thomas, p. 220-223. See also Allardyce Nicoll, *The Garrick Stage: Theatres and Audience in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Sybil Rosenfeld (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980). pp. 4-5.

¹⁴ Joseph Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975). p. 38.

his *A Brief View of the English Stage* (1832) lists thirteen minor theatres operating in London.¹⁵

Astley's was not only visited by Austen, it was chosen by her as the location for a major turning point in *Emma*.¹⁶ It is Astley's theatre where Robert Martin meets Harriet and rekindles the love affair between them, thus clearing the way for Emma and Mr Knightley to be united. Scholars have assumed that Austen is referring to the equestrian amphitheatre by Westminster Bridge in Lambeth. However, following the success of his amphitheatre, which only operated on a summer licence, Astley opened a new theatre on Wych Street in the Strand in 1806.¹⁷ Astley called his new theatre The Olympic Pavilion, but it was also known as Astley's Pavilion, The Pavilion Theatre, the Olympic Saloon, and sometimes simply Astley's.¹⁸ The theatre specialized in equestrian events, but Astley had also obtained a licence, through the influence of Queen Charlotte, for music and dancing.¹⁹

According to the testimony of Isaac Greenwood, though Astley conducted several other establishments, the new Olympic theatre was '*par excellence*, "Astley's", - a name which has become historic' (Greenwood, p. 30). He also observes that it was a popular place to take children. Astley had built his new theatre from the remains of some old naval prizes that he had bought. The deck of the ship was used for the stage

¹⁵Brayley's account includes The King's Theatre, The English Opera House, The Pantheon, Sadler's Wells, Astley's Royal Amphitheatre, The Surrey Theatre, East London Theatre, The Regency, The Adelphi Theatre, The Olympic Theatre and the Royal Coburg. Tomlins lists The Surrey Theatre, The Victoria Theatre, Astley's Amphitheatre, The Adelphi, The English Opera House, The Little Theatre in the Strand, The Olympic Theatre, The Queen's Theatre, The Pavilion, The Garrick, Sadler's Wells, The Haymarket, The St James's. See F. G. Tomlins, *A Brief View of the English Stage* (London, 1832), p. 60. More recently, Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson have accounted for twenty-eight 'lost theatres' of nineteenth-century London.

¹⁶See *Emma*, Chapters 28 and 29.

¹⁷The amphitheatre was closed from Michaelmas to Passion week, see Greenwood, p. 30.

¹⁸ See Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *The Lost Theatres of London* (New York: Taplinger, 1968), p. 253.

¹⁹See Frost, p. 48.

and the floors.²⁰ The new theatre was built like a playhouse, with a stage, orchestra, side-boxes, galleries and a pit surrounding the ring. It was the largest of London's minor theatres and accommodated three thousand people.²¹ In writing about Astley's in his *A Brief View of the English Stage* (1832), G. F. Tomlins notes that Astley's '...is a name at which the youthful heart bounds, and the olden one revives. Jeremy Bentham pronounced it to be the genuine English theatre, where John Bull, whatever superior tastes he might ape, was most sincerely at home' (Tomlins, pp. 60-61).

Austen's vagueness about dates in *Emma* (the theatre visit takes place in late summer, and Harriet's marriage to Martin takes place shortly afterwards in late September) opens up the possibility of the reference being to either the summer amphitheatre in Lambeth or the winter Olympic house off Drury Lane. Strictly speaking, the summer season commenced on Easter Monday and closed about the end of September or the beginning of October.²² Given that the Austens patronized the Lambeth amphitheatre, she may well have intended the same theatre. Conversely, the genteel John Knightleys' visit Astley's as a treat for their young boys, and Harriet, on quitting their box, is made uneasy by the size of the crowds, which suggests the superior Olympic Pavilion.²³ Furthermore, the Lambeth Amphitheatre had its own separate entrance for the boxes and the pit, with the gallery entrance fifty yards down the road, so it would be more likely that Harriet would encounter large crowds at the Olympic.²⁴

²⁰See *The Life and Enterprises of Robert William Elliston* (London, 1857), p. 210. See also Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *The Lost Theatres of London*, pp. 255-256, and Christopher Murray, *Robert William Elliston: Manager* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1975), p. 48.

²¹This conflicts with Brayley's observation, in 1826, that the theatre, when full, housed 1300 people. See Greenwood, pp. 30-31, and Brayley, p. 88.

²²See Brayley, p. 66.

²³See *Emma*, p. 472.

²⁴The amphitheatre contained one full tier of thirteen boxes, three private boxes to the side and two boxes above the stage doors. See Brayley, p. 65.

Nevertheless, whichever of Astley's playhouses Austen intended when she was writing *Emma* in 1813, the allusion is of considerable interest as the long-standing battle between the minor theatres and the patents had once again flared up that year, with the name 'Astley's' at the centre of controversy. When Elliston opened up Astley's in 1813 with the provocative name 'Little Drury Lane Theatre', he was almost immediately forced to close. He was able to re-open the theatre by reverting to its old name.²⁵ In 1812, Astley had sold his theatre and licence to Robert Elliston for two thousand, eight hundred pounds.²⁶ Almost as soon as the management passed into Elliston's hands, he re-modelled the playhouse in the hope of attracting a superior type of audience,²⁷ and put on mixed programmes of farce, pantomime and melodrama, all of course, concealed under the term 'burletta'. Though many of the minor theatres circumvented the law by similar methods, none had dared to do so in the direct vicinity of the patents. Perhaps Austen was sympathetic to Elliston's crusade to compete against the patents, for he was one of her favourite actors, and, as we will see, she had followed his fortunes throughout his career.

Jane Moody has argued that although the minor theatres were 'neither unequivocally genteel nor unequivocally plebeian places', they were considered as 'artisan domains' by reviewers, and therefore discriminated against. Not only were they housed in insalubrious locations, but they were unrespectable and vulgar, even linked with immorality and disorder.²⁸ Moody invokes the hostility of genteel reviewers towards populist adaptations of Shakespeare in the minor theatres to make a broader argument about patrician anxiety for the preservation of social and cultural hierarchies: 'The presence of mixed social groups watching these performances no

²⁵See Mander and Mitchenson, p. 261.

²⁶Elliston also had to pay an annuity to Astley for twenty pounds, see *Life and Enterprises*, p. 211.

²⁷See Mander and Mitchenson, p. 260.

²⁸See Jane Moody, 'Writing for the Metropolis: Illegitimate Performances of Shakespeare in Early Nineteenth-Century London', *Shakespeare Survey*, 47 (1994), 61-69.

doubt seemed all the more incomprehensible in view of the increasing segregation of domestic and cultural spaces by class taking place outside the theatre' (Moody, p. 69).

Astley's was known for its socially diverse audience. Frost described it as 'a popular place of amusement for all classes' (p. 27).²⁹ Tomlins observed that it was a friendly, unpretentious theatre: 'This theatre is what it pretends to be--a place of amusement, and as such is respectably conducted and respectably attended' (*A Brief View of the English Stage*, pp. 60-61). Its tickets were well below the price of the patents,³⁰ and the spectacle that it offered clearly appealed to families, and to people of all classes, much as the West-End musical attracts thousands of people today. Austen had no compunction about visiting the minor theatres when she stayed in London, and her reference to Astley's in *Emma* may have been a gesture in support of them.³¹

Given Austen's scrupulous sense of class and realism, and the particular concern in *Emma* with fine discriminations within social hierarchies, it is by no means fanciful to attach considerable weight to her choice of Astley's for the reconciliation between Harriet and Robert Martin. Precisely because of its status as a minor, illegitimate theatre, it was a place where a yeoman farmer and a girl who is without rank (carrying the 'stain of illegitimacy', we are reminded in the same chapter) could mingle freely with the gentry.

Austen does mention the patented theatres in her other novels. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Willoughby 'ran against Sir John Middleton' in the lobby of Drury Lane Theatre, where he hears that Marianne Dashwood is seriously ill at Cleveland. In

²⁹See Frost, p. 27.

³⁰Prices for admission in Astley's were 4s for boxes; 2s for pit and 1s for gallery, whereas in the patents, 7s for boxes, 3s/6d for pit, 2s for middle gallery and 1s for upper gallery. See Brayley, p. 88. Ganzel notes that ticket prices at the minor theatres were almost half the price of the patents, see p. 390.

³¹By 1832, the distinction between a 'play' and a 'burletta' no longer existed. Though the patents' monopoly was finally broken in 1843, this was seen as a mere *fait accompli*, see Ganzel, pp. 387-388.

Pride and Prejudice, Lydia Bennet, in complete disregard to the disgrace that she has brought on the family by her elopement can only prattle: 'To be sure London was rather thin, but however the Little Theatre was open' (*P&P*, p. 319). Lydia's elopement takes place in August, and, as Austen was aware, the 'Little Theatre' in the Haymarket was licensed to produce regular drama during the summer season only. There is only one other mention of playgoing in *Pride and Prejudice*, a vague reference to an 'evening at one of the theatres' in which Elizabeth Bennet and Mrs Gardiner talked over intimate family matters in what was presumably a theatre box, while the rest of the party watched the action on the stage (*P&P*, p. 152-154).

In *Persuasion*, Austen includes only a few vague references to the Theatre Royal on Orchard Street in Bath.³² However, she uses the same theatre in *Northanger Abbey* to structure an important plot link between John Thorpe and General Tilney. It is at the theatre that Thorpe, 'who was never in the same part of the house for ten minutes together' (*NA*, p. 95), falsely boasts to General Tilney that Catherine is the heiress to the Allen fortune, thus encouraging the General's plan to invite her to Northanger Abbey.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma* Austen uses the forum of the public theatre to implement crucial plot developments. Austen was influenced by Fanny Burney, whose novels about the London *ton* used the playhouses as important meeting grounds for the advancement of plot lines. For example in *Evelina*, the heroine first attends Drury Lane to see Garrick in *The Suspicious Husband* and is later re-united with Lord Orville at a performance of Congreve's *Love for Love*. Here, she is subjected to impertinent remarks by the fop Lovel who compares her to the character of Miss Prue, an ignorant rustic young hoyden, a role made famous by the comic actress, Frances Abington.³³ As Burney and Austen demonstrate in their novels, the public theatres provided an arena for the exchange of news and gossip.

³²Towards the end of the novel Charles Musgrove secures a box at the theatre for the party, see *P*, pp. 223-4.

³³Joshua Reynolds painted her formal portrait as Miss Prue, which was much copied and engraved.

In *Northanger Abbey* there is a special irony at play, for Austen's novel about an ingenue's entrance into Bath society self-consciously mirrors Burney's *Evelina or a The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*. In one of the more subtle allusions to *Evelina*, Catherine quotes from Congreve's *Love for Love* when she tells John Thorpe that she hates the idea of 'one great fortune looking out for another' (*NA*, p. 124). Like *Evelina*, Catherine delights in going to the play, though she is mindfully aware that the Theatre Royal Bath is 'quite horrid' compared to the London stage (*NA*, p. 92).

Northanger Abbey's status as a burlesque gothic novel has unwittingly deflected attention away from Austen's parody of the heroine-centred sentimental novel popularized by female writers like Burney and Edgeworth. But instead of London's *beau monde*, unfamiliar terrain to Austen, the resort city of Bath becomes a microcosm of fashionable high society. *Northanger Abbey* was written in 1798-99, and as Austen and her mother were at Bath during the later part of 1797 visiting the Leigh-Perrots, her account could well have been based on actual experience and observation.

Bath

In 1799, Austen revisited Bath, where she stayed at Queen Square with her brother Edward Knight. This visit included a trip to the Theatre Royal: 'The Play on Saturday is I *hope* to conclude our gaieties here, for nothing but a lengthened stay will make it otherwise' (*Letters*, p. 47). Austen does not name the play, but the account in the *Bath Herald and Reporter* for June 29, 1799 reveals that she saw Kotzebue's drama *The Birth-Day* and 'The pleasing spectacle of Blue-Beard' on that occasion. In the eyes of the Bath newspapers, the new Kotzebue comedy was considered to be a vast improvement on his previous immoral works:

If the German Author has justly drawn down censure for the immorality of his productions for the stage, this may be considered as expiatory--this may be accepted as his *amende honoyrable*; it is certainly throughout unexceptionable, calculated to promote the best of interest of virtue, and the purest principles of benevolence: and though written in the style of Sterne, it possesses humour without a single broad Shandyism.³⁴

James Boaden, a professed admirer of Kotzebue, described the play as 'the *naval* pendant to the *military* Toby and Trim' and thought it contained 'one of the best delineations of human nature coloured by profession'.³⁵

The Birth-Day, a comedy in three acts, was translated from Kotzebue's play, *Reconciliation*, and adapted to the English stage by Thomas Dibdin (1771-1841).³⁶ The plot is centred around a feud in a Bertram family. Twin brothers, estranged over a law suit, are finally reconciled on their sixty-third birthday by the efforts of their children, cousins who are in love with each other. The heroine, Emma Bertram, is

³⁴See *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, IV, p. 386. See also George Holbert Tucker, *Jane Austen the Woman* (New York: St. Martin's Green, 1994). Tucker cites the review from the *Bath Herald and Reporter* for June 29, 1799, p. 96.

³⁵See James Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, 2 vols (London, 1832), II, p. 14.

³⁶Chris Viveash, 'Jane Austen and Kotzebue', *Jane Austen Society Report* (1994), pp. 29-31.

devoted to her father and has vowed never to marry until she is finally persuaded by her cousin: 'But if a man could be found, who would bestow on your father a quiet old age, free from every sorrow; who, far from robbing the father of a good daughter, would weave the garland of love round three hearts, who would live under his roof, and multiply your joys, by reconciling your father and your uncle.'³⁷

Two of the best comic characters in *The Birth-Day* are a boatswain called Jack Junk and a meddling housekeeper, Mrs Moral, who has taken over Captain Bertram's household and has contributed to the family estrangement for her own devious means.³⁸ *Mansfield Park*, in which a different Kotzebue adaptation is staged, shares with this other Kotzebue play not only the family name Bertram but also these comic stereotypes in the persons of the bullying, interfering Mrs. Norris and the rum-drinking, oath-swearing Mr. Price.³⁹

In May 1801, Austen moved more permanently to Bath to live with her parents. She stayed until July 1806. Owing to the absence of letters during this time, very little is known of Austen's theatrical activities.⁴⁰ However, her residence in Bath coincided with one of the most prosperous and exciting times in the history of the Bath stage. The period from 1790 to the opening of the new theatre in Beaufort Square in 1805 marked an unprecedented time of 'prosperity, of brilliancy and of progress'.⁴¹ In

³⁷Thomas Dibdin, *The Birth-Day in A Collection of Farces and other Afterpieces, selected by Mrs Inchbald*, 7 vols (London, 1809), II, p. 8.

³⁸Captain Bertram discovers Mrs Moral's treachery when Jack Junk persuades him to hide in the closet and overhear them plotting. The Bertram brothers are united and the cousin marry one another.

³⁹Margaret Kirkham has proposed that *Emma* is a conscious adaptation of Kotzebue's play, sharing a similar heroine and major plot-line. See *Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction* (London: Athlone, 1997), pp121-129.

⁴⁰Though there are four surviving letters written during May 1801, there is a gap in Austen's correspondence until one isolated letter of 14 September 1804 (*A Family Record*, p. 119).

⁴¹The theatre flourished in these years. The receipts for benefits averaged nearly 150 pounds a night, compared to the usual fifty and sixty pounds. In 1799, Dimond, the manager, realized 161 pounds (Mrs Siddons was playing) and Elliston 146 pounds. In 1800, Dimond's benefit brought him 137 pounds, Elliston's 150 and Mrs Edwin's 150. See Belville S. Penley, *The Bath Stage* (London, 1892), p. 81.

no small part was this success due to the attraction of the theatre's main star: 'The name of Elliston stands in the front rank during these years of prosperity' (*The Bath Stage*, p. 82).

Bath was a fashionable resort town and was able to support a theatre of considerable standing for the society people who flocked there to taste the waters. The theatre was run in circuit with the Bristol playhouse and was regarded as one of the best in the country. Provincial theatres in the Georgian era were not merely seasonal or summer playhouses, playing in the London off-season, but year-round operations. Their importance to the life and culture of their cities is suggested in the increasing numbers of royal patents granted by 1800.⁴² In 1768, the Bath theatre was patented, becoming the first Theatre Royal of the English provinces.⁴³

Outside London, Bath was one of the most important theatres, maintaining a regular stock-company which was supplemented by London stars.⁴⁴ Many of the London stars had indeed cut their teeth in the Orchard Street playhouse. It was described variously as 'a dramatic nursery for the London stage' and a 'probationary school of the drama to the London stage' (*The Bath Stage*, pp. 50 & 82). Mrs Siddons had begun her career there in 1778, and retained such an affection and loyalty to the theatre that she returned during the summer seasons.⁴⁵

⁴²By 1800 royal patents had been granted to Bath, Bristol, Cheltenham, Chester, Cork, Dublin, Edinburgh, Hull, Liverpool, Manchester, Margate, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Norwich, Richmond, Weymouth, Windsor, York, Aberdeen and Yarmouth (see Donohue, *Age of Kean*, p. 28, and Brewer, p. 388).

⁴³The first patent was given to Edinburgh. Within months, the first provincial English City was petitioning for the same protection. An Enabling Act was passed for the licensing of a playhouse in Bath and was given the Royal Assent on 29 January 1768. See Thomas, pp. 222-225. See also *The Bath Stage*, p. 35.

⁴⁴See Nicoll, Allardyce, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*, 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), IV, p. 234.

⁴⁵Siddons returned to Bath in 1799 and again in April 1801 and August 1801. See *Theatre Royal Bath: A Calendar of Performances at the Orchard Street Theatre 1750-1805*, ed. Arnold Hare (Bath: Kingsmead Press, 1977), pp. 178-179, & 190-93. See also *The Bath Stage*, p. 88.

Undoubtedly, one of the theatre's main assets was Robert William Elliston (1774-1831). Intended for the church, the young Elliston ran away to Bath and made his first appearance in Orchard Street in 1793.⁴⁶ Remarkably, he stayed until 1804, although he was loaned to the London theatres 'by permission of the Bath manager' where he played once a fortnight, soldering the already strong links between the London and Bath playhouses. One of the reasons why Elliston refused to leave Bath, despite lucrative offers from both Drury Lane and Covent Garden, was his recent marriage. In 1796, he eloped with and married Elizabeth Rundall, a dance teacher, who, despite her husband's success, continued her occupation.⁴⁷

Despite Sheridan's efforts to hire him, Elliston refused a permanent engagement at Drury Lane. His new wife had recently gone into partnership running a dance and deportment Academy, and Elliston enjoyed his position as Bath's star attraction (*Life of Elliston*, p. 27). Even when he was finally lured to Drury Lane in 1804, Mrs Elliston remained in Bath. Austen was aware of the unusual arrangements of Elliston's private life. In February 1807, she shared with Cassandra some Bath gossip gleaned from her Aunt Leigh Perrot: 'Elliston, she tells us has just succeeded to a considerable fortune on the death of an Uncle. I would not have it enough to take *him* from the Stage; *she* should quit her business, & live with him in London' (*Letters*, p. 122). This remark, which has not hitherto drawn comment from Austen scholars, demonstrates her loyalty to Elliston, both in his professional and his private life. Even though Elliston was now based in London, Austen continued to take an interest in him, and she clearly disapproved of his wife's determination to remain with her academy in Bath.

⁴⁶Elliston contemplated at different times entering the church. His biographer records that in 1799 he undertook a series of lectures at Bath and Bristol on morals and general criticism: 'It was a kind of "Blair", "Kames" and *Elliston* partnership, in which the moralist and the critic, pleasantly impregnated with the popular actor, drew together very profitable assemblies at both cities' (*Life and Enterprises*, p. 48). He had even considered buying Albermarle chapel, 'having serious thoughts of taking Holy Orders and preaching therein himself' (*Life and Enterprises*, p. 158).

⁴⁷See George Raymond, *Memoirs of Robert William Elliston*, 2 vols (London, 1844).

Elliston's last engagement on the Bath stage, before leaving for London, was as Rolla in Sheridan's adaptation of Kotzebue's *Pizarro*.⁴⁸ Rolla was not a surprising choice for Elliston. His performance of the noble, virtuous warrior was one of his most acclaimed tragic roles. It was also the role that he played for his Drury Lane debut, later that year, when he took over from Kemble.⁴⁹

Another Kotzebue adaptation, *Lovers' Vows*, was performed at least seventeen times in Bath from 1801-6.⁵⁰ This suggests that Austen was familiar with the play long before she used it in *Mansfield Park*. Elliston played the part of Frederick. Kotzebue adaptations such as *The Birth-Day*, *Pizarro*, *The Stranger* and *Lovers' Vows* continued to flourish at Bath, despite objections by the *Anti-Jacobin Review* to 'the filthy effusions of this German dunce'.⁵¹ In September 1801, Siddons played Elvira in *Pizarro* alongside Elliston at the Orchard Street Theatre.⁵² Elvira, in particular, incited vicious attacks by the *Anti-Jacobin Review* which, with typically excessive rhetoric, described her 'one of the most reprehensible characters that was ever suffered to disgrace the stage' (*Dramatic Character*, p. 147). However, charges that Elvira 'is nothing less than a complete Godwinite heroine, stark staring *Mary* all over' cut no ice

⁴⁸See Genest, *Some Account of The English Stage from 1660-1830*, 10 vols (Bath, 1832), VII, p. 638.

⁴⁹See Genest, VII, p. 640.

⁵⁰ Willaim Reitzel has noted six performances of *Lovers' Vows* during the time of the Austens' residence in Bath. November 7, 1801; April 22, 1802; January 28, 1803; June 2, 1803; November 17, 1803; January 17, 1805. See William Reitzel, '*Mansfield Park and Lovers' Vows*', *RES*, 9 (1933), 454. However, Arnold Hare's calendar of Orchard Street performances, compiled from newspapers and playbills, records a further eleven performances, as follows: May 25, 1801; September 21, 1801; February 13, 1802; November 13, 1802; June 13, 1803; October 21, 1803; November 19, 1803 (not 17th as Reitzel suggests); June 22, 1804; June 23, 1804; November 12, 1804; January 17, 1805 and July 10, 1805, see Hare, pp. 191-218.

⁵¹See Joseph Donohue, *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 147. For the numerous performances of Kotzebue adaptations between 1801 and 1805 see Hare, pp. 187-218.

⁵²See Genest, VII, p. 562.

with playgoers who flocked to the Bath theatre to see Siddons as Pizzaro's dignified paramour.

Another comment to suggest that the Austens were theatregoers while living in Bath is to be found in a letter written by Austen's mother to her daughter-in-law Mary Austen: 'Cooke, I dare say will have as full houses tonight & Saturday, as he had on Tuesday' (Tucker, p. 99). George Frederick Cooke (1756-1811) was the name of the Covent Garden actor whose brilliance as a tragic actor was overshadowed by his notorious drinking problem. Cooke was one of the great actors of the English stage, the hero of Edmund Kean. After Cooke's death brought on by hardened drinking, Kean arranged for his remains to be removed to a better location, and kept the bone of the fore-finger of his right hand as a sacred relic.⁵³ Cooke's reputation as a drunkard has obscured his acting abilities. His performances of Richard III and Iago were legendary, but he was considered to be an unreliable and erratic actor. One of his critics, to Cooke's great mortification, described him in the following terms: 'No two men, however different they may be, can be more at variance than George Cooke sober and George Cooke in a state of inebriety' (*Life of Cooke*, I, p. 50). At Covent Garden in 1803, whilst playing Sir Archy MacSarcasm in *Love a la Mode*, Cooke was so drunk that he was hissed off stage and the curtain dropped (*Life of Cooke*, I, p. 295).

Like Kean and Siddons, Cooke started his career as a provincial actor before he became famous on the London stage.⁵⁴ In December 1801, Cooke returned to

⁵³ According to Dunlap, Kean moved Cooke's remains from the Stranger's Vault of St Paul's Church to a more prominent location in the centre of the church yard: 'it may hereafter be found that his surgeon possesses his skull, and his successor, Kean, the bones of the forefinger of his right-hand--that dictatorial finger'. See William Dunlap, *A History of the American Theatre* (New York, 1832), p. 393. This gave birth to one of the strangest legends in theatre history. One version of the fate of the finger claims that Kean's wife had it thrown away, upon which point Kean left the stage. The skull was purported to have been used in productions of Hamlet after Cooke's death, and was located in Jefferson Medical College in 1967 by Don. B Milmeth. See his, 'The Posthumous Career of George Frederick Cooke', *Theatre Notebook* 24 (1969-1970), 68-74.

⁵⁴ Cooke acted with Siddons in the provinces before she became a London star. See *Life of Cooke*, I, p. 43.

Bath where he played Richard III, Shylock and Sir Archy MacSarcasm. In that season, the same time that Mrs Austen was writing of him, he also played Iago to Elliston's Othello. Cooke wrote in his journal: 'I received the greatest applause and approbation from the audiences' (*Life of Cooke*, I. p. 206).

The last five seasons at the Orchard Street Theatre before the opening of the new playhouse in 1805 saw the introduction of several London actors onto the Bath stage. The appearance of such London stars gave prominence to the playhouse, and, coupled with the allure of Elliston, ensured its reputation as a theatre of the highest standing. Austen was fortunate in residing in Bath at a time when the theatre was in the 'the zenith of its glory' (*The Bath Stage*, p. 81), and where she could see her favourite actor performing all the major roles. Elliston's most famous roles in comedy were Charles Surface, Doricourt, Ranger, Benedick, Marlow, Lord Ogleby, Captain Absolute, Lord Townley and Dr. Pangloss. In tragedy, Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Douglas, The Stranger, Orestes and Rolla were just a few of the characters that her 'best Elliston' made his own.⁵⁵

Elliston was unusual in being a player of tragic and comic parts. Leigh Hunt declared Elliston 'the only genius that has approached that great actor [Garrick] in universality of imitation'. Though he preferred him in comedy, he described him as 'the best lover on the stage both in tragedy and comedy'.⁵⁶ Others praised his diversity. Byron said that he could conceive nothing better than Elliston in gentlemanly comedy and in some parts of tragedy.⁵⁷ His obituary stated that 'Elliston was undoubtedly the most versatile actor of his day'.⁵⁸ Even William Oxberry's disparaging memoir

⁵⁵See *DNB*, VII, p. 302, and *Memoirs of Elliston*, I, pp. 215-223.

⁵⁶See *Dramatic Essays*, pp. 85, & 90.

⁵⁷ See *DNB*, VII, p. 302.

⁵⁸R. W. Elliston, Esq., ' *Gentleman's Magazine*, CI, Part II (1831), 184.

conceded that 'Mr Elliston is the best versatile actor we have ever seen'.⁵⁹ Charles Lamb honoured him with high praise in his 'Ellistonia': 'wherever Elliston walked, sate, or stood still, there was the theatre'.⁶⁰

Elliston finally moved on to the London stage, where Austen saw him perform. However, she complained of the falling standards of Elliston's acting when she saw him in London. Austen's observations on his demise reveal her familiarity with his work from the Bath years. With the majority of Austen's letters from this time missing, destroyed after her death, much has been lost, for, as her London letters reveal, she was a discerning and perceptive critic of the drama. When Austen left Bath in 1806 to live with Frank Austen and his wife in Southampton, she was forced to make do with the French Street Theatre, a far cry from Bath's Theatre Royal.

⁵⁹*Oxberry's Dramatic Biography and Histrionic Anecdotes, or the Green-Room Spy*, 6 vols (London, 1825-27), III, p. 88.

⁶⁰See Charles Lamb, *The Last Essays of Elia*, ed. Edmund Blunden (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 23.

Southampton

It was during the first few months at Southampton that Austen wrote her two little playlets on baby-care.⁶¹ Frank Austen's young wife was pregnant with their first child, and writing the plays proved a welcome diversion during the winter evenings. Austen also attended the public theatre in Southampton. In her list of expenses for 1807 she noted that she had spent 17 shillings and 9 pence for water parties and plays during that year.⁶²

The French Street Theatre in Southampton was mainly served by provincial companies, but stars from the London stage made occasional visits. Sarah Siddons and Dora Jordan made visits of a few days in 1802 and 1803.⁶³ The less talented Kemble brother, Charles Kemble, and his wife played there for a few nights in August 1808.⁶⁴ John Bannister (1760-1836), one of the most popular comedians of the London stage was also well-known to the provinces. His *Memoirs* record that he played the provinces during the summer months from 1797 to 1812, and an appendix lists some 425 characters which were played by Bannister in the course of his career.⁶⁵

Although there is no record by Austen of the plays that she saw at the French Street theatre, her niece recorded one of the performances that she attended with her two aunts. In September 1807, Edward Knight and his family visited his mother and sisters in Southampton. Austen's attachment to her niece Fanny Knight is revealed in her description of her as 'almost another sister' (*Letters*, p. 144). Austen had amused

⁶¹See Chapter 1.

⁶²See Deirdre Le Faye, 'Journey, Waterparties and Plays', *Jane Austen Society Report* (1986), 29-35.

⁶³See A. Temple Patterson, *A History of Southampton 1700-1914*, 11 vols (Southampton: Southampton University Press, 1966), 1, pp. 115-116.

⁶⁴See R. A. Austen-Leigh, *Jane Austen and Southampton* (London: Spottiswoode, 1949), pp. 30-31.

⁶⁵See John Adolphus, *Memoirs of John Bannister*, 2 vols (London, 1839), and *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, p. 270.

her niece with private theatricals in 1805, and when Fanny came to stay they visited the playhouse. Fanny recorded in her journal that on 14 September 1807 the party saw John Bannister in *The Way to Keep Him* and the musical adaptation of Kotzebue's *I'm of Age Tomorrow* for his benefit.⁶⁶

Bannister's role in Arthur Murphy's comedy *The Way to Keep Him* was Sir Bashful Constant, a man of fashion in possession of the shameful secret that he is in love with his own wife, his '*Cara Sposa*'.⁶⁷ Though scholars have debated Austen's use of the latter in *Emma*, no one has noticed its presence in Murphy's comedy, where, spoken by the coxcomb Sir Brilliant Fashion, it surely got a laugh in the theatre.

Bannister was best known for his low roles. Hunt claims that 'no actor equals him in the character of a sailor' (*Dramatic Essays*, p. 31).⁶⁸ The sailor, Jack Junk, in Thomas Dibdin's adaptation of Kotzebue's *The Birth Day* was one of his best-loved roles. Bannister was also praised for his ability to transform himself into many different roles: 'The greatest comedians have thought themselves happy in understanding one or two characters, but what shall we say of Bannister, who in one night personates six, and with such felicity that by the greatest part of the audience he is sometimes taken for some unknown actor?' (*Dramatic Essays*, p. 32). Hunt was thinking, in particular, of *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, where Bannister transmigrated into five different characters. However the comic afterpiece, *Of Age Tomorrow*, that Austen saw in Southampton was also used as a vehicle for Bannister's versatility.

Thomas Dibdin adapted *Of Age Tomorrow* from Kotzebue's *Der Wildfang*. Dibdin had already adapted Kotzebue's *The Birth Day* and *The Horse and Widow*.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Kent County Archives, Centre for Kentish Studies, Fanny Knight's Journals, U951 F24/1.

⁶⁷Arthur Murphy, *The Way to Keep Him*, in *Bells's British Theatre*, 34 vols (London, 1797), XVII, p. 52.

⁶⁸The painter Samuel de Wilde painted Bannister as 'Ben the sailor'. See *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, p. 273.

⁶⁹See Thomas Dibdin, *Reminiscences*, 4 vols (London, 1827), II, p. 239.

Michael Kelly, in his *Reminiscences*, records that Bannister persuaded Kelly and Dibdin to adapt *Der Wildfang* for Drury Lane.⁷⁰ Kelly describes *Of Age Tomorrow* as a great favourite. The ballad 'No, my love, no', according to Kelly, was 'the most popular song of the day... not only to be found on every piano-forte, but also to be heard in every street' (*Kelly's Reminiscences*, II, p. 152).

Dibdin's musical farce showed Bannister adopting three different disguises in his endeavours to woo his lover, Sophia, who is guarded by a dowager aunt, Lady Brumback, who stands to lose half her fortune if her niece marries. Bannister's disguise as Fritz the *friseur* was extremely popular, especially for his comic rendering of a story of his master breaking his leg over a bannister, to which Lady Brumback remarks, 'Poor fellow! I wish there were no Bannisters in the world'.⁷¹ Kelly writes: 'Bannister's personification of the Hair Dresser, was excellent; had he served a seven years' apprenticeship to the trade, he could not have been more *au fait* in it, nor have handled the comb, curling irons and powder puff, more skillfully' (*Kelly's Reminiscences*, II, p. 151). Bannister's transformations into a Swiss soldier and a (cross-dressed) abandoned mother of a foundling child showed his powers of imitation at their very best.⁷²

The appearance of London stars at the French Street theatre may be attributed to the rising popularity of Southampton as a spa town. Charles Dibdin, the Southampton-born dramatist,⁷³ partly ascribed this transformation to the increasing number of 'genteel families who have made it their residence', and also to the tourists

⁷⁰Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 2 vols (London, 1826), II, pp. 150-152.

⁷¹Charles Dibdin, *Of Age Tomorrow* (London, n.d.), p. 18.

⁷²Bannister's other cross-dressed role was as Jenny Diver in *Beggar's Opera Metamorphosed*, which he played alongside his father's Polly Peachum in his first season at the Haymarket. Bannister was also painted in the role of Polly Peachum, so he probably took over this role from his father. See *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, pp. 268 & 273.

⁷³Charles Dibdin (1745-1814), not to be confused with his illegitimate older son Charles Dibdin the younger (1768-1833), and his illegitimate younger son Thomas Dibdin (1771-1841).

who came to Southampton for the sea-bathing (Patterson, p. 104). Though the theatre had acquired a poor reputation by the end of the eighteenth century, a new playhouse was opened in July 1803 by John Collins.⁷⁴

The French Street theatre also housed amateur theatricals from the local Grammar school. The school's headmaster George Whittaker was passionate about the theatre and encouraged his pupils to stage amateur theatricals for charitable purposes. In 1807, Home's famous tragedy *Douglas* was acted for the benefit of British prisoners of war in France, to 'an uncommonly crowded house' (Patterson, p. 114). In *Mansfield Park*, Tom Bertram's comic remarks about the efficacy of schoolboys reciting the part of young Norval in *Douglas* may have been an echo to such performances lingering in Austen's memory of amateur theatricals.

Austen's comments a year later, in 1808, about the playhouse suggest that she had taken a dislike to its shabbiness: '*Our Brother* [James] we may perhaps see in the course of a few days--& we mean to take the opportunity of his help, to go one night to the play. Martha ought to see the inside of the Theatre once while she lives in Southampton, & I think she will hardly wish to take a second veiw [sic]' (*Letters*, p. 155).

Another family descendant, Richard Arthur Leigh, observed that while Jane Austen was living in Southampton, she became friendly with a Mr Valentine Fitzhugh, whose sister-in-law was an ardent admirer of Mrs Siddons, and would assist her in dressing and make-up for her shows (*Jane Austen and Southampton*, p. 46). There is no record of any conversation that Austen might have had with Fitzhugh about the theatre, which is hardly surprising given that he was so deaf 'he could not hear a Canon, were it fired close to him' (*Letters*, p. 160).

During the Bath and Southampton years Austen's writing was put on hold. She had produced three full-length novels before leaving Steventon in 1801, and began

⁷⁴See Paul Ranger, *The Georgian Playhouses of Hampshire 1730-1830*, Hampshire Papers 10 (Winchester: Hampshire County Council, 1996), pp. 17-18.

working on them again in 1809. Biographers and critics have been puzzled by Austen's seven-year silence, attributing it to her evident unhappiness and displacement. But perhaps Bath and Southampton simply had more to offer in the way of public diversions and amusements than Hampshire and Kent. At Chawton, Austen turned her mind, once more, to her novels and with the help and encouragement of her brother Henry began to think about publication. When Austen spent time in London with Henry, negotiating with publishers, she rarely missed a chance to visit the London theatres.

Had Austen's letters not been destroyed after her death in 1817, we would have had a much more detailed sense of her passion for the theatre. But there is enough evidence in the few surviving letters to suggest that she was familiar with contemporary actors and the range and repertoire of the theatres. Austen's taste was eclectic; she enjoyed farces, musical comedy and pantomime, considered to be 'low' drama, as much as she enjoyed Shakespeare, Colman and Garrick. Her observations in her London letters reveal her to be a discerning critic, with an especially keen interest in comedy.

London

Austen and Tragedy: Siddons and Kean

1808 was a particularly busy year for Austen. She spent most of the time travelling between her various brothers and family friends. After playing Mrs Candour in *The School for Scandal* at the Manydown Twelfth Night party, Austen visited the Fowles at Kintbury and in May she visited Henry and Eliza Austen at 16 Michael Place in Brompton. The theatre-loving couple were delighted to live in close proximity to several famous London stars. The actress and singer Jane Pope lived next door to them at No. 17. Jane Pope was the original Mrs Candour in *The School for Scandal*, and played her until she was in her sixties, being the only member of the original cast left on the stage.⁷⁵ After playing the part of Mrs Candour earlier that year, Austen may have been amused to be living next door to the actress who had inspired the original role.

At No.15 Michael Place was Elizabeth Billington, the celebrated soprano singer, and Liston, the comedian at No. 21.⁷⁶ Jane Austen stayed until July, enjoying the rounds of dinner-parties, theatre trips and concerts arranged by Henry and Eliza. Henry Austen owned his own box at one of the illegitimate theatres, the Pantheon in Oxford Street.⁷⁷ The Pantheon originally opened in 1772 as a place of assembly for masquerades and concerts, which were all the rage in the 1770s.⁷⁸ Boswell and Dr Johnson visited and admired the magnificent building in 1772 and Fanny Burney distilled her own experience of the new Pantheon into *Evelina*; her heroine is

⁷⁵Pope's career on the London stage spanned 52 years and from playing sprightly comic roles she became in Hazlitt's words, 'the very picture of a duenna, a maiden lady or antiquated dowager'. See *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, XII, pp. 77-84.

⁷⁶See David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), p. 323.

⁷⁷See Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen : A Life* (London, Penguin, 1997) p. 203.

⁷⁸See Mander and Mitchenson, pp. 322-334.

'extremely struck with the beauty of the building' when she is taken to a concert there.⁷⁹

The Pantheon was converted into an Opera House in 1791 and was destroyed by fire a year later, losing its hope of a royal patent to the King's theatre in the Haymarket. Thereafter, the Pantheon was rebuilt and resumed its original function as a place of concerts and masquerades until 1812, when it re-opened as the Pantheon Theatre staging the usual mixed bill of burlettas and ballet to circumvent the licensing law.

Henry Austen's patronage of minor playhouses such as the Pantheon and the Lyceum, as well as the legitimate patent houses, suggests his unflagging interest in the theatre. Like his sister, he had no compunction about supporting the minor theatres. Unlike his brother James, who lost interest in the theatre when he became ordained, Henry's obsession with the theatre carried on into maturity, and whenever Jane and Cassandra were in town, he is to be found arranging seats at the various London theatres. Although there few surviving letters letters to fill in the details of Austen's activities at this time (the letters stop altogether from 26 July 1809 until 18 April 1811), she surely took advantage of Henry's and Eliza's hospitality as she did in the following years. Starting at the latter date, there is a sufficient amount of information to provide a fair estimate of her theatrical activities up to November 28, 1814, the last time she is known to have attended 'a theatre.

In order to be available for the proof-reading of *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen went to London in April 1811, staying with Henry and Eliza at their new home in Sloane Street. Shortly after her arrival Jane expressed a desire to see Shakespeare's *King John* at Covent Garden. In the meantime, she sacrificed a trip to the Lyceum, nursing a cold at home, in the hope of recovering for the Saturday excursion to Covent Garden:

⁷⁹Frances Burney, *Evelina*, ed. Edward A. Bloom (London:Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 104.

To night I might have been at the Play, Henry had kindly planned our going together to the Lyceum, but I have a cold which I should not like to make worse before Saturday.... [Later on Saturday] Our first object to day was Henrietta St to consult with Henry, in consequence of a very unlucky change of the Play for this very night--Hamlet instead of King John--& we are to go on Monday to Macbeth, instead, but it is a disappointment to us both (*Letters*, pp. 180-1).

Austen's preference for *King John* rather than *Hamlet* may seem curious by modern standards, but can be explained by one of the intrinsic features of Georgian theatre: the orientation of the play towards the star actor in the lead role. Austen's disappointment in the 'unlucky change' of programme from 'Hamlet instead of King John' is accounted for her in next letter to Cassandra:

I have no chance of seeing Mrs Siddons.--She *did* act on Monday, but as Henry was told by the Boxkeeper that he did not think she would, the places, & all thought of it, were given up. I should particularly have liked seeing her in Constance, & could swear at her with little effort for disappointing me (*Letters*, p. 184).

It was not so much *King John* that Austen wanted to see, as Siddons in one of her most celebrated roles as Constance, the quintessential portrait of a tragic mother. In the words of her biographer and friend, Thomas Campbell, Siddons was 'the imbodyed image of maternal love and intrepidity; of wronged and righteous feeling; of proud grief and majestic desolation'.⁸⁰ Siddons's own remarks on this 'life-exhausting' role, and the 'mental and physical' difficulties arising from the requirements of playing Constance provide a striking testimony to her all-consuming passion and commitment to the part. Siddons records:

Whenever I was called upon to personate the character of *Constance*, I never, from the beginning of the play to the end of my part in it, once suffered my dressing-room door to be closed, in order that my attention might be constantly fixed on those distressing events which, by this means, I could plainly hear going on upon the stage, the terrible effects of which progress were to be represented by me (Campbell, p. 89).

⁸⁰See Thomas Campbell, *Life of Mrs Siddons* (New York, 1834), p. 87.

Though her part was brief--she appeared in just two acts-- Siddons's impassioned interpretation was acclaimed. Constance's famously eloquent speeches and frenzied lamentations for her dead boy were newly rendered by Siddons, for she didn't 'rant' and produce the effects of noisy grief, but was stunningly understated, showing grief 'tempered and broken', as Leigh Hunt put it.⁸¹ Hunt, whilst admitting that *King John* was 'not written with the utmost power of Shakespeare', nevertheless viewed the play as a brilliant vehicle for Siddons's consummate tragic powers.⁸² Campbell also claimed that Siddons's single-handedly resuscitated the play, winning over the public to 'feel the tragedy worth seeing for the sake of *Constance* alone' (Campbell, pp. 86-87).

Jane Austen certainly felt that 'Constance' was worth the price of a ticket. Though Henry Austen was misinformed by the box-keeper and Siddons had indeed appeared in *Macbeth* on Monday (April 22), Austen was less sorry to have missed her in *Lady Macbeth* than in *Constance*, which may imply that she had previously seen her in *Macbeth*. According to Genest, Siddons acted *Lady Macbeth* eight times and *Constance* five times that 1811-1812 season, before retiring from the London stage, so perhaps Austen finally got her wish.⁸³

Austen reveals that on Saturday (April 21) the party went instead to the Lyceum Theatre in the Strand, where the Drury Lane company had taken their patent after the fire in 1809.⁸⁴ They saw a revival of Bickerstaffe's *The Hypocrite*:

We *did* go to the play after all on Saturday, we went to the Lyceum, & saw the Hypocrite, an old play taken from Moliere's *Tartuffe*, & were well entertained. Downton & Mathews were the good actors. Mrs

⁸¹The 'rant', representing the formal, rhetorical approach to tragedy was decried by the critics. See below.

⁸²See Leigh Hunt, *Dramatic Criticism*, ed. L. H. and C. W. Houtchens (New York, 1949), p. 39.

⁸³For her final season at Covent Garden she also acted Queen Katherine six times, Mrs Beverley five times, Elvira four times, Isabella twice and Lady Randolph once. See Genest, VIII, p. 239.

⁸⁴The Drury Lane Company remained at the Lyceum until 1812.

Edwin was the Heroine--& her performance is just what it used to be (*Letters*, p. 184).

In *The Hypocrite*, the roles of Maw-worm, an ignorant zealot, and the religious and moral hypocrite Dr Cantwell were acted by the renowned comic actors Charles Mathews (1776-1835), and William Dowton (1764-1851), singled out by Austen as 'the good actors'. Dowton was famous for his roles as Dr. Cantwell, Sir Oliver Premium and Sir Anthony Absolute.⁸⁵ Leigh Hunt describes his performance in the *Hypocrite* as 'one of the few perfect pieces of acting on the stage' (*Dramatic Criticism*, p. 97).

The great comic actor Charles Mathews was also a favourite of Hunt's, 'an actor of whom it is difficult to say whether his characters belong most to him or he to his characters' (*Dramatic Essays*, p. 32). Mathews was so tall and thin that he was nicknamed 'Stick'; when his manager Tate Wilkinson first saw him he called him a 'Maypole', told him he was too tall for low comedy and quipped that 'one hiss would blow him off the stage'.⁸⁶

Mathews's *Memoirs* describes the success of *The Hypocrite* at the Lyceum, and records his experiment in adding an extra fanatical speech for Maw-worm, thus breaking the rule of his 'immortal instructor, who says "Let your clowns say no more than is set down for them"' (*Memoirs of Mathews*, p. 149). His experiment worked, and the reviews were favourable: 'It was an admirable representation of "Praise God Barebones,"--an exact portraiture of one of those ignorant enthusiasts who lose sight of all good while they are vainly hunting after an ideal perfectibility' (*Memoirs*, p. 148). Austen dearly loved a fool, and in *Pride and Prejudice*, she portrays her own obsequious hypocrite and ignorant enthusiast, in Mr Collins and Mary Bennet.

⁸⁵Dowton was a notorious figure for reviving the the burlesque play *The Tailors* at the Haymarket in 1805, inciting a riot by aggrieved London tailors. See *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography*, IV, pp. 256-7.

⁸⁶Mathews describes his unprepossessing figure in his memoirs, where he relates that from a child he was 'a long, thin skewer of a child' with distorted comical features. Mathews' son, who resembled his father, became known as 'Twig'. See *The Life and Correspondence of Charles Mathews*, ed. Edmund Yates (London: Routledge, 1860), pp. 5-6, and 130. For his account of Wilkinson see p. 72.

Elizabeth Edwin (1771-1854), the wife of the actor John Edwin, performed the part of Charlotte, the archetypal witty heroine, for which she was famous.⁸⁷ The Austen sisters were clearly familiar with Edwin's acting style. Edwin had played at Bath for many years, including the time that Austen lived there, and she was also a favourite of the Southampton theatre, where the sisters may have seen her perform.⁸⁸

Elizabeth Edwin was yet another actor from the provinces who had begun her career as a child actor in a company of strolling players. She was the leading actress at Wargrave at the Earl of Barrymore's private theatricals.⁸⁹ She was often (unfairly) compared to the great Dora Jordan whose equal she never was, though they played the same comic roles. Austen's ambiguous comment about Edwin suggests that she did not rate Edwin highly as Downton and Mathews, who are the 'good actors'. Oxberry's 1826 memoir observes that though Edwin is 'an accomplished artist...she has little, if any, genius-- and is a decided mannerist'.⁹⁰ Furthermore, he describes Edwin as an 'artificial' actress who betrayed the fact that she was performing:

though we admired what she did, she never carried us with her. We knew that we were at a display of art, and never felt for a moment the illusion of its being a natural scene (*Oxberry's Dramatic Biography*, IV, p. 209).

Austen's complaint of having missed Mrs Siddons in the role of Constance reflects the orientation of the play towards the star actor in the lead role.⁹¹ In the

⁸⁷Bickerstaffe's musical version of the play was adapted from Cibber. The witty heroine of Restoration comedy had been replaced in Georgian drama by a new character assimilated from Richardsonian models, in particular the freely spoken, independent Lady G. (née Charlotte Grandison). See Chapter 4.

⁸⁸The Edwins were at Bath, Bristol and Southampton from 1797-98 through 1803-4. Edwin acted in the provinces throughout the acting career. See *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, p. 34, and Hare's *Orchard Street Calender*, p.p. 170-212.

⁸⁹C. Baron Wilson, *Our Actresses* 2 vols (London, 1844), I, p. 105.

⁹⁰Wilson, I, p. 119.

