

Kitty Bennet was satisfactorily married to a clergyman near Pemberley, while Mary obtained nothing higher than one of her uncle Phillips' clerks, and was content to be considered a star in the society of Meriton; that the "considerable sum" given by Mrs Norris to William Price was one pound; that Mr Woodhouse survived his daughter's marriage, and kept her and Mr Knightley from settling at Donwell, about two years, and that the letters placed by Frank Churchill before Jane Fairfax, which she swept away unread, contained the word "pardon" (J. E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* [London, 1906], pp. 148-9). Julia Prewitt Brown also discusses the importance of the family for Austen; see her *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and Literary Form* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), p. 9.

7. One of the best discussions of this function of irony is in Jane Nardin's *Those Elegant Decorums: The Concept of Propriety in Jane Austen's Novels* (Albany, 1973), pp. 4-11.
8. See Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago, 1974), p. 44 and passim.
9. See A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (New York, 1965), p. 108.

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Women, Power and Subversion

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I

One feels at once in *Pride and Prejudice* an edge, a critical emphasis given to the economic contradiction of men's and women's lives. Elizabeth Bennet has no decent fortune whatsoever. She *must* marry; she must marry with an eye to money; and the reason she must marry is that the family inheritance has been settled on a male. It would be hard to make a more central point of the fact that the conditions of economic life favoured men and restricted women.

The entailed fortune which so obviously benefits Mr Collins and so obviously restricts Jane Austen's heroine is merely the epitome of an economic privilege that is granted men in general and of an economic restriction that is imposed on women, and the details of that privilege and restriction are explicitly recorded throughout the novel. It is the right of Austen's men to have work that pays and to rise through preference and education, and we are directly told who has had access to what. We are told that Mr Gardiner and Mr Philips are established in business and in law, that Sir William Lucas has retired from trade, that Collins has been sent to the university and granted a living, and that Wickham has been set up first as clergyman, then as lawyer, and finally as officer - prospects which he persistently rejects or squanders. But men, no matter how hapless and undeserving, must be provided for, must be given every opportunity to earn their way.

Women, in contrast, are prepared for nothing but display. Their goal is not to accomplish but to be 'accomplished' or, as Miss Bingley puts it, to be 'esteemed accomplished' (p. 36). And Austen does not fail to tell us what 'accomplished' means - being able to paint tables, net purses, and cover screens. Women have no access at all to work that pays, for in this novel, in contrast, say, to *Emma*, even the life of a governess is not an option. (The governesses of *Pride and Prejudice* are not a promising lot. Mrs Annesley may be 'well-bred', but Mrs Jenkinson has been extinguished as a personality, and the immoral Mrs Younge has been reduced to letting rooms and taking bribes.) Finally, although women and men both inherit money, women inherit a lump sum, a kind of dowry, while men inherit livings, and Austen tells us precisely who has inherited what. The Miss Bingleys are worth £20,000 while their brother has an annual four or five. Miss Darcy's fortune is £30,000, her brother's £10,000 per annum. And Mrs Bennet has a total of £4,000 while her husband nets £2,000 a year.

The first two sentences of the novel make subtle and ironic point of this disparity, and they evoke the way in which economic inequity shapes male and female power: ✧

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

(p. 1)

Some single men, it would appear, have independent access to good fortunes, but all single women or 'daughters' must marry for them. 'Daughters' and their families, therefore, must think a good deal about marriage while single men with fortunes do not. Families with 'daughters' may try to control men too, to seize them as 'property', but it is really 'daughters', the sentence implies, who are controlled, who are 'fixed' by their economic situation. Single men appear at liberty; they can enter a neighbourhood and presumably leave it at will. Single men, in short, have an autonomy that 'daughters' do not, and at the base of this difference in autonomy is the fact that men have access to money.

That Austen sustains a lively interest in what women and men are worth, that she suggests a causal relation between money and power, sets *Pride and Prejudice* at some distance from [Fanny Burney's]

Evelina [1778], and this distance must be explained in part by historical context. Austen, for example, experienced the effects of industrial capitalism as Burney did not, and one effect of industrial takeoff (which belonged to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) was to make consciousness of money in general more universal and more respectable as well. One could hardly ignore money, after all, for money was being made and made rapidly in industry and exchange, and money was lending status and power to men who had not had either before, men in trade, for example, men with no pretence at all to the courtly patina of title, family, and long inheritance. This difference in historical context is certainly evoked by the fact that the only tradesmen to appear in *Evelina* are small-time, vulgar, and low, while in *Pride and Prejudice* Mr and Mrs Gardiner, living in sight of the Gardiner warehouses, are neither small-time nor vulgar but the most admirable, the most decent, the most well-bred adults in the novel, a fact which the aristocrats must be made to face.

The acquisition of industrial and trading fortunes must also have sharpened money consciousness and consciousness of the relation between money, status, and power - by increasing the number of men who could actually acquire country estates and merge with the gentry, another change which is expressed in contrasts between *Evelina* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Burney never alludes to the merging of gentry with persons of the middle stations - although this was certainly taking place - and she even mitigates the significance of Evelina's marriage to a lord by revealing, in the nick of time, that Evelina herself is the daughter of a baronet. In *Pride and Prejudice*, however, the merging of gentry and trade is endorsed and even common. Bingley, whose fortune comes from trade and from northern trade at that, is on the verge of finally consolidating his genteel status by purchasing a country estate. Sir William, who has actually retired from trade, has established his family in a country 'lodge', and Elizabeth herself, who is the daughter of a gentleman but who does have connections in business and in the lower regions of the law, marries a man of the upper gentry.

Pride and Prejudice, therefore, evokes the fact that money was being made, that it lent new status and power to men of the middle stations, and that it accelerated the merging of the gentry with the middle classes, and, in its focus on money and money matters, it suggests the concurrence of these phenomena with a sharpened and newly dignified money consciousness. Given this context, it is not surprising that Austen's vision of the power and status of women is persistently linked to their economic situation, as Burney's vision is

not. For a general consciousness of the relation between money, status, and power must have had its effect on the way in which the lot of middle-class women was perceived. Of course the lot of middle-class women was also becoming more contradictory, for genteel women continued to lose recognised economic value while genteel men were finding new access to work and new opportunities for rising.¹ The growing contradiction must have been felt as it could not have been felt in the age of Burney.

Austen's personal relation to this larger context certainly increased her consciousness of money in general and of the contradiction between the economic lots of genteel men and women. Although the Austen family was better connected than the Burneys, was distantly related to the aristocracy, and was more immediately related to the clergy, to men in professions (a surgeon and a solicitor), to a lord mayor of London, and to the smaller gentry, Austen felt the pinch of economic stringency when writing *Pride and Prejudice* as Burney did not when writing *Evelina*. Austen's father had died in 1805, and in 1813, the year *Pride and Prejudice* was published, Jane, her mother, and her sister Cassandra were dependent for their living on three sources: a small income of Mrs Austen's, a small legacy of Cassandra's, and the £250 provided annually by four of the Austen brothers. The sum was enhanced to some degree by the money Jane earned through writing, for in July of that year she reports that 'I have now ... written myself into £250 - which only makes me long for more'.² But the £140 brought by *Sense and Sensibility* and the £110 from *Pride and Prejudice* did not go far, and Austen's letters for that year, as for every year, are full of references to small economies.

