

A STUDY IN JANE AUSTEN'S REACTION TO THE GOTHIC NOVEL
AND THE NOVEL OF SENSIBILITY

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Manila, Philippines

1955

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of
the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
May, 1955

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author wishes to express her boundless gratitude to Dr. Agnes Berrigan for her invaluable guidance and suggestions during the preparation of this study. To her second reader, Dr. Loyd Douglas, she extends her sincere appreciation for his help and encouragement; to the staff of the Humanities department of the Oklahoma A and M College library, she expresses her thanks for making facilities readily available.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. JANE AUSTEN'S WORLD.	1
II. JANE AUSTEN'S CHARACTER.	17
III. JANE AUSTEN'S REACTION TO THE NOVEL OF SENSIBILITY	27
IV. JANE AUSTEN'S REACTION TO THE GOTHIC NOVEL	41
V. CONCLUSION	58
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	62

CHAPTER I
JANE AUSTEN'S WORLD

Although Jane Austen's six novels were all published in the nineteenth century, Pride and Prejudice, written in 1796, was published in 1813; Sense and Sensibility, written in 1797 appeared in 1811; Northanger Abbey printed in 1817, was written as early as 1798, her critics, however, agree that she belongs, "by temper and affinities wholly to the eighteenth century."¹

The world of Jane Austen was a period of great historical upheavals and literary growth. The revolution in France brought waves of terror across the channel, and Trafalgar and Waterloo were contemporary events. It was an epoch when "the map of the world was being unrolled"² and England was increasing in geographical dimensions. In art there had never before been seen in England such a trio of masters as, Reynolds, Gainsborough and Romney. On the literary horizon, the novel was "the most distinctive, the most original and the most characteristic art form developed."³

The novels of the century were reflections of the general characteristics of the time. Fiction was influenced by the conventions of a certain class of society which used this literary form as a framework of its

¹Stephen Gwynn, The Masters of English Literature (New York, 1910), p. 281.

²G. E. Mitton, Jane Austen and Her Times (London, 1905), p. 6.

³Roger P. McCutcheon, Eighteenth Century English Literature (London, 1950), p. 65.

"human and artistic existence."⁴ This framework however, not only excluded, but stubbornly denied all that lay outside its limitations. It was a period of salons and illiteracy, of thundering highwaymen and divines. Politics was corrupt, theaters were daring in their vulgar and indecent jokes and coffee houses numbering three thousand, became gambling dens. The influence of Richardson was in the direction of sentiment if not sentimentality, and the upper class people prided themselves on an exquisite sensibility which however, was invulnerable to the sufferings of the less fortunate. "Ladies whose hearts were wrung by the beauty of a snowdrop or the indisposition of a pet bird"⁵ were unmoved by the social injustices of the times. It was upon the growing middle class that regeneration had to depend. From a financial standpoint they compelled regard. This was the logical time for the transition from the play to the novel. This respected middle class swelled the reading public and the flowering of fiction was underway.

Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, opened a new era for English fiction. "These men by their genius not only set it firmly on its feet, but raised it to a new level and showed this claim to be recognized as a branch of literary art."⁶ They led the field in fictional activity but, for a considerable time, had no effect on the quality of later novels. Novels loaded with sensibility, minute detail and morbid consciousness of every thought and feeling were devoured by an uncritical multitude of fiction readers. A vast majority of these works were worthless and poor imitations of the first school of novelists. Tom

⁴Bridget G. MacCarthy, The Later Women Novelists, 1744-1818 (Dublin, 1947), p. 31.

⁵Ibid., p. 31.

⁶Ibid., p. 31.

Jones, Tristram Shandy and Clarissa," had shown great possibilities, but the quality of fiction as seen after such a series of masterpieces rapidly declined. This is attributed to several factors:

First: The novel catered to people who were incurably romantic, people who have never relinquished the old romantic tradition.

Second: It was a middle class reading public, a public who read chiefly for amusement and who were flattered by novels that reflected their secret desires and feelings.

Third: The novel was a very "saleable article," which could be mass-produced by writers working under the direction of booksellers.

Fourth: The demand came to exceed the supply, and standards fell, due to mass production.

Fifth: The growth of circulating libraries and reading clubs all over the country increased the manufacture of books for an uncritical multitude of novel readers.

A very great factor then in bringing down fiction standards of the time was the "circulating library." It was an excellent idea for the book trade but was an evil for authorship. It made authors the hired servants not merely of the booksellers, but of the crowd of novel readers. Poor novelists, poor imitators and copyists of the "great four" came into existence and special varieties of fiction were born. Among these, the "Novel of Sensibility and the Gothic Novel" became the "darlings" of the latter part of the century.