⁹¹See Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean*, pp. 62-64.

playbills of the period the dramatist's name is rarely mentioned, not only because the audience would automatically know the authors of established plays, but because of their demand for the star actor's interpretation of a classic role. For writers such as Charles Lamb, the association of a leading actor with a classic role detracted from the performance: 'It is difficult for a frequent playgoer to disembarass the idea of Hamlet from the person and voice of Mr K[emble]. We speak of Lady Macbeth, while we are in reality thinking of Mrs S[iddons].'⁹²

This preoccupation with the play as a vehicle for the star actor, popularly called 'the possession of parts', went hand-in-hand with the theatre's proclivity towards an established repertory.⁹³ It was common to see the same actor in a favourite role year in, year out. Dora Jordan's *Rosalind and Little Pickle*, both of them 'breeches' roles, were performed successfully throughout her long career. Siddons's *Lady Macbeth* and *Constance* were staples of the repertory throughout her career, and, even after her retirement, they were the subject of comparison with other performances.

Donohue observes:

Audiences by and large did not go to the theatre to see Shakespeare or Congreve, Jonson or Sheridan as such; the notion is far too abstract. Rather they went to see Betterton as Hamlet, Mrs. Siddons as Zara in Congreve's *The Mourning Bride*, Garrick as Abel Drugger in his adaptation of *The Alchemist*, or Mrs. Jordan as Miss Hoyden in Sheridan's *A Trip to Scarborough* (Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean*, p. 62).

The tradition of an actor's interpretation of a classic role, which still survives today, was an integral part of an individual play's appeal. Critics and the public would revel in the particularities of individual performances, and they would eagerly anticipate a new performance of a favourite role, though novel innovations by actors were by no means a guarantee of audience approbation.

⁹²*The Romantics on Shakespeare*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 123.

⁹³See James J. Lynch, *Box Pit and Gallery: Stage and Society in Johnson's London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), pp. 5-6.

In 1813, Austen set out for Godmersham, stopping on the way in London, where she stayed with Henry Austen in his quarters over his bank at Henrietta Street, Covent Garden. On the night of September 14, the party went by coach to the Lyceum theatre, where they had a private box on the stage. As soon as the new Drury Lane theatre had re-opened its doors to the public, the Lyceum had no choice but to revert to musical drama. Austen saw three musical pieces; the first was *The Boarding House; or Five Hours at Brighton*, the second, a musical farce called *The Beehive*, and the last *Don Juan, or the Libertine Destroyed*, a pantomime based on Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine*. Once again, Austen's reflections on the plays were shared with Cassandra:

I talked to Henry at the Play last night. We were in a private Box--Mr. Spencer's--Which made it much more pleasant. The Box is directly on the Stage. One is infinitely less fatigued than in the common way...Fanny & the two little girls are gone to take Places for tonight at Covent Garden; Clandestine Marriage & *Midas*. The latter will be a fine show for L. & M.--They revelled last night in 'Don Juan', whom we left in Hell at half-past eleven...We had Scaremouch & a Ghost--and were delighted; I speak of *them*; my delight was very tranquil, & the rest of us were sober-minded. Don Juan was the last of 3 musical things;--Five hours at Brighton, in 3 acts--of which one was over before we arrived, none the worse--& The Beehive, rather less flat & trumpery (*Letters*, p. 218-9).

The Beehive is an adaptation of Kotzebue's comedy *Das Posthaus in Treuenbrietzen*. Two lovers who have never met, but who are betrothed to one another, fall in love under assumed names. The young man discovers the ruse first and introduces his friend as himself, meanwhile the heroine, Miss Fairfax, in retaliation pretends to fall in love with the best friend.

Austen clearly preferred the Kotzebue comedy to *Five Hours at Brighton*, a low comedy set in a seaside boarding house. Her 'delight' in *Don Juan* is properly amended to 'tranquil delight', of course, to please the upright Cassandra. Byron had also seen the pantomime, in which the famous Grimaldi played Scaremouch, to which he alludes in his first stanza of *Don Juan*: 'We all have seen him, in the pantomime,

/Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time'.⁹⁴ Scaremouch was one of Grimaldi's oldest and most frequently revived parts.

Austen gives her usual precise details of the theatre visit, even down to the private box, 'directly on the stage'. Again, the Austens showed their support for the minor theatres, and Henry is arranging trips to the Lyceum. Perhaps he had an arrangement with his friend Mr. Spencer to share their private boxes at each of the minor theatres. It certainly meant that Austen could indulge in intimate discussion with Henry, as does Elizabeth Bennet with Mrs Gardiner in *Pride and Prejudice*.⁹⁵

As planned, the very next night the party went to Covent Garden Theatre where they had 'very good places in the Box next the stage box-- front and second row; the three old ones behind of course'.⁹⁶ They sat in Covent Garden's new theatre boxes, presumably in full consciousness that at the opening of the new theatre, riots had been occasioned by the extra number of private and dress boxes.⁹⁷ The Crabbes were in London and Austen jokes about seeing the reverend poet at the playhouse, particularly as the 'boxes were fitted up with crimson velvet' (*Letters*, pp. 220-221). The remark skilfully combines an allusion to Crabbe's *Gentleman Farmer*, 'In full festoons the crimson curtains fell',⁹⁸ with detailed observation of the lavish fittings of the new Covent Garden theatre, recently reopened after the fire of 1809. Edward Brayley's account of the grand new playhouse, also singles out the 'crimson-covered

⁹⁴Lord Byron: *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), V, p. 9. Byron became friends with Grimaldi, He first saw him in 1808, and always took a box ticket for his benefit. See *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi*, ed. Boz (London, 1869), p. 196. See also *The Theatre of Don Juan: A Collection of Plays and Views, 1630-1963*, ed. Oscar Mandel (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1963).

⁹⁵See *P&P*, pp. 152-154.

⁹⁶There were 3 boxes on each side of the proscenium, 3 tiers or circles of boxes in the auditory (each containing 26) and above them spacious slip boxes (on a level with the gallery), see Brayley, p. 19.

⁹⁷See Marc Baer, *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 135-165, and Gillian Russel, 'Playing at Revolution: The Politics of the O. P. Riots of 1809', *Theatre Notebook*, 44 (1990), 16-26.

⁹⁸See *Letters*, p. 419.

seats',⁹⁹ and describes the grand staircase leading to the boxes, and the ante-room with its yellow-marble statue of Shakespeare.

The Austens saw *The Clandestine Marriage* by Garrick and George Colman the Elder, and *Midas: an English Burletta*, by Kane O'Hara, a parody of the Italian comic opera.¹⁰⁰ One of the attractions was to see Mr. Terry, who had recently taken over the role of Lord Ogleby in *The Clandestine Marriage*.

The new Mr Terry was Ld Ogleby, & Henry thinks he may do; but there was no acting more than moderate; & I was as much amused by the remembrances connected with Midas as with any part of it. The girls were very much delighted but still prefer Don Juan--& I must say I have seen nobody on the stage who has been a more interesting Character than that compound of Cruelty & Lust (*Letters*, p. 221).

Daniel Terry (1780-1829) made his debut at Covent Garden on September 8th, just a few days before Austen saw him.¹⁰¹ Sir Walter Scott was a great friend and admirer of Terry (who adapted several of his novels for the stage)¹⁰² and claimed that he was an excellent actor who could act everything except lovers, fine gentlemen and operatic heroes. Scott observed that 'his old men in comedy particularly are the finest I ever saw'.¹⁰³ Henry Austen showed a little more tolerance than his sister in allowing Mr. Terry teething troubles in the role of one of the most celebrated old men of eighteenth-century comedy.

Henry Austen's faith in Mr Terry's capability of growing into a beloved role reflects the performer-oriented tendency of the age. But Austen's powerful and striking description of Don Juan is a far less typical response. Here, a more discerning

⁹⁹See Brayley, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰See Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean*, p. 47.

¹⁰¹He made his debut in Leon in *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*. See Genest, VIII.

¹⁰²See J. G. Lockhart, *Life of Walter Scott* (New York: Cromwell, 1848), p. 271.

¹⁰³See *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson, 12 vols (London: Constable, 1932), III, p. 32.

and discriminating voice prevails, and rather than the performer being the main focus of interest, she is responding to the perverse appeal of the character beneath the actor. The famous blackguard was still obviously on her mind, belying her earlier insistence upon 'tranquil delight' and 'sober-mindedness'.

Austen's reference to *Midas* confirms that she had seen this entertainment at an earlier date. Garrick's and Colman's brilliant comedy, *The Clandestine Marriage*, had also been known to her for a long time. The title appears as a phrase in one of her early works, *Love and Freindship*, and, I shall argue in Chapter 6, the play is used as a source for a key scene in *Mansfield Park*.

Austen was disappointed with her latest theatrical ventures, though if had she stayed longer in London she may have been disposed to see Elliston in a new play, *First Impressions*, later that month.¹⁰⁴ When she wrote to her brother Francis, she complained of the falling standards of the theatres:

Of our three evenings in Town one was spent at the Lyceum & another at Covent Garden;--the *Clandestine Marriage* was the most respectable of the performances, the rest were Sing-song & trumpery, but did very well for Lizzy & Marianne, who were indeed delighted; but *I* wanted better acting.--There was no Actor worth naming.--I beleive the Theatres are thought at a low ebb at present (*Letters*, p. 230).

Austen's heart-felt wish for 'better acting', or, in Edmund Bertram's words, 'real hardened acting' was soon to be realized.

Drury Lane had indeed reached its lowest ebb for some years when it was rescued by the success of a new actor, Edmund Kean (1787-1833), who made his electrifying debut as Shylock in January 1814. The story of his stage-debut has become one of the most enduring tales of the theatre.

The reconstructed Drury Lane theatre, rebuilt after it was destroyed by fire in 1809, was facing financial ruin, greatly exacerbated by the ruinous management of Sheridan, when a provincial actor, a strolling player, Edmund Kean was asked to play

¹⁰⁴See Genest, VIII, pp. 400-401.

Shylock.¹⁰⁵ Kean, in his innovative black wig, duly appeared before a meagre audience, mesmerizing them by his stage entrance. At the end of the famous speech in the third act, the audience roared its applause. 'How the devil so few of them kicked up such a row', said Oxberry, 'was something marvellous'.¹⁰⁶ Kean's mesmerizing appearance on the stage was given the seal of approval when Hazlitt, who saw him on the first night, raved: 'For voice, eye, action, and expression, no actor has come out for many years at all equal to him' (*Complete Works of Hazlitt*, V, p. 179).

The news of Kean's conquest of the stage reached Austen, and in early March, 1814, whilst she was staying with Henry during the negotiations for the publication of *Mansfield Park*, she made plans to see the latest acting sensation:

Places are secured at Drury Lane for Saturday, but so great is the rage for seeing Keen [sic] that only a third & fourth row could be got. As it is in a front box however, I hope we shall do pretty well.--Shylock.--A good play for Fanny. She cannot be much affected I think (*Letters*, p. 256).

The relatively short part of Shylock is thus considered to be a suitably gentle introduction to Kean's powerful acting for the young girl. But Austen's own excitement is barely contained in her description of the theatre party: 'We hear that Mr Keen is more admired than ever. The two vacant places of our two rows, are likely to be filled by Mr. Tilson & his brother Gen. Chownes'. Then, almost as if she has betrayed too much pleasure in the absence of her sister, she writes: 'There are no good places to be got in Drury Lane for the next fortnight, but Henry means to secure some for Saturday fortnight when You are reckoned upon' (*Letters*, p. 256).

Another visit to see Kean was intended, and Henry's acquaintance with the theatre-world is again emphasized.

¹⁰⁵By the close of the first fortnight of the 1813-1814 season, the receipts were worryingly low, averaging two hundred and fifty pounds a night compared to fifty thousand pounds in the 1807-1808 season. See Harold Newcombe Hillebrand, *Edmund Kean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), pp. 106-113.

¹⁰⁶See F. W. Hawkins, *The Life of Edmund Kean*, 2 vols (London, 1869), I, p. 131.

The party went to Drury Lane on the evening of March 5, attending the eighth performance of *The Merchant of Venice*. Austen's initial response to the latest acting phenomenon was calm and rational: 'We were quite satisfied with Kean. I cannot imagine better acting, but the part was too short, & excepting him & Miss Smith, & she did not quite answer my expectations, the parts were ill filled & the Play heavy' (*Letters*, p. 257). Hazlitt frequently complained that one of the problems of the star system was filling up the smaller parts. In his review of *The Merchant of Venice*, he is grudgingly respectful of the minor roles.

However, Kean was still very much on Austen's mind, for in the same letter, in the midst of a sentence about Henry Crawford and *Mansfield Park*, she unexpectedly reverts to the subject of him with greater enthusiasm: 'I shall like to see Kean again excessively, & to see him with You too;--it appeared to me as if there was no fault in him anywhere; & in his scene with Tubal there was exquisite acting' (*Letters*, p. 258).

Austen was conscious of the dramatic demands of Shylock's scene, which requires the actor to scale, alternately, between grief and savage glee. Her singling out of this particular scene was no doubt influenced by the reports of the opening night where the audience had been powerless to restrain their applause. Kean's biographer, Hawkins, noted the subtle intricacies of the scene in the third act ending with the dialogue between Shylock and Tubal:

Shylock's anguish at his daughter's flight, his wrath at the two Christians who had made sport of his suffering, his hatred of Christianity generally, and of Antonio in particular, and his alternations of rage, grief and ecstasy as Tubal enumerated the losses incurred in the search of Jessica--her extravagances, and then the ill-luck that had fallen on Antonio; in all this there was such originality, such terrible force, such assurance of a new and mighty master, that the house burst forth into a very whirlwind of approbation (*Life of Kean*, I, p. 130).

For those 'who had the good fortune to witness the Shylock of Edmund Kean' (*Life of Kean*, I, p. 149), his delicately shaded and finely discriminating performance was incomparable. Hazlitt also believed that the strength of Kean's performance as Shylock was due to his ability to scale the highest points and the lowest :

[I]n giving effect to the conflict of passions arising out of the contrasts of situation, in varied vehemence of declamation, in keenness of sarcasm, in the rapidity of his transitions from one tone and feeling to another, in propriety and novelty of action, presenting a succession of striking pictures, and giving perpetually fresh shocks of delight and surprise, it would be difficult to single out a competitor (*Complete Works of Hazlitt*, V, p. 179).

Kean's acting style was hereafter characterized as impulsive, electric and fracturing.¹⁰⁷

'To see him act', Coleridge observed famously, 'is like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning.'¹⁰⁸

Austen was disappointed with the performance of her old favourite Elliston.

The programme that night included him in an oriental 'melodramatic spectacle' called *Illusion, or the Trances of Nourjahad*. Austen and her party left before the end:

We were too much tired to stay for the whole of *Illusion* (Nourjahad) which has 3 acts;--there is a great deal of finery & dancing in it, but I think little merit. Elliston was Nourjahad, but it is a solemn sort of part, not at all calculated for his powers. There was nothing of the *best Elliston* about him. I might not have known him, but for his voice (*Letters*, p. 257-258).

Henry Crabb Robinson also saw Elliston as Nourjahad and wrote in his diary that 'his untragic face can express no strong emotions'.¹⁰⁹ Robinson admired Elliston as a 'fine bustling comedian', but thought that he was a 'wretched Tragedian' (Brown, p. 36)

Austen's observation that Elliston's brilliance lay especially in his comic powers was a view shared by his critics and admirers. Charles Lamb thought so too, but was afraid to say so when Elliston recounted how Drury Lane was abusing him. Lamb records: 'He complained of this: "Have you heard... how they treat me? they put me in *comedy*".

¹⁰⁷ George Beaumont observed 'there was a fire in his acting that was electric'. See Hillebrand, pp. 119 and 365.

¹⁰⁸ *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. H. N. Coleridge, 2 vols (London, 1835), I, p. 24.

¹⁰⁹ *The London Theatre, 1811-1866: Selections from the Diary of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Eluned Brown (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1966), p. 56.

Thought I--"where could they have put you better?" Then, after a pause--"Where I formerly played Romeo, I now play Mercutio" (*Ellistonia*, p. 25).

Austen's surprise to find 'the best Elliston' so altered from his glory days at Bath and his early promise at Drury Lane reflects a physical deterioration brought on by hard drinking, and a steady decline in his acting powers. From managing various minor and provincial theatres, he finally became the lessee and manager of Drury Lane from 1819 until 1826, whereupon he retired in 1826, bankrupt and addicted to drinking and gambling.¹¹⁰

Elliston's acting talent suffered when he threw his energies into his multifarious business ventures. The *London Magazine and Theatrical Inquisitor* observed that in later years Elliston had fallen into 'a coarse buffonery of manner' and Leigh Hunt observed that he had 'degraded an unequivocal and powerful talent for comedy into coarseness and vulgar confidence'.¹¹¹

Three days after seeing Kean and Elliston at Drury Lane, Austen went to the rival house Covent Garden to see Charles Coffey's farce, 'the Devil to pay...I expect to be very much amused' (*Letters*, p. 260). Genest records that Dora Jordan played Nell, one of her most famous comic roles.¹¹² The party were to see Thomas Arne's opera *Artaxerxes* with Catherine Stephens (1794-1882), the celebrated British soprano who later became the Countess of Essex.

Austen was, however, less excited by the opera than the farce: 'Excepting Miss Stephens, I dare say *Artaxerxes* will be very tiresome' (*Letters*, p. 260). Catherine Stephens acted Mandane in *Artaxerxes*, a role in which Hazlitt thought she was superb, claiming that he could hear her sing 'forever': 'There was a new sound in the air, like the voice of Spring; it was as if Music had become young again, and was

¹¹⁰See *Life and Enterprises*, p.p. 262-262, and p. 389

¹¹¹See *DNB*, VII, p. 302, and Hunt's *Dramatic Criticism*, p. 96.

¹¹²See below.

resolved to try the power of of her softest, simplest, sweetest notes' (*Complete Works of Hazlitt*, XVIII, pp. 219 & 343).

Austen's response was just as she expected: 'I was very tired of Artaxerxes, highly amused with the Farce, & in an inferior way with the Pantomime that followed' (*Letters*, p. 260). However, she was unimpressed with Catherine Stephens and grumbled at the plan for a second excursion to see her the following night: 'I have had enough for the present' (*Letters*, p. 260).

Nevertheless, in spite of a cold, she joined the party to see Stephens as Mrs Cornflower in Charles Dibdin's *The Farmer's Wife*, a role created for her musical ability and her talent in low comedy:

Well, we went to the Play again last night...The Farmer's Wife is a musical thing in 3 acts, & as Edward was steady in not staying for anything more, we were at home before 10--Fanny and Mr J.P. are delighted with Miss S, & her merit in singing is I dare say very great; that she gave *me* no pleasure is no reflection upon her, nor I hope upon myself being what Nature made me on that article. All that I am sensible of in Miss S. is, a pleasing person & no skill in acting. We had Mathews, Liston and Emery: of course some amusement (*Letters*, p. 261).

Though disappointed with Stephens, she enjoyed the performances of Mathews, Liston and Emery, who were three of the great comedians of the day. Tall and skinny Charles Mathews was noted for his brilliance as 'officious valets and humorous old men'.¹¹³ His long-time friend and fellow-actor, the inimitable Liston, often appeared alongside him.¹¹⁴

John Liston (1776-1846) was the highest paid comedian of his time.¹¹⁵ Hazlitt describes him as 'the greatest comic genius who has appeared in our time'

¹¹³See Hunt's *Dramatic Essays*, p. 67. See also above.

¹¹⁴The success of *Killing no Murder* was attributed to Mathews' and Liston's ability to play into each other's hands.

¹¹⁵When he first joined Drury Lane he was paid forty pounds a week, though he was rumoured to have earned one hundred pounds a week when he joined the Olympic.

(*Complete Works of Hazlitt*, V, p. 252). Liston was noted for his bumpkin roles and humorous old men. Hunt observes that Liston's 'happiest performances are ignorant rustics...he passes from the simplest rustic to the most conceited pretender with undiminished easiness of attainment' (*Dramatic Essays*, p. 49). Liston's grave and serious face added to the effect of his comedy, Lamb wrote, 'There is one face of Farley, one of Knight, one (but what a one it is!) of Liston.'¹¹⁶ Hazlitt wrote that Liston had 'more comic humour oozing out of his features and person than any other actor' (*Complete Works*, XVIII, p. 402). He was a particularly fine Baron Wildenhaim in *Lovers' Vows*.

John Emery (1777-1822) also played in the same line of old gentlemen and rustics, and was compared to Liston: 'If our two stage-rustics, Emery and Liston, are compared, it will be found that the former is more skilled in the habits and cunning of rusticity, and the latter in its simplicity and ignorance' (*Hunt's Dramatic Essays*, p. 60). But Hunt later claimed of Emery, that in playing the countrymen, the field was 'exclusively and entirely his' (*Hunt's Dramatic Criticism*, p. 100). Hazlitt also observed that 'in his line of rustic characters he is a perfect actor' (*Complete Works of Hazlitt*, XVIII, p. 279).

The Farmer's Wife was a vehicle for the singing talents of Stephens and the comic talents of Mathews, Liston and Emery. It tells a rather tired tale of an innocent (Emma Cornflower) abducted by a debauched aristocrat (Sir Charles). Mathews plays a village apothecary, Dr Pother. Liston plays a cunning London manservant to Sir Charles and is comically contrasted with Emery's ignorant but good-hearted Yorkshireman, servant to Farmer Cornflower.¹¹⁷ Its comic juxtapositions of high and low characters emphasize a convention long associated with the stage: the contrast

¹¹⁶*The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 2 vols (London: Methuen, 1903), II, p. 148.

¹¹⁷See Genest, VIII, p. 422.

between town and country, a theme that Austen had been working on in *Mansfield Park*.

Austen's blunt assertion that Stephens has 'no skill in acting' is refreshing and to the point, in an age distinguished by its over-elaborate encomiums of actors and their roles. Furthermore her remark reveals a strong and discerning voice, one that knows what 'good hardened acting' is, and isn't, and is confident in its own critical judgement without being unduly influenced by the current favourite of the stage. After revealing the details of the previous night's theatre to Cassandra she speaks of plans for yet another excursion to Covent Garden to see Kean's rival, Charles Mayne Young (1777-1856), acting in *Richard III*: 'Prepare for a Play the very first evening. I rather think Covent Garden, to see Young in Richard' (*Letters*, p. 261).

Young had been the leading tragedian of the London stage before Kean challenged his supremacy in 1814. Young was in the Kemble school of acting, and was noted for his heroic, dignified acting style, though he was often compared unfavourably with his predecessor Kemble: 'His most striking fault, as a tragic actor, is a perpetual imitation of Mr. Kemble'.¹¹⁸ He was often criticized for his lack of passion: 'Mr. Young never gives himself up to his feelings, but always relies upon his judgement--he never acts from the heart, but the head' (*Oxberry's Dramatic Biography*, IV, p. 10). Hunt is lukewarm about his abilities, describing him as an actor of 'elegant mediocrity' (*Hunt's Dramatic Criticism*, p. 25), and Hazlitt is even more disparaging, especially of Young's Hamlet: 'he declaims it very well, and rants it very well; but where is the expression of the feeling?' (*Complete Works of Hazlitt*, XVIII, p. 244).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸See *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography*, IV, p. 8. Hazlitt also complained that Young's Hamlet was a poor imitation of Kemble's.

¹¹⁹Austen's letters stop at this point, but Young's portrayal of Richard was not a success. *Oxberry's dramatic biography* records: 'We offer no remarks on the tameness of his *Richard*, because he has given up any further effort at this character' (IV, p. 11).

The opposition between the Kemble/Young and the Cooke/Kean school of acting was often couched in this way, as a conflict between reason and feeling, judgement and passion. It is striking that Austen, who is associated with 'sense' rather than 'sensibility', clearly preferred Kean's acting to that of Young and Kemble. Though she names most of the major stars of the London stage in her letters, there is not a single mention of Kemble.

Austen did see Young again, this time with the new acting sensation Eliza O'Neill, who was being hailed as the new Siddons. Eliza O'Neill had made her triumphant debut a month earlier as Juliet and was heralded as the only tragedian worthy to take over the mantle of Siddons. Just as Drury Lane had been saved from the brink of financial ruin by the advent of Kean, Covent Garden were desperate to bring forward their own star in reply.¹²⁰ Byron refused to see O'Neill out of his loyalty to Kean and Drury Lane, and for fear that he would like her too much: 'No I'm resolved to be un-"Oneiled"'.¹²¹ As with Kean's debut earlier that year, audiences acclaimed O'Neill as a genius from the provinces; it was claimed that some spectators fainted under her spell.¹²²

Austen's last known visit to the professional theatre took place late in 1814. She was as keen to see Covent Garden's new star as she had been to see Kean, and on the night of November 28, Henry and Edward arranged for her to see *Isabella*, a tragedy adapted by Garrick from Thomas Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage or The Innocent Adultery* in which O'Neill played the leading female role. Austen, writing to her niece Anna Lefroy, was disappointed with O'Neill's performance:

We were all at the Play last night, to see Miss O'neal [sic] in *Isabella*. I do not think that she was quite equal to my expectation. I fancy I want something more than can be. Acting seldom satisfies me. I took two

¹²⁰See *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography*, I, p. 95.

¹²¹See *Byron's Life, Letters and Journals*, ed. Thomas More (London, 1854), p. 252.

¹²²See Joseph Donohue, *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age*, p. 167.

Pocket handkerchiefs, but had very little occasion for either. She is an elegant creature however & hugs Mr Younge [sic] delightfully (*Letters*, p. 283).

Austen shows discernment in her rather cool response to O'Neill's performance. Even O'Neill's most ardent admirers admitted that she was less good in maternal parts, like *Isabella*, but was more suited to playing innocent young girls like the love-sick Juliet, and repentant fallen women, such as Jane Shore and Mrs Haller: 'She could not represent maternal affection; her love was all the love of fire, youth and passion' (*Oxberry's Dramatic Biography*, I, p. 97).

Isabella, the tragedy of a devoted wife and mother who is persuaded to marry again only to find her beloved husband is alive, was considered to be one of Siddons's finest roles, and she had established herself on the London stage with her performance of *Isabella*. O'Neill suffered from the inevitable comparisons drawn between the two women. Even Hazlitt, who admired O'Neill's *Isabella*, thought it lacked Siddons's grandeur and power: 'Nothing can be more natural or more affecting than her noble conception of the part. But there is not that terrible reaction of mental power on the scene, which forms the perfection of tragedy, whether in acting or writing' (*Complete Works of Hazlitt*, XVIII, p. 196). Oxberry's biography describes her performance in *Isabella* as 'artificial' and 'savoured strongly of adoption from the style of Kean' (*Oxberry's Dramatic Biography*, I, p. 97).

Austen was clearly intimate enough with the theatre world to know about the nuances of O'Neill's acting style. Austen's joking reference to her two pocket handkerchiefs alludes to O'Neill's reputation as an actress of excessive sensibility whose magic was to 'raise the sigh' and who provoked tears rather than terror. Her biographer observed, 'Miss O'Neill's triumph, it has been justly said is in tears'.¹²³ For Hazlitt, O'Neill's power lay in her extraordinary ability to draw sympathy from the audience. It was her 'reaction' to Romeo's death that characterized her unique acting

¹²³See Charles Inigo Jones, *Memoirs of Miss O'Neill* (London, 1816), p. 47 and p. 8.

style: 'In the silent expression of feeling, we have seldom witnessed anything finer' (*Hazlitt's Complete Works*, V, p. 199).

Austen's employment of the telling phrase '[she] hugs Mr. Young delightfully' is a kind of intimate theatrical-code between Austen and her niece. As they were both aware, coupled with O'Neill's ability to elicit sympathy and tears was her reputation as a 'hugging actress'. This appellation appears to have been given by Thomas Amyot, according to the testimony of Crabb Robinson's diary: 'Saw Miss O'Neill in Isabella. She was as Aymot well said, "a hugging actress." Sensibility shown in grief and fondness was her forte,--her only talent' (*Crabb Robinson's Diaries*, p. 299).

The effects of excessive sensibility is a recurrent theme of Austen's fiction from her earliest jokes in *Love and Freindship* to 'Sanditon', and she is amused, always, by its manifestations. Austen's joke about O'Neill's sensibility is shared not only with Anna but with her other favoured niece Fanny Knight:

I just saw Mr Hayter at the Play, & think his face would please me on acquaintance. I was sorry he did not dine here.--It seemed rather odd to me to be in the Theatre, with nobody to *watch* for. I was quite composed myself, at leisure for all the agitation Isabella could raise' (*Letters*, p. 285).

Austen's ironic remark, 'It seemed rather odd to me to be in the Theatre, with nobody to *watch* for', portrays herself in the role of the chaperone of her young nieces, guarding their exposure to excessive sensibility or 'agitation'. Earlier, we saw her worrying about Fanny's agitation on seeing Kean. As indicated, both Kean and O'Neill were reputed to have the power of making their audience faint under their spell. Towards the close of this letter, Austen makes a striking reference to the two most famous tragediennes of the age, and uses the ardent acting style of O'Neill to express the contrasting natures of her young nieces:

That puss Cassy, did not shew more pleasure in seeing me than her Sisters, but I expected no better;--she does not shine in the tender feelings. She will never be a Miss O'neal;--more in the Mrs Siddons line (*Letters*, p. 287).

This passage, perhaps more than any other single reference to the theatre, reflects Austen's intimacy with the late Georgian theatre. As Austen was aware, one of the current debates in the theatre world was the contrasting acting styles of Mrs Siddons and Miss O'Neill, which were distinguished between O'Neill's 'extreme natural sensibility' and Mrs Siddon's classical nobility. If Hazlitt viewed Siddons as the embodiment of 'high tragedy', O'Neill was the embodiment of 'instinctive sympathy'.¹²⁴

O'Neill's biographer, Charles Inigo Jones, complains of 'the rather too invidious comparisons constantly kept up betwixt her and Mrs Siddons' (*Memoir of O'Neill*, p. 50), and yet proceeds to make his own comparisons, contrasting not only the acting styles of the two women but their physical attributes which, he believes, embody their acting styles. Thus Siddons's 'grandeur and dignity are pictured in her appearance', and O'Neill's 'excess of sensibility is predominant...and well portrayed [sic] in her countenance' (*Memoirs of O'Neill*, pp. 90-91).

One of the best comparisons of the two tragedians is made in Oxberry's memoir of O' Neill:

Miss O'Neill was a lovely ardent creature, with whose griefs we sympathized, and whose sorrows raised our pity. Mrs. Siddons was a wonderful being, for whom we felt awe, veneration, and a more holy love...Miss O'Neill twined most upon our affections, but Mrs Siddons made an impression on our minds, that time never eradicated (*Oxberry's Dramatic Biography*, I, p. 98).

Austen's observations in the scanty correspondence that survives offer decisive, hitherto neglected, evidence of her deep familiarity with the theatre of Siddons and O'Neill. In addition, her manner of comparing social conduct to theatrical models such as her niece's Siddons-like dignified behaviour denoting a lack of sensibility ('the tender feelings') betrays a striking propensity for viewing life through the spectacles of theatre.

¹²⁴See *Complete Works of Hazlitt*, V, pp. 198-199.

Comedy and Dora Jordan

In January 1801, Cassandra Austen was compelled to abandon a trip to London where she intended to visit the Opera House to see the celebrated comic actress, Dora Jordan (1761-1816). Consoling Cassandra upon her missing the famous actress, Austen wrote: 'You speak with such noble resignation of Mrs Jordan & the Opera House that it would be an insult to suppose consolation required' (*Letters*, p. 71).

The King's Theatre or Italian Opera House in the Haymarket had been built by Vanbrugh in 1705. The Opera House was destroyed by fire in 1789 and was re-built on a vaster scale in 1791.¹²⁵ On the opening night, Michael Kelly sang in *The Haunted Tower* and Dora Jordan performed in Kemble's farce, *The Pannel*.¹²⁶ In 1799, the interior of the Opera House was partly remodelled by Marinari, the principal scene painter at Drury Lane.¹²⁷ Austen's sympathy for Cassandra's double disappointment was therefore equally distributed between seeing the new Opera House and seeing the great Mrs Jordan.

In 1801, Dora Jordan was at the height of her powers, and the star of Drury Lane. As Siddons was the tragic Muse of the London stage, Jordan was the comic Muse.¹²⁸ Hoppner's portrait of Jordan as the 'the Comic Muse' was a huge success at the Royal Academy in May 1786.¹²⁹ Not even Jordan's long-term liaison with the

¹²⁵See Brayley, p. 29.

¹²⁶Kelly observed that the new Opera House 'was by far the best for sound I ever sang at', and that Mrs Jordan received a great share of the applause. See Kelly's *Reminiscences*, pp. 186-187.

¹²⁷See Brayley, p. 29.

¹²⁸Her fellow actor William Macready observed, 'If Mrs Siddons appeared a personification of the tragic muse, certainly all the attributes of Thalia were most joyously combined in Mrs Jordan', see *Macready's Reminiscences*, ed. Sir Frederick Pollock (New York, 1875), p. 46. See also Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, 2 vols (London, 1831), I, p. 2.

¹²⁹The full title of the painting was 'The comic muse supported by Euphrosyne, who represses the advances of a Satyr'. See Claire Tomalin, *Mrs Jordan's Profession* (New York: Knopf, 1994), pp. 69-71.

Duke of Clarence (to whom she bore ten children over a period of twenty years) could stem the tide of 'Jordan-Mania' which swept the country in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Her image was everywhere; in the theatre, in theatrical engravings in print shop windows, and in the numerous caricatures by Gillray and Cruikshank. It was even possible to buy sheet music of the songs that she sang at Drury Lane.¹³⁰

Dora Jordan was unparalleled in comedy.¹³¹ She appealed to both the critics and the theatre-going public who flocked to see her. Coleridge, Byron, Hazlitt and Lamb were amongst her admirers.¹³² Hazlitt described her as 'the child of nature, whose voice was a cordial to the heart, because it came from it,...whose laugh was to drink nectar...who "talked far above singing" and whose singing was like the twang of Cupid's bow'.¹³³ Leigh Hunt also singled out her memorable laugh and melodious voice 'Mrs Jordan seems to speak with all her soul...her laughter is the happiest and most natural on the stage'.¹³⁴

Jordan's extensive range was unusual in an era which tended to restrict actors to specific roles. She played genteel ladies, such as Lady Teazle and Widow Belmour, and romantic leads such as Lydia Languish and Kate Hardcastle. She was also famous for her 'low' roles, playing chamber-maids, romps and hoydens to much acclaim. Miss Prue, Miss Hoyden, and Nell in *The Devil to Pay* were amongst her favourites. She was also famous for her 'breeches roles', playing the cross-dressed Hippolita, Harry

¹³⁰See Tomalin, p. 71.

¹³¹Genest claimed that she never had a superior in her line and that she was 'second to none' (Genest, VIII, p. 429). Sir Joshua Reynolds declared that she 'vastly exceeded every thing that he had ever seen, and really was what others only affected to be', see Boaden, I, p. 220.

¹³²Coleridge sent her a copy of *Lyrical Ballads*, and praised her verse-speaking to Byron as the best he ever heard. He also claimed that Jordan intended to sing stanzas of 'The Mad Mother' in Pizarro. See Tomalin, pp. 179, 181 and 270.

¹³³See *Complete Works of Hazlitt*, XVIII, p. 277.

¹³⁴See Leigh Hunt, *Dramatic Essays*, pp. 80-81. See also his 'The Comic Actress', in *Dramatic Criticism*, pp. 87-91.

Wildair, Rosalind, Viola and little Pickle in the farce, *The Spoilt Child*. Genest claimed that she 'sported the best leg ever seen on the stage' (Genest, VIII, p. 431).

Jordan's performance as the innocent country girl in Garrick's adaptation of *The Country Wife*, combined the role of a hoyden with a 'breeches part'. She played the Country Girl for fifteen seasons at Drury Lane from 1785 to 1800. In one of the most memorable scenes, Peggy takes a walk in St James's Park, disguised as a young boy, as her jealous guardian is determined to protect her from other men. In a letter of 1799, Austen uses the notion of the 'Country Girl' to express doubts about the behaviour of an acquaintance, Earle Harwood, who had married a woman of obscure birth:

I cannot help thinking from your account of Mrs E.H. [Earle Harwood] that Earle's vanity has tempted him to invent the account of her former way of Life, that his triumph in securing her might be greater;--I dare say she was nothing but an innocent Country Girl in fact (*Letters*, p. 48).

Austen's instinctive and imaginative way of using stage characters as a point of reference in her letters, coupled with her habit of weaving in quotations from favourite plays,¹³⁵ offers yet another striking example of the range and extent of her familiarity with the drama. She is viewing the world around her through the spectacles of theatre, and, simultaneously, showing her awareness of the intricacies and nuances of the kinds of social stratification reflected in the drama.¹³⁶ The invention of 'Country Girl' innocents out of ill-born characters in order to reflect light upon the inventor is precisely the kind of dubious behaviour that Austen fictionalizes so adroitly in *Emma*.

The life of low-born, illegitimate Dora Jordan echoed the theatre's predilection for plays depicting social metamorphosis. From her humble, obscure origins, she had risen to be the mistress of a prince and a royal estate.¹³⁷ Epilogues were written for

¹³⁵See Chapter One.

¹³⁶See below.

¹³⁷In 1796, the King had presented William with Bushy, a part of the Hampton Court Palace estates. See Tomalin, p. 156-157.

Jordan with pointed reference to her private circumstances. In 1791, when the Duke was stepping up his courtship of Jordan she played for her benefit an adaptation of Fletcher's *The Humorous Lieutenant* called *The Greek Slave, or The School for Cowards*.¹³⁸ Jordan played the part of a slave-girl who is love with a prince, and is eventually discovered to be of noble birth. The epilogue drew attention to her assumption of genteel roles, both on and off stage:

How Strange! methinks I hear a Critic say,
 What, *She* the serious Heroine of the Play!
 The Manager his want of Sense evinces
 To pitch on *Hoydens* for the love of Princes!
 To trick out *Chambermaids* in awkward pomp--
 Horrid! to make a Princess of a *Romp*.¹³⁹

The epilogue also drew attention to the fact that whilst she was acclaimed for her 'low' parts, her roles in polite comedy were often condemned. It seems that Jordan, even amongst her admirers, was considered to be a 'natural' at low parts. Even her adoring biographer Boaden described her low parts as 'natural...the genuine workings of nature within her' (*Life of Mrs Jordan*, I, p. 142). Leigh Hunt believed that Jordan was at her best in low comedy, and declared that she was 'all deficient in the *lady*' and unable to bring off genteel roles because of her lack of 'a certain graceful orderliness, an habitual subjection...of impulse of manner', claiming, however, that 'If Mrs Jordan were what she ought to be in the lady, we more than doubt whether she could be what she is in the boarding school-girl or the buxom woman' (*Dramatic Criticism*, pp. 87-88).

Hunt's remarks betray a consciousness about the ease with which actresses could play the lady on stage and cross social boundaries off stage. Perhaps this was because so many former actresses married into aristocratic circles. Famously, one of

¹³⁸See *Genest*, VII, p. 18, and *The London Stage 1660-1800*, ed. Emmett L. Avery, Charles Beecher Hogan, Arthur H. Scouten, George Winchester Stone, Jr., and William Van Lennep, 11 vols (Carbondale, Ill., 1960-68), V, p. 1332.

¹³⁹*The Greek Slave*, Larpent MS, 894.

Jordan's co-stars, Elizabeth Farren, quit the stage to marry the Earl of Derby.¹⁴⁰ Katherine Stephens married the Earl of Essex and Miss O'Neill retired early to become Lady Wrixon Beecher. Jordan's rise from illegitimate child-actor to royal mistress, crossing every social barrier, added an extra comic dimension to her role as Nell in Coffey's farce *The Devil to Pay*.

In 1814, Austen saw Jordan in what was perhaps her most famous role in *The Devil to Pay*, as the timid cobbler's wife who is magically transformed into an aristocratic society mistress.¹⁴¹ Jordan played the part of the down-trodden wife who makes a better wife to Sir John, and a kinder mistress to her servants, than the irascible Lady Loverule. Lady Loverule's metamorphosis into the Cobbler's wife eventually brings about her moral transformation. The rough treatment she experiences at the hands of the Cobbler is partially responsible for the change in her attitude towards her exalted position: 'There's nought but the devil /and this good strap /Could ever tame a scold'.¹⁴²

The comedy had long amused the public who enjoyed seeing Jordan's metamorphosis from rags into riches, just as she herself had been transformed, seemingly, by her liason with the Duke of Clarence. Jordan was dubbed 'Nell of Clarence' by Walpole who perhaps also intended a reference to her famous predecessor as royal theatrical mistress, Nell Gwynne. However, by the time that Austen saw *The Devil to Pay* in 1814, Jordan was separated from Clarence, and had returned to the stage and her old rival's house, Covent Garden.¹⁴³ Austen declared

¹⁴⁰See Petronius Arbiter, *Memoirs of the Present Countess of Derby* (London, 1797).

¹⁴¹Genest notes that Dora Jordan played Nell on the 7 March (Genest, VIII, p. 423).

¹⁴²Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Collection of Farces and other Afterpieces, selected by Mrs Inchbald*, 7 vols (London, 1809), p. 119.

¹⁴³Jordan had quit the stage in 1811 on the terms of her separation with the Duke of Clarence, which stated that if she returned to the stage, she would lose custody of her daughters. She did return to the stage in 1812 in order to pay the debts of her son-in-law and secured an engagement at Covent Garden, making her debut in Feb. 1813.

herself 'highly amused' with the farce. She was in good company, Hazlitt described Jordan's Nell as 'heavenly' :

Her Nell...was right royal... Miss Kelly is a dexterous knowing chambermaid: Mrs Jordan had nothing dexterous or knowing about her. She was Cleopatra turned into an oyster-wench, without knowing that she was Cleopatra, or caring that she was an oyster-wench. An oyster-wench, such as she was, would have been equal to a Cleopatra; and an Antony would not have deserted her for the empire of the world! (*Complete Works of Hazlitt*, XVIII, p. 277, and p. 234).

The Devil to Pay, the play that was so closely associated with Dora Jordan, exemplifies the drama's obsession with the concept of social mobility, and its endless play on rank and manners. The metamorphosis of a timid country girl and a termagant wife and society mistress highlighted the same sort of class tensions initiated by the unprecedented success of Richardson's *Pamela*. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* was another favourite eighteenth-century comedy which examines uneasy social stratifications by a series of ironic reversals.

It is striking, but perhaps not surprising, that Austen favoured comedies where social roles were turned topsy-turvy, such as Coffey's *The Devil to Pay*, Townley's *High Life Below Stairs*, and Colman's *The Heir at Law*.¹⁴⁴ Such comedies were popular to a wide and varied audience. Theatre historians have shown how the necessity of the public theatres to appeal to a socially diverse audience of box, pit and gallery lead to a mixed programme of entertainment.¹⁴⁵ The opposition between 'high'

¹⁴⁴The three mentioned here, that Austen knew, represent merely a fraction of farces and comedies with a similar theme, dating from Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, which first combined genres from 'high' and 'low' culture.

¹⁴⁵Garrick's famous epilogue to Murphy's *All in the Wrong* is often seen as representative of the social and architectural stratification of theatre audiences. After the main play, people were admitted into the theatre for half price. Although the assumption is that the upper and middle classes left after the main play and the lower classes gained a low ticket price for entrance to the farce, this wasn't always the case. Austen often seemed to prefer the after-piece to the the main play. Nor can we make the assumption that the social stratification of the box, pit and gallery was as circumscribed as it is sometimes assumed. Joseph Donohue has shown that the architectural and social division of the auditorium 'by no means created mutually exclusive seating areas'. See *Theatre in the Age of Kean*, p. 15.

and 'low' became a perennial theme in eighteenth-century comedy, depicting the dramatic situations and comic scenes which arise when a person crosses the boundaries from low life to high, or vice versa. The device of bringing together contrasting types, whereby different styles of action and language are attached to different classes and ironically juxtaposed, allowed the writer to exploit the comic potential of 'high' and 'low' life in Georgian England, and please the upper galleries as well as the pit.

However, pleasing the upper galleries and the boxes was only part of the intention. Writers for the theatre also knew that fashionable comedy was genteel, and that its audience was predominantly middle-class, therefore farces that criticized aristocratic manners and poked fun at 'low' characters were particularly successful. The increasingly frequent appearances of wealthy merchants, sympathetically treated in the plays of the 1790s has been ascribed to the development of 'middle-class' attitudes.¹⁴⁶

Ever since the success of Gay's *Beggars' Opera*, writers for the stage had used low life as a means of satirizing high life. In Cowley's *Which is the Man?* one of the 'low' characters duly exclaims: 'He must be a Lord by his want of ceremony'. In *The Devil to Pay*, Nell's gentle manners and innate dignity reflect badly on Lady Loverule. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen was also to depict the moral defeat of a high-ranking aristocrat (another Lady Loverule) by a young woman 'of inferior birth...without family, connections, or fortune' (*P&P*, pp. 355-356). In *Mansfield Park*, the rendition of Fanny's 'low' family in Portsmouth exploits the dramatic situations and comic scenes which arise when a person crosses the boundaries from high life to low. Yet, in the

¹⁴⁶See Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean*, p. 17, and Lynch, *Box, Pit and Gallery*, p. 2. The rise of sentimental drama has been ascribed, in part, to the idealizing of the aspiring middling classes, and the depiction of the heroic merchant figure, as in *The London Merchant* and *The West Indian*. See Arthur Sherbo, *English Sentimental Drama* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1957), and Ernest Bernbaum, *The Drama of Sensibility: A Sketch of the History of English Sentimental Comedy and Domestic Tragedy 1696-1780* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958).

end, it is the lower-ranking Price children (William, Fanny and Susan) who turn out better than the high-bred Bertrams.¹⁴⁷

It is evident throughout her work, distinguishable even from the early reference to Lewis and Quick, that Austen is particularly attuned to the discrepancies between rank and manners and the tightly circumscribed social structure of her world. This understanding is shaped and informed by her interest in the drama. In addition, the specificity of Austen's interest in social metamorphosis, with its comic interplay between high and low types, is derived from the influence of eighteenth-century comedy.

¹⁴⁷D. G. Greene proposes that the unifying theme of Austen's novels is the clash of the rising middle class with the established aristocracy: 'In *Pride and Prejudice* it is the middle-class Bennets and Gardiners who compel the noble Fitzwilliams and Darcys to take them seriously; in *Persuasion*, it is Wentworths against Elliots; in *Northanger Abbey*, Morlands against Tilneys; in *Sense and Sensibility*, Dashwoods against Ferrarses...her middle-class protagonists are as good a class as those who treat them superciliously'. See D. G. Greene, 'Jane Austen and the Peerage', *PMLA* 68 (1953), 1017-1031 [p. 1028].

Conclusion

1814, the year that *Mansfield Park* was published, saw the birth of a new age in the English theatre. Between the years of Kean's birth in the late 1780s and his death in 1833, the theatre had undergone phenomenal changes. The two patent theatres had been burned in 1808-9 and then rebuilt on a more lavish and grander scale than had been seen before. Kemble's new prices had incited sixty-seven nights of rioting in Covent Garden until he was forced to capitulate to the demands of the rioters. Edmund Kean and Eliza O'Neill had taken over the mantle of Kemble and Siddons and were bringing to the stage a unique style of intuitive acting sympathetic with the dawn of the 'Romantic' era. The rise of the illegitimate theatres and the impact of a 'theatrical revolution' in the advent of Kean (cemented by the praise of the 'cockney' young literary radicals, Keats, Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt), characterized a new age in the theatre, 'a time when the nature of theatrical vitality became radically redefined' (Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean*, p. 7).

This tumultuous period in the history of the theatre also happened to coincide with the birth and death of Jane Austen who attended the first performances of Kean and O'Neill, who witnessed the transformations taking place in the theatre, and remained in dialogue with its nuances and foibles. Austen's interest in the drama has been overlooked in the persistently mistaken notion that she was morally opposed to the theatre. Yet this is in flagrant defiance of the evidence of the letters.

In the early part of 1814, in the middle of negotiations for the publication of *Mansfield Park*, and in the space of four days, Austen visited the professional theatre three times to see Kean, Jordan and Stephens. In the same short period she writes of two more excursions to see Kean again and also his rival Young. It is a striking irony that the completion of *Mansfield Park*, the novel which has been viewed, universally,

as Austen's rejection of the theatre, coincided with a particularly busy theatre-going period for the author.¹⁴⁸

Judging by Austen's earlier theatre-going periods, visits in such close proximity were not unusual. Her visit to Henry and Eliza in 1811 is planned with the Lyceum on Thursday, followed by two more visits to Covent Garden on Saturday and Monday. In 1813, she is found at the playhouse two nights on the run, a by no means untypical procedure and an acute reminder of the frequency with which the Georgians visited the playhouse. Edward Lynch has shown how on average, there were about 180 nights each season on which the patent houses offered the playgoing public some kind of dramatic entertainment. The two winter patent houses alone could command a total of four hundred performances per season.¹⁴⁹ Whenever Austen made extended visits to town, she seems to have taken advantage of Henry's close connections with the theatre.