In fact, to read Jane Austen's letters - with their steady consciousness of bargains, pence, and shillings - is to be aware of the constancy with which money and money matters impinged upon her own experience as an unmarried woman of the middle stations. In May of 1813, for example, she writes that she is 'very lucky' in her gloves, having paid 'four shillings', that saracen and dimitry (at 2/6) are not bargains 'but good of their sort', and that a locket at eighteen shillings cost more than Cassandra intended but is 'neat and plain, set in gold'. In September she is tempted by some edging which is 'very cheap' and regretful at having spent six shillings for a white silk handkerchief. She wavers too over some 'very pretty English Poplins' (4s/3d), does not buy them, and then decides to treat herself after all with the four pounds which 'kind, beautiful' brother Edward has given her. October finds her planning to dye her blue gown, scheming

to save Cassandra postage, and inquiring after the price of butcher's meat. In November she notes a fall in the price of bread and hopes that 'my Mother's Bill next week will show it'.³

Austen's family situation, moreover, imposed upon her a heightened awareness of the economic contradiction between the lots of genteel women and genteel men, for Austen had five brothers and they had what she did not: access to work that paid, access to inheritance and privilege, and access to the status that belonged to being prosperous and male. In 1813 all but one brother was rising in a career. James was earning £1,100 a year as a curate, Henry was a partner in a successful banking firm, Frank was the captain of a ship in the Baltic, Charles was the flag captain of another, and Edward, the only brother without a profession, was living as a country gentleman on one of the two estates he had inherited from his adopted family.

The difference which money made in the relative autonomy of Austen women and Austen men was also striking, yet there is little emphatic indication in the letters that unequal economic privilege or unequal power was a source of oppression or discomfort to Jane. Her letters, for the most part, form a casual patchwork of details about her own economies and her brothers' expenditures, about her desire for money and their attainment of it, about her dependence in travelling and their liberties with horseback, carriage, and barouche, about the pressure she felt to marry and the freedom they assumed to marry or not to marry as they chose. Here and there, of course, we find some humorous consciousness of inequity, and there is more than one joke about the economic pressure to marry: 'Single Women have a dreadful propensity for being poor - which is one very strong argument in favour of Matrimony'.⁴ But, for the most part, Jane Austen's attitude toward the economic restrictions of being a woman and toward the resulting absence of autonomy - the dependence, the confinement, the pressure to marry - is, in the letters, amused and uncomplaining.

II

It is in Austen's fiction that we begin to feel an edge, a telling emphasis, being given to the difference between the economic restriction of women and the economic privilege of men. Austen's fiction, like Burney's, was obviously a means of coming to terms with a discomfiting experience, was an outlet for critical energies

which she could not otherwise express, and those energies are evident in the first sentences of the novel, where Austen implies a relation between money and autonomy which her letters reflect but do not articulate. The outcome of those energies, however, is not what one might expect, for while the rest of the novel does sustain an awareness of the economic inequality of women and men, it does not sustain a felt awareness of the causal connection between money and power. Indeed, for all its reference to money and money matters, for all its consciousness of economic fact and economic influence, *Pride and Prejudice* is devoted not to establishing but to denying the force of economics in human life. In the reading of the novel the real force of economics simply melts away.

Despite the first two sentences, despite the implication that access to money in some way determines autonomy, the difference between men's economic privilege and that of women is *not* something we are invited to *experience* as a cause of power and powerlessness in the novel. Men, for all their money and privilege, are not permitted to seem powerful but are rather bungling and absurd; and women, for all their impotence, are not seen as victims of economic restriction. What the novel finally defines as power has little to do with money, and the most authentically powerful figure in the novel is an unmarried middle-class woman without a fortune – a woman, we may note, who bears a striking resemblance to Jane Austen.

While *Evelina* ultimately justifies the control of ruling-class men, *Pride and Prejudice* sustains a fantasy of female autonomy. As in Burney, however, there is no overt indication that Austen protested the economic contradiction on which the inequities of power between men and women were based. Indeed, where the economic inequity of women's lot seems most unfair, Austen is deflecting criticism. Mrs Bennet and Lady Catherine, for example, are the only persons in the novel allowed to object to the entail, and neither is permitted to engage our sympathies. Mrs Bennet, in fact, is made to confound potential and plausible criticism by giving it an implausible direction. The entail 'was a subject on which Mrs Bennet was beyond the reach of reason; and she continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man whom nobody cared anything about' (p. 58). Any reasonable objection to the automatic selection of male inheritors is obscured here by Mrs Bennet's unreasoning protests.

But if, by deflecting criticism, Austen appears to accept, indeed to apologise for, the unequal division of money and privilege – a divi-

sion which it would have been futile to protest in 1813 – she also appears to limit, subtly and from the outset, what that inequity can mean. Although the Austen of the letters seems well aware of the status and sense of achievement involved in earning or preserving money, she omits from the novel almost any reference to and all observation of activity which has an economic reward. The effect is to mystify one major area in which upper- and middle-class men had access to a sense of power that upper- and middle-class women did not. We do hear that Mr Bennet oversees the farm, and we know that business prompts Mr Gardiner to postpone a vacation and to meet with Mr Stone. We are aware that Darcy writes letters of business and that he cares for his tenants and his library. We understand that Collins reads, writes sermons, and tends to parish duties, and we are left to imagine that Wickham does something more than gamble in his capacity as officer. But we never see them at work. Both sexes appear only at leisure – eating, reading, attending balls, paying visits, writing personal letters, and playing backgammon, piquet, quadrille, casino and loo. If the enforced idleness of genteel women seems oppressive in this novel, it is not out of contrast with the more productive activities of males.

It is principally in their personal rather than in their working lives that men appear at first to have more autonomy than women, more power to make decisions, to go and to do as they please. Throughout *Pride and Prejudice* men have a mobility that women, even women with money, do not, and that mobility suggests a greater general self-rule. From the first sentence on, men are linked with entry and removal, women with being 'fixed'. Bingley, for example, first enters the scene in a chaise and four and then leaves almost immediately for London, prompting Mrs Bennet to worry – in woman's traditional fashion – that he will 'be always flying about from one place to another' (p. 7). Bingley, in fact, prides himself on his alacrity in leaving – '... if I should resolve to quit Netherfield, I should probably be off in five minutes' – and he does leave Jane abruptly and painfully, only to saunter up again some ten months later (p. 39). Bingley's mobility is typical of that of the other single men in the novel, for the militia too enter and then leave, as do Wickham, Collins, and Darcy.

Women, in contrast, do not usually enter or leave at all except in the wake of men. The Miss Bingleys move with their brother; Lydia pursues the regiment; and Charlotte Lucas, Lydia, Elizabeth, and Jane all follow the men they marry. Lady Catherine's rude excursion to Meryton, Jane's visit to London, and Elizabeth's to

Hunsford and Derbyshire are seen as deviations from the more usual pattern of women's self-initiated activity, the movements back and forth within a small radius, 'the walks to Meryton, sometimes dirty and sometimes cold' (p. 143). So limited is women's usual movement - the walk to Meryton is only a mile - that a walk of three miles, at a rapid pace and without a companion, is an event. Indeed, women's usual state is not to move at all but to hear news or to read letters about the arrivals and departures of males. At most, perhaps, women look out of a window or throw up a sash, but they are essentially 'fixed', and it is not surprising that it is women in the novel who are dull or bored, who feel that the country is 'bare of news', who suffer when it rains, who repine at 'the dullness of everything', who feel 'forlorn' (pp. 25, 223, 311).

The patterns of movement in the novel do suggest a dramatic difference between the autonomy of women and men as the patterns of movement in *Evelina* do not. But they are finally backgrounded, like the fact that men work, and they are neither emphasised nor overthrown. It is in relation to the marriage choice that men's potential autonomy is brought most into conscious focus, and it is in relation to the marriage choice that their autonomy is also most emphatically subverted. As the first two sentences of the novel suggest, men do not need to marry. They may 'want' or desire wives, as it turns out, but they do not need to want them as women must want husbands. Men in *Pride and Prejudice*, therefore, are conscious of having the power to choose and they are fond of dwelling on it, of impressing it upon women. Mr Collins, for example, assumes that there is nothing so central to his proposal as a rehearsal of his 'reasons' for marrying - and for choosing a Bennet in particular - nothing quite so central as the information that there were 'many amiable young women' from whom he might have made his selection (pp. 101, 102).