Theatre in the late Georgian period became an essential part of fashionable middle-class life.¹⁵⁰ One of the consequences of the stock company was that the audience became familiar with the same actors, seeing them in a variety of different roles and plays of all types, coming to know not only their styles of acting, but the details of their private lives.¹⁵¹ John Brewer has shown how the proliferation of stage literature meant that readers were able to know the intimate details of actor's lives: 'The public's appetite for news, gossip and scandal about the stage was insatiable, its sense of intimate acquaintance with actors unique. A successful player could only

¹⁴⁸Naturally, her letters during this time contain various references to *Mansfield Park*, in particular Henry's comments and criticisms. Though Austen wrote that she hoped to see it published 'before the end of April' (*Letters*, p. 262), it was announced by Egerton the publisher in the *Morning Chronicle* of 23 and 27 May and was no doubt published soon afterwards. See Introductory note to Chapman's *Mansfield Park*.

¹⁴⁹During the first few weeks of the winter season, the two patent houses scheduled performances on three nights of the week, moving to six performances per week as the season progressed. See James J. Lynch, *Box Pit and Gallery*, p. 12-13.

¹⁵⁰Though theatre historians have shown that interest in the theatre was by no means limited to certain social classes or economic groups. See *Box, Pit and Gallery*, p. 199.

¹⁵¹See *Box, Pit and Gallery*, p. 143.

have a public private life' (Brewer, p. 340). To sate the audience appetite for theatre there were actor's diaries, journals, memoirs, biographies playwrights and managers, histories and annals of the theatre, periodicals, and magazines: 'Between 1800 and 1830 some one hundred and sixty different periodicals devoted exclusively to the theatre came into existence throughout Great Britain' (Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean*, p. 144).

In Hazlitt's preface to *A View of the English Stage*, he describes the allure of the theatre in late Georgian England: 'the disputes on the merits or defects of the last new piece, or a favourite performer, are as common, as frequently renewed, and carried on with as much eagerness and skill, as those on almost any other subject' (*Hazlitt's Complete Works*, V, p. 173). With Hazlitt's words in mind, one of the most striking features of Austen's letters is her discussion of the theatre as a part of everyday conversation, to be written about as she writes about other quotidian matters like shopping and gossip.

Austen's letters are a neglected historical source for her interest in and love of the theatre. The fundamental place the theatre occupied in her life is revealed in the manner in which it can be joked about, admired, even be taken for granted. Her mock-insult to Siddons, 'I could swear at her for disappointing me', reflects the way in which the sisters often consoled one another for missing particular performers. Austen, elsewhere, consoles Cassandra for having missed the famous Dora Jordan. Her tantalizing observation that Mrs Edwin's performance 'is just what it used to be' speaks a language of intimate theatrical knowledge that we can only begin to guess at.

There is something paradoxically casual and yet essential about the way that Austen 'converses' about the theatre. At times her letters reveal a striking language of precision and economy in respect to the drama; details of the seating arrangements are often as important as descriptions of the plays, sometimes a cursory remark such as 'no skill in acting' is enough for the sisters and nieces who are in tune with one another. No further elaboration is necessary, but it still needs to be said, because the interest is

there between them. That interest lasted through her life-time and, as I will demonstrate, had a profound effect on her fiction.

Part Two

JANE AUSTEN'S DRAMATIC INHERITANCE

Chapter Three

THE JUVENILIA AND THE TRADITIONS OF BURLESQUE: FIELDING AND SHERIDAN

The impact of the influx of private theatricals and the transformation of the professional theatre in the late Georgian period ensured a comprehensive and long-standing interest in the drama for Jane Austen. From her earliest attempts at playwriting to the systematic incorporation of quasi-theatrical techniques into the mature novels, the influence of the drama rarely left Austen, and undoubtedly shaped her narrative art.

Throughout the Austen canon there is a network of resonances and allusions to various eighteenth-century plays, many of which the author expects her readers to recognize. However, it is Austen's juvenilia, written to amuse her family, and not intended for public consumption, which most clearly bears the indistinguishable marks of her exposure to the drama.

In the juvenilia, Austen's literary tool is burlesque.¹ Park Honan (in his biography of Austen) argues that the young writer compiled burlesques to compete with and amuse her brothers: 'She was theatrical to please brothers who loved the stage...Mainly she cared about comic style, since she needed to impress James and Henry and knew they admired elegance and brevity.'² B. C. Southam argues that in

¹ Samuel Johnson's definition of the adjective is: 'Jocular; tending to raise laughter by unnatural or unsuitable language and images', and he defines the noun as 'ludicrous language or ideas; ridicule'. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 4 vols (London, 1756; repr. 1805). John Loftis in *Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), p. 144, cites the first definition of the noun by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: 'That species of literary composition, or of dramatic representation, which aims at exciting laughter by caricature of the manner or spirit of serious works, or by ludicrous treatment of their subject'. The key point is that the comic effect is achieved by exaggeration of the original in order to elucidate its absurdities and limitations.

² Park Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987, revised & updated, London: Phoenix, 1997), pp. 56-65.

the earlier juvenilia Austen reveals herself as a true child of the eighteenth century: 'If anyone is surprised or even shocked that a young girl was ready to joke about deformity, injury, death, drunkenness, child-bearing, and illegitimacy, it should be remembered that much of this vigorous humour derives from traditions of fiction and stage comedy with which the Steventon household was familiar.'³

³Brian Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts : A Study of the Novelist's Development through the Surviving Papers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 24.

The Loiterer

Virginia Woolf was the first to observe that Jane Austen's juvenile writings were 'meant to outlast the Christmas holidays'. That, at the tender age of fifteen she was writing 'for everybody, for nobody, for our age, for her own'.⁴

Edward Austen-Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen*, written in 1870, first mentioned that tales composed by his aunt as a girl survived. Austen-Leigh refrained from printing extracts, feeling it would be 'as unfair to expose this preliminary process to the world, as it would to display all that goes on behind the curtain of the theatre before it is drawn up.'⁵ Fortunately this scruple did not last long. Austen's three notebooks of miscellaneous material written between 1787 and the middle of 1793⁶ are now published in full. Austen clearly took pride in her early compositions; she made fair copies of her juvenilia in three notebooks, and made revisions as late as 1811, the same year that her first novel *Sense and Sensibility* was published.⁷

Southam proposes two important influences on Austen's mastery of burlesque techniques in the juvenilia. He describes home life at Steventon as 'the perfect breeding ground for literary talent of a witty and critical bent' (Southam, *Literary Manuscripts*, p. 248). Another important influence was *The Loiterer*.

⁴Virginia Woolf, 'Jane Austen', in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1963), pp. 15-24.

⁵James Edward Austen-Leigh, *Memoir of Jane Austen*, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 49. In the 1871 edition he included some manuscript material including 'The Mystery'.

⁶The contents of the three volumes are not ordered chronologically; some of the earliest and last pieces are in *Volume the First*. Austen dated some pieces of her work; where there is no date I will use Southam's dating of the juvenilia. See Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts*, p. 16.

⁷Austen's juvenile writings, in their original manuscript form, were probably handed down to family members: these have not survived. Austen later transcribed fair-copies into the three notebooks (Southam, p. 14). Deirdre Le Faye has suggested that Austen rediscovered her earlier manuscript notebooks when she unpacked them at Chawton in July 1809. See *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, by William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, revised and enlarged by Deirdre Le Faye (London: The British Library, 1989), p. 164. Revisions in *Volume the Third* indicate renewed work between 1809 and 1811. In 'Evelyn' Austen changed a date to read 'Augst. 19th 1809', and in 'Catherine' she substitutes Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (published in 1809) for Bishop Seckar's explanation of the Catechism.

The Loiterer ran for sixty copies between 1789 and 1790, and made a duty of burlesquing 'novel slang' and the absurdities of popular fiction.⁸ Henry's burlesque of the literary conventions of courtship, entitled 'Peculiar dangers of *Rusticus* from the attacks of a female cousin', is particularly striking.⁹ In this parody of a sentimental novel, the unlucky hero is besieged by the attentions of his cousin. The hero of Henry's sentimental tale is entrapped into seducing his fair cousin: 'She begged me for the loan of an arm. My arm she accordingly took, and in the course of all her frights and false steps, pinched it so hard and so often, that it is still quite black and blue, through sheer tenderness.' And, following his cousin's admission of loving 'cropt Greys to distraction', he is a lost man:

There was no standing this...I thought she never looked so much like an angel. In short, I know not where my passion might have ended, had not the luckiest accident in the world at once roused me from this rapturous dream of fancied bliss, to all the phlegm of cool reflection and sober reality. A sudden puff of wind carried off two luxuriant tresses from her beautiful Chignon, and left her (unconscious to herself) in a situation truly ridiculous. The delicate thread of sentiment and affection was broken, never to be united.¹⁰

Henry Austen's burlesque technique of juxtaposing a serious and sentimental reflection with a quasi-farcical action is echoed throughout Austen's *Volume the First*. Also typical is the taste for the absurd detail and the witty aphorism. Henry's tale ends with a description of the hero's unsuccessful attempts to be rid of his cousin; getting 'completely cut' and spilling lemonade over her dress prove fruitless: 'But she wouldn't be provoked, for when once a woman is determined to get a husband, I find trifling obstacles will not damp her hopes or sour her temper' (*The Loiterer*, pp. 13-14).

⁸The periodical modelled itself on Addison and Steele's *The Spectator*. See Park Honan, p. 70.

⁹Honan argues that this article was written with Eliza de Feuillide in mind. She had visited the Austen brothers at Oxford in 1788 (p. 56). This argument is borne out by the fact that one of the sisters in Henry's burlesque is called Eliza. That Eliza was keen on burlesque is perhaps confirmed by Jane Austen's dedication of *Love and Freindship* to her cousin.

¹⁰James Austen, *The Loiterer*, 2 vols. (Oxford: C. S. Rann, 1789-90), no. 32, pp. 13-14.

But *The Loiterer* was not the only influence on Austen. She had been writing burlesque sketches at least two years before its publication, during the time of the Steventon private theatricals.¹¹ James and Henry's taste for satirical comedies ensured that she was exposed to those masters of burlesque plays, Henry Fielding and Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

¹¹*Volume the First*, written around 1787-90 when Austen was between the ages of 12-15, incorporates farcical action with nonsensical word play. *Volume the Second* contains her two most sustained burlesques, 'Love and Freindship' and 'The History of England', dated 'June 13 1790' and 'November 26 1791' respectively (*MW*, p. 109 & p. 149). *Volume the Third* (1792-3) begins to show how Austen uses burlesque intermingled with her first experiments in realistic social comedy.

Austen and Fielding (*Volume the First*)

Fielding's burlesque *Tom Thumb or The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1730) and Sheridan's *The Critic* (1779) were two of the most successful examples of theatrical burlesque after Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*. Austen alludes to both these plays in her juvenilia. On March 22, 1788, *Tom Thumb* was acted at Steventon.¹² Fielding was hailed as a master of political satire after the commercial success of his theatre burlesques, *The Author's Farce*, *Tom Thumb*, *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register*. Fielding's repeated attacks on the Walpole government came to a head in *The Historical Register* where he was more openly hostile to Walpole than he had been in his earlier burlesques.¹³ The success of this play finally provoked the government into passing the Theatre Licensing Act of 1737, whose long-term repercussions were to result in the growth of closet drama, and 'the transfer of creative energy from the drama to the novel'.¹⁴ Fielding gave up writing and turned to the law before the publication of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) provoked him into writing again. Once again Fielding used burlesque to ridicule literary pretension and hypocrisy; *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* are different burlesques of the same book.¹⁵

Fielding's theatre burlesques relied upon a subtle blending of theatrical and political satire. *Tom Thumb or the Tragedy of Tragedies*, is chiefly a parody of contemporary tragedy, although Walpole was implicitly satirised in the portrayal of Tom Thumb, 'the great man'.¹⁶ Allardyce Nicoll describes it as 'Undoubtedly one of

¹²See Chapter 1.

¹³See F. W. Bateson, *English Comic Drama, 1700-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), p. 121.

¹⁴John Loftis argues unequivocally, 'the most profound literary consequence of the Act has been the impulse that it gave to the development of the novel.' See John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 128-153.

¹⁵See F. Homes Dudden, *Henry Fielding: His Life, Works and Times*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 326.

¹⁶In *Tom Thumb* the political satire was more incidental than in the other Haymarket burlesques. Yet, as Loftis argues, a political meaning was surely implied: 'Tom Thumb *the great*, the giant killer, the upholder of the peace, the favourite of the queen, the successful lover—could all this be innocent of

the best of literary burlesques, it attacks both the follies of the dramatist and the follies of the critic'.¹⁷

Fielding's *Tom Thumb* is a play that is intended to be ludicrous and nonsensical. After the first performance of the play audiences were 'delighted by the preposterous incongruity of a "tragedy" deliberately designed to make them laugh'. Fielding was satirizing the way in which modern tragedy was unintentionally absurd: 'what his contemporaries did unintentionally Fielding attempted with deliberate intention; he aimed at writing a tragedy which would be wholly ridiculous and laughable' (Homes Dudden, p. 57). Set in King Arthur's Court, the characters are ruthlessly caricatured in Fielding's travesty of the conventional heroic tragedy.

The play contains the panoply of neo-classical tragedy, but the superhuman giant-killing hero, Thumb 'whose soul is as big as a mountain' is a midget. The other 'noble' personages of the court are just as ridiculous. The royal couple are a quarrelsome pair. The noble King Arthur is bullied by his wife Dollalolla, a queen 'entirely faultless, saving that she is a little given to drink', and in love with the captive queen, Glumdalca, a giantess, who is in love with the dwarf, Thumb. The romantic sub-plot common in heroic tragedy is also parodied in the love triangle of the gluttonous Princess Huncamunca and her rivals, Lord Grizzle and Tom Thumb. The King's loyal courtiers, Noodle, Doodle and Foodle are foolish and inept, and the play ends with a ludicrous massacre of all the characters.

Nicoll argues that Fielding pioneered the revival of the burlesque tradition: 'in *Pasquin* and in *the Tragedy of Tragedies* the author of *Joseph Andrews* fully re-established the burlesque as a regular dramatic type, and gave many suggestions to his followers' (Nicoll, p. 265). Burlesque appealed to Austen, for her main concern in her early writings was to excite laughter. She approved of its uncomplicated aim to raise

innuendo?' See *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England*, pp. 104-5 & 135.

¹⁷Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*, 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955-1959), II, p. 263.

laughter by comic exaggeration and from the sheer absurdity of language and image. But, like Fielding, she was aware that parody acts as form of criticism, a way of elucidating the absurdities and limitations of a particular art form.

Austen shared Fielding's irreverence for literary and artistic convention. Her characters are no more heroic than Fielding's, often as physically odd or repulsive. In a deliberate echo to *Tom Thumb*, Austen sets her stories in villages called Pammydiddle and Crankhumdunberry. Like Fielding, she takes the clichéd situation and renders it absurd. In 'Frederick and Elfrida', she parodies the novelistic convention of depicting two antithetical sisters, one beautiful and foolish, the other ugly and clever. In the artificial world of fictional idealism it is the ugly Rebecca who charms the hero:

Lovely & too charming Fair one, notwithstanding your forbidding
Squint, your greazy tresses & your swelling Back, which are more
frightful than imagination can paint or pen describe, I cannot refrain
from expressing my raptures, at the engaging Qualities of your Mind,
which so amply atone for the Horror, with which your first appearance
must ever inspire the unwary visitor (*MW*, p. 6).

In *Tom Thumb*, Princess Huncamunca is confounded by the ugliness of Glumdalca: 'O Heaven, thou art as ugly as the devil.'¹⁸ Queen Dollallola is permanently drunk: 'Oh, Dollallola! do not blame my love;/ I hoped the fumes of last night's punch had laid/
Thy lovely eyelids fast' (*Tom Thumb*, p. 201).

Just as Fielding's heroes are characterized by their unheroic qualities such as physical ugliness, drunkenness and violence, Austen's earliest characters are also drunkards, murderers and adulterers. Jealous sisters poison each other, Landowners beat their workers with a cudgel on a whim, and children bite off their mother's fingers. Austen's letters suggest that she continued to find physical ugliness, illness and death amusing.¹⁹

¹⁸*The Tragedy of Tragedies, or Tom Thumb the Great, in The Beggar's Opera and Other Eighteenth-Century Plays*, ed. John Hampden (London: Dent, 1974), p. 192.

¹⁹The most notorious example being the cruel jibe she makes about miscarriage: 'Mrs Hall of Sherbourn was brought to bed yesterday of a dead child, some weeks before she expected, owing to a fright.--I suppose she happened unawares to look at her husband' (*Letters*, p. 17).

But Austen does not raise a laugh merely through the employment of knockabout farce and violent imagery. Her grasp of verbal incongruities is equally impressive. Thus, in 'Jack and Alice', the physically abhorrent Rebecca is finally sought in marriage by the aged Captain Rogers: 'Mrs Fitzroy did not approve of the match on account of the tender years of the young couple, Rebecca being but 36 & Captain Roger little more than 63. To remedy this objection, it was agreed that they should wait a little while till they were a good deal older' (*MW*, p. 7).

Furthermore, the absurdity of language is coupled with farcical action to achieve the maximum comic effect: 'From this period, the intimacy between the Families of Fitzroy, Drummond, and Falknor, daily increased till at length it grew to such a pitch, that they did not scruple to kick one another out of the window on the slightest provocation' (*MW*, p. 6). In this instance, Austen is parodying the formal rhetoric of the sentimental novel and elucidating its absurdities whilst simultaneously observing the quasi-farcical conventions of slapstick stage-comedy.

The narrative is continued with a further parody of the popular sentimental novel, when Elfrida's companion and confidante, the lovely Charlotte, makes her entrance into London society:

Scarcely were they seated as usual, in the most affectionate manner in one chair, than the Door suddenly opened & an aged gentleman with a sallow face & old pink Coat, partly by intention & partly thro' weakness was at the feet of the lovely Charlotte, declaring his attachment to her & beseeching her pity in the most moving manner.

Not being able to resolve to make any one miserable, she consented to be his wife; where upon the Gentleman left the room & all was quiet. (*MW*, p. 8)

As Southam has noted, 'the comic effect is markedly theatrical'. Similarly, in 'Jack and Alice', the uproarious account of Lady Williams' education 'begins in conventional terms and ends in the manner of a stage farce' (Southam, *Literary Manuscripts*, p. 23).

Miss Dickens was an excellent Governess. She instructed me in the Paths of Virtue; under her tuition I daily became more amiable, & might perhaps by this time have nearly attained perfection, had not my worthy Preceptress been torn from my arms, e'er I had attained my

seventeenth year. I never shall forget her last words. 'My dear Kitty she said, Good night t'ye.' I never saw her afterwards', continued Lady Williams wiping her eyes, 'She eloped with the Butler the same night' (*MW*, p. 17).

Austen's technique of juxtaposing a mock-grandiose sentiment with a comic action is influenced by the burlesque methods of Henry and James in *The Loiterer*. But, as this passage reveals, the rhythms and cadences of stage comedy imbue the narrative imperceptibly. The exalted language and upsurging rhythm of the opening sentence reaches a crescendo with the hackneyed, sentimental expression 'torn from my arms', finally leading to the pregnant expectation of the governess' final words, which are comically deflating, 'My dear Kitty, good night t'ye'. The gesture of 'Lady Williams wiping her eyes' before continuing her story introduces a theatrical pause between the two clauses of the final sentence ending with the comic quip, 'She eloped with the Butler the same night'. The trope of the governess eloping with the butler is itself reminiscent of a stage farce.²⁰

The comic timing and the quasi-slapstick ingredient of this passage, imbibed from playwrights such as Fielding, co-exist with a deeper comic awareness that imbues Austen's juvenilia. The egocentricity of the heroine's blithe remark, 'I daily became more amiable, & might perhaps by this time have nearly gained perfection', is inserted almost incidentally into the narrative. Here, the comic touch is more finely tuned. Similarly, in the same story, the 'perfect' Charles Adams, a character based on Richardson's idealised hero Sir Charles Grandison,²¹ memorably remarks, 'I expect nothing more in my wife than my wife will find in me--Perfection' (*MW*, p. 26).

Austen's heroine in 'Jack and Alice' is an absurd figure whose only fault, in the style of Fielding's Dollalolla, is a propensity for liquor. Even Lady Williams's benevolent nature is strained by her tipping companion: 'When you are more

²⁰Garrick's farce *Bon Ton or High Life above Stairs* and Townley's *High Life below Stairs* spring to mind.

²¹See Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 228-38.

intimately acquainted with my Alice you will not be surprised, Lucy, to see the dear Creature drink a little too much; for such things happen every day. She has many rare & charming qualities, but Sobriety is not one of them. The whole Family are indeed a sad drunken set' (*MW*, p. 23).

As in the 'tragic' ending of *Tom Thumb*, 'Jack and Alice' becomes increasingly absurd and farcical. At the tender age of seventeen, Lucy is poisoned to death by the envious Sukey, who is promptly raised to the gallows for murder. The hero of the story (presumably 'Jack') is finally introduced only to be killed off instantly:

It may now be proper to return to the Hero of this Novel, the brother of Alice, of whom I believe I have scarcely ever had occasion to speak; which may perhaps be partly owing to his unfortunate propensity to Liquor, which so compleatly deprived him of the use of those faculties Nature had endowed him with, that he never did anything worth mentioning (*MW*, pp. 24-25).

This final touch is pure Fielding, whose authorial intervention in the notes attached to his edition of *Tom Thumb*, enabled him to enhance his satire of literary convention.²² Of course, the real hero and heroine of Austen's story are not the ludicrous drunkards Jack and Alice of Pammydiddle, but those more sinister figures, monsters of ego and self-interest, Lady Williams and Charles Adams who are united in marriage having found their ideal of perfection in each other.

²²Austen's use of the novel form to obtain maximum authorial control will be discussed in the next chapter.

Austen and Sheridan (*Volume the Second*).

DANGLE. [*reading*] 'Bursts into tears, and exit.' What, is this a tragedy!

SNEER. No, that's a genteel comedy, not a translation--only *taken from the French*; it is written in a stile which they have lately tried to run down; the true sentimental, and nothing ridiculous in it from the beginning to the end!²³

In his edition of Sheridan's plays, Cecil Price records a famous theatrical anecdote from the *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly*. Having heard that the playwright, Richard Cumberland, had chided his children for laughing heartily throughout a recent production of *The School for Scandal*, Sheridan quipped: 'It was very ungrateful in Cumberland to have been displeased with his poor children, for laughing at *my comedy*; for I went the other night to see *his tragedy* and laughed at it from beginning to end'.²⁴

Cumberland's tragedy, *The Battle of Hastings* (1778), was certainly one of Sheridan's satirical targets in *The Critic*.²⁵ Puff's 'tragedy in rehearsal', *The Spanish Armada*, is a comically misconceived conglomeration of romantic love and patriotic excess in the style of *The Battle of Hastings*. But *The Critic* is also a satire on certain tendencies in the theatrical traditions of the late eighteenth century, including the vogue for sentimental comedy exemplified in Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* (1771). Such sentimental plays incited Sheridan's scorn and Goldsmith's disdain for 'weeping comedies'.²⁶ In Hugh Kelly's *The School for Wives* (1774), the sentimental

²³*The Dramatic Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, ed. Cecil Price, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), II, p. 501.

²⁴Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly* (1826); quoted in Price, p. 471.

²⁵It wasn't only Cumberland who was the object of Sheridan's satire. The *Morning Post* said that Sheridan had 'boldly ventured to irritate the swarm of literary insects'. See Price, p. 472.

²⁶Goldsmith's essay is the best known eighteenth-century commentary on the question, *An Essay on the Theatre; or A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy*, which appeared in *The Westminster Magazine* in 1773. See *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Comedy*, ed. Scott McMillin (New York & London: Norton, 1973), pp. 387-390.

playwright Lady Rachel Mildew complains that the theatre managers have rejected her play because 'the audiences are tired of crying at comedies'.

Thus, in *The Critic*, there is a blunt protest against the introduction of tragic subjects into comedy in Mr. Sneer's reference to a new comedy by one of his friends 'who has discovered that the follies and foibles of society, are subjects unworthy the notice of the Comic Muse, who should be taught to stoop only at the greater vices and blacker crimes of humanity' (*Sheridan*, II, p. 502). James Austen's prologue to *The Rivals* written in 1784 echoes this concern not to 'seek joy in tears & luxury in woe', but to 'draw from Folly's features fashion's mask/ To paint the scene where wit & Sense delight' (HRO, 23M93/60/3/2).

In *Volume the Second*, Austen continued to show her allegiance to burlesque. Where Fielding had been an important influence in *Volume the First*, she now turned to Sheridan who led the way in literary parody. In *The History of England*, a burlesque of Oliver Goldsmith's 'partial, prejudiced and ignorant history', Austen mocks the way in which factual history is tempered by sensationalised fiction in order to popularize its appeal. To this end, she refers her readers to *The Critic*:

Sir Walter Raleigh flourished in this & the preceding reign, & is by many people held in great veneration & respect--But as he was an enemy of the noble Essex, I have nothing to say in praise of him, & must refer all those who may wish to be acquainted with the particulars of his life, to Mr Sheridan's play of the Critic, where they will find many interesting anecdotes as well of him as of his freind [sic] Sir Christopher Hatton.---(*MW*, p. 147).

As pointed out in Chapter 1, throughout the *History*, Austen mockingly refers her readers to other 'historical' texts, in particular the plays of Shakespeare and Rowe, to flesh out the skeleton of her self-consciously fictionalised history. Her disingenuous acknowledgement of the authenticity of such methods is a hit at Goldsmith's (unacknowledged) partial and indiscriminate merging of fact and fiction.

In this passage, Austen is satirizing the liberty with which historical narrative has been distorted and fictionalized by playwrights, though, unlike Goldsmith, they do not purport to be repositories of reliable historical information. However, the tongue-

in-cheek reference to Sheridan points to a doubleness in Austen's satire, as *The Critic* is itself a burlesque of historical tragedy, which firmly eschews any intention of historical authenticity.

There are many acknowledgements to *The Critic* in Austen's full-length burlesque of sentimentalism, *Love and Freindship*. This work was dedicated to Eliza de Feuillide, who had taken the part of Miss Titupp in the Steventon production of the Garrick's *Bon Ton*. The title appears as a phrase in Garrick's play: 'Love and Friendship are very fine names to be sure, but they are merely visiting acquaintance; we know their names indeed, talk of 'em sometimes, and let 'em knock at our doors, but we never let 'em in, you know.'²⁷

Eighteenth-century 'sentimentalism' is a particularly slippery concept to define, not least because what was first an approbatory term, increasingly became a pejorative label.²⁸ A quality of emotional excess, and the indulgence or luxuriance in emotion for its own sake, is the particular target of Austen's satire in *Love and Freindship*.²⁹

²⁷David Garrick, *Bon Ton or High Life Above Stairs*, in *The Plays of David Garrick*, ed. Gerald M. Berkowitz, 4 vols (New York and London: Garland, 1981), II, p. 257. 'Love and Friendship' is a familiar phrase in 18th century literature. Austen would have known it from Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754) V. pp. 74-5, and from Henry Austen's article in *The Loiterer*: 'Let every girl who seeks for happiness conquer both her feelings and her passions. Let her avoid love and freindship', no. 29. There is also a novel of the same name listed in the preface to Colman's afterpiece *Polly Honeycombe*, which lists novels from a typical eighteenth-century circulating library.

²⁸The problem of accurately defining sentimentalism is explored by Arthur Sherbo in *English Sentimental Drama* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1957). See also Ernest Bernbaum's *The Drama of Sensibility: A Sketch of the History of English Sentimental Comedy and Domestic Tragedy 1696-1780* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958) for the standard work on English sentimental drama. John Loftis shows the 'two faces' of Sheridan's sentimentalism in *Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976). See also Richard Bevis, *The Laughing Tradition* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), pp. 45-7 and John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, repr. 1997).

²⁹Arthur Sherbo's five basic criteria are applicable here: 1. The presence of a moral element. 2. An element of the artificial, illogical, exaggerated, or improbable (very often in the treatment of emotion). 3. Good or perfectible human beings as characters. 4. An appeal to the emotions rather than the intellect. 5. An emphasis on pity, with tears for the good who suffer, and admiration for the virtuous. (p. 21).

At the end of *Volume the First*, Austen wrote a fragment called *A Beautiful Description of the Different Effects of Sensibility on Different Minds*. The excessive swooning fits of the dying heroine excite compassion from the author, indifference from her insensible sister, sighs from her melancholy husband and bad puns from the doctor who visits her on her death bed (*MW*, pp. 72-3).

Austen's burlesque novel is a parody of the heroine-centred, epistolary novel of sensibility, exemplified in Charlotte's Smith's *Emmeline, or the Orphan of the Castle*, and Fanny Burney's *Evelina*.³⁰ *Love and Freindship* duly contains all the clichés of romantic fiction: swooning heroines, unknown parentage and improbable chance meetings.

However, Austen's burlesque should not be viewed solely in the context of the sentimental novel. The cross-fertilization of sentimental techniques from the drama to the novel is epitomized in the portrayal of Sheridan's Lydia Languish, that most notorious example of absurd sentimentalism.³¹ Furthermore, many of the conventions of sentimentalism that Austen drew upon for *Love and Freindship* were parodied by Sheridan in *The Critic*.

One of the traditions of sentimental drama was the 'discovery scene', in which some dramatic (and usually emotional) revelation occurs. Thus, in Puff's tragedy, *The Spanish Armada*, there is a requisite improbable chance meeting with a stranger who is 'discovered' to be a long-lost relative:

JUSTICE
What is thy name?
SON
My name's Tom Jenkins--*alias*, have I none--
Tho' orphaned, and without a friend!
JUSTICE
Thy parents?
SON
My father dwelt in Rochester--and was,
As I have heard--a fishmonger--no more.

PUFF. What, Sir, do you leave out the account of your birth, parentage and education?

SON. They have settled it so, Sir, here.

PUFF. Oh! oh!

³⁰Both texts are burlesqued in *Northanger Abbey*. For further examples of the sentimental novel see J M S Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1932, repr. 1961).

³¹See Chapter 5.

LADY

How loudly nature whispers to my heart!
Had he no other name?

SON

I've seen a bill
Of his, sign'd *Tomkins*, creditor.

JUSTICE

This does indeed confirm each circumstance
The gypsey told!---Prepare!

SON

I do.

JUSTICE

No orphan, nor without a friend art thou--
I am thy father, *here's* thy mother, *there*
Thy uncle--this thy first cousin, and those
Are all your near relations!

MOTHER

O ecstasy of bliss!

SON

O most unlook'd for happiness!

JUSTICE

O wonderful event!

[*They faint alternately in each others arms*]

PUFF. There, you see relationship, like murder, will out (*Sheridan*, II, pp. 539-41).

Sheridan is parodying the famous sentimental discovery scene in John Home's popular tragedy, *Douglas* (1756). In Act II, Lady Randolph 'discovers' a sheep-tender and is struck by the fact that had her son lived, 'He might have been like this young gallant stranger/ And paired with him in features and in shape'. The stranger, who is Lady Randolph's lost son, describes his life-story in an eloquent, long-winded speech. In *The Critic*, the famous 'My name is Norval' speech is condensed into two lines: 'My name's Tom Jenkins--*alias*, have I none--/Though orphaned, and without a friend.!' Austen's reference to *Douglas* in *Mansfield Park* shows her familiarity with Sheridan's joke when Tom Bertram recalls play-acting as a boy: 'How many times have we mourned over the dead body of Julius Caesar, and *to be'd* and *not to be'd*, in this very room for his amusement! And I am sure, *my name was Norval*, every evening of my life through one Christmas holidays' (*MP*, p. 126-127). In *Love and Friendship*, Austen also includes the obligatory discovery scene:

Never did I see such an affecting Scene as was the meeting of Edward & Augustus.

'My life! my Soul!' (exclaimed the former) 'My adorable Angel!' (replied the latter) as they flew into each other's arms. It was too pathetic for the feelings of Sophia and myself--We fainted Alternately on a Sofa (*MW*, p. 86).

The final line is a clear allusion to *The Critic*, where the stage directions reads, 'They faint alternately in each others' arms'.

Austen continues to allude to Tom Jenkins' 'discovery scene' in the sentimental reunion of her heroine, Laura, who also discovers, unexpectedly, the existence of a wealthy grandfather and benefactor: 'At his first Appearance my Sensibility was wonderfully affected & e'er I had gazed at him a 2d time, an instinctive Sympathy whispered to my Heart, that he was my Grandfather' (*MW*, p. 91). Laura's friend and confidante, Sophia, discovers that the same venerable old man is a relative: "'Oh!" replied Sophia, "when I first beheld you the instinct of Nature whispered me that we were in some degree related--But whether Grandfathers, or Grandmothers, I could not pretend to determine"' (*MW*, p. 91).

Austen's heroines echo Sheridan's phrase, 'whispered to my heart'. This clichéd phrase indicates the trade-mark of sensibility: the heroine's grasp of the supremacy of instinctive intuition over the rational or intellectual.³² In *The Critic*, the implausible discovery scene is followed by a quick succession of equally implausible reunions, 'I am thy father, *here's* thy mother, *there* /Thy uncle--this thy first cousin, and those/Are all your near relations.!' Austen's own discovery scene is only completed when two more long-lost grandchildren, the strolling actors, Philander and Augustus, enter the Inn, much to the Grandfather's dismay:

'But tell me (continued he looking fearfully towards the Door) tell me, have I any other Grand-Children in the House'. 'None my Lord'. 'Then I will provide for you all without further delay--Here are 4 banknotes of 50£ each--Take them & remember I have done the Duty of a Grandfather--'. He instantly left the room &

³²Samuel Johnson defines sensibility as acuteness of perception, delicacy and quickness of feeling.

immediately afterwards the house...You may imagine how greatly surprised by the sudden departure of Lord St. Clair. 'Ignoble Grand-sire!' exclaimed Sophia. Unworthy Grandfather!' said I, & instantly fainted in each other's arms (*MW*, p. 92).

The swooning scene once again borrows the stage direction in *The Critic*, 'they faint alternately in each others' arms'. But Austen is also alluding to Burney's *Evelina*, her parody of improbable chance meetings with long-lost relatives is a typical feature of sentimental drama.³³ The last-minute discovery of a benevolent guardian appears in most of the sentimental plays of the period, for example Stockwell in *The West Indian* and Sir Oliver Surface in *The School for Scandal*.³⁴

As well as the conventional discovery scene, Puff's tragedy incorporates fainting fits and madness, the symptoms of extreme sensibility both in stage and in fiction: '*Enter TILBURINA and CONFIDANTE mad, according to custom*':³⁵

TILBURINA. The wind whistles--the moon rises--see
They have kill'd my squirrel in his cage!
Is this a grasshopper!--Ha! no, it is my
Whiskerandos--you shall not keep him--

³³This is also an allusion to Burney's *Evelina* where Sir John Belmont discovers numerous unknown relatives: 'I have already a daughter...and it is not three days since, that I had the pleasure of discovering a son; how many more sons and daughters may be brought to me, I am yet to learn, but I am already, perfectly satisfied with the size of my family' (*Evelina*, p. 371).

³⁴In *The West Indian*, Belcour is reunited with his father. 'STOCKWELL. I am your father./ BELCOUR. My father! Do I live?..It is too much'. Richard Cumberland, *The West Indian: A Comedy* (London, 1771), repr. in *The Beggar's Opera and other Eighteenth Century Plays* (London: Dent, 1974), p. 405.

³⁵Sheridan's title alludes to Cumberland's *The Critic*, which was also an attack on critics and newspapers. It was acted at Covent Garden, 20th March, 1779. Eustace, a young writer asks Type, a newspaper printer, to correct a tragedy he has written:

TYPE. Have you a mad scene in your play?

EUSTACE. None. Is that necessary?

TYPE. Indispensable.

EUSTACE. But the story does not admit of it.

TYPE. So much the worse for the story and the story teller. A tragedy without a mad scene, is no more than a coat without buckram...In the Fifth, and last, mad, downright mad, frantic, raving. This, with a proper sprinkling of fits, fallings, stampings, starings, cursings, prayings, stabbings and poisonings [sic], make up a good round rattling tragedy' (*Sheridan*, II, p. 469).

The archetype for sentimental madness in the novel is Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), in which the hero descends into insanity, as a result of unfulfilled love.

I know you have him in your pocket--
 An oyster may be cross'd in love!--Who says
 A whale's a bird?--Ha! did you call, my love?
 --He's here! He's there!--He's everywhere!
 Ah me! He's no where! (*Sheridan*, II, p. 548).³⁶

In *Love and Freindship*, madness and swoons are the prerequisites for the distressed heroines who witness the death of their husbands from an upturned carriage: 'Two gentlemen most elegantly attired but weltering in their own blood was what first struck our eyes... Yes dearest Marianne they were our husbands. Sophia shrieked & fainted on the Ground--I screamed and instantly ran mad'. Laura descends into madness: 'My Eyes assumed a vacant stare, My face became as pale as death, and my senses were considerably impaired' (*MW*, p. 100). Laura's mad speech echoes the incongruous jumble of images in Tilburina's :

'Talk not to me of Phaetons' (said I, raving in a frantic, incoherent manner)--'Give me a violin--I'll play to him & sooth him in his melancholy Hours--Beware ye gentle Nymphs of Cupid's Thunderbolts, avoid the piercing Shafts of Jupiter--Look at that Grove of Firs--I see a Leg of Mutton--They told me Edward was not Dead; but they deceived me--they took him for a Cucumber' (*MW*, p. 100).

In *Love and Freindship*, Austen's allusions to *The Critic* are deliberate and blatant. Her mockery of the conventions of sentimentalism are shaped by Sheridan's burlesque techniques and she acknowledges the debt in her close and deliberate echoes to the play. But the Sheridan play that has most resonances with Austen's satire on sensibility is *The Rivals*. *Love and Freindship* has been seen as an early burlesque version of *Sense and Sensibility*, and in both works Austen is indebted to *The Rivals*.

One of the tropes of sentimentalism that both Sheridan and Austen exploit is the conflicting attitudes of the young and their more prudent elders, particularly when it comes to marriage.³⁷ What leads to a tragic outcome in *Clarissa*, the most

³⁶Tilburina's speech is a parody of Ophelia. *Hamlet* was the main-piece performed on the opening night of *The Critic*.

³⁷ Loftis thus argues: 'His burlesque of the tyranny of the older generation in the persons of Sir

influential example of parental tyranny in eighteenth-century fiction, is for Sheridan in *The Rivals* a subject for burlesque. *Love and Freindship* follows Sheridan's inversion of the trope where the benign impulses of parents are wilfully misunderstood by their children. The absurd hero, Edward, opposes his father, even though the opposition is contrary to his own wishes:

'My father, seduced by the false glare of Fortune and the Deluding Pomp of Title, insisted on my giving my hand to Lady Dorothea. No never exclaimed I. Lady Dorothea is lovely and Engaging; I prefer no woman to her; but know Sir, that I scorn to marry her in compliance with your wishes. No! Never shall it be said that I obliged my Father' (*MW*, p. 81).

The comic impact arises from the contrast between Edward's sentimental outburst and his father's level-headed response, which is to rebuke his quixotic son for using language that is inflated and melodramatic:

'Sir Edward was surprized; he had perhaps little expected to meet with so spirited an opposition to his will. "Where Edward in the name of wonder (said he) did you pick up this unmeaning Gibberish? You have been studying Novels I suspect". I scorned to answer: it would have been beneath my dignity' (*MW*, p. 81).

The problem with Sir Edward's cretinous son, is that he has read too many novels. In *The Loiterer*, Henry and James Austen had satirized women for reading trashy novels, but Austen retaliated in *Love and Freindship*, by making a young *man* the target of her satire. Sir Edward accuses his son of gleaning absurdly romantic notions from the pages of sentimental fiction, just as Laura and Sophia make partial judgements based upon the sentimental novels they read:

We soon saw through his Character...They said he was Sensible, well informed, and Agreeable; we did not pretend to Judge of such trifles, but as we were convinced he had no soul, that he had never read the Sorrows of Werter, & that his Hair bore not the slightest resemblance

Anthony Absolute and Mrs Malaprop should not conceal the force of the social reality which lay behind that tyranny--the custom among affluent families of arranging marriages with close attention to property settlements. Sheridan wrote in the interval between Richardson's *Clarissa*, and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*' (*Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England*, p. 46).

to Auburn, we were certain that Janetta could feel no affection for him, or at least that she ought to feel none (*MW*, p. 93).

In the late eighteenth century, the epitome of the misguided reader of romantic novels was Lydia Languish. But Sheridan was not the first playwright to burlesque the giddy female novel reader. Lydia Languish follows on from a tradition of quixotic stage heroines such as Richard Steele's Miss Bidley in *The Tender Husband* (1705) and George Colman the Elder's *Polly Honeycombe* (1760).

Sheridan, like Austen, has limited tolerance for financially imprudent marriages. Lydia embraces the idea of love in a cottage with Ensign Beverley, 'how charming will poverty be with him.' In *Love and Freindship*, Edward also prefers the romance of living in poverty, but the absurdity of his sentimental notions is made apparent by the cool scepticism of his clever sister, Augusta:

'Never, never Augusta will I so demean myself...Support! What Support will Laura want which she can receive from him?'

'Only those very insignificant ones of Victuals and Drink' (answered she.)

'Victuals and Drink!' (replied my Husband in a most nobly contemptuous Manner) 'and dost thou then imagine that there is no other support for an exalted Mind (such as is my Laura's) than the mean and indelicate employment of Eating and Drinking?'

'None that I know of, so efficacious' (returned Augusta).

'And did you then never feel the pleasing Pangs of Love, Augusta?' (replied my Edward). 'Does it appear impossible to your vile and corrupted Palate, to exist on Love? Can you not conceive the Luxury of living in every Distress that Poverty can inflict, with the object of your tenderest Affection?'

'You are too ridiculous (said Augusta) to argue with' (*MW*, pp. 83-84).

The device of contrasting a cool, level-headed character with a foolish character is deployed by Hugh Kelly in *False Delicacy* (1768), where Mrs. Harley and Cecil provide a rational norm by which the excesses of absurd sensibility can be measured. The contrasts and conflicts arising from clashes between romantic idealism and prudent conservatism provide the comic dynamic of both Austen's and Sheridan's satire, and Austen was to rework this comic trope in *Sense and Sensibility*.³⁸

³⁸See Chapter 5.

Even in her earliest works, the harmful effects of excessive emotion are satirized, although the emphasis in *Love and Freindship* is upon the hypocrisy of sentimentalism. The two anti-heroines, Laura and Sophia, justify selfish and malicious behaviour by their skewed vision of sentimental duty. In the name of sentimentalism; they persuade Janetta to elope with an unprincipled fortune hunter, and abandon the honourable man that she really loves:

The very circumstance of his being her father's choice too, was so much in his disfavour, that had he been deserving her, in every other respect yet *that* of itself ought to have been a sufficient reason in the Eyes of Janetta for rejecting him...we had no difficulty to convince her that it was impossible she could love Graham, or that it was her duty to disobey her Father (*MW*, pp. 93-94).

What is worse, their destructive interference in a young girl's happiness is twisted into the appearance of a noble and generous act. Beneath the veneer of sensibility lies egotism and selfishness. Laura and Sophia steal, lie and cheat all in the name of sensibility: the code of conduct that unashamedly placed the individual first. Thus, when Sophia is caught *in flagrante delicto* stealing money from her host, in her own words 'majestically removing the 5th bank-note' from her cousin's private drawer, she responds in the injured tones of a virtuous heroine whose personal space has been violated, a parody on Clarissa Harlowe in Richardson's novel:

Sophia...instantly put on a most forbidding look, & darting an angry frown on the undaunted culprit, demanded in a haughty tone of voice 'Wherefore her retirement was thus insolently broken in on?' The unblushing Macdonald, without even endeavouring to exculpate himself from the crime he was charged with, meanly endeavoured to reproach Sophia with ignobly defrauding him of his money...The Dignity of Sophia was wounded; 'Wretch' (exclaimed she, hastily replacing the Bank-note in the drawer) 'how darest thou to accuse me of an Act, of which the bare idea makes me blush' (*MW*, p. 96).

Clarissa of course has every right to object to her personal space being violated, whereas Sophia does not, for she is stealing. Just as Laura and Sophia steal

unashamedly from their guests, Edward and Augustus 'scorned to reflect a moment on their pecuniary distresses and would have blushed at the idea of paying their debts' (*MW*, p. 86). This 'gentlemanly' attribute derives from Charles Surface in *The School for Scandal*, who is encouraged by his friend Careless to put off paying his huge debts with the money that he has borrowed from Premium:

CARELESS. Don't let that old Blockhead persuade you--to squander any of that money on old Musty debts, or any such Nonsense for tradesmen--Charles, are the most Exorbitant Fellows.
CHARLES. Very true, and paying them is only Encouraging them.
(*Sheridan*, I, p. 408).

In *The Rivals* Sheridan had satirized absurd sentimentalism, but in *The School for Scandal* he made explicit the connection between sensibility and hypocrisy. Comedies by playwrights such as Steele, Colman and Kelly had satirized foolish sentimentalism, but the darker *School for Scandal* showed how the cult of sensibility was abused 'when it became a front for prudery and hypocrisy'.³⁹

In *Love and Freindship*, Austen also shows how sensibility is abused by unscrupulous characters. In an allusion to Sheridan's smooth hypocrite Joseph Surface, Laura's 'refined' feelings are disturbed by the sound of 'loud and repeated snores' in a carriage journey, inciting a misplaced outburst of emotion:

'What an illiterate villain must that Man be! (thought I to myself) What a total Want of delicate refinement must he have who can thus shock our senses by such a brutal Noise! He must I am certain be capable of every bad Action! There is no crime too black for such a Character' (*MW*, p. 103).

This speech is an imitation of Joseph's hypocritical protestations when he persuades Sir Peter Teazle that his brother Charles is Lady Teazle's lover, rather than himself:

³⁹See Fintan O' Toole, *A Traitor's Kiss: The Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (London: Granta, 1998), p. 125.

Oh, 'tis not to be credited-- There may be a man capable of such Baseness to be sure-- but for my Part 'till you can give me positive Proofs-- I can not but doubt it. However if this should be proved on him He is no longer a Brother of mine! I disclaim kindred with him-- for the Man who can break thro' the laws of Hospitality-- and attempt the wife-- of his Friend deserves to be branded as the Pest of Society (*Sheridan*, I, p. 415).

The 'artful, selfish and malicious' man who 'studies sentiment' and is a member of Lady Sneerwell's circle of malicious slanderers disguises his perfidy beneath a veneer of sensibility and tells the audience that instead of the 'silver ore of pure Charity' he prefers to use 'the sentimental French plate'. Austen's mockery of the hypocritical cant of sensibility owes much to Sheridan's example. Though her characters in *Love and Freindship* are rarely permitted to stray beyond the boundaries of burlesque, in *Sense and Sensibility* the genuine sensibility of the Dashwood sisters is used to reflect upon the false sensibility of other characters. However, even in this later work she doesn't altogether abandon burlesque methods.

When Cecil Price's edition of Sheridan's complete works was published in 1973, the review in the *TLS*, 22 Feb 1974 aptly gave it the heading *Sheridan and the Art of the Burlesque*. John Loftis has persuasively argued that a deeper appreciation of burlesque is vital in understanding Sheridan's satirical intent: 'Burlesque sustains itself on its satirical target...Many of the difficulties spectators or readers of the comedies experience in evaluating them would disappear if they recognised that Sheridan was above all a master of burlesque' (*Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England*, p. 6).