Darcy is scarcely less agreeably aware of his power to choose, and from his first appearance he acts the role of high-class connoisseur, finding Elizabeth 'tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me' (p. 9). Like Mr Collins, moreover, Darcy remains preoccupied with the privilege of choice in the very act of proposing, for his first words are not 'I love you' but 'in vain have I struggled' (p. 178). Bingley, Colonel Fitzwilliam, and Wickham, the other single men in the novel, betray a similar consciousness. Bingley chooses his male friend over Jane. Fitzwilliam maintains that 'younger sons cannot marry where they like', but Elizabeth protests that they often choose to like and to propose to 'women of fortune' (p. 173). And Wickham, ever

confident in his power to choose, first chooses Georgiana Darcy and then, in succession, Elizabeth Bennet, Mary King, and Lydia Bennet.

Male privilege, then, and access to money in particular, makes men feel autonomous. It also makes them feel empowered to control others, especially the women to whom they make advances. For, as givers of economic benefits, men expect their advances to be received and even sought after. Mr Collins dwells warmly upon the 'advantages that are in [his] power to offer' and tactfully reminds Elizabeth that she is bound to accept him, for '... it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications' (pp. 102, 104).

Darcy is also pleasantly aware of his power to bestow value, whether it is his desirable attention or his desirable fortune and station. At the first ball, for example, he will not dance with Elizabeth because he says he is in 'no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men' (p. 9). His first proposal - like Mr Collins' - is 'not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride', and it betrays his confidence in having his way: '[Elizabeth] could easily see that he had no doubt of a favourable answer. He spoke of apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance expressed real security' (p. 179).

Mr Bennet, too, seems to relish the power he has over women and to seek opportunities for its display. Aware of having wasted his power of choice by choosing Mrs Bennet, he is fond of reminding his wife and his daughters that he has control over their economic wellbeing: '[The letter] is from my cousin, Mr Collins, who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases' (p. 58). Indeed, with the possible exceptions of Bingley, who is seen as an anomaly, and of Mr Gardiner, who scarcely exists, virtually every man in the novel reacts in the same fashion to his economic privilege and social status as a male. All enjoy a mobility which women do not have. All relish an autonomy which women do not have. All aspire to a mastery which women cannot grasp. And yet, in spite of their mobility, their sense of autonomy, and their desire to master and control, we do not feel that men are powerful in this novel. Their sense of power and their real pomposity are at base a setup, a preparation for poetic justice, a licence to enjoy the spectacle of men witlessly betraying their legacy of power, of men demonstrating impressive capacities for turning potential control into ineffective action and submission to the control of others.

It is significant, I think, that the only proposals of marriage recorded in the novel are unsuccessful and that both suitors are so immersed in their sense of control that they blindly offend the woman whose affections they mean to attach and, in the process, provoke what must be two of the most vigorous rejections in all literature. Here is Elizabeth to Mr Collins: 'You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make you so' (p. 103). And here is Elizabeth to Mr Darcy: 'I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry' (p. 182).⁵ It is also significant that two of the men in the novel who have risen through preference – another benefit of male privilege – enjoy little more than an inflated sense of control and succeed mainly in annoying those whom they propose to act upon. Sir William, who has 'risen to the honour of knighthood' and retired to Meryton, 'where he could think with pleasure of his own importance', does no more than provoke Darcy when he attempts to claim his society (p. 15); Mr Collins may enjoy 'the consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity', and he may persuade Charlotte Lucas to marry him, but he is thwarted in his attempts to act upon Elizabeth, Darcy, Mr Bennet, and even Lydia and Kitty (p. 66).

Our sense of male control is also undercut by the comic readiness with which some men submit to the control of others. Mr Collins and Sir William both manifest such slavish admiration of those who have raised them or of those who stand above them in rank that their own imagined power is constantly and ironically juxtaposed with images of self-abasement: picture Sir William 'stationed in the doorway, in earnest contemplation of the greatness before him', or Collins carving, eating, and praising 'as if he felt that life could furnish nothing greater' (pp. 151, 154). Collins, moreover, qualifies his potential autonomy by submitting virtually every decision to the 'particular advice and commendation' of Lady Catherine, and Bingley surrenders Jane because he depends on Darcy's opinion more strongly than on his own (p. 101). Men are also prone to misusing their autonomy by making bad investments. Mr Bennet's own imprudence must account for his unhappy domestic life, and Wickham's failure of resolution yokes him to Lydia, a giddy woman without a fortune. Thus access to money and male privilege in general do grant men the potential for control of their lives and for control over women, but, against the background of their real physical mobility, the men in

Pride and Prejudice are essentially set up – to surrender, to misuse, to fail to realise the power that is their cultural legacy.⁶

In obvious contrast to men, women, in their economic dependence, have far less potential to do as they like. Most women in the novel must marry, and, since access to money both shapes and is shaped by traditional attitudes toward women and their proper destiny, even women with money feel pressured to get a man (the rich Miss Bingley pursues Darcy, as does Lady Catherine on behalf of the wealthy Anne). Women, for the most part, do not dwell on their power to choose, do not debate over getting a husband, and seldom give thought to the value of one husband over another. Some young women, like Lydia and Kitty, are so engrossed with male regard in general that they lose sight of their reason for securing it, which is to marry, and make the attention of men – any men – an end in itself.

Indeed, the action in almost the entire first volume of the novel consists of very little but women talking or thinking or scheming about men. There is the initial plot to meet Bingley, then the first ball with its triumphs and failures. This is followed by a review of who was admired most, by a conversation between Elizabeth and Charlotte about how Jane had best pursue Bingley, by another scheme to keep Jane in Bingley's range at Netherfield, and by Miss Bingley's pursuit of Darcy at Netherfield itself. In the meantime we also hear that the militia have arrived and that Kitty and Lydia are well supplied with 'news and happiness' (p. 25). Wickham appears; Wickham is schemed over; and the whole first movement of the novel is brought to a close with another ball and another flourish of female display.⁷

The degree of female obsession with men, the degree to which they lack autonomy or self-control, may also be measured by the degree to which they helplessly and unthinkingly discount their ties to one another when a man's attention is at stake. (Caroline Bingley, of course, is the most extreme example. Her abuse of Elizabeth is unrelenting, and her friendliness and her sister's friendliness to Jane wax and wane with the absence or restoration of male regard: '... when the gentlemen entered, Jane was no longer the first object' (p. 50). Even sisterly affection is tenuous where men are concerned. Kitty and Lydia set off to inquire about Captain Carter but not to visit the ailing Jane. Kitty can only weep 'from vexation and envy' when Lydia goes to Brighton, and Lydia herself is fond of twitting her sisters about having married before them (p. 298). So languid is one sister's interest in another that, when Bingley and Darcy dine away from Netherfield,

Caroline summons Jane on the grounds that 'a whole day's tête-à-tête between two women can never end without a quarrel' (p. 27).