Simon Trussler makes an important distinction between burlesque and dramatic satire: 'Burlesque... makes fun of artistic pretensions--whereas dramatic satire hits at faults and foibles in real life'.⁴⁰ Austen's roots were in literary parody, she loved burlesque, and she never abandoned it. From her earliest full-length satire of the

⁴⁰*Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Simon Trussler (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. viii.

sentimental and Gothic novel *Northanger Abbey*, to her final uncompleted novel, Austen continued to use elements of it in her work. In 'Sanditon' she returned to her natural medium of satire and her love of the ridiculous. 'Sanditon' is extremely close in spirit to the juvenilia, and reflects a striking continuity with her early burlesques.⁴¹

In the eighteenth century Fielding and Sheridan were the masters of burlesque. *The Critic* and *Tom Thumb* were probably the two most popular burlesques of the eighteenth century. Austen's formative development as a comic writer and her affinity with literary parody can be attributed, in part, to the example set by these plays. Furthermore, the distinctive element of both plays was the degree of authorial control maintained by the authors. Fielding's satirical author's notes to the text of *Tom Thumb*, and Sheridan's rehearsal play with its author-within-the-play, permitted the writers an unusual degree of authorial control which appealed to Austen.

Claude Rawson has suggested that Austen's epistolary burlesques echo Fielding's *Shamela*. Her intention is thus to emphasize rather than discredit the presence of the author: 'Precision timing and clockwork reaction in both behaviour and repartee in *Shamela* are a stylish farcical response to Richardson's pseudo-instantaneities. They are matched in Austen's burlesques by a comedy of instant fainting fits, accelerated deaths and love at first sight followed within moments by marriage'.⁴² The deliberate introduction of farcical elements written in a dead-pan manner thus increases the presence of a mimicking author and a controlling intelligence.

In the move from the drama to the novel, Fielding pioneered the way of successfully integrating quasi-theatrical techniques with third-person narration. Austen experimented with both the dramatic and the epistolary form (both of which

⁴¹ 'Sanditon' also contains some of Austen's funniest satire of sensibility. The absurd Sir Edward Denham's taste for sentimental fiction is satirized, and his penchant for modelling himself on Richardson's Lovelace suggests the corrupting effects of the 'exceptionable parts' of Richardson's novels (*MW*, p. 358).

⁴² Claude Rawson, *Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 281.

lack a narrative voice) before turning to third-person narration. The following chapter examines Austen's transitional development from the drama to the novel.

Chapter Four

Play to Novel: Richardson, Fielding, and Inchbald

Austen's models for burlesque were Sheridan and Fielding in the dramatic tradition, and Charlotte Lennox in the novel tradition. Chapter 3 has suggested the importance of burlesque on Austen's development as a writer. In her mature fiction she was to refine and hone her use of burlesque, without abandoning it fully.

Before Austen began refining her first novels for publication in the early part of the nineteenth century, she put the finishing touches to two important transitional works: a burlesque play of Richardson's novel *Sir Charles Grandison*, and an epistolary novel, *Lady Susan*.

An analysis of these works reveals a further crucial development in the trajectory of Austen's writing career: her final experimentation and rejection of dramatic and epistolary forms, both of which lack a narrative voice, in favour of third-person narration. The novels of Henry Fielding and Elizabeth Inchbald (both of them playwrights who became novelists) were an important influence on Austen's style and enabled her to find a medium of writing which incorporated quasi-theatrical techniques with third-person narration.

Jane Austen's *Sir Charles Grandison*

'What a delightful play might be form'd out of this piece. I am sure Mr. Garrick will have it upon the stage'.

(Lady Bradshaigh to Samuel Richardson on *Sir Charles Grandison*)

Austen's five-act comedy depends upon a close knowledge of Richardson's novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*.¹ She sub-titles her play 'The Happy Man', which alludes to the way that Richardson irritatingly over-uses this phrase throughout his novel. Austen had previously made Richardson's 'perfect hero' the butt of many jokes in her juvenilia. He was the 'happy man' in 'Jack and Alice': 'an amiable, accomplished & bewitching young Man; of so dazzling a Beauty that none but Eagles could look him in the Face' (*MW*, p. 13).

Brian Southam, the editor of *Jane Austen's Sir Charles Grandison*, suggests that the most obvious stumbling block for the modern reader is the play's comedy of allusion.² Whereas Austen could be confident that the audience (her family) would catch every allusion, echo and imitation, much is lost on a modern reader. Yet, even without a knowledge of Richardson's novel, this burlesque play offers a crucial insight into her narrative development.

The play's most obvious joke is the reduction of Richardson's seven-volume, million-word novel, into a stage lampoon of five short acts, without any marked alteration to the plot. The heroine, Harriet Byron, is stolen away at a masquerade ball by a notorious blackguard, Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, before being rescued and married

¹For ease of reference, Austen's play is cited as 'Grandison', Richardson's novel as *Sir Charles Grandison*.

²See *Jane Austen's 'Sir Charles Grandison'*, ed. Brian Southam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 1-34.

to the hero Sir Charles Grandison. In the novel the reader, and the heroine, has to wait for five volumes before the hero is free to marry the woman he loves.

The telescoping of the notoriously long narrative (Samuel Johnson famously said that a man who read Richardson for the story were as well go hang himself) into a short play, is in the tradition of Fielding's reduction of *Pamela* into the sixty page tract *Shamela*. The success of burlesque writing partly depends on its brevity, as Fielding realized, and Austen shows a similar awareness of this necessity in her juvenilia, where she rarely permits the joke to be laboured. In 'Grandison' she compounds the comic impact by showing that Richardson's thin plot and million word novel could be transposed into a short play.

Southam has convincingly argued that the play was written over a number of years. Austen was probably working on it from the 1780s when the family was engaged in private theatricals. For example, Act One of 'Grandison' is very similar in style to Austen's playlets of the 1780s, where she opens with a full cast list as if this were to be a full length play.³ The manuscript of Act Two is watermarked 1799, and Southam has noted an internal allusion pointing to the summer of 1800. The final version was probably completed around 1805.⁴ The dating is important because it was the completion of 'Grandison', which heralded the way ahead for Austen's adoption of third-person narration.

By turning her favourite novel into a burlesque play, Austen showed her mocking awareness of Richardson's dramatic inheritance. Richardson was keen on the public theatre, and was friends with Colley Cibber, Aaron Hill and Edward Young.⁵

³The first scene is the only one that has no direct source in Richardson's novel. It depicts the preparations for the masquerade ball that becomes the scene of Harriet's abduction. Richardson's clichéd use of the masquerade ball had been a target of Austen's satire in her early sketches.

⁴See Chapter 2.

⁵See George Sherburn, 'Samuel Richardson's Novels and the Theatre: A Theory Sketched', *Philological Quarterly*, 41 (1962), 325-329.

Richardson was deeply influenced by the drama and gleaned a diversity of techniques and materials from his knowledge of plays.⁶

Richardson perceived himself as a dramatic novelist. In his postscript to *Clarissa*, he describes that work as a 'Dramatic Narrative', and at the front of *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* he places the 'Names of *the* Principal Persons' as a *dramatis personae*. In all of his novels Richardson has parenthetical insertions like stage directions such as 'Enter Dorcas in haste', '[rising]' and '[Rising again]' and even directions for the characters, '[Lips drawn closer: eye raised]'.⁷

Perhaps one of the most striking theatrical borrowings in *Clarissa*, is the scene before Hampstead, where Lovelace writes:

And here, supposing my narrative of the dramatic kind, ends Act the First. And now begins

ACT II. Scene, Hampstead Heath, continued

*Enter my Rascal*⁸

Lovelace has long been regarded as a theatrical character (based on Nicholas Rowe's Lothario), and George Sherburn has suggested that Richardson may have based his plot of *Clarissa* on Charles Johnson's *Caelia* (1733), where a virtuous heroine is placed in a brothel ('Samuel Richardson's Novels and the Theatre', p. 327). Lovelace's relish for role-playing and for stage-managing the action of the novel blatantly confirms his allegiance to the archetypal stage rake that he was based upon.⁹

⁶See Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist* (London: Methuen, 1973); Margaret Anne Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); Ira Konigsberg, *Samuel Richardson and the Dramatic Novel* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968).

⁷See Sherburn, p. 328.

⁸Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 764. This example is cited by Sherburn, p. 328.

⁹See Konigsberg, pp. 33-47.

A further development of Richardson's dramatic art in *Clarissa*, which he was to perfect in *Sir Charles Grandison*, was his implementation of play-book style dialogue. This can be seen in the comic description of Anna Howe's account of Uncle Anthony's courtship of Mrs Howe. The dialogue between mother and daughter is set out like a play:

I think you shall have the dialogue...

Mother. I have a very serious matter to talk with you upon, Nancy, when you are disposed to attend to matters *within* ourselves, and not let matters *without* ourselves wholly engross you...

Daughter. I am *now* disposed to attend to everything my mamma is *disposed* to say to me.

M. Why then, child--why then, my dear--(and the good lady's face looked *so* plump! *so* smooth! and *so* shining!--I see you are all attention, Nancy!--but don't be surprised!--don't be uneasy!--but I have--I have--where is it?--(And yet it lay next her heart, never another near it--so no difficulty to have found it)--I have a *letter*, my dear!--(and out from her bosom it came: but she still held it in her hand)--I have a *letter*, child--It is--it is--it is from--from a gentleman, I assure you!--lifting up her head, and smiling (*Clarissa*, p. 626).

Richardson knew that he was writing for a public used to reading play-books. Not for nothing had Pope quipped 'Our wives read Milton and our daughters plays'.¹⁰ Though Richardson explicitly made use of the play-book narration in *Clarissa*, he draws upon it even more extensively in *Sir Charles Grandison*. Though *Clarissa* (and *Pamela D*) were centred on a single plot situation that could be perceived as dramatic in origin, *Sir Charles Grandison* is more episodic. Richardson builds his script technique into the novel (recounting long dramatic conversations in the narrative) with increasingly rare authorial intervention.

Paradoxically, *Sir Charles Grandison* has little dramatic action and is more concerned with everyday social behaviour, aside from the Clementina sub-plot. Ira Konigsberg argues that *Sir Charles Grandison's* preoccupation with emotions rather than action and plot was similar to the development of sentimental drama, where the

¹⁰The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated', 172, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (London: Methuen, 1963), p. 641.

emphasis was placed on the feelings, reducing the amount of action and plot (Konigsberg, p. 69). Yet Lady Bradshaigh, among others, saw the dramatic potential of the novel as genteel comedy and remarked: 'What a delightful play might be form'd out of this piece. I am sure Mr. Garrick will have it upon the stage'.¹¹ In *Sir Charles Grandison*, Harriet explains her method of narration to Lucy:

By the way, Lucy, you are fond of plays; and it has come into my head, that to avoid all *says-I's* and *says-she's*, I will henceforth, in all dialogues, write names in the margin: so fancy [sic], my dear, that you are reading in one of your favourite volumes.¹²

Richardson's pioneering method of narration was a significant influence on writers such as Fanny Burney and Austen. Parts of Burney's early journals, for example, were written as conversations between different characters, following, what she called, 'the Grandison way of writing Dialogue.'¹³ Later, she coined her own word to describe her method of writing: 'I think I shall occasionally *Theatricalise* my Dialogues.'¹⁴

Mark Kinkead-Weekes argues that Richardson's 'Conversations', with their lack of connectives ('he said', 'she said', 'I replied', etc) enhance the dramatic impact: 'The more dialogue there is, and the less interruption by the narrator, the more dramatic the scene becomes and the nearer to experience in the theatre' (Kinkead-Weekes, p. 402). In *Sir Charles Grandison*, the letters are passed around so that most of the characters have immediate access to each others' thoughts. Richardson's depiction of Clementina is mainly through dramatic dialogues, written down as play-scripts, rather than letters revealing her character.

¹¹See Doody, p. 280.

¹²Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), I, p. 273.

¹³See *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. Lars E. Troide and Stewart J. Cooke, 3 vols so far (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988-94), I, p. 202.

¹⁴Kate Chisholm has noted this as one of many instances where Burney coined words that are now cited in the *OED*. See *Fanny Burney: Her Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998), p. 83.

It is striking, but not surprising, that Austen should turn her very favourite novel into a burlesque play version which heightens many of its weaknesses. The very act of transcribing the novel into a play was a sly hit at Richardson's claim to be a dramatic novelist. Thus Austen parodies Richardson's use of elaborate stage-directions: '*The Library at Colnebrook, a few minutes later. Curtain draws up and discovers MISS GRANDISON reading*' ('Grandison', p. 46).¹⁵ Austen's stage directions mockingly recall the way in which Richardson describes action, gesture and facial expression in his dramatic dialogues:

Sir Ch. I have a letter of his to answer. He is very urgent with me for my interest with you. I am to answer it. Will you tell me, my sister (giving her the letter) what I shall say?
Miss Gr. [after perusing it] Why, ay, poor man! he is very much in love. (*Sir Charles Grandison*, II, p. 408).

Southam suggests that Austen's stage-directions were practical measures for managing the inexperienced players in the family productions, but it is more likely that these detailed and elaborate stage directions are a mocking travesty of the way in which Richardson cross-used stage business and the play-format in his novels.

Though she admired *Grandison's* comedy of manners, Austen is irreverent about the exaggerated parts which she found comically absurd and highly artificial. One example is the incident when Harriet Byron's stomach is squeezed in a door by the villainous seducer Sir Hargrave Pollexfen. Austen dramatizes the action and mocks Richardson's melodramatic dialogue, 'So so, you have killed me, I hope--Well, now I hope, now I hope you are satisfied' ('Grandison', p. 44).

Austen parodies Richardson's stage-craft in act one, scene two of her play, where there are 12 hurried entrances and exits centred around Harriet's abduction. In Richardson's novel, Pollexfen behaves in the manner of a stage villain, and in the space of one paragraph makes numerous entrances and exits.¹⁶ As Southam observes, this

¹⁵Austen had previously used the same joke in 'The Visit' where two characters are 'discovered': a theatrical term used in stage-directions to indicate that the characters are already on the stage when the curtain rises.

¹⁶Pollexfen is more of a conventional stage villain, and lacks the force of Lovelace. Kinkead-

part of the novel is already highly dramatic and merely requires the 'slightest tilt' by Austen to turn it into broad, knockabout farce.

There were a number of school-room abridgements of *Sir Charles Grandison*. Austen's burlesque play was also a mockery of the popular bowdlerized abridgements deemed suitable for young women; expurgated versions, of course¹⁷: 'The schoolroom versions were notably reticent in retailing the events at Paddington, where the threat of rape hangs heavy in the air. Jane Austen makes this the high point of her comic melodrama. Far from closing her eyes to the strain of erotic titillation in Richardson, Jane Austen laughs it off the stage' (Introduction to 'Grandison', p. 22).

Unlike the farcical vigour of act two, acts three to five of her play are 'an imitative pastiche of the drawing room comedy-of-manners' ('Grandison', p. 26). The parts of *Sir Charles Grandison* which Austen least enjoyed were the excessive sentimental and melodramatic elements, such as the abduction of Harriet and the madness of Clementina. Austen was aware that Richardson's debt to the dramatic tradition was best expressed in his conversations and the 'battle of the sexes' combats in the drawing room and the cedar parlour.

Margaret Doody has shown that Richardson wrote the novel by instalments, and then read them aloud to a responsive audience of friends: 'The prospect of reading each new scene aloud must have called forth his best efforts, and stimulated him to write passages and conversational scenes suitable for semi-dramatic rendering' (Doody, p. 305).

Doody has also persuasively argued that Richardson's comic types are drawn from Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy. In particular, she argues that

Weekes describes the abduction scene as 'Lovelace-and-water', and further argues 'nor has Hargrave any of the charm, flair for playacting and disguise, or psychological insight of Richardson's splendid villain' (Kinkead-Weekes, p. 299).

¹⁷ Southam notes that Austen may have encountered one of the most popular versions, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison abridged from the works of Samuel Richardson*, which reached a tenth edition by 1798 (Introduction to *Sir Charles Grandison*, p. 33). Austen had already made fun of popular, bowdlerized abridgements in her burlesque of Goldsmith's *History of England*.

Charlotte Grandison (later to become the married Lady G.) derives from the witty, teasing heroines of stage comedy. She traces Richardson's witty heroine to Harriet in *The Man of Mode*, Harriot in Steele's *The Funeral* and Lady Betty Modish in Cibber's *The Careless Husband*.¹⁸

In addition, Charlotte resembles Congreve's Millamant, and though her wit and raillery provokes censure from her brother he confesses that he loves her '*With all your faults, my dear*; and I had almost said, *for some of them*' (*Sir Charles Grandison*, II, p. 99). Sir Charles is surely alluding to Mirabell's description of Millamant: 'I like her with all her Faults; nay, like her for her Faults. Her Follies are so natural, so artful, that they become her; and those Affectations which in another Woman wou'd be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable'.¹⁹ Mirabell's remarks are also echoed in Knightley's feelings about Emma, when he describes her as 'faultless, in spite of all her faults'²⁰ (*E*, p. 433), and claims that he has always doated on her 'faults and all' (*E*, p. 462).

Austen's burlesque of Harriet, who loses all her spirit and interest as soon as she falls in love, is thrown into relief by her evident admiration of Charlotte Grandison. Throughout Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, few characters get the better of Charlotte, and she is usually the winner in the various wit combats which pervade the narrative. Charlotte dislikes the subordination of women in marriage and delights in her own independence. Even as she is led up to the altar she is overheard to say, very much in the manner of Millamant, 'You don't know what you are about, man. I expect to have all my way: Remember that's one of my articles before marriage' (*Sir Charles*

¹⁸In *The Funeral*, Steele dramatizes two sisters of contrasting characters, Harriot and Sharlot. The coquettish and giddy Harriot is contrasted with the more grave Sharlot. Doody suggests that Richardson has given his heroines the same names but reversed the roles (Doody, p. 287).

¹⁹William Congreve, *The Way of the World*, ed. Brian Gibbons, 2nd edn (London: A& C Black, 1994), I, 3. pp. 140-5.

²⁰See Frank W. Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 74.

Grandison, II, p. 340). Unusually for the fiction of the time, Charlotte remains an unreformed coquette even after her marriage to her bashful and doting husband.

Austen demonstrates her awareness of Charlotte Grandison's stature as the real heroine of the novel, and simultaneously burlesques one of Richardson's duller characters, Mr Reeves, by reversing his character, and enabling her own Charlotte to confess that Mr Reeves 'disputes charmingly. I thought he would have got the better of me' ('Grandison', p. 45). Later Austen has Miss Jervois satirically observe of Lord G., Charlotte's betrothed: 'he will certainly get the better of you at last. He did it once, you know' ('Grandison', p. 51).

Brian Southam argues in his introduction to the play that once again Austen mocks both Grandison and her favourite writer in this lampoon: 'taken as a whole, the play is a shrewd and amusing swipe at the character of Richardson's "happy man"' (Introduction to 'Grandison', p. 27). But the play signifies much more than this.

Austen's version of *Sir Charles Grandison* and the use of the burlesque tradition to highlight its artificiality was a way of exorcising the parts she least liked, of escaping from the excessive sentimentality and melodramatic elements of Richardson's narrative method, and enabling her to be liberated to produce her own ironized version of the sentimental novel. The dramatic form was clearly unable to give her the authorial control she required, and she was now to reject it after her unsuccessful experimentation. It is surely no coincidence that she was also doing something similar with the epistolary tradition, a form of narration that Richardson had pioneered as being naturally dramatic.

Lady Susan

Around the same time as she put the finishing touches to her burlesque play of *Sir Charles Grandison*, Austen was completing *Lady Susan*. This short epistolary novel was probably written around 1794-5 and posthumously published in 1871 from an untitled manuscript dated 1805 (The manuscript is not a draft but a fair copy; two of its leaves are watermarked 1805). Chapman dates its composition from the year of the watermark, but Southam argues that the 1805 manuscript, almost free from correction and revision, is a rewrite of an earlier version written around 1795, the same period as the epistolary first draft of 'Elinor and Marianne'. Marilyn Butler has argued that the work belongs to a later date of 1809, but it is unlikely that Austen would return to the epistolary form after *Northanger Abbey*.²¹

It is perhaps more likely that *Lady Susan* was carefully copied out around 1805, when she also added an author's conclusion in third person. This was, I suspect, the same period as she was finishing *Sir Charles Grandison*. This is not coincidental, but heralds an important development in her writing where she rejects the epistolary and dramatic form and embraces third-person narration.

Lady Susan is Austen's most ambitious early work. It is Austen's only extant epistolary novel of substance, and it is with this novel that she really begins to explore the possibilities of the letter as a narrative form. *Lady Susan* reveals how the author recast inherited conventions by means of ongoing experiments with narrative voice, and shows how Austen was still strongly influenced by Richardson.

Lady Susan playfully reworks the structure of Richardson's great tragic novel, *Clarissa*. It reproduces the first part of Richardson's plot, where a daughter is imprisoned for her refusal to marry the man of her parents' choice. And as Lovelace is

²¹Butler's argument for the later date is that *Lady Susan* was based on Maria Edgeworth's epistolary novel *Leonara* (1806), which depicts the break up of a marriage by a beautiful, unscrupulous widow, and her tale *Manoeuvring* (1809), *London Review of Books*, 5 March, 1998. In response to this article, Brian Southam argues that it would be unlikely that Austen would return to the epistolary at this later date. My argument, below, that it is in fact based on *Clarissa* tends to support Southam.

the traditional rake (of both stage and page), Lady Susan is the temptress, manipulating men by employing her personal charms; charming and witty, and morally corrupt. Lady Susan justifies her attempt to ensnare the young hero on two accounts: partly to amuse herself with the challenge of subduing an 'insolent spirit', and also to avenge herself on the Vernon family, whom she despises, 'to humble the Pride of these self-important Courcies still lower' (*MW*, p. 254). These are exactly the two reasons why Lovelace literally ensnares Clarissa: 'Then what a triumph would it be to the *Harlowe pride*, were I now to marry this lady?' (*Clarissa*, p. 426); 'Why will she not if *once subdued be always subdued*' (*Clarissa*, p. 430).

Lady Susan was Austen's first novel to contrast the town and the country. The novel depicts events which occur mainly at the country house of the Vernons, and sets them against those which occur in London. This device, which the novel absorbed from stage comedy, was used to fine effect in Richardson; Austen used it again in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*. Unlike Richardson, who is brilliant in the London scenes, Austen is at her finest when she is depicting events in the country. She recast inherited stage conventions by having the Londoners entering the country and causing trouble, rather than the ingenues entering London society, as was conventional in stage comedy and developed by writers like Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth.

Lady Susan was an important transitional work for Austen. Unlike *Love and Freindship* which parodied the novel-of-letters, this work is a serious trial of the epistolary form. In *Clarissa*, Richardson perfected and mastered the epistolary form. Unlike *Pamela*, the same characters and events are seen and judged from a variety of viewpoints; different characters reveal how all actions are open to many layers of interpretation and potential distortion.

The double yet separate correspondence of *Lady Susan* echoes that of *Clarissa* and Anne Howe and Lovelace and Belford. The psychological richness of Lovelace's character is rendered by Richardson's complex interweaving of letters between the four correspondents, and his careful manipulation of point of view. Just as Richardson's

letters permit us to enter into the mind of the villainous Lovelace, Austen allows us into the mind of the equally unscrupulous Lady Susan. By the juxtaposition of Lady Susan's first two letters, Austen establishes her heroine's villainous potential. The tone and content of Lady Susan's deferential opening letter is contrasted and highlighted by the sheer force of her stylishly defiant second letter, with its insolent self-justification of her villainous conduct.

Despite the fact that Austen renders her judgement against her heroine, the rebelliousness and lively epistolary style of Lady Susan, reminiscent of Lovelace's, make her an appealing villain. But, unlike Richardson, Austen does not sufficiently develop her counter-balancing epistolary voices.

Lady Susan reproduces the first part of the *Clarissa* plot, but considers it from a different perspective. Like Clarissa, Lady Susan's daughter Frederica is imprisoned. Though Frederica is not imprisoned in a brothel, nor drugged, raped and left alone to die, her fate is nevertheless a devious form of confinement orchestrated by her mother. Clarissa is defined by her letters and her freedom to write; even after her 'literal death' her posthumous letters confirm and sustain her existence in the life of the novel. By contrast Frederica is forced to suffer a diametrically opposed, but equally significant form of confinement. Frederica's punishment for trying to escape from her mother is the ban on her freedom to speak. Frederica has no voice. Nor does Austen give her a pen, save for one brief letter. The young heroine is silenced, but this causes a potential problem for Austen; since we have Clarissa's letters, we can judge Lovelace's villainy. Without Frederica's letters and without the counter-balancing voice of a strong male character, there is a danger that Lady Susan will completely dominate the novel.

Austen tries to get round this problem by contrasting her heroine with another strong female character, the sagacious and perceptive Mrs Vernon. Southam argues that Mrs Vernon and Alicia Johnson (Lady Susan's friend and correspondent) merely function as points of view rather than characters: 'Having drawn Lady Susan, Jane Austen seems to have lost interest in the other figures and lets the work run to a conventional ending, without any serious regard to probability and distinction in

character and action' (*Literary Manuscripts*, p. 48). However, Southam perhaps underestimates the Belford-like force of Mrs Vernon. The confrontation described in letter 24 is between two characters, not one character and one point-of-view.

Austen demonstrates her own 'command of language' (*MW*, p. 251) in a scene that anticipates the vigour and sophistication of her later dialogues. This is a brilliant set-piece; like so many of her later set-pieces it is an arresting confrontation between two women, who are usually in conflict over a young man. This motif reappears in the confrontation between Elinor Dashwood and Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility*, and Elizabeth Bennet and Lady Catherine De Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*.

The dispute is induced by Frederica's plea for help, the substance of her first and only letter. Austen establishes the tone of this dramatic confrontation by Lady Susan's exultant acknowledgement of her manipulative powers: 'Did not I tell you, said she with a smile, that your Brother would not leave us after all?' (*MW*, p. 287). Lady Susan is barely able to contain her derision at her daughter's guilelessness: 'had Frederica possessed the penetration, the abilities, which I could have wished in my daughter, or had I even known her to possess so much as she does, I should not have been anxious for the match' (*MW*, p. 288). Mrs Vernon's defence of Frederica is equally spirited: 'It is odd that you alone should be ignorant of your Daughter's sense' (*MW*, p. 288).

The dialogue is continued in this vein characterized by Lady Susan's tears, excuses, and vindications contrasted with Mrs Vernon's brusque, impatient rejoinders. Austen's delivery of Lady Susan's animated utterances, with its affected tone of injured virtue remains faithful to the inimitable voice of her letters:

Can you possibly suppose that I was aware of her unhappiness? that it was my object to make my own child miserable, & that I had forbidden her speaking to you on the subject, from a fear of your interrupting the Diabolical scheme? Can you think me destitute of every honest, every natural feeling? Am I capable of consigning *her* to everlasting Misery, whose welfare it is my first Earthly Duty to promote? (*MW*, p. 289).

Austen's ability to depict subtle shades of meaning through language is established in this confrontation. Before letter 24 we have heard much of Lady Susan's linguistic arts, but in this letter we see them fully in action.

By the dramatic force of this confrontation, Austen blurs the distinction between reported and immediate action. Following Richardson's model, Austen punctuates her speeches with added commentary, almost like stage directions: 'here she began to cry', 'with a smile', 'taking me by the hand'. Whilst Mrs Vernon's interjections are used to draw attention to Lady Susan's theatrical skills they are also used to reveal one of the strengths of the epistolary form. The letter simultaneously allows for the correspondent's retrospective viewpoint of the action, whilst providing immediate access to the character's writing 'of the moment'. Austen's device of switching between direct and reported speech also enables the flow of the heated exchange to gain full momentum. In response to Lady Susan's impassioned pleas and theatrical gestures, Mrs Vernon's reply is uncompromisingly brusque: 'The idea is horrible. What then was your intention when you insisted on her silence?' (*MW*, p. 289).

Mrs Vernon's resistance is, however, short-lived, and she is finally defeated by the sheer intellectual vigour of Lady Susan. That the day is hers is suggested in Lady Susan's closing barb: 'Excuse me, my dearest Sister, for thus trespassing on your time, but I owed it to my own Character; & after this explanation I trust I am in no danger of sinking in your opinion' (*MW*, p. 290).

Stunned by this final example of her opponent's effrontery, Mrs Vernon, like all Lady Susan's enemies (including her own daughter), is reduced to silence: 'It was the greatest stretch of Forbearance I could practise. I could not have stopped myself, had I begun' (*MW*, p. 291). Lady Susan's following letter rejoices over this major victory: 'I call on you my dear Alicia, for congratulations. I am again myself; gay and triumphant' (*MW*, p. 291).

Following the defeat of Mrs Vernon the pace of the novel increases with a series of short letters, which serve to wind up the plot. Like Lovelace, Lady Susan

wreaks revenge on all who have crossed her, and her favourite place to execute her plans is London. Richardson and Burney both located London as their immoral centre for corrupt society. Lovelace's plot is chiefly dependent upon the lax morals of the prostitutes in the London brothel and he insists that his intrigues can only work in a place that has the anonymity of the capital. Similarly, Lady Susan adores the bustle and intrigue of the town, 'for London will be always the fairest field of action' (*MW*, p. 294).

Austen devotes little space to the events in London, and swiftly moves to the denouement of plot, the exposition of Lady Susan's continuing affair with Manwaring, and its subsequent disclosure. The self-revelatory ensuing letters do little to disguise the depths of Lady Susan's villainy. This is the weakest part of the novel and reveal Austen's impatience to wind up the plot. She abandons the letters and rounds off the ending with an author's summary, which summarizes the fate of the main characters in a distinctive third person narration that makes fun of the epistolary device that she has used. Austen, seemingly frustrated with a character who has got out of hand, assumes a studied indifference to the fate of her essentially unsympathetic characters. The novel ends rather predictably with the promise of Frederica's and Reginald's marriage, but by now the author doesn't really care: 'Frederica was therefore fixed in the family of her Uncle & Aunt, till such time as Reginald De Courcy could be talked, flattered & finessed into an affection for her...Three months might have done it in general, but Reginald's feelings were no less lasting than lively' (*MW*, p. 313).

Austen's conclusion also represents an attack on the epistolary style: 'This Correspondence...could not, to the great detriment of the Post office Revenue, be continued longer' (*MW*, p. 311). Deborah Kaplan has argued that this conclusion represents an attack on the epistolary method and concludes that it did not 'give the means for controlling the moral judgements of her readers', seeing Lady Susan as 'a

dead end, an interesting but unsuccessful experiment in a dying form' which Austen tries to salvage with third person narration.²²

The break-down of the epistolary form is the price which Austen has to pay for Lady Susan's domination of the narrative. In the absence of the strong balancing forces, and with the silencing of Frederica and the defeat of Mrs Vernon in letter 24, the epistolary form cannot provide Austen with a sufficiently powerful means of being both inside and outside her protagonist.

Far from guiding our moral responses, the author's withering conclusion leaves readers to decide for themselves if the characters' fates are justified. Lady Susan marries the rich fop Sir James and we assume gets what she deserves: 'The world must judge from Probability. She had nothing against her, but her Husband, & her Conscience.' The author's own sympathy is devoted to one of her minor characters who loses her lover to Lady Susan: 'For myself, I confess that *I* can pity only Miss Manwaring, who coming to Town & putting herself to an expense in Cloathes, which impoverished her for two years, on purpose to secure him, was defrauded of her due by a Woman ten years older than herself' (*MW*, p. 313). And on that tantalising jibe, the novel ends, somewhat satisfactorily in its own terms, but leaving us eager to hear more of that ironically detached *I*.

²²D. Kaplan, 'Female Friendship and the Development of Jane Austen's Fiction', *Criticism*, 29 (1987), 163-78 (p. 171). See also Susan Pepper Robbin's essay 'Jane Austen's Epistolary Fiction', in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, ed. David Grey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 215-24.

Austen's rejection of Richardson

Austen's rejection of Richardson, through her burlesque play 'Grandison' and through *Lady Susan*, was a casting aside of both epistolary and dramatic form. Neither of these were suitable mediums for her desire to be simultaneously inside and outside her characters, something which she eventually achieved by her use of irony and free indirect speech in third-person narration. Though *Lady Susan* was a serious experiment in epistolary narrative, Austen rejected it precisely because the epistolary is itself 'dramatic'; it formally banishes the authorial voice, though the 'author' or 'editor' is still implicit as co-ordinating effects of juxtaposition, sequence, contrasting tones and parallelism. Richardson's effacement of the authorial voice through the epistolary was clearly uncongenial to the mature Austen.

Austen also rejected the epistolary form for creating the illusion of 'writing to the moment'. Lovelace's own phrase, 'I love to write to the moment' (*Clarissa*, p. 721), suggests that the events are happening in the present tense, giving the reader a sense of the story's immediacy. The characters are always in the middle of their own experience and the dramatic illusion is compounded by the absence of a controlling authorial presence, a feature which Fielding had been quick to exploit in *Shamela*: 'You see I write in the present Tense.'²³ Austen parodied the epistolary novel and its technical limitations in her juvenilia.²⁴

Mark Kinkead-Weekes has argued that Richardson achieved 'the equivalent in the novel of the experience of drama' (p. 395). Because the epistolary method banishes the author, we seem to be experiencing the action directly, rather than

²³Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his friend Mr. Abraham Adams and An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews*, ed. Douglas Brook-Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 330.

²⁴See 'Amelia Webster' (*MW*, pp. 47-49).

through an authorial filter. Richardson's dramatic narratives and dialogues or 'conversations' are 'attempts to catch living voices in a dramatic present':

Richardson is an 'epistolary novelist' certainly; but to lay the emphasis there is to mistake a technical means, however central, for the formal end itself: the novel as drama. Richardson not only wishes to produce an experience that is 'like' drama; he creates by the imaginative process that is characteristic of the true dramatist, whether it be in verse monologues, stage plays, epistolary novels, or any other convention (Kinkead-Weekes, p. 397).

Anna Barbauld, in the introduction to her 1804 edition of Richardson's correspondence, described what she considered to be the differences between conventional methods of novelistic narration, and defined the epistolary method as naturally dramatic:

This method unites, in good measure, the advantages of the other two; [the 'narrative' or 'epic' found for example in Cervantes and Fielding, and the 'memoir' found in Smollett and Goldsmith] it gives the feelings of the moment. It allows a pleasing variety of stile, if the author has sufficient command of the pen to assume it. It makes the whole work dramatic, since all the characters speak in their own persons.²⁵

This multiple perspective makes the narration naturally dramatic, as the author cannot be identified with any one point of view. Whilst writing *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson described to his friend, Lady Bradshaigh, the paradoxes of his narrative method in which the author's presence is banished and yet can simultaneously be identified with any one of the characters:

Here I sit down to form characters. One I intend to be all goodness; All goodness he is. Another I intend to be all gravity; All gravity he is. Another *Lady G--ish*; All *Lady G--ish* she is. I am all the while absorbed in the character. It is not fair to say --I, identically I, am anywhere, while I keep within the character.²⁶

²⁵ *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. A.L. Barbauld, 6 vols (London, 1804), I, pp. xxviii.

²⁶ *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 286.

This dramatic projection allows him to enter into the points of view of all of his characters; there is no single reliable authorial voice. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen achieves a similar effect, not only because there are multiple perspectives at work, but because we are encouraged to distrust the point of view of the heroine. Austen uses free indirect speech, rather than epistolary form, to achieve this effect.²⁷ In direct opposition to the Richardsonian imperative, Austen discovered that she favoured the authorial voice, the voice that we hear at the end of *Lady Susan*. By adding her author's conclusion to *Lady Susan*, Austen bids farewell to the epistolary form.²⁸

Nevertheless, Richardson was an important influence on Austen's narrative art. His pioneering use of dramatic-style dialogue was crucial to her development, and she assimilated both epistolary and quasi-theatrical techniques into her mature novels. Austen had parodied Richardson in her juvenilia and in 'Grandison', and in *Lady Susan* she had paid tribute to the epistolary tradition, before transcending her favourite writer. Paradoxically, the writer whose narrative style she now turned to was Henry Fielding who pioneered the way of successfully integrating quasi-theatrical techniques with third-person narration.

²⁷See further discussion in Chapters 5 and 6.

²⁸The first versions of *Sense and Sensibility* and probably *Pride and Prejudice* were in letter-form, though she abandoned this method in the final versions.

Fielding and Inchbald: Playwrights and Novelists

Though it was Richardson's undisputed contribution to the comedy of manners that Austen was to adopt and refine in her mature fiction, she also followed Fielding's model by choosing third-person narration, and like him incorporated theatrical devices into the novel. Whilst she learned much from Richardson's mastery of revelation of character through dialogue, she also learned from Fielding. It is an irony that Richardson was singled out for his dramatic powers and imagination, whilst the playwright-turned-novelist Fielding was characterized by his obtrusive authorial presence, and his distrust of the epistolary form.

Fielding's metamorphosis into a novelist provided a powerful model for Austen. Fielding had made the transition from burlesquing the epistolary tradition and highlighting its weaknesses and artificiality in *Shamela*, to the sophisticated third-person narration of *Joseph Andrews*. Austen not only shared his love of burlesque, but, like him, also successfully made the transition from epistolary to third-person narration. In his preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding distinguished his new genre of 'comic epic' from his earlier works of burlesque; the former arising from 'surprising absurdity', the latter from 'the just imitation' of nature, though some burlesque in descriptive parts is permissible' (pp. 4-5).

As noted in Chapter 3, Fielding's political satire and his attack on Robert Walpole, led, in part, to the Licensing Act of 1737. This abruptly terminated his career as a playwright, just as he was reaching his peak, but fired his career as a novelist. His burlesque of *Pamela* and his 'comic epic' *Joseph Andrews* sent him in a different direction, allowing him freedom of authorial speech in third-person narration. In *Joseph Andrews* (his second burlesque of *Pamela*) Fielding abandoned the epistolary format that he had ridiculed in *Shamela*, and employed third-person narration to show what kind of novelist he was *not* going to be.²⁹

²⁹In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen achieves the same effect by her displacement and dislocation of the gothic novel. Terry Castle describes Austen's burlesque method as a 'recall and displace' technique:

Fielding saw himself as what Brecht would call an epic playwright, whose successful plays depended upon commentary between the audience and the action. *The Author's Farce* and *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, early in his career, included experiments in authorial commentary (as in the gloss of *Tom Thumb*), as did his later more politicized comedies *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register*. In each of these burlesques there is a central character or a group of characters who act as commentator on the play. Those may be seen as prototype authorial figures. Claude Rawson has suggested that the Rehearsal plays are an exception to the norm of drama, since they contain authors-within-the-plays who stand outside their play and pass commentary upon the text; although he concedes that as authorial guides they have limited scope.³⁰ However, the move to the novel, after the Licensing Act, enabled Fielding to have a voice that not even the rehearsal play had permitted.

Rawson has shown that although Fielding did not attempt the self-consciously dramatic novel-writing that Richardson had pioneered, he did attempt 'stylisations' which show a debt to his theatrical training. Rawson has persuasively argued that Austen shares deep affinities with Fielding, and that both writers show the marks of theatrical experience, which were introduced into the novel:

The novels of both authors show many marks of this experience: a keen sense of plot; characters or episodes framed as set-pieces, analogous in shape and length to a scene in a play; comic reversals and resolutions; semi-autonomous *tableaux*; a sharp ear for dialogue and especially a highly-developed feeling for the character-revealing stylisations in dialogue; the 'playfulness and epigrammatism' in *Pride and Prejudice*, often reminiscent of repartee in wit-comedy; a whole repertoire of stage-routines, including well-timed coincidences,

'Austen repeatedly sets up a superficial resemblance between her own fiction and Radcliffe's only to revoke it with a simple yet devastating shift in context. *Uldopho's* romantic situations are reconstituted—but in the comically *unromantic* milieu of "the midland counties of England". Jane Austen, ed. John Davie, with a new introduction by Terry Castle, *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sanditon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. xi.

³⁰See Claude Rawson, *Order From Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), p. 271.

contrived meetings, comic misunderstandings, conversations heard at cross-purposes.³¹

These importations of theatrical devices into the novel, were, Rawson argues, the means to 'maximise, rather than reduce, the impression of authorial management' (*Sentiment*, p. 282). In direct opposition to Richardson's epistolary style, which both Fielding and Austen had parodied, they favoured authorial mediation and a controlling intelligence:

The importance of authorial mediation, guaranteeing a presiding wisdom and a protective filter against the invasiveness of raw experience, was deeply inscribed in an Augustan cultural code of which Fielding was a (sometimes rather loud) spokesman, and to which Austen paid an instinctive allegiance in a modified and subtler form' (*Sentiment*, p. 280).

The theatrical elements deployed by Fielding and Austen in the novel were stylisations which took from the drama its 'artifices rather than its immediacies'. Rawson neglects, however, the influence of women writers such as Elizabeth Inchbald and Fanny Burney, both novelists who also wrote for the stage. Fanny Burney was a major influence on Austen. After the success of her first novel, *Evelina*, Burney's comic genius propelled Sheridan into urging her to write a comedy for the stage. An even more interesting case is that of Elizabeth Inchbald, who, like Fielding, was a playwright turned novelist, and who wrote a highly acclaimed first novel, *A Simple Story*, loosely based on *The Winter's Tale*. Austen knew Inchbald's adaptation of *Lovers' Vows* which she used in *Mansfield Park*. She also perhaps alludes to Inchbald's controversial novel in *Emma*, where Mr. Knightley describes the news of Harriet's engagement to Robert Martin as a 'simple story'.³²

³¹Claude Rawson, *Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 281.

³²*Emma*, ed. by R.W. Chapman, *The Novels of Jane Austen*, vol. 4 (3rd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 471.

Inchbald moved successfully between the traditions of the novel and the drama, and the traffic between them is exemplified by the motif of the coquette and clergyman, which she used in both *A Simple Story* and *Lovers' Vows*.³³ Furthermore, *A Simple Story* was intimately linked to the drama because of Inchbald's relationship with John Kemble. Inchbald was obsessed with the relationship between a coquette and a clergyman, not least because Kemble, with whom she was in love, abandoned his clerical vocation in order to become an actor.³⁴ Kemble had teased Inchbald about her forthcoming novel, and its allegiance to the hackneyed conventions of the period: 'Pray how far are you advanced in your novel?--what new characters have you in it--what situations? how many distressed damsels and valourous knights? how many prudes, how many coquettes?'.³⁵

Inchbald's interpolation of dramatic detail into the novel was highly commended. Like Fielding, she found new opportunities in her move from theatrical to narrative writing. Drawing on her long experience as a dramatist and an actress, Inchbald incorporated quasi-theatrical techniques into her novel. An emphasis on direct speech and telling gesture was used to achieve dramatic revelation of character. *The Monthly Review* thus noted: 'The secret charm, that gives a grace to the whole is the art with which Mrs Inchbald has made her work dramatic. The business is, in a great degree, carried on in dialogue. In dialogue the characters unfold themselves. Their motions, their looks, their attitudes, discover the inward temper'.³⁶

With the minimum of authorial intervention, Inchbald thus promises to let her heroine reveal herself: 'And now--leaving description--the reader must form a

³³See my forthcoming article, 'A Simple Story: From Inchbald to Austen', *Romanticism*, 5.2 (1999).

³⁴In his biography of Mrs Inchbald, James Boaden suggested that *A Simple Story* was based upon Mrs Inchbald's relationship with the actor, John Kemble. See James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald*, 2 vols (London: 1833).

³⁵See Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald*, vol 1. p. 93.

³⁶See Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story*, ed. Pamela Clemit (London: Penguin, 1996), p. viii.

judgment of her by her actions; by all the round of great or trivial circumstances that shall be related.'³⁷ In her lively and irreverent dialogue, the heroine Miss Milner is indebted to the witty stage heroines of restoration and eighteenth-century comedy. From her first exchange with the austere guardian/priest Dorriforth, she shows herself capable of forthright charm and candour: 'in some respects I am like you Roman Catholics; I don't believe from my own understanding, but from what other people tell me' (*A Simple Story*, p. 16). In contrast, Dorriforth's repressed nature is conveyed in the stilted and wooden tones by which he endeavours to conceal his passion for his vivacious ward.

Inchbald's theatrical training is evident in the numerous reversals and parallels of incident and characterization and the tightly-structured comedy of misunderstandings and misreadings between her intimate group of characters. Dorriforth ascribes Miss Milner's blushes to excessive modesty, but her embarrassment betrays something other than maidenly virtue:

'How can I doubt of a lady's virtue, when her countenance gives such evident proofs of them? believe me, Miss Milner, that in the midst of your gayest follies; while you thus continue to blush, I shall reverence your internal sensations.'

'Oh! my lord, did you know some of them, I am afraid you would think them unpardonable' (*A Simple Story*, p. 110).

Not only do the characters misunderstand each other, but they often dwell in ignorance of their own feelings. It is only Dorriforth's jealousy of a rival lover that forces him to acknowledge his illicit love for his ward.

Furthermore, Inchbald interest in dramatic presentation is revealed in her deployment of comic parallels and contrasts to the main action. A comic device that she uses to great effect in *A Simple Story* is that of showing a series of reactions to the same incident. When Dorriforth's confessor, Sandford, tells the ladies that Dorriforth is to fight a duel over Miss Milner, they respond in a variety of ways:

³⁷See Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story*, ed. J. M. S. Tompkins with a new introduction by Jane Spencer (1791; Oxford: Oxford University Press, repr. 1988), p. 15.

Mrs. Horton exclaimed, 'If Mr Dorriforth dies, he dies a martyr'.
 Miss Woodley cried with fervour, 'Heaven forbid!'
 Miss Fenton cried, 'Dear me!'
 While Miss Milner, without uttering one word, sunk speechless on the
 floor (*A Simple Story*, p. 67).

The dramatic detail that was absorbed into her novel led Maria Edgeworth to praise the novel: 'I am of the opinion that it is by leaving more than most other writers to the imagination, that you succeed so eminently in affecting it. By the force that is necessary to repress feeling, we judge of the intensity of the feeling; and you always contrive to give us by intelligible but simple signs the measure of this force.'³⁸

Edgeworth's remarks provide a key insight into Inchbald's technical innovation in narrative writing: the power of 'intelligible but simple signs'. Actions in *A Simple Story* often render dialogue or authorial elaboration unnecessary. The movement of a knife and fork in Miss Milner's hand, a mistake made while playing cards, or thrusting her head outside the window to cool her flushed face, all convey the strongest emotion beneath the exterior.³⁹

Austen's keen interest in different reactions to the same incident, and the depiction of strong emotion beneath the surface of polite conduct, is evident in her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*. Frank Bradbrook has drawn attention to Austen's theatrical-like concentration on minor points of detail in *Sense and Sensibility*. Signs or actions, like rolling papers and cutting scissors, are used to suggest emotional turmoil within, 'as if the characters were acting (as in a sense they are) on a stage' (Bradbrook, p. 70).

Bradbrook draws attention to the close relationship between the novelist, in particular the writer of satirical comedy, and the drama: 'Novels of satirical comedy, implying a civilized standard of personal relationships, tend to be dramatic in this

³⁸Boaden, II, pp. 152-3.

³⁹Gary Kelly has suggested that the use of gestures supplanting that which words often fail to express came from Inchbald's experience as an actress on the London stage. See Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 88.

manner...In replacing the drama, the novel absorbed some of its finer qualities, in the realm of comedy, at least' (Bradbrook, p. 70) .

It is striking that playwrights such as Fielding and Inchbald were metamorphosing themselves into novelists, and in doing so introducing theatrical effects into the novel. Austen abandoned the dramatic and epistolary forms because they lacked a controlling narrative voice and turned to the novels of Fielding and Inchbald. By adopting the best parts of Richardson's comedy of manners and the quasi-theatrical innovations of Fielding and Inchbald she achieved a synthesis that enabled her to make her own contribution to the novel.

Chapter Five

Sense and Sensibility and Sheridan

The female reader: from stage to page

Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen's first published novel, is usually read in the context of the tradition of the sentimental novel, as *Northanger Abbey* is read in the context of the gothic novel. But for Austen, the figure of the giddy female reader who falls into misadventures as a result of wishing to be like the sentimental heroines of fiction does not only derive from the novel form itself. There are other exemplars -- and they offer further, hitherto neglected, evidence of the importance for her of the theatrical tradition.

In *Love and Freindship*, Austen had satirized sensibility and its harmful effect on the minds of young lovers who imbibe distorted romantic notions from the pages of sentimental novels. Like Henry Austen's burlesque heroine in *The Loiterer*,¹ Austen's sentimental heroines, Laura and Sophia, are influenced by Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*. Literary parody associated with the harmful effects of reading on the young naive mind is to be found amongst the papers of *The Spectator* and in novels such as Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752). Yet the key tradition in this respect was that of the theatre, where since 1705 there had been a comic paradigm of the giddy novel reader. Versions of this figure re-emerge in plays throughout the century. She was usually female, and she was often portrayed as mad, or, at the very least, misguided and foolish.