Women in *Pride and Prejudice*, then, do not generally act like choosers, and, since they devote a good deal of energy to compulsive scheming and plotting, they obviously do not entertain illusions of easy control. What power women do aspire to is manipulative and indirect and is further diminished by the fact that obsession makes them ineffective and unreflecting. Mrs Bennet, for example, frustrates her own ends time and time again while entertaining 'the delightful persuasion' that she is promoting Jane's marriage (p. 99). Miss Bingley's pathetic snares entangle not Darcy but herself. Mary's eagerness for display blinds her to the embarrassment of her 'pedantic air', and Lydia's passion for the attentions of a charming male wins her a husband who must be bribed to marry her and whose affection for her 'soon sunk into indifference' (pp. 22, 366).

It is important to note, however, that we are not just speaking of the Mrs Bennets, the Carolines, the Lydias, and the Marys, for all young women in the novel are caught to some degree in the same currents, and this enforces our sense of a universal female condition. All the Bennet women spend a good part of one evening lecturing about Bingley and 'determining when they should ask him to dinner' (p. 6). All are pleased with their own or with each other's triumphs. All are bored by the 'interval of waiting' for the gentlemen, and the prospect of the Netherfield ball is 'extremely agreeable to every female of the family' (pp. 72, 92). Our first introduction to Elizabeth, in fact, finds her trimming a hat.

Women, like men, therefore appear to be determined almost uniformly by a shared economic and social condition, but, just as we are not permitted to feel that men's economic privilege necessitates power, so are we not permitted to feel that women's lack of privilege necessitates powerlessness. The first two sentences of the novel may emphasise the idea that women's compulsive husband hunting has an economic base, but we are never allowed to feel that base as a determining force in their experience. As I have suggested, almost every reference in the novel to economic necessity is relegated to Mrs Bennet, a woman whose worries we are not allowed to take seriously because they are continually undermined by their link with the comic and the absurd: '... Miss Lizzy, if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all - and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead' (pp. 108-9). This is the kind of financial

threat which would be taken seriously in a novel by Charlotte Brontë, but in *Pride and Prejudice* this threat, this sting of potential poverty, is undercut. There is consciousness of economics, to be sure, but that consciousness is raised and then subverted.⁸ This is an odd manoeuvre on the part of an author sometimes praised for her awareness of social and economic forces, but it serves a purpose as preparation for Elizabeth by defining the nature of Elizabeth's world.

The Charlotte Lucas episode is especially significant in this light, for at a distance it might suggest that economic forces do indeed have tragic domination over 'sensible, intelligent' young women (p. 15). But once again this is not what we are actually invited to feel. We are not allowed to dwell on the economic realities of Charlotte's situation, because the shifting ironies almost continually direct us elsewhere: we look with irony at Mr Collins, for example, or at Charlotte's family, or at Charlotte herself. When her economic considerations are introduced, they are introduced ironically and at her expense. Miss Lucas ... accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment' (p. 117).

If we feel sympathy for Charlotte at any point, we first do so when her family dwells on the economic and social advantages of the match and gives no thought at all to her personal happiness. To Sir William and Lady Lucas the fulsome Mr Collins is 'a most eligible match for their daughter, to whom they could give little fortune' (p. 117). Charlotte's brothers are relieved of their fear that she will become a financial burden, 'an old maid', and her younger sisters 'formed hopes of coming out a year or two sooner', in order we presume to strike their own marital bargains (p. 118). But these ironies still do not put us in contact with her economic necessities. They may expose the selfishness and money-mindedness of Charlotte's relations, but if anything the suggestion that Charlotte's family is overly concerned with money puts us at a greater distance from any real sense of Charlotte's economic needs.

It is in the paragraph on Charlotte's own reflections that we come closest to seeing her as the victim of those economic and social forces which tend to reduce genteel unmarried women to the status of merchandise:

Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservation

from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it.

(p. 118)

The reference here to marriage as the 'only honourable provision' evokes a strong pull of sympathy for Charlotte but, coming as it does in the midst of her other reflections, it is not entirely clear to what extent the narrator joins her in this point of view. The extent to which we *can* feel the authority of this reference is the extent to which we will feel the force of economic necessity in Charlotte's decision, but the authority of the reference is never clear.

Elizabeth's own judgement lays the blame for Charlotte's decision on Charlotte's perversity: 'She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage' (p. 121). Yet the extent to which Elizabeth's judgement has narrative authority is also cloudy. Certainly, Elizabeth can be accused of speaking from fear, fear that Charlotte's example is a portent of her own fate as a single woman of small fortune. And certainly Elizabeth is inconsistent, for she defends Wickham for the same behaviour with Mary King. If we see Charlotte with irony, we see Elizabeth with irony too, and ultimately the narrator abandons us to ambivalence. The Charlotte Lucas episode, on the whole, is left to suggest, on the one hand, the perverting force of women's economic lot and to prevent us, on the other, from feeling that force as a reality in the universe of Elizabeth Bennet.⁹

One effect of undermining the force of economic realities is to make most women, in their helpless fixation on men and marriage, look perverse or merely silly and to lay the blame on women themselves, not on their economic and social lot. Another effect, however, is to suggest, rather wishfully, that there is some way out. Men may go about acting more powerful than women – indeed, their lot in life may give them the potential for having power – but because a sense of power seems to befuddle critical vision they are not really powerful at all. Conversely, women may seem powerless as men are not, but because we are finally not to feel that they are victims of social and economic forces they do not have to be powerless after all. What we have in *Pride and Prejudice*, it seems, is a novel that recognises the shaping influence of economics but that

denies its force. The novel, in fact, all but levels what in life we know to have been the material base of power and powerlessness and defines real power as something separate from the economic.

III

Real power in *Pride and Prejudice*, as is often observed, involves having the intelligence, the wit, and the critical attitudes of Jane Austen; and Elizabeth Bennet, as it is also sometimes observed, is essentially an Austen fantasy, a fantasy of power.¹⁰ As a fantasy, of course, Austen's Elizabeth is to some extent like Burney's Evelina; the nature of her power is traditional and womanly; it is the power of autonomy and, specifically, the power of private opinion and self-defence. Elizabeth's opinions, however, are not so private as Evelina's. They are not confined to letters, nor, as a matter of fact, are they confined to novels. For Elizabeth's world, as created by Jane Austen, affords her a freedom which Austen's world evidently did not. It affords her scope not only to entertain critical attitudes but to express them with energy and to put them into effective action. Elizabeth can do more than quietly scorn Miss Bingley's eagerness to please Darcy – she can laugh out loud at Jane's gratitude for being admired, and she can reject outright Charlotte's schemes for securing a husband. She can put herself at some distance from gratefulness, scheming, and over eagerness to please men, and in the process she can also be rather direct and effective in challenging Darcy's traditional assumption of control as a ruling-class man.

Elizabeth's world, in contrast to Austen's, permits her something more than spiritual victories, permits her more than that *sense of autonomy which comes with wittily observing the confinements of one's situation, with standing apart from them in spirit while having to bend to them in daily behaviour*. It permits her not only the energetic expression of but also the forceful use of those critical energies which Austen herself diverted into novels and which Evelina confines, more or less, to correspondence. Austen's fantasy of female autonomy is far more rebellious, then, than Fanny Burney's, for Elizabeth's autonomy, although a version of those 'private opinions' which even 'yoked creatures' entertain, is still a version which allows them rather free expression and, most important, which allows them to modify the power relations in Elizabeth's world.