In the late eighteenth century, the epitome of the misguided reader of romantic novels was Lydia Languish in *The Rivals* (1775). Sheridan's brilliant portrayal of sentimental delusion made Lydia a household name, and helped to perpetuate the idea

¹See Chapter 3.

that novels were an inferior form of fiction, producing harmful effects on the minds of their undiscerning readers:

Here, my dear Lucy, hide these books.--Quick, quick.--Fling *Peregrine Pickle* under the toilet--throw *Roderick Random* into the closet--put *the Innocent Adultery* into *The Whole Duty of Man*--thrust *Lord Aimworth* under the sofa--cram *Ovid* behind the bolster-- there--put *the Man of Feeling* into your pocket--so, so, now lay *Mrs Chapone* in sight, and leave *Fordyce's Sermons* open on the table.²

Sheridan's burlesque of the reader of the sentimental novel follows on from a tradition of quixotic stage heroines such as Richard Steele's Miss Biddy in *The Tender Husband* (1705) and George Colman the Elder's *Polly Honeycombe* (1760).³

Austen clearly knew *The Tender Husband*, as she alludes to Miss Biddy in *Love and Freindship*:

She was a Widow & had only one Daughter, who was then just Seventeen--One of the best of ages; but alas! she was very plain & her name was Bridget...Nothing therefore could be expected from her--she could not be supposed to possess either exalted Ideas, Delicate Feelings or refined Sensibilities--She was nothing more than a mere good tempered, civil & obliging Young Woman; as such we could scarcely dislike her--she was only an Object of Contempt (*MW*, pp. 100-101).

Steele's Bridget objects to her own name, 'How often must I desire you, Madam, to lay aside that familiar name, Cousin *Biddy*? I never heard of it without Blushing--did

²*The Dramatic Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, ed. Cecil Price, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), I, p. 84.

³Colman's hostility towards his female quixotic is suggested by the fact that she loses her lover by the end of the play without being cured of her romantically absurd notions. Furthermore, in the first edition of *Polly Honeycombe* (1760), Colman provides a preface warning of the dangers of novel-reading for young women. However, as Richard Bevis has noted, the play 'has a second face: while it purports to castigate the evils of the circulating library, it half sympathises with the Pollys and ridicules their oppressors'. See Richard Bevis, *The Laughing Tradition* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), p. 50. Colman's prologue suggest a hostile critique of the novel and its dangers in turning the heads of young women:

'But now, the dear delight of later years, /The Younger Sister of ROMANCE appears:/Less solemn is her air, her drift the same,/And NOVEL her enchanting, charming, Name.../Tis not alone the Small-Talk and the Smart,/Tis NOVEL most beguiles the Female Heart'/Miss Reads--She Melts--she sighs--Love steals upon her--/And then--Alas, poor Girl!--good night, poor Honour'.

you ever meet with an Heroine in those Idle romances as you call 'em, that was term'd *Biddy*?'.⁴

The literary tradition of the female quixotic was popularized by Charlotte Lennox's novel, though her heroine Arabella was in fact based on Steele's *Biddy Tipkin*. When Polly Honeycombe condemns her loathed suitor she likens him to fictional characters from the novels she reads, 'you are as deceitful as Blifil, as rude as the Harlowes, and as ugly as Doctor Slop',⁵ and is met with by the same incredulous reaction as that of Lennox's lovely but absurd heroine, whose head has been turned by reading novels.⁶ In *The Rivals*, Sir Anthony Absolute cries, 'the girl's mad!--her brain's turn'd by reading' (*Sheridan*, I, p. 123). If Lydia Languish and Polly Honeycombe should be viewed in the light of Lennox's heroine, attention should also be paid to Steele's earlier model from which it is more likely that they derive.

The final speech of Polly's exasperated father is a warning to fathers, that 'a man might as well turn his Daughter loose in Covent garden, as trust the cultivation of her mind to A CIRCULATING LIBRARY.' In *The Rivals*, Sir Anthony Absolute continues the tradition of fathers fulminating against the evils of the circulating library. Both Sir Anthony Absolute and Mr. Honeycombe single out young girls as the targets for the circulating library, as did many other eighteenth-century critics.

J.M.S. Tompkins in her study of the novel market in *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800*, provides much evidence of the vilification of the woman reader, including a remark from *Critical Review* (1771), that due to the increasing wealth of the middle classes it soon became 'no less necessary for a lady to unbend her mind than to unlace her stays'. Because of the popularity of the cheap, flimsy romantic novel,

⁴*The Plays of Richard Steele*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 233.

⁵See *Polly Honeycombe* in *The Plays of George Colman the Elder*, ed. Kalman A. Burnim, 6 vols. (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1983), p. 41.

⁶The lovely Arabella is considered to be out of her senses, and Colman picks up the motif: 'She's downright raving--mad as a March hare--I'll put her into Bedlam' (*Colman*, p. 41).

second class writers gave the novel a bad name, and 'a scene in a circulating library, with its personnel of ignorant bookseller, driven hack, avid girl readers and empty-witted fine ladies, is a commonplace of satire.'⁷

However, contrary to popular belief, it was not only women who patronized these 'slop-shops'. John Brewer shows that although the picture of the flighty female reader patronizing the circulating libraries is corroborated by fictional and stage representations, 'this tells us more about male fears of the effects of eating from what Sir Anthony Absolute, in Sheridan's *The Rivals*, called "that evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge" than about the diverse purposes and audiences which circulating libraries served'.⁸

Isaac Cruikshank's caricature *The Circulating Library* lends credence to the cliché of the giddy female reader: two young women are leaving the circulating library novels in hand, whilst another fashionable woman peruses the pages of a novel. The shelves for 'novels', 'tales' and 'romances' are all empty, whilst the shelves for 'sermons' are full.⁹ But Brewer shows that in fact women were not the main public of the circulating library, and that women subscribers were still in the minority.¹⁰ Brewer suggests that the view of circulating libraries as 'the repositories of fictional pap, served up to women of leisure who had little to do but surfeit themselves with romantic nonsense' was a fiction: 'To judge from all we know about eighteenth century readers--diaries, membership lists from circulating libraries and so on--the flighty novel-reader was just as likely to be male as female' (Brewer, p. 194).

⁷See J M S Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800* (1932; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 1-33.

⁸John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 169-197.

⁹See Brewer, p. 178, figure 66.

¹⁰At Marshall's circulating library in Bath, 35 percent of readers in 1793 and 22 per cent in 1798 were female subscribers (Brewer, p. 179). Brewer also notes that numbers of novels and romances were never as great as those of history, travel and geography, although these figures refer to books on the shelf as no records survive of borrowing record in a major circulating library (Brewer, p. 177).

Certainly Jane Austen took this view from the beginning of her writing career to the end. In *Love and Freindship* it is Edward who is directly accused of gleaning absurd notions from reading novels, and in 'Sanditon' Sir Edward Denham is a quixotic figure ludicrously enthralled by sensational novels and determined to be 'a dangerous man, quite in the line of the Lovelaces' (*MW*, p. 405). Willoughby loves 'all the same novels' as Marianne and has the same respectful, if detached, admiration for Pope, 'no more than what is proper'. Henry Tilney claims to have 'hundreds and hundreds' of novels and teasingly defends his rights as a male reader of novels, 'for they read nearly as many as women' (*NA*, p.107).

Furthermore, Austen's closest attempt at drawing her own giddy quixotic heroine, and avid reader of sensational fiction, Catherine Morland, paradoxically reveals a surprising doubleness, where the novel-reading heroine, contrary to expectation, *does* in fact learn about life from books.¹¹ Austen's defence of the novel in Chapter five of *Northanger Abbey* is compounded by Catherine's epiphany at the end of the novel: 'Catherine, at any rate, heard enough to feel, that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty' (*NA*, p. 201).

Neither does Austen conform to the view that circulating libraries are the repositories of pap. She used circulating libraries and in 1798 commented on the opening of a subscription library which she intended to join: 'As an inducement to subscribe Mrs 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' (*Letters*, p. 26). One of Fanny Price's compensations for being exiled from Mansfield is the discovery of the joys of Portsmouth's circulating library.

¹¹ Paradoxically, what Austen's foolish, deluded, novel-reading heroine ultimately discovers is that reading books can prepare you for life, and teach you to distrust paternal authority. See Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 39-43.

The idea that giddy readers of fiction were not necessarily female is borne out by the practice of both the great comic dramatist and the great comic novelist of the period: as will be shown, both Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Jane Austen reveal that men as well as women are susceptible to absurd and self-destructive sentimentalism. Both writers burlesque literary sentimentalism and its hackneyed features that arose in the genres of both fiction and drama, often interchangeably.¹² Austen and Sheridan's shared sense of literary parody has already been discussed in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I want to suggest that the debate about the giddy female reader is but one aspect of a much more profound link between *The Rivals* and *Sense and Sensibility*. This connection is a paradigm for Austen's reworking of theatrical techniques from eighteenth-century dramatic models.

¹²Colman's preoccupation with the traffic between the drama and the novel is exemplified not only in *Polly Honeycombe*, but also in *The Jealous Wife*, which openly acknowledges a debt to Fielding's *Tom Jones*. See John Loftis, *Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), p. 28.

The Principle of Pairings

In *The Rivals*, Sheridan exploits the quasi-farcical trope of mistaken identity in the character of Jack Absolute who disguises himself as the penniless Ensign Beverley so that his lover can marry beneath her. *The Rivals* has two contrasting heroines --one sensible and level-headed (Julia Melville), the other excessively romantic and filled with quixotic notions (Lydia Languish). The amorous entanglement of Lydia and Jack is paralleled by that of Julia and Faulkland.

By this principle of pairings Sheridan is able to provide contrasts and comparisons between his two female characters, as well as the male. The sensible Julia acts as a foil to the captious sentimentalist, Faulkland, as Lydia's sensibility is mocked by Absolute. But Julia also acts as a foil to Lydia's romantic attitudes, as Jack censures Faulkland's self-destructive impulses. The contrasts and conflicts arising from clashes between romantic idealism and prudent conservatism provide the comic dynamic of Sheridan's satire.

Lydia's quixotic notions threaten her own happiness. She invents a quarrel with Jack Absolute by writing a letter to herself, defaming his character, and is grievously disappointed to be denied a Gretna Green elopement. The association of the name Lydia with elopement is, of course, echoed in *Pride and Prejudice*, where the foolish Lydia writes to Mrs Forster of her hopes of eloping to Gretna Green.¹³

Lydia Bennet, like Lydia Languish, is also denied a Gretna Green marriage:

LYD. There had I projected one of the most sentimental elopements!--so becoming a disguise!--so amiable a ladder of Ropes!--Conscious Moon--four horses--Scotch parson--with such surprize to Mrs Malaprop--and such paragraphs in the News-papers!--O, I shall die with disappointment.

JUL. I don't wonder at it!...

¹³See *P&P*, p. 274. Both girls are attracted to 'a bit of red cloth' and show disrespect for Fordyce's sermons. Lydia Languish tears out pages of Fordyce's sermons for curl papers. See also E. E. Phare, 'Lydia Languish, Lydia Bennet, and Dr Fordyce's Sermons', *Notes and Queries*, 209 (1964), 182-183.

LYD. How mortifying, to remember the dear delicious shifts I used to be put to, to gain half a minute's conversation with this fellow!--How often have I stole forth, in the coldest night in January, and found him in the garden, stuck like a dripping statue!--There would he kneel to me in the snow, and sneeze and cough so pathetically! he shivering with cold, and I with apprehension! and while the freezing blast numb'd our joints, how warmly would he press me to pity his flame, and glow with mutual ardour!--Ah, Julia! that was something like being in love.
 JUL. If I were in spirits, Lydia, I should chide you only by laughing heartily at you (*Sheridan*, I, p. 135).

Julia's level-headed response to her friend's misplaced misery throws into relief the comic absurdity of Sheridan's sentimental heroine. Furthermore, Julia is paralleled with Jack, for both characters needlessly suffer at the hands of their incorrigible lovers. The sympathy between them is suggested by Julia's heartfelt rebuke of Lydia's affectation: '[I] entreat you, not to let a man, who loves you with sincerity, suffer that unhappiness from *caprice*, which I know too well *caprice* can inflict' (*Sheridan*, I, p. 135). Lydia's response confirms the parallelism of character: 'What does Julia tax me with caprice?--I thought her lover Faulkland had enured her to it' (p.82).

Absolute is frustrated by Lydia's 'dev'lish romantic, and very absurd' notions, and Julia is wearied by Faulkland's self-tormenting impulses. But as Julia critiques Lydia, Absolute censures Faulkland:

FAULK. Now, Jack. as you are my friend, own honestly--don't you think there is something forward--something indelicate in this haste to forgive?..
 ABS. I have not patience to listen to you:--thou'rt incorrigible!...a captious sceptic in love,--a slave to fretfulness and whim--who has no difficulties but of *his own* creating--is a subject more fit for ridicule than compassion (*Sheridan*, I, pp. 130-131).

The first critics of *The Rivals* did not seem to share Absolute's exasperation with his friend, but on the contrary took Faulkland as a model of delicacy and refined sensibility.¹⁴ Furthermore they felt that Lydia's romantic notions would be best suited

¹⁴Ironically, Faulkland was first admired by the public as a true picture of a sentimental hero. As John Loftis argues, 'Faulkland serves as a reminder that the "age of sensibility" had not passed, and Sheridan shares an affectionate regard for sensibility even while burlesquing it'. See Loftis, *Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England*, p. 51. Eighteenth century audiences had more sympathy for him than we have, judging by the reviews. *The Morning Chronicle* wrote, 'he is a beautiful exotic, and tho' not found in every garden, we cannot deny it may in some; the exquisite refinement in his disposition, opposed to the noble simplicity, tenderness, and candor of Julia's, gives rise to some of

to Faulkland's neurotic musings, although this would reduce the comedy arising from the contrasts between the lovers and their counterparts.¹⁵

The Rivals employs a series of common-sense, sceptical figures who provide an ironic contrast with the sentimental characters, and who directly challenge their pretensions. Sheridan levies his critique at sentimentalism by contrasting sensible and rational figures with their opposites, who not only stand in direct contrast to their more foolish counterparts but openly avow their disapproval of them. This principle of pairings defines his comic effect. Thus by doubling up the romantic leads, Sheridan fully exploits the contrasts between the two female friends and the two males, as well as those between the pairs of lovers.

The Rivals was an important influence on Austen's exploration of sensibility in her first published novel. Critics who have sought literary antecedents in Austen's use of 'sense' and 'sensibility' characters as foils to one another have neglected the influence of stage models. Perhaps the best exploration of sources for *Sense and Sensibility* is Kenneth Molar's study, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion*.¹⁶ Molar finds numerous examples of fictional antecedents to Elinor and Marianne, but neglects the influence of the drama.

The Rivals is an important example of the 'sense' and 'sensibility' opposition in comic heroines, though other playwrights had explored the comic potential of antithetical characters. This tradition of contrasting foils is prevalent in the dramatic tradition. In *The Funeral, or, Grief A-la-mode* (1701), Richard Steele dramatizes two

the most affecting sentimental scenes I ever remember to have met with'. See Price p. 47. However John Bernard in *Retrospections of the Stage* (1830) acidly commented that 'Faulkland and Julia (which Sheridan had obviously introduced to conciliate the sentimentalists, but which in the present day are considered heavy incumbrances,) were the characters most favourably received' (Price, p. 55). Sheridan's critique of sentimentalism is perhaps clouded by his ambiguous attitude towards Faulkland, and the fact that he pragmatically increased some of his sentimental speeches after the first unsuccessful performance of the play.

¹⁵See Loftis p. 52.

¹⁶See Kenneth Molar, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), and J.M.S. Tomkins "'Elinor and Marianne": A Note on Jane Austen', *The Review of English Studies*, 16 (1940), 33-43.

sisters of contrasting characters, Harriot and Sharlot. The coquettish and giddy Harriot is contrasted with the more grave Sharlot. In Cibber's *The Careless Husband* (1704), the coquettish Lady Betty Modish is contrasted with her virtuous friend Lady Easy. Margaret Doody has shown how in *Sir Charles Grandison* Richardson took his contrasting female models from stage comedy, thus assimilating dramatic techniques into fiction.¹⁷ Though Austen may be following Richardson's example, she is also showing an allegiance to a well-established tradition in stage comedy.

For example, in Hugh Kelly's *False Delicacy* (1768), another play satirizing excessive sensibility, the sentimental heroine Lady Betty is contrasted with the common-sensical Mrs Harley. When Lady Betty's personal happiness with Lord Winworth is compromised by her belief in the 'laws of delicacy' (one element being that 'a woman of real delicacy shou'd never admit a second impression on her heart'), she is roundly scolded by her friend Mrs Harley:

What a work there is with you sentimental folks...thank heaven my sentiments are not sufficiently refin'd to make me unhappy...the devil take this delicacy; I don't know any thing it does besides making people miserable.¹⁸

Kelly's comedy, like *Sense and Sensibility*, shows that sustained mockery of sensibility may co-exist with a strong sympathy for it.¹⁹ Although there is no direct evidence that Austen knew the play, she certainly knew *The Rivals*, which, like Kelly's play, dramatizes a giddy and a wise female duo.

Austen's principle of pairings is the structural base of *Sense and Sensibility*, and is developed in the contrasting and comparable characters of two heroines. An

¹⁷See Margaret Anne Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 287.

¹⁸*False Delicacy* in *The Plays of Hugh Kelly*, ed. Larry Carver and Mary J.H. Gross (New York and London: Garland, 1980), pp. 19-20.

¹⁹See Claude Rawson's 'Some Remarks on Eighteenth-Century "delicacy", with a note on Hugh Kelly's *False Delicacy* (1768)', *JEGP*, 61 (1962), 1-13, p. 12. Rawson also provides notes on 'Delicacy' in *Order From Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), pp. 341-354.

antithetical position of representing one sister with sense, Elinor, and the other sister with sensibility, Marianne, is set up, only to be subsequently undermined. So much so, that by the end of the novel it is the sensible sister who makes a romantic marriage, and the romantic sister who makes a sensible marriage. Like *False Delicacy*, Austen's satire of sensibility is less straightforward than it appears. The book is consciously structured around a series of ironic oppositions, which work to deflate fixed notions. Having two heroines allows the author's sympathy to be balanced between them as they are played off against one another.

The rationalism of Julia and Jack in *The Rivals*, which actively condemns sensibility, is reworked in *Sense and Sensibility*, where Elinor's dry responses to Marianne's impassioned outbursts often, though not always, critique her sensibility. In *The Rivals*, Julia Melville is amused and exasperated by her friend's distorted notions of romance, and provides a dramatic foil to Lydia's romantic notions. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen also uses contrasts and parallels between two seemingly different heroines to attack excessive sensibility. One of Marianne's most impassioned outbursts about falling autumnal leaves is dryly condemned by Elinor, 'It is not everyone who has your passion for dead leaves' (*S&S*, p. 88). Julia Melville's genuine pain is keenly dramatized, whereas Lydia's pain is satirized because it is chiefly of her own making. Similarly, we feel limited sympathy for Faulkland's self-destructive impulses. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor's internal suffering is keenly dramatized, whilst Marianne's is often satirized, largely because it is of her own creation: 'Marianne would have thought herself very inexcusable had she had been able to sleep at all the first night after parting from Willoughby...Her sensibility was potent enough' (*S&S*, p. 83).

In *The Rivals*, Sheridan's principle of pairings allows him to exploit the comic possibilities which arise from the conflicts between reason and feeling, sense and sensibility. But we are meant to distinguish between Faulkland's problems of temperament and Lydia's quixotic errors. The quixotic figure is clearly to be

considered differently to the melancholic figure, deriving from one of the most influential of all sentimental novels, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.

Though Faulkland's expectation of female decorum in courtship is derived from his distorted sentimental notions, the implication seems to be that they are imbibed not necessarily from romantic fiction, but from the effects of a melancholic, neurotic nature. After expecting that he is to be rejected by Julia, he is only more distressed to find that he has been forgiven; forgiveness does not accord with his preconceived notion that a lover must be made to suffer: 'Don't you think there is something forward--something indelicate in this haste to forgive? Women should never sue for reconciliation' (*Sheridan*, I, p.130).

It is therefore striking that Faulkland puts Lydia's flaw down to 'the errors of an ill-directed imagination', whilst his own he describes as a problem of temperament and the effects of 'an unhappy temper' (p. 144). This perhaps makes Faulkland a closer model for Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, and Benwick in *Persuasion*, whose melancholic temperaments are partly instrumental in their own misery. In *Northanger Abbey*, the quixotic Catherine Morland is famously reproached by Henry Tilney for the liberty of her imagination (*NA*, p. 199), but her danger to herself is not life-threatening.

Marianne Dashwood's romantic ideas, like those of Lydia Languish, are derived from the books that she reads. Austen gains much comic mileage from her young heroine's faith in her own originality, although, ironically, her conduct places her as a rather conventional comic type. Marianne has very fixed opinions on life and love, just as she has fixed, and limited, ideas about economic realities; both are based on romantic illusion and inexperience. Both Lydia and Marianne are slavishly following the dictates of romantic novels where economic realities are disregarded. Lydia insists on marrying a penniless ensign and Marianne wonders 'What have wealth or grandeur to do with happiness?' (*S&S*, p. 91). Her romantic sentiments are contrasted with her sister's more practical considerations, yet as Elinor paradoxically suggests, 'we may come to the same point. *Your* competence and *my* wealth are very

much alike'. Ironically, Marianne's 'competence' of two thousand a year is greater than Elinor's 'wealth' of one thousand. This is an example of how the same thing or idea (wealth or competence) can be seen or be represented from two diametrically opposed and yet similar angles. This surprising doubleness becomes a main feature of the novel's dynamic.

In this conversation Austen is still drawing out the contrasts between her two heroines; yet this early exchange between the sisters alerts the reader to a deeper epistemological discrepancy which is never fully resolved. Initially, Austen appears to be making broad antithetical judgements between the sisters. *Sense and Sensibility* is a deliberately undemanding title (each sister implicitly representing the antithetical position), suggesting a fairly primitive schematization. But the novel subsequently proceeds to undermine this expectation. Both sisters have sense and sensibility, though in different proportions. Austen's symmetrical and ironic reversals of situation and character are influenced by dramatic models.

In the main plot a very similar situation of courtship is set up between the two sisters, and the men that they are in love with, in order to invite parallels, contrasts and ironic reversals. Towards the end of volume one, Austen draws a structural parallel where both Willoughby and Edward have left Barton with no adequate explanation, nor any promise of return. In contrast to the conduct of her sister, Elinor 'does not adopt the method so judiciously employed by Marianne, on a similar occasion, to augment and fix her sorrow, by seeking silence, solitude and idleness' (*S&S*, p. 104). Elinor does not trouble her mother and sister by an excessive display of grief, and her self-control spares her mother and sisters 'much solicitude on her account'. Marianne's 'method' is, of course, more selfish and indulgent. Whereas Marianne sees nothing to be recommended in Elinor's behaviour and takes it as a sign of not having 'strong affections', Austen reveals that Elinor's self-control should not be taken as an indication of shallow feelings. Elinor spends most of her time thinking about Edward, illustrating the disparity between independence of mind and outward conduct that she earlier ascribed to Marianne: 'My doctrine has never aimed at the subjection of the

understanding. All I have ever attempted to influence has been the behaviour' (*S&S*, p. 94).

Marianne's penchant for the idealized and the romantic is satirized and revealed to be both contradictory and paradoxical. There are numerous examples throughout the novel, with varying levels of seriousness attached to them, ranging from romantic idealization of 'falling leaves' to egotism: 'She expected from other people the same opinions and feelings as her own, and she judged of their motives by the immediate effect of their actions on herself' (*S&S*, p. 202).

However, Austen confounds our didactic expectations by drawing on similarities between Elinor and Marianne. Marianne's romantic notions are frequently punctured by Austen, who uses Elinor to expose her sister's contradictory views and lack of self-knowledge, just as Sheridan uses Julia Melville to counterbalance Lydia. But Austen's irony is also pitted against Elinor, who is frequently mistaken and misguided in her notions. Her irony is directed at both heroines and both types of conduct: 'Their means were as different as their objects, and equally suited to the advancement of each' (*S&S*, p. 104).

At the end of volume two, in another structural parallel, both heroines prepare to leave London for home having been jilted by their lovers who are now engaged to other women. Marianne herself shows her awareness of the similarities of their positions when she shrewdly remarks that they are both behaving in a curiously similar and yet diametrically opposed way: 'We have neither of us anything to tell; you, because you communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing' (*S&S*, p.170).

Austen begins by satirizing Marianne's sensibility but later moves to an imaginative imposition that is clearly on her side. Though Marianne is initially presented as a quixotic heroine, her genuine sensibility is never in doubt. Marianne is a far more vulnerable figure than Lydia Languish, whose conduct often borders on the absurd. Lydia's lack of intellectual curiosity is not to be compared with Marianne's inquiring mind. We cannot imagine Lydia reading Thomson's *The Seasons*, one of Marianne's favourites. Austen early on hints that Marianne's sensibility is a problem of

temperament when Elinor perceptively comments that though her sister is 'earnest' and 'very eager' she is 'not often really merry' (*S&S*, p. 93).

Marianne's melancholy and intensity of feeling, like Faulkland's, adds to her own misery. Even after her 'rupture' with Willoughby, Marianne blames herself, and seems bent on a similar course of excessive and obsessive self-destruction when she plans to spend her life in solitary study. Like Faulkland's, Marianne's sensibility can be seen as absurd and self-destructive, but its authenticity is not doubted. If there is any doubt of this, Austen contrasts Marianne's genuine sensibility with the false sensibility of the Steele sisters.

Austen's principle of pairings, as the structural base of *Sense and Sensibility*, allows her to mirror complex comparisons and contrasts between character and behaviour. Her principle of pairings makes the issue more complicated than one person being right and the other wrong. Not only does Austen draw upon comparisons and contrasts between the two Dashwood sisters, but by bringing in two other pairs of sisters who reflect upon our view of Marianne and Elinor, she further complicates the picture. Her principle of pairings is not confined to two heroines as in *The Rivals*, but is developed in two other pairs of sisters, the Jennings sisters (now Lady Middleton and Mrs Palmer), and the Steele sisters.

The discussion about the picturesque with Edward Ferrars allows Austen to draw further parallels between the sisters, as well as dramatize Edward, but the arrival of the Palmers provides a comic perspective on all of this. There are ways in which the two sisters (Mrs Palmer and Lady Middleton) and Mr Palmer can be compared with the Dashwood sisters and Edward. Austen juxtaposes the scenes one after another for comic effect, but also to suggest more serious alternative readings of how we view the Dashwoods. Lady Middleton's elegance and coldness are contrasted unfavourably to her sister's 'prepossessing manners', her warmth and friendliness and lack of ceremony, which again forces us to draw contrasts between Elinor and Marianne as sisters and as individuals. The controlled and coldly elegant Lady Middleton could be viewed as a more extreme version of Elinor and Mrs Palmer, with

her prettiness and warmth as a crude version of Marianne. Mrs Palmer's claims to have almost married Brandon confirm this parallel.

The introduction of the Steele sisters in quick succession to the Jennings sisters offers yet another variant on the use of siblings in this novel. Sir John is effusive in their praise, but at the first meeting, Elinor assesses them as shallow and sycophantic. Anne in particular is extremely foolish, her conversation dominated by thoughts of her beaux. Like the Dashwoods, the Steeles are without financial means and are in need of the social patronage of the Middletons. The chief differences are initially summed up in the Dashwoods' refusal to ingratiate themselves into the Middletons' society; it is always Sir John who presses the girls to accept his invitations. While the Dashwoods refuse to engage in sycophantic behaviour in respect of Lady Middleton's children, the Steeles have the 'good sense to make themselves agreeable' to the Lady of the house through courting her children. Austen also deflates another tendency of sensibility, which was to idolize childhood innocence. One of Austen's favourite plays was the popular farce *The Spoilt Child*, which dramatized the cunning and naughty conduct of a small child.²⁰

Austen's principle of pairings is also developed in the contrasting characters of Brandon and Willoughby. They are even summed up like characters in a drama by the costumes they wear. Willoughby is first seen in his hunting clothes, which, to the smitten Marianne, is a mark of his manliness: 'of all manly dresses a shooting jacket was the most becoming' (*S&S*, p. 26). In contrast, Brandon wears a flannel waistcoat which has drearily unromantic associations of 'aches, cramps, rheumatisms, and every species of ailment that can afflict the old and the feeble' (*S&S*, p. 25). In the eighteenth century farce *My Grandmother*, to which Austen directly alludes in *Mansfield Park*, one of the characters is ridiculed for wearing a flannel waistcoat. Austen's use of the flannel-waistcoat-motif from a well-known farce is perhaps a

²⁰This was one of the plays performed in the Kent private theatricals in 1805, with Fanny Knight.

deliberate gesture to suggest the crude contrasts of stage-heroes, whose costumes represent character.

Austen makes less crude comparisons and contrasts between Edward and Willoughby, though she uses a familiar stage trope to reveal the differences between them. Both are dependent upon an older woman's authority, which means that they are unable to marry freely the women they love. But in Austen's hands, like Sheridan's before her, the traditional comic motif of the antagonism between the old order and the new is re-worked.

Parental tyranny exercised in the choice of spouse for a son, daughter or ward has long been traditional in comedy, and is paradoxically reworked in *The Rivals*.²¹ Sheridan's inversion of this trope is to portray Mrs Malaprop and Sir Anthony Absolute, who, far from dividing the young lovers, only wish to encourage the union. That the marriage is delayed by Jack and Lydia's own perversity, rather than parental intervention, is the main comic thrust:

ABS. Sure, Sir, this is not very reasonable, to summon my affections for a lady I know nothing of!

SIR ANTH. I am sure, Sir, 'tis more unreasonable in you to *object* to a lady you know nothing of (*Sheridan*, I, p. 97).

Sir Anthony's implacable demands of obedience from his son in matters matrimonial become a double-edged comic device in Sheridan's handling of the trope. As soon as Jack discovers that the girl intended for him *is* Lydia Languish, he is all too eager to submit to his father, in what becomes a brilliant inversion of a traditional motif of antagonism between the old and the young:

ABS. 'Tis just as Fag told me, indeed.--Whimsical enough, faith! My Father wants to *force* me to marry the very girl I am plotting to run away with!...However, I'll read my recantation instantly.--My

²¹ Polly Honeycombe's closing lines to her lover, Scribble, are: 'You may depend upon my constancy and affection. I never read of any lady's giving up her lover, to submit to the absurd election of her parents' (*Polly Honeycombe*, p. 41). Lydia Languish is distressed to find that her romantic fantasies are dashed when she discovers that she has her guardian's consent to marriage: 'So, while I fondly imagined we were deceiving my relations...my hopes are to be crush'd at once, by my Aunt's consent and approbation!' (*Sheridan*, II, p. 26).

conversion is something sudden, indeed--but I can assure him it is very *sincere*...

SIR. ANTH. Fellow, get out of my way.

ABS. Sir, you see a penitent before you.

SIR. ANTH. I see an impudent scoundrel before me.

ABS. A sincere penitent.--I am come, Sir, to acknowledge my error, and to submit entirely to your will... the result of my reflections is--a resolution to sacrifice every inclination of my own to your satisfaction (*The Rivals*, 1, p. 103).

Austen's parody of secret engagements and parental interference makes use of a brilliant device clearly borrowed from *The Rivals*. The pivot of Sheridan's comic plot is his exploitation of the trope of filial disobedience. As discussed in Chapter 3, Austen had used this model in *Love and Freindship* in a reversal of the comic trope where an authority figure prevents the lovers' union. But in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen uses this trope in a far more complex and ambiguous way.

Both Elinor and Marianne wrongly attribute their lovers' inconsistent conduct to parental interference. Mrs Dashwood also falls into the sentimental trap set up by Austen, as she concocts a sentimentalized fantasy of Willoughby's conflict with his patron Mrs Smith: 'I am persuaded that Mrs. Smith suspects his regard for Marianne, disapproves of it, (perhaps because she has other views for him,) and on that account is eager to send him away' (*S&S*, p. 78). Mrs Dashwood's account is highly ironic, as we later discover that Mrs. Smith is no ogre, but wishes her nephew to act correctly by the woman he has seduced.

Similarly, Mrs Dashwood attributes Edward's low spirits to Mrs Ferrars's interference: 'attributing it to some want of liberality in his mother, [she] sat down to table indignant against all selfish parents' (*S&S*, p. 90). The irony is intensified, as once more we have the same situation, and the same explanation as Mrs Dashwood had excused in the case of Willoughby. Elinor, as well as Marianne, is shown to be capable of error when she attributes Edward's inconsistent behaviour to his mother's influence. She mistakenly attributes Edward's 'want of spirits, of openness, and of consistency' to the interference of Mrs Ferrars, and Austen ironically notes, 'it was happy for her that he had a mother whose character was so imperfectly known to her,

as to be the general excuse for every thing strange on the part of her son' (*S&S*, p. 101).

The irony is clear: Elinor expresses doubt about Marianne's excuse of parental tyranny dividing her from Willoughby, yet Elinor is willing to use the same excuse when it comes to herself: 'she was very well disposed on the whole to regard his actions with all the candid allowances and generous qualifications, which had been rather more painfully exhorted from her, for Willoughby's service, by her mother' (*S&S*, p.101). Elinor is happy to blame Mrs Ferrars for her interference in her son's affairs: 'The old, well established grievance of duty against will, parent against child, was the cause of all' (*S&S*, p.102). Elinor could not be more wrong.

As in *The Rivals*, parental interference is a red herring. It is the lovers' own conduct and their own irresponsibility that causes their anguish. Although Mrs Ferrars conforms to the stereotype of parental power and authority, she is finally powerless to prevent both sons from marrying whom they want. Conversely, Mrs Smith is not the dictatorial authority figure of stage comedy, nor a Mrs Malaprop, hastening to marry her nephew off to a rich woman. To his horror Willoughby discovers that marrying the heiress Miss Grey has paradoxically alienated him from his benefactor. Miss Smith's desire that he should marry Eliza is a complex reversal of his expectations. So too is his discovery that 'had he behaved with honour towards Marianne, he might at once have been happy and rich' (*S&S*, p. 379). It is Willoughby's own conduct that is responsible for his own fate: 'That his repentance of his misconduct, which thus brought its own punishment, was sincere, need not be doubted' (*S&S*, p. 379).

Austen draws a final ironic parallel between Elinor and Marianne. On hearing the news of the public revelation of Lucy and Edward's secret engagement, Elinor is made even more painfully aware of this 'resemblance in their situations' (*S&S*, p. 261). And Marianne confirms this by seeing Edward as a 'second Willoughby' (*S&S*, p. 261).

Early on when Elinor had been informed of the secret engagement between Edward and Lucy she had considered the opposition of Mrs Ferrars to this match and perceived that 'melancholy was the state of the person, by whom the expectation of

family opposition and unkindness, could be felt as a relief' (*S&S*, p. 140). 'Relief in this context seems to point towards Edward being relieved of his engagement to Lucy through parental opposition, but Elinor is confounded once again by Edward's defiance of his mother.

Edward's situation is now paralleled with Willoughby's-- with one important difference, Edward's acceptance of his contract with Lucy Steele. But, paradoxically, Edward's defiance of his mother, Mrs Ferrars, adds to his own misery, just as Willoughby's defiance of Mrs Smith brings its own punishment. This is yet another ironic reversal where defiance of parental authority works against the characters' best interests. Edward is made to conform to the picture of the romantic hero, who courageously defies parental authority for the sake of the woman he is engaged to. But this is satirically undermined by the fact that Edward is *not* in love with the young woman: 'Elinor's heart wrung for the feelings of Edward, while braving his mother's threats, for a woman who could not reward him' (*S&S*, p. 268).

This is the sort of comic paradox that Sheridan explores to great effect in *The Rivals*. But Austen's ironic reversal of parental disobedience is more complex and multi-faceted. Edward's 'honourable' refusal to extricate himself from a hastily formed and unwanted engagement is now compared favourably with Willoughby's refusal to honour either his implicit engagement with Marianne, or his more explicit contract with Eliza. Whilst Mrs Jennings praises Edward's conduct in comparison with Willoughby's 'only Elinor and Marianne understood its true merit. *They* only knew how little he had had to tempt him to be disobedient' (*S&S*, p. 270).

Edward's only respite is time: 'everything depended...on his getting that preferment, of which, at present, there seemed not the smallest chance' (*S&S*, p. 276). Not even Elinor predicts the final cruel twist, when Brandon, misunderstanding the true state of affairs between Edward and Elinor, provides the means for Edward to marry Lucy.

This is yet another reversal of a sentimental trope. One of the stalwarts of sentimental stage comedy is the last-minute benefactor who unites the young lovers

against all odds. Perhaps the most famous eighteenth-century example was Stockwell in Cumberland's *The West Indian*. Brandon's benevolence is partly inspired by his (misplaced) admiration for Edward's chivalric conduct in opposing his mother for the sake of love: 'The cruelty...of dividing, or attempting to divide, two young people long attached to each other, is terrible--Mrs Ferrars does not know what she may be doing--what she may drive her son to' (*S&S*, p. 282). Brandon, of course, labours under a mistaken understanding of the situation, and the ironies increase as he makes Elinor his confidante. Brandon's generous interference unites the lovers (who are no longer in love), and seals Elinor's fate.

Austen's satirical inversion of this sentimental convention is in the spirit and manner of *The Rivals*, where the young lovers' union is threatened only by their own behaviour and not by parental interference. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the young men are financially dependent on older authority figures, but they are also free to make their own choices. Edward Ferrars's defiance of his mother for the sake of a woman he no longer loves is dangerously close to the absurd conduct of Edward Lindsay in *Love and Freindship*, who defies his father by his refusal to marry the woman he loves. Austen's principle of pairings is the structural base of *Sense and Sensibility*. The pairing of Elinor and Lucy is developed through their parallel situation (both women are in love with the same man) in the final chapters leading up to the end of volume one and the closer paralleling of their behaviour in volume two. The revelation of Lucy's secret engagement at the end of volume one echoes the ambiguity surrounding the 'truth' of the secret engagement between Marianne and Willoughby and shows how contrasts, parallels and discordant similarities of action and exchange constantly resonate against each other. Austen thus ends the first volume with a theatrical flourish. And in volume two she deploys a further quasi-theatrical device, the 'set-piece' of a confrontation between two female rivals.

The 'set-piece'

Claude Rawson has argued that theatrical stylisations are imported into Austen's narrative: 'characters or episodes [are] framed as set-pieces, analogous in shape and length to a scene in a play'.²² Frank Bradbrook has also suggested Austen deploys a dramatic device: 'when two ladies, who are enemies, meet to discuss the gentleman concerned it is inevitably a theatrical moment'.²³ Bradbrook compares this confrontation to a set-piece in *Joseph Andrews*, where Lady Booby meets with Pamela to discuss the former's nephew: 'In Jane Austen, the division of the novels into volumes suggests a parallel with the acts of a play, but here the actual setting is also dramatic, like Fielding's' (Bradbrook p. 69).

Austen's set-piece between her 'two fair rivals' deliberately appeals to stage comic models. Scenes such as this, which contain pointed exchanges of dialogue and repartee, can be traced back to wit-comedies. The classic example of this kind of dramatic exchange, the 'polite quarrel' between two female characters, is the exchange between Céleméne and Arsinoe in Moliere's *Misanthrope*. Rawson has shown how Henry Fielding used this model in his plays, and then more effectively in his novels.²⁴ But Austen's dramatic rendering of the polite quarrel in *Sense and Sensibility* achieves a realistic quality that transcends the burlesque absurdities of similar comically-stylized exchanges in Fielding's plays and novels.

An example of a more conventionally stylized set-piece in Austen is the confrontation between Elizabeth Bennet and Lady Catherine in *Pride and Prejudice*.

²²Claude Rawson, *Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 281.

²³Frank W. Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 70, and 'Style and Judgement in Jane Austen's Novels', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 4 (1951), 515-537 (pp. 521-23).

²⁴Though Rawson's chapter is a study of dialogue and authorial presence in Fielding's novels and plays, it has striking implications for Austen's implementation of theatrical devices. See *Order From Confusion Sprung*, pp. 271-284.

This scene has more overt resonances with stage comedy, perhaps because it relies on more strongly sketched comic characters, and reverts to a more traditional comic motif of the triumph of the young against the old. The contrast between the old order and the new, in the exchange between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine, implies a more obvious comic and moral notation, whereas the confrontation between Elinor and Lucy in *Sense and Sensibility* is more morally ambivalent.

The confrontation between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth takes place outdoors in a garden. The setting is entirely appropriate for the freshness and vigour of the young heroine who so unequivocally defeats the condescension and snobbishness of the older woman. Rather than an explicit sense of authorial intervention, the moral notation is expressed through dialogue. As Norman Page has noted, Austen's dialogue owes a debt to Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy:

'Upon my word,' said her Ladyship, 'you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person.--Pray, what is your age?'
 'With three younger sisters grown up,' replied Elizabeth smiling, 'your Ladyship can hardly expect me to own it' (*P&P*, pp. 165-166)

Austen described her style in *Pride and Prejudice* as 'epigrammatic', and, as Page observes, the witty elegance of Elizabeth's retorts 'stands in a tradition that runs from Congreve and Sheridan to Wilde and Shaw'.²⁵ Given its dramatic potential, it is hardly surprising that *Pride and Prejudice* has been the most favoured Austen novel for dramatization. In particular, the Lady Catherine and Elizabeth dialogue and Mr Collins' proposal have most frequently merited this treatment.²⁶

By contrast, the scene between Elinor and Lucy is set in the Middletons' drawing room, and takes place in the stuffy, dimly-lit environment of the ladies' dining party. The controlling presence of the author is felt in the narrative preliminaries which sketches the unpleasant social atmosphere in which the dialogue takes place.

²⁵Norman Page, 'Influence on Later Writers', in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. J. David Grey, Brian Southam & A. Walton Litz (London: Athlone Press, 1986), pp. 228-236 (p. 228).

²⁶See Introduction.

On stage this would be achieved by the actors and the producer. The scene between Elinor and Lucy is introduced by Lady Middleton's proposal of a card game. Austen invites the reader to consider the relationship between game-playing and social conduct.

The dialogue is preceded by a quasi-dramatic monologue in which Elinor's internal thoughts about Lucy's revelation are processed by a circuitous route of disbelief, indignation, and finally, acceptance. Austen thus sets the scene in the context of her heroine's disappointment and pain. Through this internalizing of her heroine's thoughts, we discover the reason for Lucy's confidence in Elinor. Elinor discovers that, like Marianne, she has been jilted, but also that her rival is insistent on asserting her prior claim:

What other reason for the disclosure of the affair could there be, but that Elinor might be informed by it of Lucy's superior claims on Edward, and be taught to avoid him in future? She had little difficulty in understanding thus much of her rival's intentions...(S&S, p. 142).

Elinor's desire to renew the topic with Lucy in order to ascertain further details is an ironic variant on the confidante role. Just as Austen satirizes the trope of parental defiance, she now parodies a favourite sentimental convention: a secret engagement due to the opposition of a cruel parent, and told to a best friend in confidence.

Elinor's decision to accept the role of Lucy's confidante threatens to compromise her integrity. The confidante or 'tame duenna', as Mary Crawford reminds us in *Mansfield Park*, is a conventional trope of stage comedy that had been successfully assimilated into the sentimental novel. In *The Rivals*, Julia acts as Lydia's confidante, although she expands the usual role of by her critique of her friend. Susanna Centlivre's comedy *The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret* centres its plot around the role of the confidante. The title alone suggests that it is highly unusual for a woman to be trustworthy, even though Centlivre's heroine keeps her friend's secret at great personal cost. Austen's heroine also keeps a secret at great personal cost to

her self-respect and dignity. Lucy and Elinor provide a cruel parody of the duenna trope, particularly as we know the reasons why Lucy is confiding in Elinor.

The theatrical tableau set up by Austen is reminiscent of the opening of Congreve's *The Way of the World*. Two gamblers are at cards in a chocolate-house, and as the dialogue begins, the card-game dissolves to become a metaphor for the dramatic action. Mirabell and Fainall each seek to elicit information from the other without revealing his own hand. In Austen's tableau, Elinor and Lucy are working together on a filigree basket; this is extremely delicate ornamental work, which involves twisting, plaiting and weaving together the strands of the basket. Whilst the 'remaining five draw their cards' (*S&S*, p. 145), Lucy and Elinor engage in their more serious game: 'the two fair rivals were thus seated side by side at the same table, and with the utmost harmony in forwarding the same work' (*S&S*, p. 145). Lucy's 'work' is to ensure that she is safe from the interference of Elinor, but she sadistically uses the opportunity to taunt her rival. Elinor's 'work' is to elicit information about the engagement.

The confrontation scene between Elinor and Lucy consists of a whole chapter written mainly in dialogue form. The dramatic element is reinforced by the relative absence of connectives (He said, she said). The scene is fairly unmediated in terms of authorial voice, although there appears to be a conscious sense of a controlling presence from the opening line of the chapter:

In a firm, though cautious tone, Elinor thus began.
 'I should be undeserving of the confidence you have honoured me with, if I felt no desire for its continuance, or no farther curiosity on its subject. I will not apologize therefore for bringing it forward again.'
 'Thank you,' cried Lucy warmly, 'for breaking the ice; you have set my heart at ease by it; for I was somehow or other afraid I had offended you by what I told you that Monday.'
 'Offended me! How could you suppose so?...'
 'And yet I do assure you,' replied Lucy, her little sharp eyes full of meaning, 'there seemed to me to be a coldness and displeasure in your manner, that made me quite uncomfortable'...(*S&S*, p. 146).

The opening sentence seems to be the objective voice of the narrator, but a closer look reveals that this is Elinor's perspective shaping the narrative. The effect of Austen's

free indirect speech in this instance is that Elinor's apprehension is conveyed in her desire to appear in control; the implication being that she is not.

Though the confrontation begins politely, the underlying tone of the exchange is established with added interjections, such as 'her little sharp eyes full of meaning'. Again, there is an ambiguity at play. The interjections are very much in the style of Richardson's 'conversations', but the point of view is deliberately muddy. If this is Elinor noting Lucy's aggressive body language, rather than an objective description by the author, the emotional content of the confrontation is intensified. Austen's free indirect speech gives her the means of being simultaneously inside and outside her character.

In the opening dialogue Austen creates a subtle instability of tone; the hints, evasions and insinuations convey the impression of much being withheld, and yet paradoxically revealed. The ritual of social nastiness and feminine swordmanship truly gets underway with Elinor's sarcastic and uncharacteristic baiting: 'Could you have a motive for the trust, that was not honourable and flattering to me?' (*S&S*, p. 146). Thus begins an intricate 'I know that you know that I know' dialogue in the tradition of the kind of multi-layered exchanges to be found in Congreve.

In the opening dialogue of *The Way of the World*, the cause of tension between the two men is Mrs Marwood. Mrs Marwood has frustrated Mirabell's plan to gain Lady Wishfort's approval of his match with Millamant. Mirabell suspects Fainall of being Mrs Marwood's lover and privy to her design. In turn, Fainall suspects Mrs Marwood of being in love with Mirabell and seeks to establish whether Mirabell returns the sentiment or not. Furthermore, part of Mirabell's preoccupation is also to gauge Fainall's relationship with his wife, who happens to be Mirabell's lover. The exchange is thus fraught with innuendo, double meaning and insinuation, as the men play a complex double-game.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen establishes a similar kind of narrative subtlety. Elinor wants to establish certain truths and details, and wishes to convince her rival of her indifference, whilst Lucy wants to taunt Elinor and keep her away from Edward.

But, as the dialogue gets under way, the surface politeness and restraint become increasingly strained and the mutual dislike and jealousy of the two rivals is apparent:

[Lucy] 'If you knew what a consolation it was to me to relieve my heart by speaking to you of what I am always thinking of every moment of my life, your compassion would make you overlook everything else I am sure.'

'Indeed I can easily believe that it was a very great relief to you, to acknowledge your situation to me, and be assured that you shall never have cause to repent it' (*S&S*, p. 146).

The point-scoring repartee reaches a natural climax in Elinor's (untruthful) plea of indifference:

...'the power of dividing two people so tenderly attached is too much for an indifferent person.'

' 'Tis because you are an indifferent person,' said Lucy, with some pique, and laying a particular stress on those words, 'that your judgement might justly have such weight with me. If you could be supposed to be biassed in any respect by your own feelings, your opinion would not be worth having' (*S&S*, p. 150).