If in *Evelina* the most central expression of power is that of landed male control, in *Pride and Prejudice* the most prominent

form of power is that of female autonomy, and it is not implausible to see in this distance between Burney and Austen an expression of the changing social context. Austen, for example, in allowing female autonomy to work effectively against a ruling-class male – a use of power entirely foreign to *Evelina* – evokes a more general sense that the authority of landed males had been challenged if not actually mitigated. In her endorsement of an autonomy not tied to class or fortune, Austen also reveals some affinity with an individualism that had ties to the French and the Industrial revolutions. This individualism is usually identified as middle-class and, by implication too, as male, and it is usually discussed in its economic application. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, sees 'individualist competition, the "career open to talent", and the triumph of merit over birth and connexion' as a significant result of the dual revolutions, but the 'career open to talent' is a concept which applies only to men and for the most part to men of the middle class.¹¹ John Owen also refers to the early nineteenth century as a 'new era of individualism and *laissez-faire*', another definition of 'individualism' which emphasises the growing economic privileges of middle-class men.¹² And Ian Watt, in his discussion of 'individualism and the novel', focuses upon 'economic individualism' as represented in the 'economic man' – although in this case 'economic man' includes Moll Flanders, a low-life female.¹³

The individualism or autonomy of Austen's heroine, however, is adapted to the purposes of a genteel unmarried woman. It is not expressed, therefore, through economic achievement, as it might be in a male, nor is it expressed through grand actions upon the world. It is an individualism, moreover, that cannot really be defined as middle-class or anti-gentry, for it is tied less to Austen's class sympathies than to her partially articulated feelings as a woman – the energy of Elizabeth's critical opinions, for example, is directed against men of middle stations, like Collins and Wickham, not just against the upper-class Darcy. Elizabeth's individualism, that is, is often directed against those very men of the middle stations, those men rising in careers, who conventionally define for us what individualism means. Austen's adaptation of individualism is thus more feminist than middle-class, for it is a disguised expression of discontent with the growing division in money, status, and power between middle-class men and middle-class women.

Elizabeth's autonomy, then, expresses an individualism adapted to female use, but because it is so adapted it is also heavily qualified and disguised, much as *Evelina*'s far less developed powers are qualified

and disguised by Fanny Burney. And the most potent qualification of Elizabeth's autonomy lies in the nature of the fictional world that Austen has created on her behalf. That we enjoy Elizabeth's critical energies as we do, that we feel safe with them, and that generations of conventional readers have found her charming rather than reckless owe much to the fact that Austen's version of Elizabeth's universe is one which mitigates the punishing potential of her critical views and challenging behaviour. If money, for example, were really a force in the novel, we might find Elizabeth heedless, radical, or at best naïve for insulting and rejecting a man with £10,000 a year, for condemning her best friend, a plain and portionless twenty-seven-year-old, because she married a man who could support her in comfort. In similar fashion, if wealthy young men were less given to bungling and dissipating the autonomy and control that are their legacy, we might feel uncomfortable or incredulous when Elizabeth takes on Darcy. It is Austen's subversion of economic realities and of male power that permits us to enjoy Elizabeth's rebellious exuberance, because it is principally this subversion which limits, from the outset, the extent to which we feel Elizabeth is in conflict with the forces of her world.

But to allow a nineteenth-century heroine to get away with being critical and challenging – especially about male control and feminine submission – is still to rebel against ideology and dominant social relations, no matter how charmingly that heroine may be repented, no matter how safe her rebellion is made to appear. When Austen allows Elizabeth to express critical attitudes and to act upon them without penalty, she is moving against early nineteenth-century ideologies about feminine behaviour and feminine fate, for by any traditional standards Elizabeth's departures from convention ought to earn her a life of spinsterhood, not a man, a carriage, and £10,000 a year. Elizabeth's universe, moreover, is real enough – its economic and social forces are kept close enough to the surface – that we believe in it and do not dismiss it as fantasy. And Elizabeth herself is so convincing that we can't dismiss her either. For all its charm and relative safety, Elizabeth's rebellion invites us to take it seriously, and it is for this reason, I assume, that the rebelliousness of *Pride and Prejudice*, like the rebelliousness of most women's writing, is even further qualified.

One major qualification of Elizabeth's resistance to male control, to men's assumption of control, and to women's submissive behaviour is that, like Austen, she accepts the basic division in men's and women's economic lots. Men have a right to money that women

do not. Thus Wickham is prudent for pursuing Mary King, but Charlotte is mercenary for marrying Collins. Men also have a right to greater autonomy, to greater power of choice, for Elizabeth never does challenge Darcy's ideologically justified right to criticise women or to act the connoisseur. Nor is it entirely clear that she objects to men's general assumption of control over women. Her real aim is self-defence; she wants to resist intimidation and to deny Darcy's particular assumption of control over her, a control which he exercises through the expression of critical judgements: 'He has a very satirical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of him' (p. 21).

Elizabeth's habitual tactic with Darcy is to anticipate and to deflate him in the role of critic and chooser but never to challenge the privilege by which he is either one. One of her manoeuvres is to insinuate her own judgement before Darcy can deliver his: 'Did not you think, Mr Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now ...' (p. 21). Another is to deprive him of the opportunity to judge at all: '... he means to be severe on us, and our surest way of disappointing him, will be to ask nothing about it' (p. 52). And still another is to defy him outright: '... despise me if you dare' (p. 48). Elizabeth's witty portraits of Darcy are also designed to cast doubt upon his reliability as critic but not upon his right to criticise. Darcy's pride and his alleged indifference to friendship, for example, must make him overly harsh and therefore untrustworthy in his judgements: 'And your defect is a propensity to hate every body' (p. 54).

Elizabeth, of course, in defending herself against the controlling power of Darcy's negative judgements, suggests that she is also defending herself against a desire to please Darcy and to enjoy the benefit of his positive attentions. Her defence, that is, continually implies an underlying vulnerability to his good opinion, and this is another qualification of her autonomy. Elizabeth never challenges the privilege by which Darcy bestows benefit through his regard, never entirely denies the benefit he does bestow, and is never wholly immune to enjoying it. She merely tries to avoid responding to his attentions with that show of gratefulness and pleasure which he egoistically expects and which her own feelings indeed prompt in her. At Netherfield, when Darcy asks her to dance, she is at first 'amazed at the dignity to which she [had] arrived', but her overriding defensive purpose is to deny both to herself and to him that the occasion affords her any sense of status or pleasure (p. 86). It is evident, then, that Elizabeth's resistance to Darcy is undermined by a lingering sus-

ceptibility to his attentions and by a lingering desire to please. In fact, the very energy with which she defends herself against both pleasing and being pleased argues that she is not only vulnerable to Darcy's power over her feelings but ironically and defensively controlled by it.

Elizabeth's qualified opposition to being controlled by one attractive male is juxtaposed, moreover, with her complete vulnerability to the emotional control of another, for she succumbs to pleasing Wickham and being flattered by him even before he reveals himself as an ally. Indeed, Elizabeth's readiness to believe Wickham is partially explained by the fact that, like all the young women in the novel, she is ready to approve any attractive and charming man who pays her attention, to decide absurdly that his 'very countenance may vouch for [his] being amiable' (p. 77). Elizabeth's head is full not only of what Wickham tells her about Darcy but of Wickham himself, and in dressing for the Netherfield ball she thinks both of 'seeing a confirmation of every thing in Mr Darcy's looks and behaviour' and of conquering 'all that remained unsubdued of [Wickham's] heart' (pp. 80, 85). Even after Wickham has thrown her over for Mary King, or Mary King's fortune, she continues to be flattered by 'a solicitude, an interest which she felt must ever attach her to him with a most sincere regard' (p. 144).

As it turns out, of course, Elizabeth is not only not autonomous with Darcy and Wickham, she is mistaken and wrong. She is wrong about Darcy's intentions, and she is wrong about Wickham's, and she is wrong for the same reason that she is not self-directing. Despite her intelligence, wit, and critical energies, she cares too much about male regard.¹⁴ As she herself is aware, after reading Darcy's letter, it is her 'vanity', her vulnerability to the good opinion of men, that has blinded her both to Darcy's character and to Wickham's:

But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned.