Lucy implies that Edward has given himself away by talking too much of Elinor, and that she knows the full state of affairs between them, and with her malicious innuendo on 'indifference', incites Elinor's tactical withdrawal: 'Elinor thought it wisest to make no answer to this, lest they might provoke each other to an unsuitable increase of ease and unreserve' (*S&S*, p. 150).

The internal rhythms of a polite quarrel are set within the framework of realistic dialogue. In a similar scene, earlier in the novel, Lucy reveals her secret engagement to Elinor. Austen punctuates the dialogue with dramatic interjections: 'eyeing Elinor attentively as she spoke'; 'amiably bashful, with only one side glance at her companion to observe its effect on her'; "'not to Mr. *Robert* Ferrars--I never saw him in my life; but," fixing her eyes upon Elinor, "to his elder brother"' (*S&S*, pp. 128-129). The dialogue is reinforced by Lucy's use of props, the reference to the ring and the 'taking a letter from her pocket', are asides in the manner of stage directions.

Furthermore, as well as using quasi-theatrical interjections to suggest the emotional force of the confrontation, Austen shows how seemingly careless actions,

such as the rolling of the papers, convey powerful emotional conflict beneath the calm surface. Towards the end of the novel, the unspoken but powerful emotion of Edward's revelation of his release from Lucy is given added force by his action of inadvertently cutting the sheath into pieces with the scissors. Mindless actions which suggest powerful emotional conflict are in the tradition of the drama.

Austen's set-pieces often have a semi-autonomous quality, making them resemble individual scenes in a play. But though they may be presented as self-contained and carefully patterned scenes, which rely mainly on character-revealing dialogue, they nevertheless establish a controlling, though often extremely delicate, authorial presence. But this is less the case in the filigree basket scene in *Sense and Sensibility* than in the famous encounter in *Pride and Prejudice*. Great comic set-pieces, such as Mr Collins' proposal to Elizabeth and Elizabeth's confrontation with Lady Catherine have a more explicit sense of moral notation. This is because the characters of Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine often touch on the absurd, and hence there is a more comfortable sense of contrasting foils and moral direction. The authorial presence vigorously asserts itself in its uncompromising depiction of the odious Collins and Lady Catherine.

In the filigree basket scene there is no absurdity to dissolve the moral sting. The dynamic is not dependent on the strong contrast between characters and viewpoints as in *Pride and Prejudice*. The scheming and odious Lucy Steele presents a serious and considerable threat to Elinor's happiness, whereas Lady Catherine and Mr Collins are presented as potentially harmful, but ultimately ridiculous.

Thus, in the *Sense and Sensibility* set-piece, there is a sense of Austen losing control of her moral organization, which almost threatens to collapse in this exchange between Elinor and Lucy. The danger is that Elinor's aptitude for dissimulation and disingenuousness is alarmingly akin to Lucy's.

Elinor's complicity in the 'game' of confidences that is duplicitously set up by Lucy is undermined by the cruel truth that the Dashwood sisters do not confide in each

other. What we are now invited to witness and sympathize with in Elinor is an extension of Lucy Steele:

'If the strength of your reciprocal attachment had failed, as between many people and under many circumstances it naturally would during a four years' engagement, your situation would have been pitiable indeed.'

Lucy here looked up; but Elinor was careful in guarding her countenance from every expression that could give her words a suspicious tendency (*S&S*, p. 147).

The danger that is implied in the adoption and exploitation of Lucy's methods is swiftly curtailed by Austen. Elinor attempts this participation in what is really an unpleasant social game only once: 'From this time forth the subject was never revived by Elinor...it was treated by the former with calmness and caution, and dismissed as soon as civility would allow; for she felt such conversations to be an indulgence which Lucy did not deserve, and which *were dangerous to herself*' (*S&S*, p. 151, my italics).

A further aspect of Austen's principle of pairings between Elinor and Lucy is the implication for Marianne. If Elinor's extreme is Lucy at one end and Lady Middleton at the other, Marianne's extreme must be the garrulous, empty-headed Anne Steele, who at thirty is clearly beyond marriage prospects, and the rattling Mrs Palmer. Austen is perhaps inviting us to consider that Anne is a version of a character that Marianne might have become at the end of the novel, after having renounced sensibility, had she not been rescued by Colonel Brandon. It is the case that as Lucy constantly smooths over her sister's glaring faux pas, Elinor 'screens' Marianne's deliberate rudeness. Anne Steele at one point is severely rebuked by Lucy for yet another social impropriety. The sharpness of Lucy's reprimand 'though it did not give much sweetness to the manners of one sister, was of advantage in governing those of the other' (*S&S*, p. 219). This comment has significance for both pairs of sisters--although Elinor's gentler methods of 'governing' her sister's social conduct are more praiseworthy than Lucy's.

However, the paralleling of Anne and Marianne's social indiscretions also serves as a method of highlighting Marianne's virtues by contrasting them with an idiot

version, much in the way that Mr Darcy is contrasted with Mr Collins. It is striking just how similar are Collins' and Darcy's proposal speeches. By the comparison between the two sets of sisters, Austen implies that Elinor's danger lies in becoming too adept at the social game, becoming dangerously close to Lucy. Through Austen's favourable comparison with Anne Steele, and the contrast between Marianne's genuine sensibility and the false sensibility of the Steeles, Austen is moving towards an imposition which is now on Marianne's side.

Austen's pairing of Lucy and Elinor enables her to make comparisons in ways that reflect favourably on Marianne. Thus when Elinor tries similar Lucy-like behaviour on her sister, Austen censures her duplicity and the authorial sympathy shifts to Marianne:

Marianne looked at her steadily, and said, 'You know, Elinor, that this is a kind of talking which I cannot bear. If you only hope to have your assertion contradicted, as I must suppose to be the case, you ought to recollect that I am the last person in the world to do it. I cannot descend to be tricked out of assurances, that are not really wanted' (*S&S*, p. 244).

Marianne's outright refusal to participate in this form of social hypocrisy is revealed in an admirable light. The authorial sympathy, at this point, returns to Marianne.

Entrances and Exits

It was from the drama that Austen received invaluable training for a novelist interested in scenes and dialogue. Scenes or set-pieces are units of action built around exits and entrances. How do you begin and end a scene except through entrances and exits? They are the markers of beginnings and endings, and of moments of surprise and suspense; of drama. But exits and entrances are not merely the units which mark beginnings and ends in a play, they can also come in the middle of a scene as an element of surprise. Throughout *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen provides us with a running motif of characters who are mistaken for others, as well as unexpectedly appearing and disappearing through doors, as in a farce.

This is particularly the case with her male characters. As one male character enters, the other exits. A morning walk in the country becomes an occasion of thwarted expectation for Marianne when she sees a man on horseback in the distance and immediately presumes that it is Willoughby, 'It is he; it is indeed;--I know it is!' (*S&S*, p. 86), whereas the more sceptical Elinor is sure that it is not. Close up it in fact turns out to be Edward--Elinor is right. But later in the novel this scene is inverted when Elinor sees a gentleman on horseback and assumes it to be Colonel Brandon, only to discover that it is Edward (*S&S*, p. 358). Austen's principle of pairings makes the issue more complex than one character being right and the other wrong. Both sisters misperceive. This exposes an important theme for the novel: the dangers of conjecture and subjective interpretation.

Austen's plot device of people appearing and disappearing through doors is a means of exploring the discrepancy between illusion and reality. This is particularly the case with her male characters who disappear for unexplained reasons, and reappear again unannounced. Edward absents himself indefinitely from Elinor, Brandon leaves for London unexpectedly, and Willoughby's abrupt departure from Barton cottage is equally mysterious and unexplained.

When the action of the novel shifts to London, a knock on the door is assumed by both sisters to herald Willoughby's long-awaited arrival in Berkeley Street:

Elinor felt secure of its announcing Willoughby's approach, and Marianne starting up moved towards the door. Everything was silent; this could not be borne many seconds, she opened the door, advanced a few steps towards the stairs, and after listening half a minute, returned into the room in all the agitation which a conviction of having heard him would naturally produce; in the extasy of her feelings at the instant she could not help exclaiming, 'Oh! Elinor, it is Willoughby, indeed it is!' and seemed almost ready to throw herself into his arms, when Colonel Brandon appeared (*S&S*, p. 161).

The situation of a young girl throwing herself into the arms of the wrong lover is a trope markedly theatrical. But Austen does not employ it here for comic effect. Marianne's disappointment is severe. Furthermore, this quasi-farcical moment points ahead to the union between Marianne and Brandon, in a way that not even Elinor anticipates. This is a scene of dramatic surprise, where the reader is kept in suspense of who is behind the door.

The comic inversion of this incident is rendered in the great set-piece of Edward Ferrars's unpropitious arrival at Berkeley Street only to find himself compromisingly positioned between the woman he wishes to marry and the woman he is engaged to marry:

Elinor was prevented from making any reply to this civil triumph, by the door's being thrown open, the servant's announcing Mr. Ferrars, and Edward's immediately walking in.

It was a very awkward moment; and the countenance of each showed that it was so. They all looked exceedingly foolish; and Edward seemed to have as great an inclination to walk out of the room again, as to advance further into it' (*S&S*, pp. 240-1).

But this scene is one of dramatic irony. When Edward walks through the door to see Elinor, he has no idea that Lucy Steele is in the room. His innate social awkwardness is now ironically transformed to the acute embarrassment of being caught unaware, but unable to explain himself to either of them. Positioned thus between Lucy and Elinor all he can do is look embarrassed: 'his embarrassment still exceeded that of the ladies in a proportion, which the case rendered reasonable, though his sex might make it rare;

for his heart had not the indifference of Lucy's, nor could his conscience have quite the ease of Elinor's' (*S&S*, p. 241).

If this is not sufficient discomfort for him, Austen compounds the comic impact with Marianne's arrival. Her customary directness is agonisingly misplaced as she heavily alludes to Edward's love for her sister in front of Lucy Steele: 'don't think of *my* health. Elinor is well, you see. That must be enough for us both' (*S&S*, p. 242). The dramatic irony is intensified by Marianne's faith in Edward's good honour, following her own disappointment in Willoughby, which leads her to magnify Edward's qualities. She is, of course, wildly off beam and misinterprets Edward's evident agitation 'to whatever cause best pleased herself'. Austen, meanwhile, invites us to enjoy his discomfort: 'Poor Edward muttered something, but what it was, nobody knew, not even himself' (*S&S*, p. 243).

In *The Rivals* there are numerous examples of comic embarrassment built around untimely entrances and exits. In one memorable scene, Jack Absolute in the disguise of Ensign Beverley pretends to disguise himself as his own rival, Jack Absolute, in order to simultaneously deceive Mrs Malaprop and Lydia--who both know him as different characters. Just when he thinks that he has got away with deceiving the women, he is caught out by his father who demands, along with them, that his son confess his true identity. Jack is placed in an impossible position when he is forced to admit his deception and confess his true identity to both Lydia, and Mrs Malaprop; caught between offending one or the other and incurring the displeasure of both. In *Sense and Sensibility* we see how Austen is adapting similar theatrical devices to Sheridan. She is building her structure through 'scenes' woven around entrances and exits, and using this as a device of comic embarrassment in the model of eighteenth-century comedy.

If Edward's visit to Elinor is the comic apotheosis of unexpected entrances, Willoughby's equally unexpected arrival at Marianne's sick-bed is surely the tragic. As with the mistaken identities of the men on horseback, Austen almost identically parallels Marianne's misconceptions with Elinor's. This time it is Elinor who almost

rushes into the wrong man's arms. Upon hearing the sound of an approaching carriage, Elinor assumes that it heralds her mother's and Brandon's imminent arrival at Cleveland. Even though her common sense confounds the probability of this (she knows that it is far too early for their arrival) she vehemently wishes to believe in the truth of the '*almost impossibility of their being already come*'.

Austen builds Elinor's anticipation of being re-united with her mother and Brandon, in a way that echoes the earlier scene of Marianne's expectation of her imminent reunion with Willoughby: 'the night was cold and stormy...the clock struck eight.' And, in a structural parallel typical of the novel's dynamic, Austen thwarts Elinor's expectations: 'Never in her life had Elinor found it so difficult to be calm, as at that moment...The bustle in the vestibule, as she passed along an inner lobby, assured her that they were already in the house. She rushed forwards towards the drawing-room, --she entered it, --and saw only Willoughby' (*S&S*, p. 316).

At various points in the novel Edward is mistaken for Willoughby, Edward is mistaken for Brandon, Brandon is mistaken for Willoughby and Willoughby is mistaken for Brandon. In a novel which has pointedly alerted its characters to the discrepancies between illusion and reality, and the perplexities of interpretation and misconception, it is finally befitting that Willoughby should present his point of view. Indeed he refers explicitly to the dangers of subjective interpretation: "Remember", cried Willoughby, "from whom you received the account. Could it be an impartial one?" (*S&S*, p. 322).

The confusion between the identities of the male characters, though quasi-farcical, poses a more sobering social reality for Austen's female characters. Behind such farcical or burlesque-like absurdities lies a cynical reminder that poverty is one of the best inducements for marriage, reminding us of Austen's advice to her niece, Fanny, on the social and economic realities for dependent women: 'Single Women have a dreadful propensity for being poor--which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony' (*Letters*, p. 332).

The casualness of husband-hunting is suggested quite early in the novel when Charlotte Palmer claims that she might have married Brandon 'if Mama had not objected to it', even though he had only seen her twice and had not owned an affection to her: 'he would have been very glad to have had me, if he could. Sir John and Lady Middleton wished it very much. But Mama did not think the match good enough for me, otherwise Sir John would have mentioned it to the Colonel, and we should have been married immediately' (*S&S*, p. 117). Mrs Jennings's observation that she has 'the whip hand' of Mr Palmer because 'you have taken Charlotte off my hands, and cannot give her back again' (*S&S*, p. 112) also emphasizes how women were perceived as burdens on their family.

Austen had earlier observed that having married off her own daughters, Mrs Jennings had now 'nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world' (*S&S*, p. 36). Mrs Jennings shows no compunction in transferring her match-making plans from one lover to another. She has no trouble in switching Edward Ferrars's allegiance from Elinor to Lucy Steele, and again in transferring Brandon's from Marianne to Elinor. Furthermore, Elinor is also suspected by John Dashwood of making a conquest of Brandon: 'A very little trouble on your side secures him' (*S&S*, p. 223).

But it is not only stage routines, such as entrances and exits, that Austen uses to illustrate the harsh reality of the marriage market. Other artifices from the drama, such as comic misunderstandings and conversations heard at cross-purposes are also employed to signal this theme. Austen taps into a long theatrical tradition of such over-hearings, those producing comic effects for example in *Much Ado about Nothing*, and tragic consequences in *Othello*. Mrs Jennings' misconception of 'overhearing' what she believes is a proposal of marriage between Brandon and Elinor, is in fact Brandon's offer to save Edward and Lucy. Mrs Jennings' congratulations to Elinor are taken by Elinor to mean to quite the opposite--the impending marriage to Edward and Lucy. The mistake persists, even though Mrs Jennings is amused and surprised by the coolness of the lovers: 'I have not heard of anything to please me so well since Charlotte was brought abed' (*S&S*, p. 287). As Brandon apologizes for the 'badness of

his house', meaning the Delaford parsonage, Mrs Jennings takes it to mean his own estate: 'This set the matter beyond a doubt' (*S&S*, p. 281). She is as eager to congratulate Elinor on her good luck, even though previously insistent that Brandon was in love with Marianne. Like John Dashwood, Mrs Jennings expresses indifference as to the identity of the future Mrs Brandon.

The misunderstanding is finally resolved by Mrs Jennings' direct reference to Elinor's marriage to Brandon: 'The deception could not continue after this; and an explanation immediately took place, by which both gained considerable amusement for the moment, without any material loss of happiness to either, for Mrs Jennings only exchanged one form of delight for another, and still without forfeiting her expectation of the first' (*S&S*, p. 292).

This scene of classic misunderstanding is offset by the conversation between Elinor and Edward where instead of mutual verbal confusion, there is mutual but unspoken understanding--the exact antithesis of what has gone before. But comic misunderstandings persist to the very end with Mrs Jennings' letter to Elinor relating Edward's heartache at having been jilted by Lucy (*S&S*, p. 370) and Brandon's delusions about Edward.

Austen's pointed use of artifices from the drama thus becomes a means of exposing her views on love and marriage. The confusion between the lovers and their arbitrary switching of partners, and the varying levels of deceit and mercenary considerations, provide a satirical exposé of the marriage market. As the various lovers pass in and out of doors, and are mistaken for each other right up to the very end, where Elinor believes that Edward is Brandon, we are encouraged to believe that the plot could go any way. Love becomes a chance encounter; whoever comes through the door could be the man you marry.

Therefore, contrary to critical consensus, no-one should be surprised by Lucy's sudden marriage to Robert Ferrars (especially since he is now the new heir), nor to Marianne's union with Brandon, and Elinor's with Edward. When John Dashwood informs Elinor that his family think of Robert's marrying Miss Morton, his sister deftly

sums up the situation: 'The lady, I suppose, has no choice in the affair...it must be the same to Miss Morton whether she marry Edward or Robert' (*S&S*, p. 296). John Dashwood's brutal reply reflects the cynicism of the age when he answers, 'Certainly, there can be no difference' (*S&S*, p. 297).

Ironic Detachment

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen exploits specific sentimental conventions from stage comedy, devices that had been assimilated into the sentimental novel: parental defiance, romantic heroes, giddy heroines, kindly benefactors. She satirizes them in the way that Sheridan had done in *The Rivals*. Furthermore, Austen derives her principle of pairings from the example set by stage models in *The Rivals* and *False Delicacy*. In a kaleidoscopic fashion, her principle of pairings creates a diversion and shifting of sympathies, particularly between the two heroines. Like Sheridan and Hugh Kelly before her, Austen uses her principle of pairings to show that sustained mockery of sensibility may co-exist with a strong sympathy for it.

Thus in the filigree basket scene between Elinor and Lucy, Elinor's 'sense' is shown to be as dangerous as Marianne's 'sensibility'.²⁷ When Elinor feels in danger of entering into a form of social hypocrisy she quickly draws back, but not before the similarities between her and Lucy have been drawn. Austen's principle of pairings is the means to enable her to shift authorial sympathy from one heroine to the other, without a failure in her moral organization.

In *The Rivals*, the doubling of the female leads enables the satire to be directed against the sentimental Lydia Languish, but Austen's use of this device is far more elaborate than Sheridan's. In Austen's hands, the pairs-motif is further complicated. Individual sisters are not only compared with each other, but with other pairs of sisters. As with Lucy and Anne we are encouraged not only to draw comparisons between their conduct in comparison with Elinor and Marianne, but, also, to draw comparisons between Anne and Marianne, and Lucy and Elinor. Having extreme versions of the foils means that they are not just foils to each other. The Steele sisters and the Jennings sister provide almost caricature-like versions of the heroines, which

²⁷However, Austen is also inviting us to question the morals of civilized society and the social pressures of marriage for dependent women whose economic and social status are determined by this institution.

encourages us to view Elinor and Marianne and 'sense' and 'sensibility' in different lights. Austen's use of the principle of pairings is far more complex and nuanced than Sheridan's for it enables her to ironize both heroines. Elinor's capacity to be as mistaken as Marianne allows for a shift in our perceptions and the displacement of our expectations, which is an important part of Austen's ironic method. Ironically, Elinor's and Marianne's similarities become more acute than their differences.

Towards the close of *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen upholds an ironic detachment from her characters and a strict adherence to a sense of comic decorum. The authorial voice accords, perfectly, with the moral ambivalence achieved by the principle of pairings. Marianne 'instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion', falls for a man 'she had considered too old to be married, --and who still sought the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat' (*S&S*, p. 378). Elinor, after succumbing to a fit of sensibility in which she 'bursts into tears of joy' marries the disinherited Edward. The winner is the unscrupulous Lucy Steele:

The whole of Lucy's behaviour in the affair, and the prosperity which crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every advantage of fortune (*S&S*, p. 376).

The authorial voice, at the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, is less ostentatious than the absurd Fieldingesque voice at the end of 'Jack and Alice',²⁸ and the satirical voice at the end of *Lady Susan*.²⁹

Claude Rawson has noted that Austen's 'stylized self-projections', though less obtrusive than Fielding's overt narrative intrusions, support her allegiance to authorial control.³⁰ However, this chapter has argued that Austen's principle of pairings,

²⁸It may be proper to return to the hero of this Novel, the brother of Alice, of whom I believe I have scarcely ever had the occasion to speak' (*MW*, pp. 24-25).

²⁹For myself, I confess that I can only pity Miss Manwaring, who coming to Town & putting herself to an expense in Cloathes, which impoverished her for two years, on purpose to secure him, was defrauded of her due by a Woman ten years older than herself' (*MW*, p. 313).

³⁰See Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. John Davie with an introduction by Claude Rawson (Oxford:

derived from specific stage models, was the means of enabling her to achieve an ironic detachment from her characters which she was to perfect in her later novels by her increasing use of free indirect speech. Austen's principle of pairing in *Sense and Sensibility* allows a shift in authorial sympathy and an ambiguity of moral tone. Furthermore, her use of parallelism and contrast, which, for example, enables her to show a variety of different responses to the same situation, encourages us to constantly call into question the things we take for granted.

Free indirect speech also combines complex and shifting intimations of judgmental perspective, and Austen was to perfect her use of this narrative device in *Mansfield Park*. As Norman Page has noted, the power of free indirect speech enables Austen 'to embody dramatic elements within the flow of narrative'.³¹ In *Mansfield Park*, we see her most ambitious integration of theatrical devices into narrative. It is a novel that is built around a much larger cast of characters, bringing a multiple perspective. And of course its plot is interwoven with one of the most controversial plays of the eighteenth-century, *Lovers' Vows*.

Oxford University Press, 1990), p. xvi-xvii.

³¹Norman Page, *The Language of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 1972), p. 127.

Chapter Six

Mansfield Park and the Comic Theatre

Mansfield Park is considered to be Austen's problem novel, contrasting sharply with the comic brilliance of its predecessor, *Pride and Prejudice*.¹ Its depiction of an awkward, shy and socially displaced heroine (diametrically opposed to the lively, unrestrained Elizabeth Bennet), has aroused a fair amount of hostility.² Yet, as an author who is constantly experimenting with narrative style and technique, it seems appropriate that Austen should invert the role of the witty stage-heroine to the anti-heroine, Mary Crawford, and depict the heroine, Fanny Price, as a reliable but dull under-study waiting in the wings.³

The metaphor is apt, as the novel ambitiously undertakes to depict the consciousness of not one, but a whole cast of characters.⁴ Austen, more broadly than usual, focuses her plot on the development of four young women. With most of the action taking place in a large country house, the dynamics of the plot are rendered

¹See Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952). '*Mansfield Park* has always been more respected than loved' observes Marilyn Butler in her introduction to a recent edition of the novel. See Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. James Kinsley with a new introduction by Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. vii.

²Notably Kingsley Amis in his 'What Became of Jane Austen? [*Mansfield Park*],' *The Spectator*, 199 (4 Oct., 1957), 339. Tony Tanner has observed that 'nobody has ever fallen in love with Fanny Price'. See Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 143. Jane Austen's mother thought her 'insipid' and Reginald Farrer declared that Henry Crawford had a 'near miss', since 'fiction holds no heroine more repulsive in her cast-iron self righteousness and steely rigidity of prejudice' than Fanny. See Reginald Farrer, 'Jane Austen's *Gran Refiuto*', in *Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, and Mansfield Park: A Casebook*, ed. B. C. Southam (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 210-211.

³Pam Perkins has argued that Mary Crawford and Fanny Price represent (respectively) 'laughing' comedy versus sentimental comedy. See 'A Subdued Gaiety: The Comedy of *Mansfield Park*', *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 48 (1993), 1-25.

⁴Marilyn Butler has noted how the consciousness of a number of characters is conveyed in one chapter: 'The characters in this part of *Mansfield Park* each have their own speeches, their scenes, like characters in a drama'. See *Jane Austen and The War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 230.

through the grouping and re-grouping of this large cast of characters. As in the other novels, relationships are developed in the setting of the formal or semi-formal occasion: balls, outings, dinner parties, family visits.

Austen expressed dissatisfaction with the 'playfulness and epigrammatism' of *Pride and Prejudice*, and in *Mansfield Park* returns to the more morally ambiguous and uncertain territory of *Sense and Sensibility*. In deliberate contrast to *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's third published novel sets a more sober tone from the outset. Nevertheless, as David Lodge has observed, comedy permeates the novel. In particular, he notes that the 'comings and goings in the "wilderness" of Sotherton' and 'the whole saga of the theatricals are exquisitely comic in a highly dramatic way'.⁵

Marilyn Butler describes the play-acting sequence as 'the central illumination and symbolic core of *Mansfield Park*'.⁶ Of all the novels in the Austen canon, *Mansfield Park* is the one that most systematically engages with the drama. Primarily, this is because the novel's plot is interwoven with the plot of the controversial eighteenth century play, *Lovers' Vows*. Through the paralleling and contrasting of the characters in both novel and play, Austen's interest in the connection between role-playing and social conduct is given its most extensive treatment.

⁵David Lodge, 'Jane Austen's Novels: Form and Structure', in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. J. David Grey, Brian Southam & A. Walton Litz (London: Athlone Press, 1986), 165-178 [p. 170].

⁶See Butler's new introduction to the Oxford edition of *Mansfield Park*, p. xx.

Lovers' Vows and *Mansfield Park*

The critical debate that continues to surround Austen's use of *Lovers' Vows* is, in part, due to the ideological concerns raised by the play's author. The play rehearsed for the Mansfield theatricals is Elizabeth Inchbald's expurgated version of Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows*, 'Das Kind der Liebe, oder: der Strassenrauber aus kindlicher Liebe' (*The Natural Son or The Child of Love*; 1790). According to Mrs Inchbald's first biographer, James Boaden, a translation of Kotzebue's popular melodrama was brought to her in 1798 by the manager of Covent Garden, who 'desired her to fit it to the English stage'.⁷ Boaden claims that after surmounting the problems of a poor quality literal translation of *The Child of Love*, Mrs Inchbald finally produced a play 'so purified, that no English reader has ever for a moment endured the rival publication of Miss Plumtre'. In her preface to *Lovers' Vows* Inchbald laments the fact that no 'person of talents and literary knowledge...has thought it worth employment to make a translation of the work', since its publication in 1791. Yet in 1798, rival editions to Inchbald's adaptation, Anne Plumtre's 'The Natural Son' and Stephen Porter's 'Lovers' Vows', suggested a fresh surge of interest in this play.⁸

Under the title of *Lovers' Vows*, Mrs Inchbald's play was performed at Covent Garden in 1798. Its continuing popularity throughout the 1798-9 Covent Garden season (42 performances) was assured by favourable reviews and high receipts.⁹

⁷See James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald*, 2 vols (London: 1833), II, p. 20.

⁸Plumtre's preface enumerates the chief points of variation between *Lover's Vows* and the play in its original form. In particular, Plumtre condemns Inchbald's alteration of Amelia: 'The Amelia in *Lovers' Vows*, so far from being the artless, innocent child of nature, drawn by Kotzebue, appears a forward country hoyden, who deviates, in many instances, from the established usages of society, and the decorums of her sex, in a manner wholly unwarranted by the original'. Anne Plumtre, *The Natural Son* (London, 1798), pp. 5-6.

⁹See *The London Stage 1660-1800*, ed. Emmett L. Avery *et al*, 5 pts. in 11 vols (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960-68), *Part 5: 1776-1800*, ed. Charles Beecher Hogan, for receipts and *Times Review* (13th Oct, 1798): '*Lovers' Vows* continues to exercise a resistless controul over the feelings of the audience. The fifth act is, without exception, worked up with more art and nature, and is more impressive in its termination, than any denouement which the English stage has

Lovers' Vows was staged at Drury Lane, The Haymarket and The Theatre Royal, Bath in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The play was publicly performed in Bath at least seventeen times when the Austens lived there between 1801 and 1806.¹⁰

Much has been made in recent years of the political implications of the play-within-the-novel. For some critics, what is particularly attractive about Austen's choice of play is the opportunity it has given them to construe *Mansfield Park* as an attack upon the drama, and Kotzebue in particular.¹¹ Marilyn Butler, for instance, has argued that Kotzebue's name alone would have alerted readers to the moral and political dangers of *Lovers' Vows* because his works were synonymous with the German drama so despised by anti-Jacobins: 'There could be no doubt in the minds of Jane Austen and most of her readers that the name of Kotzebue was synonymous with everything most sinister in German Literature of the period'.¹² Butler argues that Austen was attacking the infiltration of German ideology into English culture: 'Ideologically, the choice of play is crucial' (*War of Ideas*, p. 233). The implications of this sort of political reading have condemned Austen to a reductive position of being viewed as a conservative propagandist whose politics are unstintingly anti-Jacobin. Even though Butler has softened her position since the publication of *The War of Ideas*, she still insists upon 'Austen's evident detestation of Kotzebue's play'.¹³

Butler corroborates her anti-Kotzebue argument with the misleading 'evidence' of Austen's supposed Evangelical suspicion of theatre.¹⁴ Her influential reading of

hitherto furnished' [p. 2116].

¹⁰See Chapter 2.

¹¹See Lionel Trilling's influential work on the objections to 'the histrionic art', *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 75-8.

¹²Marilyn Butler also argues that Kotzebue's name was synonymous with political subversion and that the play naturalizes dangerous Jacobin messages, 'freedom in sexual matters and defiance of traditional restraints' (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp. 233-4).

¹³See Butler's 'History, Politics and Religion', in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, pp. 190-207, and her introduction to the Oxford *Mansfield Park*, p. xxv.

¹⁴See *War of Ideas*, pp. 231-232, 242, & 285. See also Peter Garside and Elizabeth McDonald, 'Evangelicalism and *Mansfield Park*', *Trivium*, 10 (1975), 34-49. For those who oppose Austen's

the *Lovers' Vows* debacle has, along with Lionel Trilling, put the final seal upon Austen's seeming distrust and condemnation of private theatricals. Thus, even though the evidence of Austen's life conflicts strongly with the arguments advocated by Butler and Trilling, and even though a plethora of critical ambiguity surrounds the play-going sequence in *Mansfield Park*, few have challenged Austen's supposed hostility to the drama.

One of the problems of Butler's argument, which she fails to address, is that Austen enjoyed going to Kotzebue plays. Chapter 2 has demonstrated that she saw various Kotzebue adaptations at the professional theatre, including *The Birth-day, Of Age Tomorrow* and *The Bee-Hive*. She saw the latter as late as 1813. She clearly knew *Lovers' Vows* extremely well. Two of Elliston's favourite and oft-performed roles were the heroes of the immensely popular adaptations of Kotzebue's *The Stranger* and *Pizarro*. Margaret Kirkham has proposed that Austen attended an amateur version of *Lovers' Vows* in a private theatre; a suggestion that is borne out by the striking testimony of three letters written to Cassandra in 1814.¹⁵

Kirkham's intriguing argument is built around Austen's repeated references to General Chowne, a family friend whom she repeatedly refers to as 'Frederick' in the context of comments made about *Mansfield Park*. Austen remarks, 'I shall be ready to laugh at the sight of Frederick again' (*Letters*, p. 256), and finds Chowne much changed when she sits next to him at the theatre: 'he has not much remains of Frederick' (*Letters*, p. 258). Her final reference to Chowne connects him once again with 'Frederick': 'We met only Gen Chowne today, who has not much to say for himself.--I was ready to laugh at the remembrance of Frederick, and such a different Frederick as we chose to fancy him to the real Christopher!' (*Letters*, p. 262).

evangelicalism, see Michael Williams, *Jane Austen: Six Novels and their Methods* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1986), pp. 92-97. See also David Monaghan, 'Mansfield Park and Evangelicalism: A Reassessment', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 33 (1978), 215-230.

¹⁵Margaret Kirkham, 'The Theatricals in *Mansfield Park* and "Frederick" in *Lovers' Vows*', *Notes and Queries*, 220 (1975), 389-399.

According to Chapman's edition of the letters, there is no trace of a Frederick in the Tilson family. Deirdre Le Faye, the most recent editor of the letters, follows Kirkham's suggestion and dates the amateur performance at between 1798-99 when the General was still Captain Tilson. It is evident that Austen recalls the laughter associated with 'the remembrance of Frederick' and, as Kirkham argues, this indisputably affects our perception of how we view the *Lovers' Vows* episode in *Mansfield Park*:

Almost everyone who reads *Mansfield Park* now reads some kind of brief introduction first, so he is more likely than not to believe before he starts that Jane Austen said its subject was ordination and that in this period of her life she had become sympathetic to the Evangelical outlook. If the reader started instead with the knowledge that Jane Austen had once seen a very funny performance of *Lovers' Vows* and that a good many years later, just after *Mansfield Park* was finished, she was ready to laugh at the remembrance of the chief male character in it, he might perhaps begin reading what he would expect to be a comedy. The benefits that this might eventually bring, even if improperly derived, would be very considerable (*N & Q*, p. 390).

Kirkham raises a most telling point when she observes that the misunderstanding of the notorious Ordination letter and the misleading application of remarks about the Evangelicals, made in very select circumstances to Fanny Knight, are interpretations that have influenced critical writings on *Mansfield Park*. It is an irony, she argues, that the laughter associated with *Lovers' Vows* has been twisted into moral disapprobation and censure.

However, even if this claim is speculative, it cannot be disputed that Austen showed little compunction in supporting Kotzebue plays at the public theatre, or taking her 'impressionable' young nieces along with her.¹⁶ Nor can it be disputed that whilst Austen was reading Gisborne 'with approval' (*War of Ideas*, p. 231) in 1805, she was performing private theatricals with her nieces. Butler's disregard of the evidence of Fanny Knight's journals was understandable in 1975, but not in 1990.¹⁷

¹⁶In her letters, she jokes about her role as the young girls' chaperone. See Chapter 2.

¹⁷There is no mention of the Kent theatricals in Marilyn Butler's 1990 introduction to the Oxford

Butler's claim of Austen's evangelical suspicion of theatre and her 'evident detestation of Kotzebue' simply does not ring true, nor does her belief in Austen's apparent sympathy with 'the articulate leadership of the *Anti-Jacobin*' (p. 123). Can we really believe that Austen was in concurrence with the views of a magazine whose prevailing tone was almost absurdly venomous and extreme, who described Kotzebue's plays as 'the filthy effusions of this German dunce'?¹⁸

This is not to suggest that Austen was unaware of the controversial aspects of *Lovers' Vows*.¹⁹ Indeed, she draws some of her most effective irony from her different characters' reaction to the chosen play. Edmund's sarcastic suggestion that the theatrical party put on a 'German play' shows him taking a rather conventional stance of high-minded prejudice against German drama. The Earl of Carlisle, writing his *Thoughts Upon the Present Conditions of the Stage* in 1808 laments a decline in standards due to 'those vicious productions of the German writers': 'This accounts for what appears to be a most vitiated taste of the public in the endurance of those childish pantomimes, Blue Beard, etc. on the very boards where Shakespeare and Otway once stormed the human heart'.²⁰

When Edmund's ironic suggestion is turned against him and the group settle on *Lovers' Vows*, his shocked reaction to the female parts also conforms to a very stereotypical prejudice against the character of the fallen woman. Austen makes it clear that it is Agatha more than Amelia who is the cause for concern. When Edmund

edition of *Mansfield Park*. Deirdre Le Faye's 1989 revised and updated version of *A Family Record* details the 1805 private theatricals. See *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, by W. Austen-Leigh, R. A. Austen-Leigh & Deirdre Le Faye (British Library, London, 1989, repr. 1993), p. 133.

¹⁸See Joseph Donohue, *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 147.

¹⁹ William Reitzel cites a theatre review from *The Porcupine* in 1801 condemning the play for its dangerous political sentiments as well as its dramatic inferiority: 'Independent of the morality of this piece, the first act is the heaviest bundle of dramatic lumber ever tolerated on the boards of an English theatre' –William Reitzel, 'Mansfield Park and Lovers' Vows', *RES*, 9 (1933), 451-6 [p. 453].

²⁰Frederick Howard, Earl of Carlisle, *Thoughts Upon the Present Conditions of the Stage* (London, 1808), pp. 5 & 22.

pointedly asks Maria 'what do you do for women', she is unable even to speak the name of Agatha: 'I take the part which Lady Ravenshaw was to have done' (*MP*, p. 139).

The rendering of the plight of fallen women was not uncommon on the eighteenth-century stage. Nicholas Rowe's tragedy *Jane Shore*, which Austen satirized in her juvenilia, was a vehicle for stars like Siddons, and later O'Neill, to arouse pity and feeling for the abject figure of the fallen woman. Hastings's attempted rape of Jane Shore and the humiliating treatment she suffers at his hands is partly punishment for her lapse from virtue, but she is portrayed, ultimately, as a dignified and repentant figure. Though she attains her husband's forgiveness in her final moments, one of most famous speeches is a reminder of the harsh, but inescapable, truth of the inequality of women:

Why should I think that man will do for me
 What yet he never did for wretches like me?
 Mark by what partial justice we are judged:
 Such is the fate unhappy women find,
 And such the curse intail'd upon our kind,
 That man, the lawless libertine, may rove,
 Free and unquestion'd through the wilds of love;
 While woman, sense and nature's easy fool,
 If poor weak woman swerve from virtue's rule,
 If, strongly charm'd, she leave the thorny way,
 And in the softer paths of pleasure stray;
 Ruin ensues, reproach and endless shame,
 And one false step entirely damns her fame.
 In vain with tears the loss she may deplore,
 In vain look back to what she was before,
 She sets, like stars that fall, to rise no more.²¹

Charles Inigo Jones, in his memoir of Eliza O'Neill, was keen to impress her ability to render purity to Kotzebue's fallen women, and he isolates Jane Shore's speech as the lynch-pin of English morality: 'These sentiments of Rowe may be considered as the

²¹Nicholas Rowe, *Jane Shore, a Tragedy as performed at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane, regulated from the prompt-book, by permission of the Managers, by Mr. Hopkins, prompter* (London, 1776), p. 18.

standard English opinion on the subject of female frailty, contrasted with the modern school of Kotzebue, as inferred by his portrait of Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger*'.²²

Kotzebue's fallen women, such as Elvira in *Pizarro* and Mrs Haller in *The Stranger*, are certainly less abject figures than their English counterparts, and it was therefore vital that actors such as Siddons and O'Neill display the requisite purity and dignity: 'The sterling good sense of this country is not easily led astray by the sophistry of the new philosophy...A Mrs. Haller and a Mary Wolstancroft [sic] are the same; and if their morality is to be the guide and standard of female excellence, virtue will be but an empty name, and guilt lose all its turpitude' (Inigo Jones, p. 49).

William Dunlap in his memoir of G. F. Cooke took a rather more liberal view of Kotzebue's fallen women than the archetypal one shown by Jones, and put into the mouth of Edmund Bertram: 'What torrents of abuse have been turned upon Kotzebue for writing *Agatha Fribourg* in wedlock to her seducer, after twenty years of exemplary conduct and exemplary suffering.'²³ Dunlap's complaint is that whilst Colman the Younger's *Peregrine* was seen as a lesson in high morality, 'Its great object is to excite a just detestation of the character of a seducer, and to inculcate mercy and forgiveness to the seduced', Kotzebue is damned for the same lesson: 'The reprehension of the crime, and the exhibition of the consequences are stronger in Kotzebue than in Colman. But German literature had become at one period too brilliant, too fashionable, and usurped too much attention--it became the interest of certain English writers to put it down' (Dunlap, p. 295).

Edmund thus adopts a rather conventional stance of trashing German drama and condemning the figure of Agatha Fribourg, although his moral indignation does not prohibit him from taking part in *Lovers' Vows*. Dunlap's memoir of Cooke was first published in 1814, which suggest that the controversy about Kotzebue and

²²See Charles Inigo Jones, *Memoirs of Miss O'Neill* (London, 1816), p. 61.

²³See William Dunlap, *The Life and Time of George Frederick Cooke*, 2 vols (2nd ed., London, 1815), p. 295.

Agatha Fribourg was still topical when *Mansfield Park* was published (Dunlap had that same year also adapted *Lovers' Vows* in America).²⁴ However, the *débauche* surrounding the author of *Lovers' Vows* has been further complicated by the fact that the version of the play that Austen used was an adaptation by the controversial writer Elizabeth Inchbald.²⁵

Inchbald's reputation as a writer was well-established and she was highly respected amongst literary circles. Although Marilyn Butler describes her as being in close association with Jacobin and feminist circles, Mrs Inchbald was no extremist, as the preface to *Lovers' Vows* indicates. Having herself successfully overcome the stigma of being a stage actress, and well aware of the increasing sensitivity to the issue of female propriety, she was also prudent enough to disengage herself from the Godwin/Wollstonecraft circle.²⁶

Thus in her preface to *Lovers' Vows* she altered Amelia's 'indelicately blunt' proposal of love to suit the sensibilities of her English audience by replacing 'coarse abruptness' with 'whimsical insinuations'.²⁷ Furthermore she removed any sensitive political reference such as Count Cassel's description of his attack in Paris at the start of the Revolution.²⁸ She also increased the comedy by building up the part of Verdun

²⁴William Dunlap, *A History of the American Theatre* (New York, 1832), p. 95.

²⁵Gary Kelly considers the authorship of Mrs Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* in *Mansfield Park* as controversial 'because of the impropriety of its social *mores* rather than the Jacobinism of its political views'. See *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 65.

²⁶The question of Inchbald's politics remains ambiguous. Although *Lovers' Vows* was rendered less controversial than Kotzebue's original play, Inchbald's liberal sympathies with radical and bohemian circles has been noted in many of her works. Her play 'Every One Has His Fault' was particularly controversial, inciting a riot in the Portsmouth theatre in 1795. But according to evidence from her biographer James Boaden, her Royalist sympathies and strict sense of female decorum defy stringent readings of her supposed radicalism.

²⁷Inchbald's description of her alteration of Amelia's style of language is a fitting tribute to Mary Crawford, the mistress of 'whimsical insinuations'. See *MP*, p. 478

²⁸Sheridan's adaptation of Kotzebue's *Pizarro* was also highly successful, and like Inchbald, he showed a similar prudence, and business acumen, by excising the controversial aspects of Kotzebue's play. In particular the part of Elvira played by Sarah Siddons was heightened from a soldier's whore to a dignified fallen woman. See Donohue, *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age*, pp. 125-156.

the Butler. Austen's deliberate omission of the playwright's name only draws further attention to Mrs Inchbald, particularly when viewed in the light of her earlier narrative of a love affair between a priest and a coquette, *A Simple Story*.²⁹

Lovers' Vows ideally suited Austen's intentions of interweaving a dramatic counter-text with the plot of her novel. The particular rendering of a relationship between a coquette and a clergyman in this play, for example, has no other precedent in the drama. The character of Agatha Fribourg, perhaps one of the most notorious portrayals of a fallen woman, resonates with Austen's own depiction of a fallen woman.

Lovers' Vows is so closely interwoven with *Mansfield Park* that its parallels of character and situation, and its verbal and thematic echoes seem more than incidental. Many critics have done fine work on the parallels between play and novel which enrich our understanding of the novel.³⁰ For this reason, I will not rehearse the parallels again here. In the 1930s, E. M. Butler examined the correspondences between the plots and sub-plots of play and novel, claiming 'The real fact of the case I believe to be this: *Mansfield Park* is nothing more nor less than *Lovers' Vows* translated into terms of real life with the moral standard neatly re-inverted'.³¹ Critics who do perceive a comparative relationship between *Mansfield Park* and *Lovers' Vows* have tended to emphasize the deep discrepancies between the novel's moral efficacy and the play's inefficacy. In other words, the lessons of the novel are to be learnt at the expense of the play's dangerously radical advocations. But more recently critics have seen through this weak schematic didacticism. Ironically, as Roger Sales suggests, the

²⁹See Chapter 4.

³⁰The most interesting is Dvora Zelicovici who provides an illuminating comparison of play and novel in 'The Inefficacy of *Lovers' Vows*', *ELH*, 50 (1983), 531-40.

³¹See E M Butler, '*Mansfield Park* and Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows*', *MLR*, 28 (July 1933), 326-337. This view was roundly challenged by Winifred H. Husbands, who thought that Jane Austen was rendered unrecognizable in the 'merciless and savage moralist here presented', see '*Mansfield Park* and *Lovers' Vows*: A Reply', *MLR*, 29 (1934), 176-9, [p. 176].

novel is more radical in what it is saying about class and mobility than the play. Claudia Johnson likewise subverts the novel's supposed conservative ideology by exposing its critique of the 'impossibility' of sexual modesty for women, as corroborated in Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows*.³²

The play poses questions, about the right of women to choose their own sexual partners, about a father's duty to his children, and about the claims of innate merit over riches and social position. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen is sympathetic to all of these issues. In order for her to further develop her interest in the relationship between role playing and social behaviour, Austen needed a play that could be inter-linked with the characters in her novel. The sub-plot of *Lovers' Vows* parallels the main plot in *Mansfield Park*: the prohibited love between her heroine and the clergyman/mentor who is responsible for forming her mind and her values. Additionally, the countertext allows Austen to explore the 'dangerous intimacies' between the pairings of Edmund/Mary and Henry/Maria, with Fanny weaving between the two couples. There is simply no other play that could do as well as *Lovers' Vows*.

Austen describes the seemingly careless gesture of Tom Bertram flicking through the pages of the eclectic volumes of plays that line the table, only to chance upon the script of *Lovers' Vows*--but of course the choice has been carefully and consciously made, long before the heir of Mansfield Park triumphantly alights upon it. As Yates insists, 'After all our debatings and difficulties, we find there is nothing that will suit us altogether so well, nothing so unexceptionable, as *Lovers' Vows*' (*MP*, p. 139).

However, *Lovers' Vows* is not the only eighteenth century play that is used to explore the novel's interest in the drama. For instance, the play that is *not* chosen for performance by the Mansfield acting party, Colman the Younger's comedy, *The Heir at Law*, and Garrick and Colman's popular comedy, *The Clandestine Marriage*,

³²See Roger Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 121, and Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 109-110.

provide hitherto unexplored theatrical aspects of *Mansfield Park*.

Other plays in *Mansfield Park*: *The Clandestine Marriage* and *The Heir at Law*.

In this section I want to set aside the play that is chosen at Mansfield Park and instead consider some other dimensions of the novel's interest in the drama, including the play that is not chosen. By doing so, I hope to demonstrate that in both the range of its allusiveness and the variety of its quasi-dramatic techniques, *Mansfield Park* is much more deeply involved with the theatre than has hitherto been assumed.

In a previous chapter, I have demonstrated Austen's debt to the theatrical 'set-piece' or scene, showing how some of the most memorable moments in the oeuvre of the Austen canon are perceived in terms of their dramatic impact. Austen's novels are 'dramatic' in the sense that scenes seem often to be conceived and conducted in stage terms. The use of character-revealing dialogue is not the only theatrical debt, but should be considered alongside the collecting of characters in appropriate groups, and the contriving of entrances and exits. The first group activity in *Mansfield Park*, before the play sequence is introduced, is the outing to Sotherton Court, ostensibly for the purpose of advising its owner on the efficacy of landscape improvement. The family visit to Sotherton and the play sequence are firmly linked in Fanny's consciousness as the two social events in which illicit misconduct goes unwarranted and unchecked.³³

The outing to Sotherton is used primarily to explore the initial stages of the courtship between Mary and Edmund and Henry and Maria. It also prefigures later important occurrences: Edmund's ordination and Maria's marriage. Furthermore, the flirtations that get under way in the grounds of Sotherton between the two pairs of lovers (Mary/Edmund, Maria /Henry) are further developed in the rehearsals of *Lovers' Vows*.

³³Fanny's low opinion of Henry Crawford is compelled to undergo a change when he shows himself capable of 'ardent, disinterested love', though she connects his previous ill-conduct with Sotherton and the private theatricals (see *MP*, p. 328).

There are parallels between the theatrical party and the improving party. Both schemes spring from the desire to alleviate boredom in the country, and both events incorporate the use of theatrical language to mask the unlicensed love-play that takes place between the characters. The events at Sotherton are the first steps in seduction, and, in the style of Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy, pairings of lovers are explored as the characters wander, aimlessly, around the grounds of Sotherton Court. The Sotherton episode could be described as a prelude to the main-piece of *Lovers' Vows*. On both occasions, Austen interweaves her narrative with the plot of a well-known eighteenth-century play.