(p. 196)

If there is any punch left in Elizabeth's resistance to Darcy's traditional assumptions of control, it is certainly diminished by our continuing awareness that the rebellion itself works in the interests of tradition. That is, Elizabeth's assertion of autonomy attracts Darcy rather than putting him off. Elizabeth, we are assured, has a 'mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for

her to affront anybody; and Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her' (p. 48). Heightened aggression on Elizabeth's part is met by heightened feeling on Darcy's, by greater fears of 'the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention' (p. 54). Thus we may enjoy Elizabeth's self-assertions, but we are never invited to value them in themselves, as we are invited by later novelists to value Jane Eyre's or Lucy Snowe's or Maggie Tulliver's. Elizabeth's qualified resistance to Darcy, attractive as relief from the extreme male centring of most women in the novel, is valued in great measure, nevertheless, because it attracts the attention of a desirable man.

Elizabeth's autonomy, then, is quiet, is not intended to alarm. It invites the conventional female reader to identify with unconventional energies but commits her to nothing more, and it permits the conventional male reader to admire Elizabeth's spirit while finding comfort in the fact that she is wrong, that she is not autonomous after all, and that her whole resistance to male control only secures and gives value to the love of a good man. It is as if Austen could not be indirect or qualified enough in presenting this self-assertive heroine, for we almost never focus on Elizabeth's rebellious energies without feeling the undermining force of one irony or another. It is, in fact, Austen's qualification of Elizabeth's power that accounts for most of the complexities and ironies in the first two-thirds of the novel, and it is these ironies, I suspect, that have permitted the most conventional readers to find Elizabeth charming – and most charming of all when she asserts her independence of Darcy's traditional control as a male.

As a power fantasy, Elizabeth is in some ways astoundingly modest. The remarkable thing, perhaps, is that her rebelliousness, undercut and qualified as it is, still maintains a quality of force, still strikes us as power. It does so in part because of its juxtaposition with Miss Bingley's ineffective machinations and Jane's well-intentioned passivity, both reminders of what it means to be traditionally feminine. And in part, too, Elizabeth's rebellious energies retain a quality of force because they really act upon her world; they change Darcy, change the way he responds to his economic and social privileges, change something basic to the power relation between him and Elizabeth. Without intending to, Elizabeth exercises influence over Darcy, renders him more courtly, less liable to impress upon her the power he has to choose and to give her benefits, and less liable to assume control of her feelings. Evelina, in contrast, must depend upon the purely voluntary goodness of Lord Orville.

Still, neither Elizabeth's much qualified self-defence nor even her unintended influence over Darcy establishes her as the powerful

character she is. The most profound source of what we feel as Elizabeth's power is her ability – in the last third of the novel – to turn her critical vision upon herself, upon her own unthinking vulnerability to male approval. It is at this point in the novel that Elizabeth establishes what we could call real autonomy. It is at this point, moreover – the point at which Elizabeth redirects her critical energies from Darcy to herself – that the multiple ironies which have characterised the first two-thirds of the novel are suddenly dropped. It is a less anxiety-provoking business for a woman to assert autonomy against an aspect of herself, against the enemy within, than against the traditional power relations of her culture. And though it is necessary and vital to assess one's own blindness, in a patriarchal society, this is also a much surer and more lasting form of power than pitting one's self against the traditional privileges of men.

Elizabeth's recognition of her vulnerability to male attention does force her, however, into painful and even humiliating recognitions. It is a hard thing for a woman who has felt herself defended against the control of a ruling-class man to discover, after all, that she has been led astray by her extreme vulnerability to his good opinion. It is humiliating to feel apologetic toward an oppressor – for Darcy has greater control than Elizabeth and has made her feel it. Why has Austen put her through this? One answer, perhaps, is that Elizabeth's recognition of her 'vanity' further undercuts her rebellion against male control. But her confessions may also be seen as a hard lesson in the difficulties of confronting the enemy within, a hard lesson in the fact that the most apparently autonomous women may be creatures of their culture too.

This lesson is especially painful and realistic because, despite Austen's ironic underminings, the force of Elizabeth's community is strongly felt. But in this novel, in contrast say to Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, the shaping force of community is evoked only to be dramatically overthrown. The degree to which Elizabeth has been immersed in the values and mystifications of her community is the degree to which we feel that she is powerful when she separates herself from both.

IV

Pride and Prejudice brings to a culmination the kind of quest plot which is only initiated and then dropped in *Evelina*, for by the end

of this novel the heroine has achieved real autonomy and self-direction; indeed, no other character in the novel achieves her measure of self-knowledge or potential self-rule. The self-knowledge which comes to Darcy comes to him offstage and at the instigation of Elizabeth. Elizabeth alone is her own analyst and, in a novel where Austen brilliantly arranges for intelligence to mitigate the forces of economics and social position, Elizabeth emerges for the readers as the most powerful because the most intelligent and self-directing character in the novel. But if, in reading Darcy's letter, Elizabeth gains a measure of real autonomy, in that she gains a measure of freedom from the unthinking desire for male regard, what Elizabeth's freedom finally purchases is an ability to consider, to weigh, to choose which male's regard she really values. Elizabeth's autonomy, that is, frees her to choose Darcy, and her untraditional power is rewarded not with some different life but with woman's traditional life, with love and marriage. Quest in this novel is partly justified by and then rewarded with love.

The economic contradiction of men's and women's lives, the paucity of options for genteel women at the time, the weight of ideology as expressed in life and fiction permit Austen no other happy ending, but there is of course a major difficulty in Elizabeth's reward. For marriage in this novel, as in life, involves a power relation between unequals, and that is hardly a fitting end for a fantasy of power. What we find at the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, therefore, is a complicated and not entirely successful juggling act in which all the economic privilege and social authority of the traditional husband-hero must be demonstrated at last but demonstrated without diminishing the autonomy of the heroine.

It is not until late in the novel, for example, not until Elizabeth rejects Darcy's proposal, reads his letter, and establishes herself as the most powerful character in the book, that we are permitted firsthand exposure to Darcy's economic and social significance. Only at Pemberley, for example, are we made to feel the reality of his authority to act upon the world: 'As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered ... How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow' (p. 234). Darcy's authority, moreover, is juxtaposed on this visit with the first signs that he has been influenced by Elizabeth's self-assertion: 'Never in her life had she seen his manners so little dignified, never had he spoken with such gentleness as on this unexpected meeting' (p. 235).

Darcy's rescue of Lydia is another demonstration of the hero's traditional authority, the authority belonging to money, class, and male privilege, but it is also to be construed as further demonstration that Elizabeth has influenced him, that he is more courtly not only to her but to her family, whom he is now not above serving. Darcy's second proposal, moreover, is brought on by still another spirited assertion of Elizabeth's autonomy, her refusal to conciliate Lady Catherine, and even the timing of this proposal scene is set by Elizabeth. The proposal itself, finally, is followed by Darcy's lengthy reminder that it is Elizabeth who has changed him: 'You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first but most advantageous. By you I was properly humbled' (p. 349).