One of the aims of this thesis is to show how Austen was deeply familiar with the drama of the period. The other is to suggest how she imbibed dramatic techniques and devices and assimilated them into the novel. The Sotherton episode both alludes to and adapts one of the most popular comedies of the eighteenth century stage.

Sotherton and *The Clandestine Marriage*.

'What was done there is not to be told'

From an early age, Austen was familiar with George Colman's and David Garrick's successful comedy, *The Clandestine Marriage*. She makes an explicit reference to the play in her early novel, *Love and Freindship*.³⁴ In 1813, she attended a production of the play at Covent Garden, commenting on the new Lord Ogleby, and complaining that the acting was only 'moderate'.³⁵ Colman's and Garrick's play is the first of a number of contemporary plays that Austen alludes to in *Mansfield Park*. Readers would be alerted to the allusion to *The Clandestine Marriage* not only because of its demure heroine, Fanny Sterling, but because Austen adapts the technique of using a pastoral setting to dramatize illicit love-play.

In *The Clandestine Marriage*, the various love intrigues of the play are conducted in the extensive gardens of Sterling's country estate.³⁶ The conventional comic trope of love-play outdoors, assimilated from Restoration comedy, is given an eighteenth-century slant with the emphasis on the trend for landscape improvements.

³⁴After having so nobly disentagled themselves from the shackles of parental authority, by a Clandestine Marriage...' (*MW*, p. 87).

³⁵Austen saw *The Clandestine Marriage* on September 15, 1813, at Covent Garden. Her lukewarm reaction to the new Lord Ogleby suggests that she had seen the play before. See Chapter 2. *Mansfield Park* was begun about February 1811 and finished 'soon after June 1813' (See Chapman's introductory note to *MP*, p. xi).

³⁶The plot of Garrick's and Colman's comedy turns upon a secret--the clandestine marriage between Fanny Sterling and Lovewell, which gives rise to various incongruous and comic misunderstandings. Fanny is bound by a promise to her husband to keep her marriage to Lovewell a secret, until an appropriate time, but in the meantime is harassed by other would-be-suitors--one of whom has switched his affections from her elder sister. Lovewell wishes to delay the news, fearing that Fanny's avaricious father and interfering aunt will disinherit them. The lecherous Lord Ogleby mistakenly believes that Fanny's secret love is for him, when she unburdens herself to tell him that she is devoted to another man, and places herself under his protection in a comic scene of misunderstandings and cross purposes.

'The chief pleasure of a country-house is to make improvements' remarks the master of the house, as he shows his guests around the grounds of his huge estate.³⁷ Sterling's 'improvements' naturally include the needless destruction of trees: 'We were surrounded with trees. I cut down above fifty to make the lawn before the house, and let in the wind and sun--Smack smooth--as you see' (*Clandestine Marriage*, p. 36). Sterling's fashionably slavish desire for picturesque 'ruins' is ironized: 'It has just cost me a hundred and fifty pounds to put my ruins in thorough repair' (*Clandestine Marriage*, p. 38).

Austen provides her own parody of the picturesque in the portrayal of the foolish improver, Rushworth. Rushworth has already cut down 'two or three fine old trees..that grew too near the house' and talks of cutting down the avenue at Sotherton, something that Fanny laments, quoting from Cowper's *The Task* in defence of the fate of the elm (*MP*, pp. 55-6).

The numerous puns on 'improvements' in *The Clandestine Marriage* are specifically given a lascivious *double entendre*. Sterling's fake church spire against a tree 'to terminate the prospect' is commented upon by the lecherous Lord Ogleby: 'Very ingenious, indeed! For my part, I desire no finer prospect than this I see before me. [*Leering at the Women.*] Simple, yet varied; bounded, yet extensive' (*Clandestine Marriage*, p. 38-9). Ogleby continues to make puns on this theme: 'We're in the garden of Eden, you know; in all the region of perpetual spring, youth and beauty [*Leering at the Women*]'.

Ogleby's metaphor of the garden of Eden is extended by his reference to a 'serpentine path':

STERLING: How d'ye like these close walks, my lord?

LORD OG: A most excellent serpentine! It forms a perfect maze, and winds like a true lover's knot (*Clandestine Marriage*, p. 37).

³⁷*The British Theatre; or A Collection of Plays, with biographical and critical remarks by Mrs Inchbald*, 25 vols (London, 1808), xvi, p. 36.

The lover's knot, which becomes increasingly entangled, is the secret love affair between Fanny and Lovewell. A comic love-triangle is created when Fanny unburdens herself to Lord Ogleby, who mistakenly believes that he is the recipient of Fanny's secret affections. The 'lover's knot' is further complicated by the unexpected and genuine conversion of the rake, Sir John Melvil, who also falls in love with Fanny. It is out in the garden that Melvil makes the confession that, although engaged in a treaty of marriage with the elder sister, he is now in love with the younger sister. As in a Restoration comedy, the garden is the scene of seduction and intrigue. The physical landscape of the garden, its winding paths and sheltered walkways, screens the illicit behaviour of the characters.

Austen adapts the theatrical device of love-play outdoors, and a serpentine path to symbolically to suggest her own 'lover's knot' (Edmund walks the path with Fanny and Mary on each arm). As in the *Clandestine Marriage*, a connection between sexual temptation and the Garden of Eden is suggested by the serpentine path. It is no coincidence that Mary first tries to tempt Edmund from his religious vocation on the serpentine path. Illicit misconduct and sexual temptation is suggested in Austen's language from the moment that the young people meet with an outward door, 'temptingly open on a flight of steps which led immediately to turf and shrubs, and all the sweets of pleasure-grounds, as by one impulse, one wish for air and liberty, all walked out' (*MP*, p. 90).

A second 'lover's knot' is explored in the secret flirtation between Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram, who is betrothed to John Rushworth. It is Mrs Grant who first makes a pun on the word 'improvements' with her insinuating remark that Maria will be Sotherton's finest 'improvement': 'Sotherton will have *every* improvement in time which his heart can desire', and this is spoken to Mrs Norris with 'a smile' (*MP*, 53).³⁸ Henry Crawford picks up the metaphor when he is flirting with Maria before

³⁸Henry has already exploited his sister's (Mrs Grant's) pun: 'I am inclined to envy Mr. Rushworth for having so much happiness yet before him. I have been a devourer of my own' (*MP*, p. 61).

the iron gate: 'I do not think that *I* shall ever see Sotherton again with so much pleasure as I do now. Another summer will hardly improve it to me' (*MP*, p. 98).³⁹

Henry Crawford's surreptitious flirtation with Maria is conducted in quasi-theatrical terms. As Mary Crawford is the witty heroine of eighteenth-century comedy, her brother is the charming rake of sentimental comedy, whose 'reformation' is at stake. Austen's implementation of a brother/sister duo who infiltrate a different society is a striking reversal of a popular eighteenth-century comic convention.

Colman the Younger's *The Heir at Law* and Hannah Cowley's *Which is the Man?* rely upon a conventional comic plot device. Both plays introduce a pair of rustics, a brother and sister, whose entrance into London society gives rise to many incongruities and misunderstandings. In these plays, different styles of language and action are attached to different classes and ironically juxtaposed.

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen reverses this convention. The brother/sister duo are sophisticated Londoners who leave town to enter the country. If the prosaic conversations of Fanny and Edmund seems dull by comparison, this is precisely the effect that Austen wants to create. As Edmund warns Mary, there is no fear of him saying 'a bon-mot, for there is not the least wit in my nature' (*MP*, 94). In contrast, the Crawfords' sparkling dialogue and witty repartee, with just a lacing of French phrases, reflect their cosmopolitan life-styles: they are the kind of sophisticated Frenchified types parodied in Garrick's satire against fashionable gallantry, *Bon Ton or High Life Above Stairs*.

In the Sotherton chapel, Henry plays the part of the charming rake with characteristic aplomb. The striking tableau that is set up in the family chapel foreshadows and supplants the actual marriage ceremony between Maria and Rushworth, which later takes place 'off-stage'. Julia draws the group's attention to the 'performance': 'Do look at Mr. Rushworth and Maria, standing side by side, exactly as

³⁹Mary Crawford is also fond of puns, as her notorious Rears and Vices joke suggests. Her other misplaced pun on the abandoning of family prayer as 'improvement' also falls rather flat, as the pun is made for Edmund's benefit.

if the ceremony were going to be performed' (*MP*, p. 88). As readers, we are encouraged to watch the group audience themselves watching the tableau of the marriage ceremony between Maria and Rushworth which finally takes place unobserved by the reader. The emphasis on the visual semiotics is undercut by Henry's whisper to the bride 'in a voice which she only could hear, "I do not like to see Miss Bertram so near the altar"' (*MP*, p. 88).

Maria's complicity is suggested in her acceptance of Henry's challenge and she continues the intimate banter by asking if he would 'give her away'. His response is equally provocative: "I am afraid I should do it very awkwardly", was his reply with a look of meaning' (*MP*, p. 88). Henry's flirtatious 'asides' to Maria set the tone for the repartee that is continued in the grounds before the iron gate. Austen contrasts the stifling indoor scene of the Sotherton private chapel with the liberating outdoor scene. The indoor scene centres upon the legitimizing of love-play by its public acknowledgement in marriage, whilst the outdoor scene embraces the idea of unlicensed, clandestine love-play. Thus, the cool chapel, where marital love is sanctioned, is contrasted with the stifling heat of the outdoors.⁴⁰

The substantial stretch of direct speech between Maria and Henry, before the iron gate with Fanny as audience, is virtually a ready made dramatic script:

[Henry] 'I find [Sotherton] better, grander, more complete in its style, though that style may not be the best. And to tell you the truth,' speaking rather lower, 'I do not think that *I* shall ever see Sotherton again with so much pleasure as I do now. Another summer will hardly improve it to me'.

After a moment's embarrassment the lady replied,
'You are too much of a man of the world not to see with the eyes of the world. If other people think Sotherton improved, I have no doubt that you will'.

⁴⁰Both the corpulent Rushworth and the delicate Fanny are rendered breathless by the heat and emotion of the day. The heat of the day is emphasized for contributing to the mishaps and confusions, 'one hot day in August', 'insufferably hot', the 'unmitigated glare of the day'. Later, Henry confesses to his misconduct: 'With something of consciousness he shook his head at his sister, and laughingly replied, "I cannot say there was much done at Sotherton; but it was a hot day, and we were all walking after each other and bewildered"' (*MP*, p. 245).

'I am afraid that I am not quite so much the man of the world as might be good for me in some points. My feelings are not quite so evanescent, nor my memory of the past under such easy dominion as one finds to be the case with men of the world'.

This was followed by a short silence. Miss Bertram began again.

'You seemed to be enjoying your drive here very much this morning. I was glad to see you so well entertained. You and Julia were laughing the whole way'.

'Were we? Yes, I believe we were; but I have not the least recollection at what. Oh! I believe I was relating to her some ridiculous stories of an old Irish groom of my uncle's. Your sister loves to laugh'.

'You think her more light-hearted than I am.'

'More easily amused', he replied, 'consequently you know,' smiling, 'better company. I could not have hoped to entertain *you* with Irish anecdotes during a ten miles' drive.'

'Naturally, I believe, I am as lively as Julia, but I have more to think of now.'

'You have undoubtedly--and there are situations in which very high spirits would denote insensibility. Your prospects, however, are too fair to justify want of spirits. You have a very smiling scene before you'.

'Do you mean literally or figuratively? Literally, I conclude. Yes, certainly the sun shines and the park looks very cheerful. But, unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. I cannot get out, as the starling said'. As she spoke, and it was with expression, she walked to the gate; he followed her. 'Mr. Rushworth is so long fetching this key'.

'And for the world you would not get out without the key and without Mr. Rushworth's authority and protection, or I think you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance; I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited'.

'Prohibited! nonsense! I certainly can get out that way, and I will. Mr. Rushworth will be here in a moment you know--we shall not be out of sight'

'Or if we are, Miss Price will be so good as to tell him, that he will find us near that knoll, the grove of oak on the knoll.'

Fanny, feeling all this to be wrong, could not help making an effort to prevent it. 'You will hurt yourself, Miss Bertram,' she cried, 'you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes--you will tear your gown--you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha. You had better not go' (*MP*, pp. 98-100).

The quality of the dialogue between Henry and Maria (the rake and the flirt) recalls eighteenth-century stage comedy. Verbal fencing and wit combat between lovers are redolent of Restoration and Georgian comedy and Henry's challenging pun on

'improvement' is met with Maria's cool response: 'If other people think Sotherton improved, I have no doubt that you will'.

Many of Austen's dialogues consist of a rapid exchange of debating points, as in the confrontation between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Elinor and Lucy in *Sense and Sensibility*. However, the set-piece between the clandestine lovers in *Mansfield Park* is striking for its use of silence to delineate the characters and attitudes of the speakers. Maria's jealousy and chagrin are expressed, finely, in the pause between her remarks regarding her impending marriage and her accusative comments about Julia and Henry: 'You seemed to be enjoying your drive here very much this morning'.

The provision of 'stage directions' is a paralinguistic quality which Austen uses to reinforce and sometimes contradict the spoken word. In Henry's case, the directions 'smiling', and 'speaking rather lower' reveal the hollowness of the verbal facade. The use of *double entendre* enhances the illicit tone of the banter, and if we are in any doubt of the sub-text, Maria, with surprising clarity, focuses the reader with her question, 'Do you mean literally or figuratively?'. With this breakthrough of consciousness, the authorial sympathy shifts to Maria momentarily with her poignant declaration 'I cannot get out, as the starling said'. Austen's allusion to Sterne's imprisoned starling in *A Sentimental Journey* singing 'I can't get out, I can't get out' is significant. Shortly before he hears the bird's 'song for liberty', Yorick is contemplating confinement in the Bastille, which he describes as a 'but another word for a house you can't get out of'. Maria Bertram describes Sotherton as 'dismal old prison' (*MP*, p. 53), and her words also resonate with that other notorious Maria, Wollstonecraft's trapped heroine of *The Wrongs of Woman*, who declares that 'Marriage had bastilled me for life'.⁴¹

⁴¹Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary and The Wrongs of Women*, ed. James Kinsley and Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 155. See also Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction* (London; Athlone Press, 1997), p. 37.

The remaining dialogue forecasts Maria's adultery, and the point of view moves to Fanny who is suddenly reintroduced into the narrative with the warning cry: 'You will hurt yourself against these spikes--you will tear your gown--you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha'.

Fanny's unexpected intrusion, with its overt prediction of sexual misconduct ('spikes', torn clothing, descent into ill-fame), has the effect of distancing Maria as it simultaneously draws the narrative focus back to Fanny. Just as Henry and Maria have forgotten about Fanny's presence, so too has the reader. The relative absence of authorial intervention in the long dialogue between Henry and Maria is emphasized by the sudden reappearance of the heroine, and the reader is jolted into remembering that Fanny has witnessed this highly-charged exchange. Only at this point does the authorial perspective return Fanny's predictable conclusion: 'Fanny was again left to her solitude, and with no increase of pleasant feelings, for she was sorry for almost all that she had seen and heard, astonished at Miss Bertram and angry with Mr. Crawford' (*MP*, p. 100).

The scene before the iron gate continues to be conducted in stage terms, not only in the use of dialogue, but also in the contriving of exits and entrances. The single setting is retained throughout with Fanny seated on the bench. The rest is as follows: initially Mary and Edmund exit from the bench as Rushworth, Maria and Henry enter. Rushworth exits for the key. Maria and Henry exits around the locked gate. Julia enters, and exits around the locked door. Rushworth enters with the key and exits through the gate. Enter Edmund and Mary. Subordinate dialogues take place, leaving Fanny to contemplate the outcome of events from the central position of the bench. Confusingly, Fanny's ubiquitous presence, rather than focusing the ironies of the scene, offers a disarming lack of perspective. Throughout the quasi-farcical entrances and exits of the various characters, her thoughts are shaped, largely, by her jealous concern for Edmund. But though she seems to be little more than a conduit, it is significant that she should witness Henry in action to enable her to reject his advances in the third volume of the novel.

One of the most unexpected twists of *Mansfield Park* is the controversial reformation of the rake, Henry Crawford. The reformed rake had become a favourite stage type ever since the reformation of Loveless in the very first sentimental drama, Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* (1696). In an important conversation which takes place shortly after Maria's marriage to Rushworth, Henry is reminded of Fanny's status as a silent witness to his conduct at Sotherton. Mary Crawford's commendation of her brother's behaviour at Sotherton makes her complicit in his misconduct: 'Only think what grand things were produced there by our all going with him one hot day in August to drive about the grounds and see his genius take fire. There we went, and there we came home again; and what was done there is not to be told!' (*MP*, p. 244). But it is Fanny's reaction to this comment that discomposes Henry:

Fanny's eyes were turned on Crawford for a moment with an expression more than grave, even reproachful; but on catching his were instantly withdrawn. With something of consciousness he shook his head at his sister, and laughingly replied, 'I cannot say there was much done at Sotherton; but it was a hot day, and we were all walking after each other and bewildered'. As soon as a general buzz gave him shelter, he added, in a low voice directed solely at Fanny, 'I should be sorry to have my powers of *planning* judged of by the day at Sotherton. I see things very differently now. Do not think of me as I appeared then' (*MP*, p. 244-5).

For Henry, part of Fanny's charm is her indifference to him. What begins as a game to make 'a small hole in Fanny Price's heart' becomes a challenge when he discovers that she does, in fact, dislike him: 'Her looks say, "I will not like you, I am determined not to like you," and I say, she shall' (*MP*, p. 230). Henry's unexpectedly genuine conversion to love is of no greater surprise to anyone but himself: 'I am fairly caught. You know with what idle designs I began--but this is the end of them' (*MP*, p. 292).

The most influential example of a reformed rake in the novel tradition was Mr. B. in Richardson's *Pamela*, who is tamed by the virtue and religious principles of a lowly maidservant.⁴² But in the relationship between Fanny Price and Henry

⁴²In *Clarissa*, the rake Lovelace doesn't repent, unlike the reformed rake Loveless in *Love's Last Shift*. Richardson's deliberate and ironic allusion to Loveless/Lovelace is yet another telling example

Crawford readers would have recognized allusions to *The Clandestine Marriage*. Not least because its demure heroine, Fanny Sterling (whose very name reflects the solid worth and reliable qualities of Austen's heroine) rejects the proposals of a reformed rake. Sir Thomas comes to prize in Fanny 'the *sterling* good of principle' (*MP*, p. 471, my italics). Fanny Sterling is described as possessing 'delicacy' and a 'quick sensibility'. She is gentle and amiable, though is often misunderstood as being 'sly and deceitful': '[S]he wants nothing but a crook in her hand, and a lamb under her arm, to be a perfect picture of innocence and simplicity' (*Clandestine Marriage*, p. 56). Subjected to the jealousy of an elder sister and in possession of a secret that renders her helpless to resist the unwanted attention of her sister's lover, Fanny is a target for ill-treatment. However, the unexpected twist in the plot of *The Clandestine Marriage* is the conversion of the rake, Melvil:

I came into this family without any impressions on my mind--with an unimpassioned indifference, ready to receive one woman as soon as another. I looked upon love, serious, sober love as a chimera, and marriage as a thing of course, as you know most people do. But I, who was lately so great an infidel in love, am now one of its sincerest votaries.--In short, my defection from Miss Sterling proceeds from the violence of my attachment to another...who is she! who can she be, but Fanny--the tender, amiable engaging Fanny? (*Clandestine Marriage*, pp. 39-40).

Neither is the rake insensible to Fanny's superior attractions: 'was it possible for me to be indulged in a perpetual intercourse with two such objects as Fanny and her sister, and not find my heart led by insensible attraction towards her' (*Clandestine Marriage*, p. 40).

Fanny's conduct is persistently misunderstood. Her repulsion of Melvil does not appease her sister, nor are her claims for female solidarity understood: 'If I forebore to exert a proper spirit nay, if I did not even express the quickest resentment

of the traffic between the drama and the novel. Richardson's expectation is that the reader will know the dramatic repertoire, and consequently the irony of expectation is intensified when Lovelace does not reform.

at your behaviour, it was only in consideration of that respect I wish to pay you, in honour to my sister: and be assured, sir, that woman as I am, that my vanity could reap no pleasure from a triumph that must result from the blackest treachery to her' (*Clandestine Marriage*, p. 43).

Despite Fanny's protestations and anger at Melvil's persistence, his ardour is only increased by her resistance: 'And yet, opposition, instead of smothering, increases my inclination. I must have her' (*Clandestine Marriage*, p. 63). Fanny's final declaration that she could never love Melvil, likewise falls on stony ground: 'Hear me, sir, hear my final declaration.--Were my father and sister, as insensible as you are pleased to represent them; --were my heart forever to remain disengaged to any other, I could not listen to your proposals' (*Clandestine Marriage*, p. 44). Unable and unwilling to return his affections, Fanny is 'packed off' to town to 'send her out of the way' (*Clandestine Marriage*, p. 64).

Like her predecessor, Fanny Price is in possession of a secret (her attachment to Edmund), and her attempts to conceal this secret cause her conduct to be consistently misunderstood. Fanny's gentle repulsions only increase Henry's ardour, for he does not realize that she has a pre-engaged heart. Furthermore, she takes no pleasure in scoring against the opposite sex, or indeed her own sex, telling Mary that she cannot think highly of a man 'who sports with any woman's feelings' (*MP*, p. 363). Fanny Price's rejection of a reformed rake mirrors Fanny Sterling's rejection of Melvil, and, as a final remedy, she is packed off to Portsmouth to be taught the 'value of a good income' (*MP*, p. 369). Sir Thomas's harsh 'experiment' is viewed as 'a medicinal project upon his niece's understanding, which he must consider as at present diseased' (*MP*, p. 369).

David Lodge and Isobel Armstrong have suggested that the play that Austen is alluding to in the Sotherton episode is Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Armstrong argues that the mock marriage ceremony in the Jacobean family chapel (proposed by the jealous Julia) suggests shades of the mock marriage performed by Celia to unite

Rosalind and Orlando.⁴³ Furthermore, Armstrong links Austen's adaptation of the pastoral setting of Sotherton to *As You Like It*:

[T]he escape from the bounds of the social world to the seemingly free, unlimited area of wood and forest only reproduces the problems of the social world. The self-conscious artifice and theatricality introduced into the forest of *As You Like It*--'all the world's a Stage... '--its emphasis on role-playing and its arrangements as a series of scenes in which characters overlook one another, are all present in the Sotherton episode (Armstrong, p. 62).

Armstrong argues that the play's interest in temporality is present in the Sotherton episode: 'Like the Forest of Arden, the Sotherton wilderness is a physically oppressive place, as people tire easily and imagine that they have been walking longer than they actually have' (Armstrong, p. 63). Thus Mary and Edmund debate how long they have walked along the serpentine path, and Fanny comforts Rushworth with the words, 'when people are waiting, they are bad judges of time, and every half minute seems like five' (*MP*, p. 102). David Lodge has also suggested that the comings and goings in the 'wilderness' at Sotherton are reminiscent of Shakespeare's forest of Arden.

Certainly, *Mansfield Park* is interested in role-play and 'lookings on'. Fanny Price is accused by Mrs Norris of excessive 'lookings on'; 'these are fine times for you, but you must not be always walking from one room to the other and doing the lookings on, at your ease, in this way' (*MP*, p. 166).⁴⁴ But, though *Mansfield Park* is interested in the idea of role playing, in its broadest sense, the Sotherton episode only tentatively begins to raise the issue of 'acting' or 'pretending' as a form of social conduct. It is throughout the *Lovers' Vows* episode that Austen truly begins to explore the possibilities raised by the adoption of various roles.

⁴³Isobel Armstrong, *Jane Austen: Mansfield Park: Penguin Critical Studies*, ed. Bryan Loughrey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), pp. 62-5.

⁴⁴Fanny's presence in the rehearsals of *Lovers' Vows* is essential, of course, as she alone must be privy to Henry Crawford's conduct.

Rather than *As You Like It* being a key text for the Sotherton episode, it is more useful to look closer to eighteenth-century stage comedy. Once again, Armstrong's and Lodge's argument demonstrates the neglect of the influence of eighteenth-century stage comedy on Austen's work. The connection between the pastoral tradition and a kind of unlimited freedom of behaviour does derive from Shakespearean comedy, but the pastoral scene is usually the wood or forest, as in the Italian tradition from which the genre derived. The use of the park or garden of a country estate is the Restoration assimilation of the pastoral which was also the model for eighteenth century comedy. Austen's use of the garden to dramatize freedom of conduct shows an allegiance less directly to Shakespeare than to recent and contemporaneous stage comedy.

In *The Clandestine Marriage*, possibly the most popular comedy of the period, there are a whole range of techniques which Austen assimilates into the Sotherton episode. The dramatic setting of the garden of a large country estate, the use of a serpentine path, flirtatious banter between quasi-theatrical stage types, such as 'the flirt' and 'the rake', the use of puns and innuendoes specifically linked to the idea of 'improvements', exits and entrances, and a keen sense of audience and looking on, are all suggestive of *The Clandestine Marriage*.

Furthermore, Austen borrows the name Fanny for her heroine (who has similar sterling qualities as Garrick and Colman's Fanny), and specifically uses the word 'clandestine' to describe Henry Crawford's conduct at Sotherton in a revealing passage that connects Sotherton with *Lovers' Vows*. Fanny firmly links the two episodes together when she too feels herself in danger of being seduced by Crawford: 'Mr. Crawford was no longer the Mr. Crawford who, as the clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria Bertram, had been her abhorrence...She might have disdained him in all the dignity of angry virtue, in the grounds of Sotherton, or the theatre at Mansfield Park; but he approached her now with rights that demanded different treatment' (*MP*, pp. 327-8).

Tom Bertram and *The Heir at Law*

The seed for Jane Austen's idea for private theatricals can be found in a short sketch written in about 1792. In 'The Three Sisters', the greedy, pleasure-seeking Mary Stanhope demands a private theatre as part of her marriage settlement: 'You must do nothing but give Balls & Masquerades. You must build a room on purpose & a Theatre to act Plays in. The first Play we have shall be *Which is the Man*, and I will do Lady Bell Bloomer' (*MW*, p. 65).

Towards the end of *Love and Freindship*, Austen depicts the problems facing a small company of strolling actors in a manner that surely recalls her own family's difficulties in finding suitable plays for their amateur dramatics:

our Company was indeed rather small, as it consisted only of the Manager his wife & ourselves, but there were fewer to pay and the only inconvenience attending it was the Scarcity of Plays which for want of People to fill the Characters, we could perform.--. We did not mind trifles however--. One of our most admired Performances was *Macbeth*, in which we were truly great. The Manager always played *Banquo* himself, his wife my *Lady Macbeth*. I did the *Three Witches* & Philander acted *all the rest* (*MW*, p. 107-108).

The absurdity of Philander playing the parts of characters who appear on the stage at the same time, such as Macbeth and Macduff, and Gustavus playing all three witches, will especially amuse anyone who has had to work within the limitations of a small theatre company. The Austens sometimes solved their casting problems by inviting neighbouring families to take part in their performances. It is, of course, in order to avoid just such a measure that Edmund Bertram reluctantly agrees to join the theatrical ensemble in *Mansfield Park*.

The interest which was sparked by the Steventon theatricals and flickered through the juvenilia was rekindled in the writing of *Mansfield Park*. Significantly though, Austen focuses that interest on the pre-production, rehearsals and aftermath of *Lovers' Vows*, rather than the actual performance of the play, which is so memorably pre-empted by Sir Thomas's return. Austen's satirical treatment of the 'inconveniences'

attached to 'scarcity of plays' in *Love and Freindship* is reworked in the Mansfield theatricals, where, ironically, the search for a suitable play is dramatized more fully than the play itself:

'Oh! no, *that* will never do. Let us have no ranting tragedies. Too many characters--Not a tolerable woman's part in the play--Anything but *that*, my dear Tom. It would be impossible to fill it up--One could not expect any body to take such a part--Nothing but buffoonery from beginning to end. *That* might do, perhaps, but for the low parts--If I *must* give my opinion, I have always thought it the most insipid play in the English language--*I* do not wish to make objections, I shall be happy to be of any use, but I think we could not choose worse' (*MP*, p. 131).

Clearly Austen was no stranger to the exigencies of choosing a suitable play for home representation, and she delights in the sheer egomania of the would-be actors who find it so hard to make a decision, chiefly because they all want the 'best characters'. Fanny Price, like her author, is 'not unamused' by this picture of 'disguised' selfishness. Fanny seems only too happy to observe the theatrical events: 'For her own gratification she could have wished that something might be acted, for she had never seen half a play, but everything of higher consequence was against it' (*MP*, p. 131).

Fanny forewarns Edmund that the group's theatrical preferences are markedly dissimilar: 'Your brother's taste, and your sisters', seem very different'. Edmund and Fanny even cherish hopes that the theatrical project will never get off the ground because there are too many people to be pleased. Austen ominously details the practical arrangements which begin to escalate in scale and expense--the carpenter has taken measurements and is already at work erecting a stage, the housemaids are making up the curtain-- even before a choice of play has been fixed upon. The 'great irreconcilable difference' is over comedy or tragedy, and choosing a suitable play becomes an all-consuming task.

Shakespeare's tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, together with Moore's *The Gamester* and Home's *Douglas* (probably the two most popular 'sentimental' tragedies of the eighteenth century), are rejected as unsuitable. *The Rivals*, *The School for*

Scandal, *Wheel of Fortune*, and *The Heir at Law* are eschewed by the tragedians 'with yet warmer objections' (*MP*, p. 131). Whilst the majority view holds out for tragedy, Tom Bertram's preference is clearly for comedy, and although he is tacitly seconded by Mary Crawford, 'his determinateness and his power, seemed to make allies unnecessary' (*MP*, p. 130). Tom insists upon a comedy, or at least a comic part for himself: 'I take any part you choose to give me, so as it be comic. Let it but be comic, I condition for nothing more' (*MP*, p. 131). Tom is 'exactly adapted to the novelty of acting' by dint of his 'lively talents' and 'comic taste'.

In *Mansfield Park* the character who is most deeply 'infected' by the vogue for amateur theatricals is Tom Bertram. Few have noticed how central he is to the theatricals.⁴⁵ Of all the characters, he appears to be the one with the most detailed and enthusiastic knowledge of the drama. Initially he doesn't want a sentimental play like *Lovers' Vows*--he wants to put on a comedy.

Tom's suggested plays, all well-established comedies of the London stage, represent a cross-section of some of the best works of the successful eighteenth-century playwrights, Sheridan, George Colman the Younger, and Richard Cumberland. *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* are perhaps obvious choices for Austen, as both of these plays were performed by her own family. Cumberland's sentimental comedy, *The Wheel of Fortune*, as the title suggests, presents a profligate, Woodville, who has squandered his fortune at the gaming table, enabling his arch enemy, Penruddock-- a role made famous by John Philip Kemble-- to exact revenge on him. It hardly needs to be emphasized that Tom Bertram has already squandered away part of his father's fortune on gambling losses, and cost Edmund his clerical living at Mansfield. *The Wheel of Fortune* dramatizes a failed relationship between father and son. Whilst the son has been off fighting for his country, his father has lost his home and wife through his addiction to gambling.

⁴⁵Though Tom's importance is recognized by Roger Sales in *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, pp. 93-106.

But it is *The Heir at Law* which Tom earnestly proposes five times. There are two parts that Tom considers for himself; one is the famed comic role of the great opportunist Dr Pangloss, the other is the role of Lord Duberley--the comically displaced heir-at-law.⁴⁶ Tom's choice of play and role provide a significant insight into his character, which is wholly lost on a reader today.

George Colman the Younger, playwright and manager of the Haymarket Theatre, produced *The Heir at Law* on 15 July 1797.⁴⁷ The play enjoyed over a hundred years of success before disappearing from the boards; a performance was even noted as late as 1906.⁴⁸ Colman's play is another striking example of the era's preference for comedies depicting social transformations. This device of bringing together contrasting 'types' allowed Colman to fully exploit the comic potential of the juxtapositions of 'high' and 'low' life in Georgian England, and please the upper galleries as well as the pit.

The eponymous heir-at-law, Lord Duberley formerly Daniel Dowlas, is a common tradesman who in the absence of a natural heir has inherited a title and an estate belonging to a distant cousin. Uncomfortable with his role of nobleman, he secretly employs the services of Dr Pangloss for the purpose of 'fashioning his discourse' so that he can assume his 'rightful' place in genteel society. Meanwhile, the true heir, Henry Moreland, supposedly lost at sea, returns to England, only to find a common merchant in his father's place. The play is full of lively, displaced characters, uncomfortable with the roles that either society or fortune has apportioned them.

⁴⁶ Duberley is spelt thus by Austen and I will use her spelling, although 'Duberly' is printed in the text of *The Heir at Law*.

⁴⁷ *The Heir at Law*, in *The Plays of George Colman the Younger*, ed. Peter Tasch, 2 vols (New York and London: Garland, 1981).

⁴⁸ See introduction to Colman's *Plays*, xli. The play was performed 28 times during the summer of 1797. Austen stayed in Bath during the latter part of 1797, and might well have attended a performance of the play on Nov 19, 1797.

Colman's play shows that 'the fickle world is full of changes'. The plot revolves around inequalities of birth, where 'chance may remove one man so far from another, in the rank of life', and social mobility, where one's fortune can be made by improving a vulgar family's 'cacology'; by becoming a rich man's mistress, or by winning the lottery.⁴⁹ Colman's socially displaced characters are made miserable by their shifting roles and positions in society and at the play's denouement they are all restored to their original status, with the exception of the rustic, Zekiel Homespun, who confounds all social classifications by his win on the lottery. Daniel Dowlas is only too relieved to relinquish his burdensome rights and responsibilities to the real heir, Moreland, whose return from the 'watery grave' restores the authentic peer to his estate.

Gillian Russell has shown that plays depicting incongruous social reversals, such as *The Heir at Law* and Townley's *High Life Below Stairs*, were the particular favourites of the amateur theatricals of the public schools, military academies and spouting clubs. These exclusively male dilettante theatricals favoured comedies where social roles were turned topsy-turvy. Part of the attraction, was the opportunity it gave for enacting scenarios of social transformations: '[A]n artisan could play Lord Duberley in *The Heir at Law*, for example, or a lowly corporal could strut the stage as Othello or Mabeth'.⁵⁰ Navy theatricals enabled officers to indulge themselves in coveted stereotypical 'low-life' roles.

Furthermore, Russell observes, the intrinsic characteristic of the male amateur acting clubs was the absence of patriarchal authority: 'These clubs were independent of sources of authority--the schoolmaster, the captain, the father--and afforded young men the opportunity for conviviality and free association' (*Theatres of War*, p. 132).

⁴⁹*Heir At Law*, 41. 'Cacology' means 'Bad choice of words; bad pronunciation'. Dowlas mispronounces it as 'cakelology'.

⁵⁰See Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793-1815* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 132.

She also argues that the private theatricals of the minor gentry were significant 'in the negotiation of a younger generation's "entrance into the world."' In Carrick-on-Suir, Ireland, Dorothea Herbert, the daughter of a country rector, recorded an account of family production of the morally dubious *The Fair Penitent*. Dorothea's father is notably absent:

As in *Mansfield Park*, the theatricals at Carrick-on-Suir take place in an environment where patriarchal authority only seems to be abeyance: such a dispensation allows for the expression of sexual and sibling tension, but temporarily, as the fact of the theatricals is predicated on the eventual restoration of the rule of the father (*Theatres of War*, p. 130).

Tom Bertram's interest in the *Heir at Law* and his desire to perform the role of Lord Duberley encourage us to reconsider his position of inheritor to the Mansfield Park estate.

Tom's choice of the role of Lord Duberley is especially revealing, for the character is a fake aristocrat, a pretender. Thus the heir to the Mansfield estate wishes to play the part of the vulgar tradesman playing the part of the aristocratic Lord. The desire to play the inauthentic peer instated by a 'freak of fortune' suggests Tom's uneasiness with the role of elder son--a role that he persistently rejects. Lord Duberley's character, decent, genial, but totally unfit for high office, accords well with Tom's cavalier attitude towards the responsibilities of his position and his light regard towards his duties as a future landowner. Mary Crawford quickly realizes that the quickest way to Tom's heart is through horse-racing and gambling--his real love-- and just as quickly perceives that his first priorities are to himself:

his lengthened absence from Mansfield, without any thing but pleasure in view, and his own will to consult, made it perfectly clear that he did not care about her; and his indifference was so much more than equalled by her own, that were he now to step forth the owner of Mansfield park, the Sir Thomas complete, which he was to be in time, she did not believe that she could accept him (*MP*, p. 114).

Mary's piqued reflections highlight the dangers which face the baronet in Antigua; at any moment Tom might be requested to 'step forth' into his father's shoes. The fear

for Sir Thomas' safety is constantly emphasized, disproportionately by Mrs Norris who longs to be the bearer of the news of his untimely decease. One of Edmund's many reasons for opposing the theatricals is fear for his father's safety: 'It would show great want of feeling on my father's account, absent as he is, and in some degree of constant danger' (*MP*, p. 125). Although the danger is not specified, the threat is from not only the 'unfavourable circumstances' in Antigua, but more significantly the dangers of the voyage home. In the event of a disaster at sea, Sir Thomas' death would place Tom in the same position as Lord Duberley, who is heir at law by dint of the shipwrecked and supposedly drowned Henry Moreland.

Austen makes it clear that Tom is *in loco parentis* in the absence of his father: 'the inclination to act was awakened, and in no one more strongly than in him who was now master of the house' (*MP*, p. 123). Tom's wish to escape the role of 'the Sir Thomas complete' is undoubtedly reflected in his desire to play the part of Lord Duberley, the comically unsatisfactory heir to the estate. If he had had his way with the Colman play, his best scene as Lord Duberley, one of conventional mistaken identity and misapprehension, would have suggested a particularly significant reading of his relationship to his father and the estate. In this scene, Stedfast, Moreland's friend, confuses Dowlas with the original Lord Duberley. The comic appeal is dependent upon the fragile equation of virtue with rank, which in this instance is shown to be falsifying:

Ignorance may palliate meanness and buffoonery, and merely meet contempt, but want of feeling excites indignation. You have shocked me, and I leave you. From exalted rank like yours, my lord, men look for exalted virtue; and when these are coupled, they command respect, and grace each other:--but the coronet, which gives and receives splendour, when fixed on the brow of merit, glitters of the worthless head, like a mark of disgrace, to render vice, folly and inhumanity conspicuous (*Colman*, p. 38).

The joke is compounded by Stedfast's surprise at finding so little physiognomical evidence of the dignity and nobility that he has been encouraged to take for granted in a peer of the realm. Stedfast's high expectations stem from an earlier scene where the

reputation of Lord Duberley has been warmly expounded by his son, who excuses his father's social reserve as a mark of his dignity:

but I confess to those who are unacquainted with them, these qualities are concealed by a coldness in his manner...a long habit too of haranguing in Parliament, gives a man a kind of dignity of deportment, and an elevation of style not to be met with every day you know. But Gentleman is written legibly upon his brow; erudition shines thro' every polished period of his language; and he is the best of men, and of fathers, believe me (*Colman*, p. 31).

In Colman's play appearances are deceptive. Dowlas neither looks nor speaks like a nobleman, and, although his good nature is undeniable, he is scorned for his natural vulgarity and 'lowness'. Conversely, Moreland's description of his father's noble physiognomy reminds us of another lofty Baronet whose countenance is repeatedly described as being marked with solemn dignity, whose coldness is felt by his children and whose conduct is not always presented as virtuous or gentlemanly: Sir Thomas Bertram. One of the most shocking moments for Fanny is when she realizes that her uncle's motives and conduct towards her are far from disinterested and noble. To her own 'infinite grief' she discovers that she has been deceived by the Baronet's outward appearance.

When Sir Thomas inadvertently makes his debut on the stage of his son's theatre, we are surely invited to compare the difference between the old Sir Thomas and the future 'Sir Thomas complete'. Tom Bertram is as uncomfortable with his future role as 'plain Daniel Dowlas of Gosport' is at playing the part of Lord Duberley. In Colman's comedy all comes right in the return of the true heir who restores everyone to their rightful social positions; the fake Lord is ejected, and the social order is maintained. Of course, in the conventions of comic theatre appearances that seem deceptive are revealed in their true light. It is only Daniel Dowlas who is surprised by the discovery that he has been merely *locum tenens* in the absence of Henry Moreland: a 'peer's warming pan' (*Colman*, p. 64).

In the more complex world of *Mansfield Park*, the social order is not so easily restored. Nor are appearances always a reliable guide to conduct, as Fanny discovers.

Tom Bertram appears to be little more than a 'warming pan', as his self-inflicted illness almost threatens to grant Mary Crawford her desire to see the younger brother become 'Sir Edmund' Bertram. But the heir by birth, who is the fake heir by nature, finally does inherit Mansfield, and the heroine, the spiritual heir to the 'great' house, is displaced to the vicarage. The social order looks decidedly shaky in *Mansfield Park*.

It is unsurprising that the other role to appeal to Tom's theatrical inclinations is that of Dr. Pangloss. If he is not to play the part of Lord Duberley, he covets the great comic role of Colman's doctor-on-the-make. When he is denied his preferred choice of play by the opposition of the rest of the cast, he happily chooses *Lovers' Vows*, rejects the role of Baron Wildenhaim and is content to appropriate a suitably humbler role to himself-- the comic, rhyming Butler.⁵¹

In taking the 'low' part of the Butler, Tom is conforming to the picture that Gillian Russell portrays of the 'retreat from the public theatre to the "private" domain of the great house', which enabled the 'elite to savour fully the pleasure of aping the lower orders' (*Theatres of War*, p. 124). As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Lord Barrymore played the roles of rustics and servants in his Wargrave playhouse. This is a striking reversal of the convention of the public theatre where a low-born actor could successfully portray the role of a gentleman. As we have seen, the actor William (Gentleman) Lewis was famous for his rendering of 'high' gentlemanly roles, and Sheridan wrote the part of the delicate and over-refined Faulkland especially for him. At Wargrave, the low-born actress Elizabeth Edwin often played the parts of aristocratic ladies to Lord Barrymore's rustics.⁵²

The low-born Irish actor William O'Brien was well-known for his performance in *High Life Below Stairs*. O'Brien played Lovel, a rich young colonial who disguises

⁵¹As A Walton Litz points out, Tom takes on a triple role in *Lovers' Vows* playing Butler/Landlord/Cottager. A Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study Of Her Artistic Development* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 123. Tom later regrets this and wishes that the play could be changed.

⁵²C. Baron Wilson, *Our Actresses*, 2 vols (London, 1844), I, p, 105.

himself as a servant and takes employment under his own Butler so that he can spy on his lazy servants. Thus, O'Brien played the part of a West Indian Merchant who played the role of a servant. As Stella Tillyard notes, the problem was that O'Brien could play the gentleman off stage as well as on it: 'In the spring of 1764 the social and metaphorical distance between the aristocratic and the theatrical house broke down altogether when Lady Susan Strangeways Fox eloped with William O'Brien'.⁵³

O'Brien's union with Lady Susan was controversial and scandalous, for it was far more common and acceptable for a lowly actress to marry into the aristocracy. When Elizabeth Farren, formerly a child actor in a company of strolling players in the provinces, became famous for her depiction of well-bred, elegant ladies at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, she was courted by the Earl of Derby.⁵⁴ Farren's meteoric rise from obscurity to the highest stratum of society, from 'a Barn to a Court', was complete when she became a countess and was presented at Court (*Memoirs of the Countess of Derby*, p. 27). Officially she was now the character that had sustained her in her numerous stage roles. Unlike O'Brien, Elizabeth Farren was highly respected and her behaviour won the approval of Queen Charlotte. She did however insist that her former life should never be mentioned.

Austen's interest in social mobility is inextricably bound up with her knowledge of eighteenth-century theatre, both public and private, where reversals of rank and station were commonplace. Lord Barrymore's well-publicized theatricals were made even more notorious by the presence and 'princely patronage' of the Prince of Wales.⁵⁵ The Prince's connections with low-born actresses, most famously Mary 'Perdita'

⁵³See Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox 1740-1832* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), p. 183.

⁵⁴See Petronius Arbiter, *Memoirs of the Present Countess of Derby* (London, 1797).

⁵⁵See *Truth opposed to Fiction, or an Impartial Review of the Late Earl of Barrymore by a personal observer* (London, 1793).

Robinson, no doubt added to the controversy. Austen's juvenilia shows her poking fun at the Prince's notorious relationships with low-born women.⁵⁶

Part one of the thesis has demonstrated that Austen particularly relished cross-over farces such as *The Devil to Pay* and *High Life Below Stairs*, where reversals of rank and station were employed to reflect upon social conduct, and where low life was used to criticize high life. In *Mansfield Park*, her preoccupation with the blurring of the boundaries between the ranks is suggested from the opening pages where Sir Thomas and Mrs Norris are keen that Fanny should know her place and not be considered 'a *Miss Bertram*' (*MP*, p. 10). Sir Thomas is keen to emphasize that the cousins are not 'equals': 'Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different' (*MP*, p. 11). However, by the end of the novel, he is compelled to re-assess his thinking about the differences between the 'low' Price children and his own highly-bred children. Sir Thomas duly acknowledges, 'In [Susan's] usefulness, in Fanny's excellence, in William's continued good conduct, and rising fame, and in the general well-doing and success of the other members of the family, all assisting to advance each other...the advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure' (*MP*, p. 473).

Austen's unashamed delight in Elizabeth's and Jane Bennet's social mobility in *Pride and Prejudice* is somewhat tempered in her depiction of the social mobility of Fanny and Susan Price, where endurance and hard work are emphasized. For William Price (and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion*), Austen uses the forum of the Navy to emphasize the claims of innate merit and talent over social position and inherited wealth. In eighteenth-century comedies such as *The Heir at Law*, and *She Stoops to Conquer*, the stock-character of the profligate son and heir to the estate who refuses to commit to his appropriate social role is used to reflect favourably upon lesser-ranking characters.

⁵⁶See *MW*, p. 29.

Tom's preoccupation with *The Heir at Law* suggests, even more forcibly, that Austen was well attuned to the nuances of eighteenth-century social class and identity, as explored in the drama. Tom's uneasiness with his identity of heir to Mansfield Park is connected to his sense of the theatricality of social behaviour. He has already discovered that appearance is not necessarily a safe guide to conduct: 'Manners as well as appearance are, generally speaking, so totally different' (*MP*, p. 49). His amusing account of his social blunder on the mysteries of female protocol, of the Miss Anderson who was 'not out', and the Miss Sneyd who was 'out' (*MP*, p. 50) is in the style of eighteenth-century's comedy's endless play on rank and manners; a convention that Tom is particularly attuned to.

Miss Anderson's ambiguous social conduct is a source of embarrassment for Tom. Her behaviour when she is 'not out' is not so much excessive modesty as downright rudeness: 'I could hardly get a word or a look from the young lady--nothing like a civil answer--she screwed up her mouth, and turned from me with such an air!' (*MP*, p. 50). But what is worse for Tom is when Miss Anderson, who is now 'out', displays a pushy, flirtatious manner in public: 'She came up to me, claimed me as an acquaintance, stared me out of countenance, and talked and laughed till I did not know which way to look. I felt that I must be the jest of the room at the time--and Miss Crawford, it is plain, has heard the story' (*MP*, p. 50).

Likewise, Tom's 'dreadful scrape' at Ramsgate with the younger Miss Sneyd who is 'not out' is caused by misleading female dress codes that fail to denote behaviour. Mary Crawford's distinction between the protocol of the 'out' and the 'not out' girl is 'a close bonnet' (*MP*, p. 49), but Tom's blunder is occasioned by Miss Sneyd's failure to appear in an appropriately coded costume: 'The close bonnet and demure air...tell one what is expected; but I got into a dreadful scrape last year from the want of them' (*MP*, p. 51).

In Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1771), a comedy premised on the ambiguities of social class and the discrepancies between rank and manners, the plot is based upon a similar social blunder by a young gentleman. Marlow mistakes a

gentleman for an inn-keeper partly because 'manners and appearance' are 'so totally different' (*MP*, p. 49). Furthermore, Kate Hardcastle's disguise as a barmaid is a voluntary undertaking of the reversal of the class roles in order to 'conquer' the socially awkward Marlow who is reduced to inarticulacy by genteel women.⁵⁷ But it is her father's insistence on her wearing a plain dress which first confuses Marlow, and the success of her plot is dependent upon the bonnet she wears in their first meeting which enables her to carry out her disguise.

Tom's impatience with the mores of civilized society is shown by his languid observations on dancing (an important and necessary part of the social environment), and his focusing of the scene into a fantasy of sexual intrigue:

'I only wonder how the good people can keep it up so long.-- They had need be *all* in love, to find any amusement in such folly--and so they are, I fancy. If you look at them, you may see they are so many couple of lovers--all but Yates and Mrs Grant-- and, between ourselves, she, poor woman! must want a lover as much as any one of them. A desperate dull life her's must be with the doctor' (*MP*, 118-119).

His observation on the Grant's ill-suited marriage comes straight out of stage comedy. Dr Grant's pretty wife is 'fifteen years his junior' and suffers at the hands of her apoplectic, gormandizing husband. Their type of union, the sexually deficient older man, who is cuckolded by his beautiful young wife, had been a topic of comic convention ever since the Restoration. Eighteenth century comedy is full of plot lines where young wives, like Sheridan's Lady Teazle, are tempted by rakes, repent of their flightiness, and are reconciled to their old spouses. Tom's speculation about Mrs Grant's sexually unfulfilled marriage suggests Yates as a candidate for the lover she needs to assuage her 'desperate dull life'.

⁵⁷In Goldsmith's comedy, it is not only Marlow who is uncomfortable with genteel women and happy in the company of 'females of another class'. Tony Lumpkin and Mr Hardcastle are more relaxed in the company of their servants than their genteel guests. At the arrival of Marlow and Hastings, Lumpkin asks his yokel friends to leave with the words, 'Gentlemen...they mayn't be good enough company for you'. See Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer*, ed. Tom Davies (London: Black, 1979), p. 18.

Tom's aside reveals a comic propensity for viewing life through the spectacles of theatre, a propensity which should not be underestimated in a novel which uses theatricality and role-playing to comment upon social behaviour. It is in yet another of his seemingly careless asides that he first draws an explicit parallel between real life and theatricality. Yates's endless preoccupation with the termination of the private theatricals at Ecclesford, due to the death of a dowager grandmother, provokes another theatrical joke from Tom: 'An after-piece instead of a comedy...Lovers' Vows were at an end, and Lord and Lady Ravenshaw left to act *My Grandmother* by themselves' (*MP*, p. 122-123).

Ostensibly, Tom's comment reveals how he has such a vast repertoire of eighteenth-century plays in his head that he can produce a theatrical witticism for any occasion. *My Grandmother*, a popular farce by Prince Hoare, was indeed performed as an 'afterpiece' to the main play, as were most eighteenth-century farces.⁵⁸ After the death of the dowager and the departure of the young people, Lord and Lady Ravenshaw are left to perform that ultimate after-piece, a funeral. But Tom's remark shows a more complex investment in theatricality than merely a knowledge of contemporary plays.

Tom's pun is dependent upon us perceiving a literal interpretation of the plays' titles to convey the 'real' situation (the death of a grandmother, or love-play between young people), and it also confirms a literal understanding of the nature of the relationship between title and plot. This makes it startlingly clear that 'Lovers' Vows' is to be regarded as *double entendre* for young lovers engaging in love-play, making and breaking promises.⁵⁹ Tom is thus the first character to make the fertile

⁵⁸*My Grandmother* was first performed 16, December 1793 at the Haymarket Theatre, but soon became so popular that it was later performed as a mainpiece.

⁵⁹ The significance of the play's deeply ironic title is made doubly clear later on in Mrs Norris' description of the play to Lady Bertram, 'It is about Lovers' Vows' (*MP*, p. 167). I cannot concur with Chapman's proposal (*MP*, p. 544) that Austen is suggesting Mrs Norris' theatrical ignorance in this comment. I would suggest quite the reverse, that although she earlier claims that she doesn't know the play, she knows enough about it to screen her sister from watching the rehearsal. As Mrs Norris bluntly confirms, the play *is* 'about Lovers' Vows'. On the other hand, Rushworth's comment in the

connection between real life and theatricality, which is then further explored not only by the paralleling of *Lovers' Vows* with the novel, but also by the interplay between role-playing and social conduct.

first edition *is* highly suggestive of theatrical ignorance. In the first edition he says *it is to be called Lovers' Vows*, but this was changed in the second edition to *it is to be Lovers' Vows* (*MP*, p. 138). Chapman writes that Austen 'may have repented of the hit at poor Mr Rushworth (perhaps in consideration of his having seen the play in London)', *MP*, p. 544. This seems a good explanation, although we must lament this loss of Rushworth's blunder which would have played off nicely against Tom's theatrical sophistication and wit.

'Nature and Feeling': The new naturalism

Lionel Trilling's misleading claim about the insincerity of role-playing, and the dangers of acting leading to a compromising of the individual self, has been countered by Marilyn Butler's brilliant insight in *The War of Ideas*. Butler argues that Trilling's claim is near the opposite of the truth:

In touching one another or making love to one another on the stage these four [Mary/Edmund and Henry/Maria] are not adopting a pose, but are, on the contrary, expressing their real feelings. The impropriety lies in the fact that they are *not* acting, but are finding an indirect means to gratify desires which are illicit, and should have been contained (*War of Ideas*, p. 232).

Austen explicitly points to Edmund's absorption in 'his theatrical and his real part' (*MP*, p. 163). Even though he expresses doubt, initially, about his closeness to the role of Anhalt: 'the man who chooses the profession itself, is, perhaps, one of the last who would wish to represent it on the stage' (*MP*, p. 145), he is unable to resist the allure of Mary's bold request: 'What gentleman among you am I to have the pleasure of making love to?' (*MP*, p. 143).

Austen also plays with the eighteenth-century notion of 'naturalism' in acting to convey the idea that the four lovers are expressing real feelings. Thus Fanny notes that 'Maria ...acted well--too well' (*MP*, p. 165). And Mary Crawford quips that 'those indefatigable rehearsers, Agatha and Frederick' should excel at their parts, for they are so often embracing: 'If *they* are not perfect, I *shall* be surprised' (*MP*, p. 169). Mary's reference to Henry and Maria by their stage names is a reminder of their emotional identification with the roles of Agatha and Frederick.

The stage directions of the first act of *Lovers' Vows* reveal the 'dangerous intimacy' of Tom's theatre (*MP*, p. 462): '[*Rising and Embracing him*]', '[*leans her head against his breast*]', '[*He embraces her*]', '[*Agatha presses him to her breast*]', '[*Frederick with his eyes cast down, takes her hand, and puts it to his heart*].' This final direction is at the point where Henry and Maria are later interrupted by Sir

Thomas' arrival, which shows how closely Austen followed Mrs Inchbald's stage directions. Ironically, Agatha's words which precede this direction are, 'His flattery made me vain, and his repeated vows--' (*MP*, p. 487). Henry's act of retaining Maria's hand after Julia's melodramatic announcement of Sir Thomas's arrival gives Maria the false impression that the gesture denotes an implicit lover's vow, and she fully expects that this will be followed by a formal declaration for her hand.⁶⁰ After days of anxious waiting, 'the agony of her mind was severe' when she discovers that no declaration is to be made: 'The hand which had so pressed her's to his heart!--The hand and the heart were alike motionless and passive now!' (*MP*, p. 193).

As well as watching Henry and Maria engaging in love-play, Fanny is compelled to be the 'judge and critic' of the rehearsal between Mary and Edmund and afterwards reflects on the unhappy experience: 'she was inclined to believe their performance would, indeed, have such nature and feeling in it, as must ensure their credit, and make it a very suffering exhibition to herself' (*MP*, p. 170).

Fanny's observation is, of course, heavily ironic: she is referring, not to Edmund's and Mary's acting abilities, but to the display of their real feelings. However, the combination of the words 'nature and feeling' in the context of acting would have had deep resonances with Austen's early readers, especially as Edmund Kean had recently made his electrifying debut on the London stage. Kean's 'natural' style fuelled a long-standing debate, going back to Macklin and Garrick, about traditional styles of acting in tragedy versus the new naturalism.

From the second half of the eighteenth century some leading actors, such as Macklin and Garrick, began to think analytically about the nature of their art. The declamatory, rhetorical approach, with its 'rants and 'starts', represented by the Cibber, Booth and Wilks school of acting was slowly reformed by a shift in emphasis from exaggeration to 'naturalism', from tradition to originality.⁶¹ The formal, rhetorical

⁶⁰See *MP*, p. 176, & pp. 191-194.

⁶¹See Alan S. Downer, 'Nature to Advantage Dressed: Eighteenth-Century Acting', *PMLA* 58 (1943), 1002-37, and Lily B. Campbell, 'The Rise of a Theory of Stage Presentation in England during the

tradition represented by James Quin was challenged by Macklin and Garrick, and, rather than simply imitating nature, the new 'naturalist' approach accepted the actor's right to freedom of interpretation.

The birth of the new naturalist approach is memorialized in the story of Garrick's appearance at Goodman's Fields in *Richard III* and Quin's shocked exclamation, 'That if the young fellow was right, he, and the rest of the players, had been all wrong'.⁶² Richard Cumberland, who saw Garrick and Quin acting the principal male leads in *The Fair Penitent*, was astonished by Garrick's performance: 'it seemed as if a whole century had been stepped over in the transition of a single scene'.⁶³ However, even before Garrick, Macklin had challenged the rhetorical and formal tradition to acting. For example his unconventional approach to Hamlet's first meeting with the ghost was played with an understated simplicity and respect rather than the expected exaggerated and bombastic 'starts' and 'rants'.⁶⁴

The 'rant', which was the conventional mode of delivery for tragedy, became 'the most unvarying subject of attack by theatrical critics'.⁶⁵ Both Arthur Murphy and Thomas Davies in their biographies of Garrick describe him as having banished 'ranting'.⁶⁶ Austen shows her own awareness of the practice of ranting in *Mansfield*

Eighteenth Century', *PMLA* 32 (1917), 163-200.

⁶²See Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of Garrick*, 2 vols (Boston, 1818), I, p. 46.

⁶³*Memoirs of Richard Cumberland*, ed. Henry Flanders (New York, 1856, repr. Benjamin Blom, 1969), p. 47.

⁶⁴Davies records: 'After the short ejaculation of "Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!" he endeavoured to conquer that fear and terror into which he was naturally thrown by the first sight of the vision, and uttered the remainder of the address calmly, but respectfully, and with a firm tone of voice, as from one who had subdued his timidity and apprehension'. Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies*, 3 vols (London, 1785), III, p. 30.

⁶⁵See Downer, p. 1021.

⁶⁶Murphy describes Garrick's rescue of the drama 'from its lowest ebb: in tragedy, declamation roared in a most unnatural strain; rant was passion; whining was grief; vociferation was terror, and drawling accents were the voice of love', see Murphy's *Life of David Garrick*, 2 vols (London, 1801), I, p. 17. Davies records: 'Mr. Garrick shone forth like a theatrical Newton; he threw new light on elocution and action; he banished ranting, bombast and grimace; and restored nature, ease, simplicity, and genuine humour'. See Davies, *Memoirs of Garrick*, I, p. 45.

Park, when she depicts her dilettante actor John Yates as one who 'rants' and 'starts' in the style of the old school: 'Mr. Yates was in general thought to rant dreadfully' (*MP*, p. 164). At Ecclesford Yates had 'grudged every rant of Lord Ravenshaw's and been forced to re-rant it all in his own room' (*MP*, p. 132).

On the other hand, Henry Crawford is regarded by the theatrical party as an accomplished actor: 'he had more confidence than Edmund, more judgment than Tom, more talent and taste than Mr. Yates' (*MP*, p. 165). It is little surprise that the only character, apart from Rushworth, to dislike Henry's acting style is Yates, who exclaims against 'his tameness and insipidity' (*MP*, p. 165). The histrionic, ranting Yates would, of course, find Henry's naturalism too tame. Fanny, on the other hand, finds Henry's style 'truly dramatic': 'His acting had first taught Fanny what pleasure a play might give' (*MP*, p. 337).

In Austen's era, actors such as Cooke and Siddons followed Garrick in their belief that it was not enough to copy nature, but to interpret it, and both expressed the need for emotional identification in their work. For some leading actors, losing yourself in the role was desirable. Leigh Hunt observes that Siddons 'has the air of never being the actress; she seems unconscious that there is a motley crowd called a pit waiting to applaud her, or that there are a dozen fiddlers waiting for her exit'.⁶⁷ But not every actor expressed the need for emotional identification in their work. Samuel Johnson enquired of Kemble, 'Are you, sir, one of those enthusiasts who believe yourself transformed into the very character you represent?'. Boswell records 'Upon Mr. Kemble's answering that he never felt so strong a persuasion himself; "to be sure not, Sir, (said Johnson) the thing is impossible. And if Garrick really believed himself to be that monster, Richard III, he deserved to be hanged every time he performed it"⁶⁸

⁶⁷See Hunt's *Dramatic Essays*, ed. William Archer and Robert W. Lowe (London, 1894), p. 13.

⁶⁸See Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 6 vols (Oxford, 1937), IV, pp. 243-244.

In *Tom Jones*, Fielding's own comic depiction of the debate is mediated through the less sophisticated viewpoint of Partridge. Tom Jones is eager for a criticism of Garrick 'unadulterated by art' and informed by 'the simple dictates of nature', and is amused to discover that Partridge dislikes Garrick's Hamlet because it is too true to life: 'why I could act as well as he myself. I am sure if I had seen a ghost, I should have looked in the very same manner, and done just what he did.'⁶⁹ Partridge prefers the exaggerated histrionic acting of Claudius because he 'speaks all his words distinctly, half as loud again as the other.--Any body may see he is an actor.' (Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones*, I, p. 857).

Fielding's fictionalizing of Garrick's naturalistic performance seen through the eyes of the naive Partridge is a reminder of the way in which the actor's art became the subject of analysis and discussion in the Georgian era.⁷⁰ In *Mansfield Park*, Austen uses private theatricals rather than the public theatre to explore her own interest in the debate. Her allusions therefore to the 'nature and feeling' of her four principals, and her comparison of the ranting Yates with the naturalism of Henry Crawford would not have been lost on her first readers, especially as Kean's realism questioned the relationship between artistic convention and life.⁷¹

Although Kean made his debut shortly after the completion of *Mansfield Park*, it is nevertheless intriguing that Austen writes about him in the context of her novel.

⁶⁹Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), II, p. 852-857.

⁷⁰A number of acting handbooks were published during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Macklin even established a training school to advocate his naturalistic approach. See *Restoration and Georgian England: Theatre in Europe: A Documentary History*, ed. David Thomas and Arnold Hare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 342-348.

⁷¹The words 'nature' and 'feeling' were often applied to Kean. Sir George Beaumont raved that 'no actor since Garrick exhibited so much genuine *feeling of nature*' and was 'wholly free from the measured and artificial practise of the Kemble school', see Harold Newcombe Hillebrand, *Edmund Kean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), p. 119. Byron was mesmerized by Kean and recorded his impression in his journal: 'Just returned from seeing Kean in Richard. By Jove, he is a soul! Life --nature --truth--without exaggeration or diminution...Richard is a man; and Kean is Richard'. See *Byron's Life, Letters and Journals*, ed. Thomas Moore (London, 1854), p. 222.

In the midst of her enthusiasm about *Mansfield Park*, her train of thought slides from Henry Austen's reading of the novel to Henry Crawford to Kean:

Henry has this moment said that he likes my M. P. better & better;--he is in the 3d vol.--I beleive [sic] *now* he has changed his mind as to foreseeing the end;--he said yesterday at least, that he defied anybody to say whether H. C. would be reformed, or would forget Fanny in a fortnight.--I shall like to see Kean again excessively, & to see him with You too;--it appeared to me that there was no fault in him anywhere (*Letters*, p. 258).

Critics have perceived a source for Henry Crawford in the theatre-loving, soldier-banker-turned-clergyman Henry Austen. But what is striking about this letter, in terms of *Mansfield Park's* hitherto uneasy relationship with the theatre, is that far from being scornful, she enthusiastically reverts to thinking of Kean and the theatre in the context of 'H. C.' It is highly appropriate that Henry Crawford wishes to 'undertake any character that ever was written, from Shylock or Richard III' (*MP*, p. 123), for those were the two parts with which Kean made his name .

Having just completed the novel that dealt most exclusively with her interest in the relationship between art and life, it is highly fitting that Austen was disposed to be pleased with the style of acting heralded by Kean. Unlike Dr. Johnson, she does not express any moral concern for the actor's emotional and intellectual identification with the role, but sees, on the contrary, that it creates 'exquisite acting'. It is almost absurd to suggest, as Trilling does, that in *Mansfield Park* acting is seen to diminish the integrity of the individual self.⁷² Fanny not only masters Rushworth's part, but she masters every part in the play in her unofficial capacity as prompter, and, consequently, is persuaded to play the role of Cottager's wife. Furthermore, far from proposing that acting encourages a kind of insincere role-playing in life, an ability to

⁷²Trilling observes, 'It is the fear that the impersonation of a bad or inferior character will have a harmful effect upon the impersonator, that, indeed, the impersonation of any other self will diminish the integrity of the self' (*The Opposing Self*, p. 218). In a later study, Trilling also compares Plato's moral objection to acting with Rousseau's, for encouraging a falsifying of the self and a weakening of the fabric of society. See Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 64-79.

perform socially is often perceived as a necessity in Austen's depiction of polite society.⁷³

Austen's preoccupation with the relationship between artistic convention and 'real life' is further explored by the interplay between role-playing and social conduct. This allows her to explore the difficulties for characters restricted by social mores, which force them to behave in a particular manner. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Mrs Dashwood anxiously demands if Willoughby has 'been acting a part' throughout his courtship of Marianne. In the equally morally ambiguous world of *Mansfield Park*, Austen consistently puns on the words 'act' and 'acting' to blur the distinctions between role-playing and social conduct.⁷⁴ Austen fully exploits this motif with Henry Crawford. Thus when he informs Fanny of his reformation from an absentee landlord to a responsible landlord, Austen alerts us to the possibility of doubt: 'This was aimed, and well aimed, at Fanny. It was pleasing to hear him speak so properly; here, he had been acting as he ought to do' (*MP*, p. 404). Critics such as Claudia Johnson and Joseph Litvak believe that the major characters in *Mansfield Park* are acting all the time.⁷⁵

In contrast to the Crawfords, who have mastered the art of *social role-playing*, Tom Bertram is rendered uneasy by the rules of civilized society, for, as he has discovered with Miss Sneyd and Miss Anderson, they often breed deception and confusion. More than any other character in the novel, Tom is alert to the discrepancy

⁷³ Austen is keenly aware of the necessity for certain kinds of social conduct, which may conflict with the beliefs of the individual. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor's prudent social conduct is contrasted with Marianne's often ill-judged insistence upon being true to herself.

⁷⁴ It is also revealing that both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* follow the more conventional comic pattern of contrasting the country with the city—comparing 'real' behaviour with affected behaviour.

⁷⁵ Johnson observes, 'Mrs. Norris plays the self-sacrificing sister and aunt, Maria and Julia the parts of proper young ladies, and Edmund the highminded priest', and singles out Sir Thomas as a particularly effective actor, see *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, p. 101. Joseph Litvak argues that even Fanny Price cannot help but to act a part: 'All along in eschewing acting, Fanny has in fact been playing a role, albeit "sincerely"... From Henry's performance she learns not the necessity of acting, but the impossibility of *not* acting'. See *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), p. 21.

between manners and appearance, and the theatricality of social conduct, and thus it is through his eyes that we witness the *eclaircissement* of the *Lovers' Vows* sequence: Sir Thomas Bertram's stage debut.

Sir Thomas's Stage Debut

The difference between the *bon ton* theatricals of the aristocracy and those of the gentrified and professional classes has been discussed in Chapter 1. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen distinguishes the fashionably elite theatricals of the aristocracy from those of the squirearchy in her portrayal of Tom's aristocratic 'friend', the Honourable Mr Yates, who brings the 'itch' for acting from the Ecclesford theatricals. Richard Yates (1706-1796) was the name of the popular actor and comedian who was the first Oliver Surface in Drury Lane's *School for Scandal*. He was part of a famous acting couple, with his wife Mary Anne Yates (1728-1787), who was a famous tragedian often compared to Siddons, and one of Garrick's leading ladies.⁷⁶

Mrs Yates was often compared with another leading actress of the eighteenth-century stage, the tragedienne, Mrs Ann Crawford (1734-1801).⁷⁷ Crawford was known as the 'lover of the stage'.⁷⁸ She was also part of a famous acting couple with the notoriously 'handsome, volatile, and noisy' Thomas (Billy) Crawford (1750-1794).⁷⁹ Campbell writes in his biography of Siddons: 'Next to Mrs. Pritchard in point of time, our two greatest actresses were Mrs. Yates and Mrs. Crawford. They were contemporaries and great rivals; the former bearing the palm for dignity and sculptresque beauty, while the latter, though less pleasing in looks, had more passion and versatility'.⁸⁰ The names Yates and Crawford were thus linked in the theatre-

⁷⁶See *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, 16, p. 314-319.

⁷⁷See William Hawkins, *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose and Theatrical Biography* (London, 1792).

⁷⁸See John Bernard, *Retrospections of the Stage*, 2 vols (London, 1830), I, pp. 278-280.

⁷⁹This was Hannah's More's description of Crawford in a letter to Garrick. See *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, 4, p.34. When Crawford married Ann, in 1778, she was the leading tragedian at Covent Garden and was able to get an engagement for her husband. They then went to Drury Lane, but left after a season. She soon left him and tried to recover her previous glory. See Thomas Gilliland, *Dramatic Mirror*, 2 vols (London, 1808).

⁸⁰Thomas Campbell, *Life of Mrs Siddons* (New York, 1834), p. 87, p. 63.

world, not only because they were famous tragediennes in their own right, but because they were both married to famous actors.

Austen's allusion to the names Yates and Crawford in the context of her private theatre would not have been lost to her readers who were no doubt familiar with the famous eighteenth-century theatrical dynasties. The romantic pairings of the real-life Yateses and Crawfords add an extra dimension to Austen's use of the names in *Mansfield Park*. The two characters who are excluded from the theatrical party, Fanny Price and Julia Bertram, come closer to the Georgian theatrical world when they (potentially, in Fanny's case) become Mrs Crawford and Mrs Yates.

The events at Ecclesford are curiously proleptic of the events at Mansfield Park. *Lovers' Vows* is provokingly interrupted on both occasions. The Ecclesford group are banished upon grounds of strict propriety: 'Lord Ravenshaw, who I suppose is one of the most correct men in England, would not hear of it' (*MP*, p. 122). Similarly, the impropriety of putting on a play when Sir Thomas is 'in some degree of constant danger' is one of Edmund's objections. Death has broken up the Ecclesford theatre. Even the public theatres closed for the day when a royal death occurred. The point is clear: that if news came back of Sir Thomas' death, the play would be interrupted in the same way as at Ecclesford, and *Lovers' Vows* would again be broken up, this time leaving Lady Bertram alone to act the after-piece of 'The Widow' or *The Distressed Mother*. Lady Bertam certainly 'acts' the part of a grieving mother when she hears the news of Tom's decline: 'It was a sort of playing at being frightened' (*MP*, p. 427).

Lord Ravenshaw's theatrical party, which includes a scattering of the aristocracy (Lord and Lady Ravenshaw are joined by the Honourable John Yates, a Sir Henry, and even a duke), is conducted on suitably lavish terms. Tom's desire to 'raise a little theatre at Mansfield' (*MP*, p. 123) evinces an ambition for something more extravagant than the makeshift theatres of the gentry. His longing for the 'Ecclesford theatre and scenery to try something with' is contrasted with Maria's entreaty to 'make the *performance*, not the *theatre*, our object' (*MP*, p. 124). Even Henry's suggestion

that there is more to a theatre than the buildings and scenery fails to satisfy Tom: 'and for a theatre, what signifies a theatre? We shall only be amusing ourselves. Any room in this house might suffice'. Tom 'concedes to a makeshift theatre on the proviso that there are at least some theatrical accoutrements, a 'green curtain and a little carpenter's work' (*MP*, p. 127). Only then can he begin to envisage a prospective theatrical venue ensuing from the conversion of two rooms by 'merely moving the book-case in my father's room' (*MP*, p.125).

Tom concentrates his theatrical energies behind the scenes. He is a committed manager, obsessed with the minutiae of stagecraft; he consults with the carpenters, he sets up a committee to pore over the text, to cut and lop where necessary, he suggests ideas for Fanny's costume and stage make-up, he is even prepared to ride across the country to find one more actor for his company (*MP*, p. 148). His efforts to professionalize the theatre are compounded by an adoption of theatrical language: he speaks of his 'company', the 'green room'; the billiard room is now '*the Theatre*'. Rather than respecting the 'privacy of the representation' he gives 'an invitation to every family who came in his way' (*MP*, p. 164). *Having learnt his part, 'all his parts'*, he is impatient to act.

Roger Sales has argued that *Mansfield Park* should be considered in the context of the 1810-1812 Regency crisis. Sales has suggested the Prince Regent as a likely source for Tom Bertram, who has his own unruly 'regency' at Mansfield Park whilst his father is absent in Antigua.⁸¹ However, Tom's attempts at *bon ton* theatricals are far more akin to those of Barrymore at Wargrave. Soon after his death, Barrymore was condemned for engaging in 'the most ridiculous, expensive, profuse and prodigal scheme, that ever signaled a predilection for *private theatricals*'.⁸² Other complaints levied against his private theatre were rehearsals practised by night in

⁸¹See Sales, pp. 71-72, & 93-106.

⁸²*Truth opposed to Fiction*, p. 34.

preference to day, 'beginning at nine or ten and concluding at four or five in the morning' (*Truth Opposed to Fiction*, p. 37). Dress rehearsals took place on a Sunday when the professional actors were free. Tickets were 'distributed to all the families of fashion and eminence in the surrounding neighbourhood', and 'sums exceeding all rational comprehension, all *common* credulity, (to the amount of forty or fifty thousand) have been most degradingly lavished in every scene of riot, debauchery and extravagance' (pp. 38- 40).

Barrymore's 'infatuation' with his theatre was condemned: 'he became so severely infected with the deceptive *glee*, the affected *mirth*, the superficial *wit*, the interested *politesse*, the *political attachment*, the general *levity*, the charactersitic *indigence*, and attracting tout ensemble of a GREEN ROOM' (pp. 44-45). Only after his death, are the house and village rescued from 'the appearance of a *metropolis* in *miniature*' and restored to a 'truly remote and rusticated village' (pp. 36-37).

This is analogous to the sophisticated Londoners, Henry and Mary Crawford, bringing their city values to the country.

Tom's desire to ape Lord Ravenshaw, not only by choosing *Lovers' Vows*, but by longing for 'the Ecclesford theatre and the scenery', resonates with the fashionably elite theatricals of the aristocracy. His rendering of the 'low roles', the Butler and Cottager, also reflects Barrymore's performance of rustics and servants at Wargrave. Tom's responsibility for the theatricals is made clear: 'the inclination to act was awakened, and in no one more strongly than in him who was now master of the house' (*MP*, 123).⁸³

The disruptive consequences of Tom's theatricalizing are most powerfully realized at the end of the first volume of *Mansfield Park* with the unexpected return of Sir Thomas. The first full dress rehearsal of *Lovers' Vows* has just begun when Sir

⁸³ Avrom Fleishman's anti-aristocracy reading of *Mansfield Park* is illuminating, but he is incorrect in ascribing both the proposal for the Mansfield theatricals and the choice of play to Mr. Yates, see Fleishman's *A Reading of 'Mansfield Park'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), p. 26. It is Tom Bertram who is made fully responsible for the scheme. See *MP*, pp. 123 & 132.

Thomas makes his own melodramatic entrance from the West Indies. Sir Thomas interrupts a moment of high drama on stage, leading to a moment of high drama off stage.

The whole sequence of Sir Thomas's return and the termination of the *Lovers' Vows* is deliciously comic. The opening scene of the play is interrupted at the precise moment when Agatha is explaining the circumstances of her seduction and ruination to her son Frederick. At this point in Inchabld's play the stage directions reveal that Frederick 'takes the hand of Agatha and puts it to his heart'. Austen's specificity reveals her close knowledge of the play: 'Frederick was listening with looks of devotion to Agatha's narrative, and pressing her hand to her heart' (*MP*, p. 175). This moment occurs about ten minutes into the opening scene at the end of Agatha's speech.⁸⁴

[H]e talked of love and promised me marriage...His flattery made me vain, and his repeated vows---Don't look at me, dear Frederick!--I can say no more. [Frederick *with his eyes cast down, takes her hand, and puts it to his heart.*] Oh! Oh! my son! I was intoxicated by the fervent caresses of a young, inexperienced, capricious man, and did not recover from the delirium till it was too late (*MP*, p. 487).

The tableau on stage is framed, specifically, within the structure of the novel. In the Sotherton chapel, Julia directs the rest of the group to the visual tableau of the marriage between Rushworth and Maria. Now, Austen repeats the motif, except that, even more spectacularly, she uses the moment to end the first volume of the novel. Furthermore, this time the tableau is itself a theatrical one--quite literally it forms the first scene of the first act of *Lovers' Vows*. Instead of Maria and Rushworth at the altar, a legitimate and formalized version of love, we now see Maria and Henry in a physical embrace. It is Julia who once again, as in the Sotherton chapel, directs our gaze to the tableau, but this time there is a double focus: the reader watches a

⁸⁴The play opens with a short scene between Landlord/ Tom and Agatha/Maria, then with Frederick/Henry, Agatha/Maria and Landlord/Tom, and then the Landlord exits, leaving Agatha and Frederick centre stage.

character in the novel watching a character on stage. Furthermore, the scene is not filtered through the eyes of Fanny, for she is also on the stage, about to take her part. It is Julia's re-entrance and horrified cry that ends the first volume: 'My father is come! He is in the hall at this moment' (*MP*, p. 172).

At the beginning of the second volume Austen raises the curtain to reveal the frozen tableau of the cast on stage, motionless and fearful in the 'terrible pause' which precedes 'the corroborating sounds of opening doors and footsteps' (*MP*, p. 175). Once again, silence is used to characterize the attitudes of the group. In *Mansfield Park*, Frederick's pointed gesture of retaining Agatha's hand close to his heart does not go unnoticed by Julia, who literally exits the stage in protest with a suitably frosty closing line, 'I need not be afraid of appearing before him' (*MP*, p. 175). Austen's reference to Henry and Maria by their stage names signifies that we are watching the lovers on a stage, about to rehearse their opening scene, the sentimental reunion of a mother and her son. But offstage we are also about to witness another reunion scene, that between Sir Thomas and his family.

The tone of the narrative lightens with the piqued exit of Julia which breaks the on-stage tableau. The Bertram brothers also exit hastily 'feeling the necessity of doing something'. Whilst the Bertrams hurriedly leave the stage to face their father in the drawing room, Austen completes the scene with the rake, Henry, wickedly encouraging the fop, Rushworth, to 'pay his respects to Sir Thomas without delay' and sending him through the door after the others 'with delighted haste' (*MP*, p. 176). The Crawfords, naturally, make their own perfectly timed exit and Fanny exits hesitatingly, leaving Yates centre stage.

Sir Thomas' family reunion in the drawing room is one of intense dramatic irony, for we know, along with Fanny, that at any minute 'unsuspected vexation was probably ready to burst on him' (*MP*, p. 178). His entrance into the drawing room is comically marked by Mrs Norris' 'instinctive caution with which she had whisked away Mr. Rushworth's pink satin cloak as her brother-in-law entered' (*MP*, p. 179-180).

Austen invites us to enjoy the discomfort of a pregnant and highly awkward social situation. Furthermore, rather than the gothic father figure that Fanny has come to expect, Austen delights in surprising her with a much-changed Sir Thomas, who is physically altered: 'His manner seemed changed; his voice was quick from the agitation of joy, and all that had been awful in his dignity seemed lost in tenderness' (*MP*, p. 178). Furthermore, 'the delights of his sensations in being again in his own house, in the centre of his family, after such a separation, made him communicative and chatty in a very unusual degree' (*MP*, p. 178).

But it is not only the master of the house who seems predisposed for chat. In the 'elation of her spirits Lady Bertram became talkative' And it is her unusual garrulousness that so comically lets the cat out of the bag: 'How do you think the young people have been amusing themselves lately, Sir Thomas? They have been acting. We have been all alive with acting' (*MP*, p. 181). Austen adds, mischievously, 'and what were the sensations of her children upon hearing her'.

The culmination of the theatrical saga comes in the uproariously comic moment of Sir Thomas' own stage debut. Wishing to take a look at his 'own dear room' the master of the house enters his study to discover general confusion and upheaval, notably the removal of the bookcase from the adjoining door, which we know leads directly to 'the theatre'. Hearing a strange 'hallooing' in the next room Sir Thomas passes through the door and finds himself face to face with the ranting Yates 'who appeared likely to knock him down backwards' (*MP*, p. 182). This moment of quasi-farcical humour is compounded by the sardonic description of Yates 'giving perhaps the very best start he had ever given in the whole course of his rehearsals' as he almost knocks the august Sir Thomas off-balance.

The quasi-farcical moment of Sir Thomas's great comic entrance onto the stage at Mansfield is generally agreed to crystallize Austen's interplay between life and theatre, novel and play. But what is most striking about this scene is that it is witnessed by Tom Bertram from the back of what has become the auditorium. The ironies of the scene are focused through the eyes of Tom, who can barely contain

himself with laughter at the sight of his father's near pratfall. Crucially, then, it is only Tom who witnesses this piece of real-life theatre.

Tom's amusement runs deeper than an impartial appreciation of the farcical potential of the scene: 'His father's looks of solemnity and amazement on this his first appearance on any stage, and the gradual metamorphosis of the impassioned Baron Wildenheim into the well-bred and easy Mr. Yates, making his bow and apology to Sir Thomas Bertram was such an exhibition, such *a piece of true acting*, as he would not have lost upon any account' (my italics, *MP*, p. 182). The fluidity of the sentence, itself metamorphosing through four personae from 'His father --to Baron Wildenheim-- to Mr. Yates-- to Sir Thomas Bertram', is richly suggestive of the blurring of distinctions between theatricality and reality. Yates and Sir Thomas are first startled, then recover themselves to perform their social roles, which create the exhibition of 'true acting'. 'His father', unintentionally, becomes an actor in a scene before reverting to his role as 'Sir Thomas Bertram'. Mr. Yates is startled from his melodramatic posture as the ranting Baron Wildenheim before he recovers to perform a social grace of a visitor presenting his formal compliments to his host.

The ability to adopt a social role is not to be confused with the polymorphic skills of Henry Crawford, but Yates's metamorphosis from the 'impassioned Baron Wildenheim' into 'the well-bred and easy Mr Yates', is a complex reversal of the requirements of the acting process. In metamorphosing back into himself he is abandoning his usual histrionic style, and is now acting naturalistically: what for Tom Bertram is 'true acting' is that absence of posturing, which for Partridge, watching Garrick, was bad acting. But paradoxically, as Tom understands, Yates's bow and apology to 'Sir Thomas Bertram' is merely another form of social acting.

The ingenuity of describing this encounter through Tom's perspective is that, unlike Fanny, he understands the subtleties and absurdities of social performance. Tom's desire to play the displaced Lord Duberley in Colman's *Heir at Law* first identifies his understanding of the interchangeability of social roles, and the unstable relationship between status and conduct-- perhaps first initiated by his confusion

about Miss Anderson whose 'out' behaviour he found so perplexing. It is this understanding of the art of social role-playing that now shapes one of the most important scenes of the novel, the encounter between Yates and Sir Thomas, a slice of real-life theatre: 'It would be the last--in all probability the last scene on that stage; but he was sure there could not be a finer. The house would close with the greatest eclat' (*MP*, pp. 182-183).

Nowhere is Austen's eclat more evident than in this scene with its dissolution of the distinction between true acting on a stage and in social situations: the ultimate example of that general 'love of the theatre' (*MP*, p. 121), which lasted throughout her lifetime.

Epilogue

Jane Austen goes to Hollywood

The explosion of interest in Jane Austen in the 1990s, inspired by the highly successful film and television adaptations of the novels, has been examined in a collection of essays by Austen scholars entitled *Jane Austen in Hollywood*.¹ The appeal of the films is variously ascribed to a nostalgic yearning for the past, a resurgence of interest in the heroine-figure (and the reshaping of the Austenian hero) in the light of twentieth-century feminism, and the marketing of Austen as a cultural icon, who has as much relevance to contemporary life as to her own time.

However, absent from this plethora of insights into the ideological appeal of the various adaptations is a more simple yet fundamental aspect of their attraction to a new kind of 'audience'. Austen's narrative art was shaped and influenced by her interest in the comic theatre; perhaps it is for this reason that adapters have had such success in translating her novels into film and television drama. Austen's novels translate so effectively to film because of their reliance on quasi-theatrical techniques, such as scenic construction, intricate plot-lines, theatrical-like dialogue, and strong sustained characterization. The success of the recent film adaptations is not surprising: Austen's roots in the theatre make her a natural candidate for 'revisioning' in the modern dramatic medium of film.

Austen's crafting of the 'set-piece' or the quasi-theatrical scene, which owes so much to the influence of dramatists-turned-novelists such as Fielding and Inchbald, renders the transition from novel to film effective and effortless precisely because of her innate sense of theatricality. This thesis has demonstrated that her own understanding of the importance of carefully constructed plot-lines, entrances and exits, comic misunderstandings (intrinsic features which may be considered as stage-

¹*Jane Austen in Hollywood*, ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

business) has too often been overlooked by the critical emphasis on dialogue and characterization.

Lyndsey Doran, daughter of a Hollywood studio executive and producer of the 1995 film adaptation of *Sense of Sensibility*, thus recognized, from her first reading of the novel, all the requisite qualities necessary for cinematic success: '*Sense and Sensibility* seemed to have them all: wonderful characters, a strong love story (actually, *three* strong love stories), surprising plot twists, good jokes, relevant themes, and a heart-stopping ending'.²

A crucial problem for film, however, is the rendering of the ironic third-person authorial voice that is so important to Austen's narrative method. The fundamental problem with Doran's analysis of the filmic possibilities of *Sense and Sensibility*, which is compounded by Emma Thompson's screenplay and Ang Lee's direction, is the absence of Austen's ironic vision. Furthermore, Ang Lee's desire to make a film which will 'break people's hearts so badly they'll still be recovering from it two months later' (*Screenplay and Diaries*, p. 15) is a blatant misreading of the novel. Perversely, the film version sets out to celebrate the conventions of romance that the novel critiques, and glorifies the very thing that Austen deflates.

In the early part of the film contrasts are drawn between Elinor's sense and Marianne's sensibility. This section of the film succeeds in satirizing Marianne's sensibility by its fidelity to Austen's satirical techniques in the novel, and it retains many of Marianne's impassioned outbursts of feeling ranging from taste in poetry to ideas of romantic love, and compares them with Elinor's language of controlled restraint. Contrasts are accordingly drawn between 'sense' and 'sensibility' in situations that are culled directly from the novel, coupled with innovative additions. In her screenplay, Thompson draws out the differences between the sisters in a short scene which relies upon a juxtaposition of visual and verbal ironies:

²Emma Thompson, *The Sense and Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 11.

NORLAND PARK. DRAWING ROOM. DAY

A beautiful young WOMAN (MARIANNE DASHWOOD) is sitting at the piano playing a particularly sad piece. ELINOR enters

ELINOR

Marianne, cannot you play something else? Mama has been weeping since breakfast.

MARIANNE stops, turns the pages of her music book and starts playing something equally lugubrious.

ELINOR

I meant something less mournful, dearest.

This over-simplistic, yet comically effective, device of contrasting the two heroines works well in the early moments of the film. However, both Thompson's screenplay and Lee's direction fail to convey the ambiguities and complexities of the novel which increasingly work to confound our expectations of sense and sensibility.

As I suggested in Chapter 5, this ambiguity is achieved by Austen's complex use of the principle of pairings, whereby Marianne and Elinor are compared and contrasted not only with one another, but with two other pairs of sisters, Lady Middleton and Mrs Palmer, and Lucy and Anne Steele (Lady Middleton and Anne Steele are omitted altogether in Thompson's screenplay). One critical casualty of this omission for the screen version is the loss of Austen's critique of Elinor. Austen does not rely solely on free indirect speech to ironize Elinor, but compares her conduct with that of the odious Lucy Steele to show disarming similarities of social dishonesty, and also provides an extreme version of Elinor in the cold and unfeeling Lady Middleton. Furthermore, Austen's re-directed sympathy towards Marianne is displayed in the novel by contrasting her genuine sensibility with the feigned sensibility of Fanny Dashwood and Lucy Steele. Marianne's intelligence and 'sense' are contrasted with Charlotte Palmer's and Anne Steele's gushing inanity. One of the most important

ironies of the novel, as it progresses, is the way in which the similarities between Elinor and Marianne become more acute than their differences.

Thompson's reduction of the female characters means that the contrasts between Marianne and Elinor and 'sense' and 'sensibility' remain over-schematic and didactic. Without the necessary ironizing of Elinor to balance the satirical treatment of Marianne, the film loses much of its edge. Elinor's capacity to be as mistaken as Marianne, and her suppressed (but no-less-heartfelt) sensibility allows for the shift in our perceptions, the displacement of our expectations, that is a critical part of Austen's ironic method.

Chapter 5 proposed that Austen's re-working of theatrical techniques from Sheridan's *The Rivals* in *Sense and Sensibility* was far more sophisticated than simply reproducing a wise and giddy female duo to invite ironic comparisons and contrasts. Emma Thompson and Ang Lee use the principle of pairings in much the same way as Sheridan, to compare and contrast the conduct of his two heroines. But in the novel, Austen uses the principle of pairings to achieve something far more complex and nuanced, employing other pairs of women to ironize both heroines, as well as showing a variety of different responses to what is essentially the same situation, and thereby encouraging us to constantly call into question things we take for granted.

In *Emma*, Austen perfects her ironic technique by her use of free indirect speech. Rather than drawing comparisons between the heroine's conduct and that of other characters, she centers the novel inside Emma's (often faulty) consciousness so that we are drawn intimately into her world as events unfold around her. It is difficult to imagine how a film version of *Emma* could succeed in creating the requisite sustained ironic treatment of its flawed heroine. Douglas McGrath's 1996 film starring Gwyneth Paltrow succeeds as a comedy of errors, but fails to capture the pervasive quality of the author's ironic treatment of Emma's delusions and her skewed perspective. Perhaps this is understandably difficult in the genre of film, yet at times McGrath demonstrates that cinematic techniques can create a kind of visual irony

whereby a gap is created between the heroine's distorted perception of events and events themselves.

Thus, Emma's and Mr Knightley's disagreement over Robert Martin's suitability for Harriet Smith is conducted in the midst of a game of archery.³ Emma's incompetence as Cupid is revealed in her increasing failure to hit the target as she simultaneously shows her ill-judgement and snobbishness in the words 'He is not Harriet's equal'. With each misguided statement that she makes about Robert Martin, her arrow bounces further away from the target. Emma's faith in her own judgement is undermined by the visual image which tells us that she is way off the mark.

This scene alerts us to the possibility that the heroine is wrong, but it comes into McGrath's film almost as an isolated incident and marginally too late for us to be uncompromisingly seduced by, and yet aware of, Emma's distorted perception. Furthermore, it is not followed up by similar visual ironies which mark the discrepancy between what the character is saying and what the character is doing. Perversely, McGrath wastes a valuable opportunity to ironize his heroine in a series of scenes which depict her writing her journal at night. Though McGrath uses first-person voice-over to expose Emma's thoughts as she writes, there is no hint betrayed of her self-absorption, lack of self-knowledge or capacity for misunderstanding events around her.

Amy Heckerling's updated film adaptation of *Emma* succeeds where the others fail. *Clueless* takes the plot of *Emma* and very closely translates it to Beverly Hills, jettisons the dialogue, and yet retains the spirit of a young girl's growth into self-knowledge. Arguably, of all the recent adaptations of Austen novels, this is the film that remains most true to her comic vision. Heckerling manages to surmount the obstacle of ironizing the heroine through free indirect speech by the substitution of first-person voice-over and ironic editing.

³See Nora Nachumi's excellent essay, "'As If!': Translating Austen's Ironic Narrator to Film', in *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, pp. 130-137 [134-135]. Nachumi makes a number of similar points to myself, particularly in her observations about *Clueless*.

From the outset, the heroine's distorted perspective is shown by the disparity between her first-person narration and the visual image that we see on screen. The film's opening montage offers a series of sun-drenched images of life in Beverly Hills, showing the heroine shopping, relaxing by the pool, and driving fast cars. Her claim (in first-person voice-over) that she is simply a normal teenager who wakes up in the morning, brushes her teeth and gets dressed is comically undercut by the visual image of her sitting in her luxurious dressing-room, co-ordinating impeccably stylish outfits on a computer.

Heckerling shows that Emma's/Cher's environment plays a crucial role in her (mis)understanding of herself, and through ironic editing succeeds in drawing out the disparity between the visual and the verbal. Thus when she expresses her need for a quiet place to relax and be herself, the camera pans out to a shot of a busy shopping mall. As Heckerling understands, the insular, exclusive and privileged world of Beverly Hills in the 1990s is not so dissimilar to the world of Highbury with its rigid social stratifications, and its fear of outsiders who threaten to displace and controvert the social hierarchy and its unspoken codes of conduct.

The film continues to present the viewer with a series of comic verbal and visual ironies at the heroine's expense. Her observation at a party that 'love was everywhere' is accompanied by an image of drug-crazed teenagers vomiting into a swimming pool. Her claim that Christian/Frank Churchill is madly in love with her and ignores every other girl in the room is juxtaposed with a shot of him flirting with a barman (in *Clueless*, Christian's/Frank's ineligibility is transposed to his homosexuality). Paradoxically, whilst we are aware of the heroine's skewed perspective, the first part of the film has ensured that we are drawn into Cher's consciousness by the effects of extensive use of voice-over and camera angles shot from Cher's point of view. Heckerling's careful use of cinematic techniques such as ironic editing, voice-over and juxtapositions of verbal and visual contradictions all succeed in ironizing the heroine, whilst daring us to like her.

In faithful spirit to the novel, that which seems to be factual and reliable is often misguided and false, and thus the viewer is encouraged to question the values and expectations that they bring to the film. The misplaced but irrepressible confidence of the heroine is displayed as she misjudges both herself and the world around her with admirable panache. But beneath her self-absorption lies a good heart. When she finally understands that she has been 'mistaken about everything' and comes to know her own heart, the visual image (the illuminated fountain behind her) and voice-over correspond for the first time.⁴

The 1995/6 film versions of *Emma* and *Sensibility* were highly successful box-office hits, and provide a telling reminder of the quasi-theatrical elements of Austen's novels. However, whilst their importance as 'gateways' to the novel should not be underestimated,⁵ they ultimately fail to remain true to Austen's ironic vision.

One of the aims of the thesis has been to show how Austen rejected dramatic form and instead re-cast conventions inherited from the drama, incorporating quasi-theatrical techniques and devices into the novel of manners. She does not simply turn plays into novels, but uses the influence of the drama in a much more innovative and striking manner, for example in the way she alludes to plays such as *The Clandestine Marriage* and *The Heir at Law* in *Mansfield Park*. For this reason it is not enough to turn the novels back into plays or straightforward adaptations.

The best analogy to what Austen does with the drama can be found in *Clueless*, which itself alludes to *Emma*, but also gives us a film in its own right which parodies and satirizes its own genre. As *Emma* is an ironic subversion of the eighteenth-century women's romance, *Clueless* is an ironic subversion of the Hollywood-teen movie. Emma marries a fraternal, domestic mentor instead of a

⁴As Nachumi observes, Cher's capacity for moral growth and likeable nature poses a challenge to our stereotypical images of spoiled rich teenagers who live in Beverly Hills. See *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, p. 137.

⁵See M. Casey Diana, 'Emma Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* as Gateway to Austen's Novel', in *Jane Austen and Hollywood*, pp. 140-147.

mysterious, handsome stranger.⁶ Cher partners her step-brother, a college type with a social conscience, rather than a party boy.

Heckerling's understanding of *Emma* as a comedy of errors sustained by the manipulations of a clueless young girl is augmented by her fidelity to Austen's strong moral sense. Though uproariously funny, *Clueless* nevertheless conveys the awakening of a spoilt, self-absorbed teenager who learns that the most important social transformation is not external and cosmetic but lies within our willingness 'to make-over our souls'.

⁶See Claudia L Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), pp. 199-201.

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