But it 'will never do' for Elizabeth to seem more powerful than Darcy (p. 361). That is not what traditional marriages, what 'good' marriages, are all about. According to Mr Bennet, in fact, Elizabeth 'could be neither happy nor respectable unless [she] truly esteemed [her] husband, unless [she] looked up to him as a superior' (p. 356). Darcy must protest, then, that he would have proposed whether Elizabeth opened the way or not: 'I was not in a humour to wait for any opening of yours' (p. 361). And Elizabeth, for her part, must betray some consciousness of and gratefulness for the traditional economic and social benefits. She must appreciate Pemberley not just for the good taste that it exhibits but for its economic grandeur,¹⁵ for the 'very large' park and for the 'lofty and handsome' rooms (pp. 228, 229). She must acknowledge that to be mistress of Pemberley might be 'something', and she must experience 'gratitude' to Darcy for loving her (pp. 228, 248). Yet Elizabeth's own autonomy must not be diminished. She is allowed, therefore, to see more than Darcy does to the last:¹⁶ 'She remembered that he had yet to learn to be laughed at, and it was rather too early to begin' (p. 351). We leave her, in fact, in the last paragraph of the novel, surrounded by Pemberley's splendour but seeming to hold her own, astonishing Georgiana with her 'lively, sportive manner' and her 'open pleasantry' and persuading Darcy, against his will, to make peace with Lady Catherine (p. 367).

Austen's difficulties with Elizabeth's reward, her attempt to give her marriage but to alter what marriage means, her attempt to balance love and quest, her tinkering with heroine and hero must account for the fact that most readers of *Pride and Prejudice* find the end less satisfactory than the beginning. On the one hand, the charge

that Elizabeth, as witty heroine, is now too inclined to moralise and be grateful owes much to the fact that marriage requires her to dwindle by degrees into a wife. On the other hand, the observation that Darcy as hero is less convincing than as villain owes much to the requirements of Austen's fantasy, which are that Elizabeth not dwindle too far, that she maintain her equality with if not her ascendancy over her husband.¹⁷ Darcy, therefore, though he must demonstrate all the economic privilege and social authority of the traditional hero - which are plenty - ~~may not have everything~~, he may not have Pemberley, £10,000 a year, rank, looks, intelligence, flexibility, wit, and a convincing reality as well. There is some point, though an unconscious point, to his stiffness and unreality, for both function at some level to preserve the fantasy of Elizabeth's power.

The end of *Pride and Prejudice*, nevertheless, witnesses a decline in Elizabeth Bennet, for in *Pride and Prejudice* as in much of women's fiction the end, the reward, of woman's apprenticeship to life is marriage, and marriage demands resignation even as it prompts rejoicing, initiates new life while it confirms a flickering suspicion that the best is over. Given the ambivalent blessing of marriage as a happy ending, it is a tribute to Austen's genius that what we take from *Pride and Prejudice* is not a sense of Elizabeth's untimely decline but a tonic impression of her intelligence, her wit, and her power, and it is an even greater tribute that we believe in her power, that we do not perceive it as fantasy. For Austen's brilliant construction of her heroine's world, her recognition and subtle subversion of economic forces, the mobile intelligence of the heroine herself, the ironies directed at that intelligence, the complexities of Elizabeth's failure in vision and of her recovery complicate what is at base a wish fulfilment, give it an air of credibility which lends force to the spell of the fantasy upon us. As one of my students put it, we need more fantasies like Elizabeth.

From Judith Lowder Newton, *Women, Power and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860* (Athens, Ga., 1981), pp. 55-85.

NOTES

[Judith Newton's *Women, Power and Subversion* shares with Mary Poovey's essays above a concern with the way in which fictions by women deal with patriarchal ideology. She recognises that Jane Austen's novels can be read as supporting the conservative view of women's role as ideally that of wife and moral guardian, and that the romance of *Pride and Prejudice* works as a

compensatory fantasy for women's impotence. However, she observes that because the fantasy represents women as important, competent, intelligent, and well aware of their situation, the fantasy subverts patriarchal ideas of women as passive, emotional and incompetent. The triumph of Elizabeth Bennet redefines power in terms of intellectual ability - precisely the area where Austen and other women could compete as equals. This redefinition depends upon the fiction not representing the full extent of economic, legal and political subjugation, but the productive value of the fantasy cannot be denied and Jane Austen's fictions do represent women's lives as dominated by the marriage market. Her women characters spend their time scheming and competing to obtain control over men who are represented as absurd and bungling. Elizabeth Bennet's marriage to Darcy is, for Newton, a sad necessity of the genre, but whilst her dwindling to the role of submissive wife is politically retrograde, the image that readers carry away from the text is of the light, bright and sparkling heroine who was more than a match for any man around, and who compelled a man with money and power to set aside his prejudices and offer her all. Such a fantasy may be compensatory to women readers whose life experience is probably in total contradiction, but the fantasy invites women to be like Elizabeth and not feel abashed before patriarchal oppression. References to *Pride and Prejudice* which appear in the text are to the Rhinehart edition (New York, 1949). Ed.]

1. See Eric J. Hobsbawm's chapter, 'The Career Open to Talent', *Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (New York, 1962), p. 226 and see Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York, 1969), p. 315.
2. Jane Austen, letter to Frank Austen, 3 July 1813, letter 8.1, in *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others*, ed. R. W. Chapman (London, 1959), p. 317.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 306-10, 328, 326, 321, 352, 361, 367.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
5. Douglas Bush suggests that rejected proposals 'have more dramatic possibilities than happy acceptances', but the 'dramatic possibilities', I feel, tend to one end - the deflation of male power. See *Jane Austen* (New York, 1975), p. 95.
6. Critics such as Frank W. Bradbrook and Kenneth Moler have observed that Darcy is set up to be deflated, that he is in fact a caricature of the Burney-Richardson hero, but the character of Darcy also reflects a larger tendency in the novel to set up and subvert male power in general. See Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 97; Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln, 1968), p. 89.
7. See Nina Auerbach's fine chapter on *Pride and Prejudice*: 'The unexpressed intensity of this collective waiting for the door to open and a Pygmalion to bring life into limbo defines the female world of *Pride*

- and *Prejudice*. 'Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction' (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), p. 39.
8. Though see Auerbach on the way in which the Bennet women's economic invisibility is subtly expressed in the 'near invisibility of Longbourn and the collective life of the Bennets within'. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
 9. It is hardly surprising that readers of *Pride and Prejudice* are widely divergent in their assessment of the Charlotte Lucas episode. A few, for example, sympathise with Charlotte and see her, more or less, as a victim of economic and social necessity. See David Daiches, 'Jane Austen, Karl Marx and the Aristocratic Dance', *American Scholar*, 17 (1947-8), 289; and see Mark Schorer, 'Pride Unprejudiced', *Kerryn Review*, 18 (1956), 83, 85. On the other end of the spectrum, many critics are inclined to see Charlotte as a rather simple example of moral or intellectual perversity. See W. A. Craik, *Jane Austen: the Six Novels* (London, 1965), p. 65, and Jane Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums: The Concept of Propriety in Jane Austen's Novels* (Albany, 1973), p. 51.
 10. Several critics observe elements, at least, of wish fulfilment or self-projection in Austen's heroines. See, for example, Yasmine Gooneratne, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 95.
 11. Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, p. 218.
 12. John B. Owen, *The Eighteenth Century, 1714-1815* (Totowa, NJ, 1962), p. 314.
 13. Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley, 1962), p. 61.
 14. See Auerbach on the safety of being 'partial, prejudiced, and ignorant. Objectivity, impartiality and knowledge might endanger the cloak of invisibility which is so intrinsic a part of Austen's perception of a woman's life'. *Communities of Women*, p. 54.
 15. See Auerbach's description of Pemberley's 'architectural and natural power'. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
 16. While it is true, as Gilbert and Gubar maintain, that Austen's stories dramatise 'the necessity of female submission for female survival', the end of *Pride and Prejudice* is managed so as to mitigate the degree to which the heroine must submit. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, 1979), p. 154.
 17. Several critics note that Darcy is more convincing as villain than as hero. See, for example, Henrietta Ten Harnsel, *Jane Austen: A Study in Fictional Conventions* (The Hague, 1964), p. 81. And Kenneth Moler, for one, finds Elizabeth becoming more and more like the conventional Evelina; see *Austen's Art of Allusion*, p. 107. See also Nina Auerbach's treatment of Darcy's 'shadowy reality', in *Communities of Women*, p. 53.

8

Necessary Conjunctions

JULIA PREWITT BROWN

Certain moments in literature always surprise us, no matter how many times we encounter them. One such moment is Cordelia's response to Lear, 'Nothing', in the first act of the tragedy. Another is the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife' (p. 3). Like Cordelia's unexpected reply, Austen's claim is surprising because we do not know how to interpret it. Is Cordelia's answer faint or firm, resigned or defiant? In the atmosphere of Lear's complex vanities, its stark simplicity makes it ambiguous. Similarly, the opening claim of *Pride and Prejudice* is either an instance of unalloyed irony or comic hyperbole. Read ironically, it means a great deal more than it says; read comically, it means a great deal less. Because its targets are unknown, its assurance is baffling. No matter how we read it, its finality is its irony (or comedy); it holds its 'truth' and the resistance to its truth in one — the quintessential stance of the ironic comedies.

Such instances are very few and brief in Jane Austen. They constitute a direct address from the author to the reader. They dazzle us partly because they are infrequent, and they provide in their flashing ambiguity a highly concentrated version of the novelist's perspective. The discourse of the rest of *Pride and Prejudice* issues from this initial stance and falls into two broad categories, narrative and dialogue. Perceived together, as they are meant to be perceived, the narrative and the dialogue achieve the same brilliant ambiguity of the authorial voice. Consider the first appearance of narrative comment in the novel, at the close of chapter 1:

32. For Miller in *Narrative and its Discontents*, Austen's fiction enacts a perpetual double bind between 'its tendency to disown at an ideological level what it embraces at a constructional one', that is, the moral lapses, blindness, or waywardness of her heroines. Despite the richness of his reading of Austen, he fails to see that the 'coincidence of truth with closure in Jane Austen's novels' is undermined by her ironic play with the conventions of the female plot (pp. 46-54).
33. For a detailed and scholarly discussion of Austen's place on the philosophical and political map of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Butler, *Jane Austen*, and Tanner's introduction, *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 42-45.
34. Marxist Feminist Literature Collective, 'Women's Writing: *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Villette*, *Aurora Leigh*', *Ideology and Consciousness* (Spring, 1978) 34-5. Nancy Miller argues that the fantasy and extravagance of the plot in women's fiction is linked to their unsatisfied ambitious wishes or desires often concealed in seemingly erotic longing ('Emphasis Added', pp. 40-1); see also Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, pp. 336ff.
35. 'Women's Writing', p. 31.
36. Annette Kolodny, 'Some Notes on Defining a Feminist Literary Criticism', *Critical Inquiry*, 2 (1975), 78.
37. *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris, 1977), pp. 134ff.
38. See Froma I. Zeitlin's interesting discussion of parody and mimesis in 'Travesties of Gender and Genre in Aristophanes', *Thesmophoriazousae*, *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1981), 311ff.

Further Reading

The following brief reading list covers a range of topics and includes works from which I would have liked to select had there been space in the volume. I have collected them into categories as a rough guide to approach. In some cases this is a very arbitrary process: the concerns of most feminist approaches are deeply historical, the concerns of many historical approaches are feminist. Labels are useful, but only as labels. The best advice always is to judge what is written, not what the category is.

BIOGRAPHY AND THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

There are now a number of differently useful biographies of Jane Austen. Since the documentary traces that Jane Austen might have left for history were erased by her sister Cassandra and other members of her family, her biographers have to resort to reading the life and social context in and out of the historical record and the novels themselves. There is arguable good in all of them. They are:

John Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984).
 Park Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987).

Oliver McDonagh, *Jane Austen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

On the relationship between Austen and her socio-political context, apart from works mentioned in the Introduction to this volume, see:

D. D. Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1975).
 Warren Roberts, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

Igor Webb, *From Custom to Capital: the English Novel and the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

FEMINIST STUDIES

Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women: an Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

- Rachel M. Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).
 Mary Evans, *Jane Austen and the State* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987).
 Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988).
 Claudia L. Johnson, 'A Sweet Face as White as Death', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 22 (1989), 159-74.
 Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983).
 Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: W. H. Allen, 1977).
 Laura G. Mooneyham, *Romance, Language and Education in the Novels of Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1988).
 Lillian S. Robinson, *Sex, Class and Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1986).
 Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Austen's Laughter', *Women's Studies*, 15 (1988), 71-85.
 Patricia Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York, 1975).
 Janet Todd, *Women's Friendship* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976).
 Janet Todd, 'Jane Austen, Politics and Sensibility', in Susan Sellers and Linda Hurchon (eds), *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf), pp. 71-87.

LANGUAGE

- The most important aspect of Jane Austen's works is obviously her language. Without its irony, why would one read her novels? Yet the very stuff of her art is difficult to ascertain. Helpful contributions can be found in:
- Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1982).
 Zelda Boyd, 'Jane Austen's "must": the Will and the World', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 39 (1984), 127-43.
 J. F. Burrows, *Computation in Criticism: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels and an Experiment in Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).
 C. Finch and P. Bowen, 'The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury - Gossip and the Free Indirect Style in *Emma*, *Representations*, 31 (1990), 1-18.
 Louise Flavin, 'Mansfield Park: Free Indirect Discourse and the Psychological Novel', *Studies in the Novel*, 19 (1987), 137-57.
 Jan B. Gordon, 'A-filialive Families and Subversive Reproduction - Gossip in Jane Austen', *Genre*, 21 (1988), 5-46.
 Jane Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums: The Concept of Propriety in Jane Austen's Novels* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1973).
 Norman Page, *The Language of Jane Austen* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972).
 Roy Pascal, *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and its Functioning in the 19th Century European Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).

LANDSCAPE STUDIES

- As the essays by Alistair Duckworth and Isobel Armstrong in the present volume make clear, Jane Austen was profoundly engaged with the political aesthetics of landscape gardening and its conjoint concern, estate improvement. The following essays explore this most important aspect of her work:
- B. M. Benedict, 'Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*: the Politics of Point of View', *Philological Quarterly*, 69 (1990), 453-70.
 Rosemarie Bodenheimer, 'Looking at the Landscape in Jane Austen', *Studies in English Literature*, 21 (1981), 605-23.
 John Dixon Hunt, 'Sense and Sensibility in the Landscape Designs of Humphry Repton', *Studies in Burke and His Time*, 19 (1978), 3-28.

IDEATIONAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

- Philip Drew, 'Jane Austen and Bishop Butler', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 35 (1980), 127-49.
 W. Galperin, 'Byron, Austen and the Revolution of Irony', *Criticism*, 32 (1990), 51-80.
 Claudia L. Johnson, 'The "Twilight of Probability": Uncertainty and Hope in *Sense and Sensibility*', *Philological Quarterly*, 62 (1983), 171-86.
 Claudia L. Johnson, 'The Operations of Time, and the Changes of the Human Mind: Jane Austen and Dr Johnson Again', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 44 (1983), 23-38.
 Robert Scholes, 'Dr Johnson and Jane Austen', *Philological Quarterly*, 54 (1975), 380-90.
 Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986).

OTHERS

- All groupings create a category of the excluded. These are some that seriously merit attention:
- Derek Brewer, *Symbolic Stories: Traditional Narratives of the Family Drama in English Literature* (London: Longman, 1988).
 Lennard Davis, *Resisting Novels* (London: Methuen, 1987).
 Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987).
 Meier Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978).
 Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- For those who wish to explore criticism written before 1980, David Gilson provides a useful guide in his *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).