Before the novel of sensibility can be discussed, a definition of sensibility is necessary. Most eighteenth century writers used "sentimentality" and "sensibility" as if they were virtually synonyms. Sentiment really differed from sensibility mainly in degree. Bridget G.

McCarthy in her book, Later Women Novelists gives a clear definition of both terms:

"Sentiment is in a sense, the norm of feeling. Sensibility was an excessive vulnerability to feeling. It arose from an idealization of spiritual delicacy. It eventually perished of its own falsity. In its career it exhausted every variety of aim, form and degree. Sensibility did not merely value emotion in itself as a proof of the sensitive nature. It substituted emotion for thought and laid great stress on arriving at a truth instinctively."⁷

Most definitions agree with this one. Other writers term "sensibility" "...emotional intensity⁸ ...high-flown emotionalism⁹ ...elegantly exaggerated sentimentalism...."¹⁰ Sensibility then was an exquisite susceptibility to emotion by which one felt one's way through life, making one, "tremblingly alive; without it one merely existed in a vegetative state."¹¹

Deism, the orthodox religion of the century, fostered the growth of sensibility in a way, because it stimulated an interest in wild and rugged scenes and a belief in a natural religion based on reason. This made a Deist, a "man of feeling,"¹² who always found nature a sovereign remedy and a source of consolation, a man perpetually dissolving in "streams of tears,"¹³ with an inveterate tendency toward damp emotional effects.

The novel of sensibility can be traced back to the romances of

⁷MacCarthy, p. 34.

⁸James R. Foster, History of the Pre-Romantic Novel in England (New York, 1949), p. 7.

⁹Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel, V (London, 1934), p. 121.

¹⁰Montague Summers, The Gothic Quest (London, n.d.), p. 112.

¹¹MacCarthy, p. 35.

¹²Foster, p. 7.

¹³MacCarthy, p. 38.

courtly love and certain Renaissance narratives, mostly novelle. Here lovers disguised as shepherds, experienced tender passions or subjected their hearts to self-tormenting analysis. In England, Sensibility had made its novelistic debut in the love stories that came from the pens of authors who were little known, or known principally for their coarse comedies or scandalous court chronicles. By the second half of the century, the reading public, three quarters of which were women, had reacted against "coarseness," and had preoccupied themselves with conventional morality and in a strong bent towards emotionalism. In Richardson they had found their greatest exponent and gained from his works added impetus. This gave birth to the cult of sensibility and sentiment, with sensibility later finding expression not only in the novel of sentiment but in the Gothic novel as well.

Books of sentiment revelling in emotion, especially grief and compassion, decided moral problems according to the reactions of feeling. Plots were deliberately made to involve the characters in as many sufferings and tribulations possible. "Suffering was a bottomless abyss in which a human being might fall forever."¹⁴ Aside from suffering, authors aroused sensibility by love, affection, poverty and ill-fortune. Beauty was another irritant of sensibility, whether of a face, a book or a scene. Moral sensitiveness was still another phase of sensibility made use of by the authors of the time. Pity, benevolence, fidelity, magnanimity, sympathy and tenderness were brought into play and often carried a message. The plot of these novels was little but a series of distressing situations where the natures of the sentimental hero and

¹⁴Ibid., p. 35.

heroine were demonstrated completely.

The heroes and heroines were indeed pathetic types. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the sentimental hero often "lost control of himself, or complained too much about the misfortunes which dogged his footsteps, or felt that his refined soul set him apart from and above the rest of mankind."¹⁵ But after the seventeen sixties, the tendency for the "man of feeling" was to become unrestrained, flighty and extremely egoistic. They started subordinating all things to that "exquisitely sensitive soul whose sensibility it is their only function to arouse."¹⁶

The heroine of sensibility, lived constantly in the midst of misfortunes and adventures. She must be young, at least in her heroic period, and above all, virtuous. The index of virtue was sensibility, and since sensibility thrived on adventure, anything unadventurous or domestic, was considered trivial. If the heroine is beyond the heroic age, say one of fifty-five, she may be good for giving advice on the ground of experience. In the end, when a young woman grew old, she would be induced to give a "detailed, self-conscious account of her life to some friend: and, since sensibility is infinitely varied and beautiful, the language will be full of circumlocution and ornament."¹⁷

The eighteenth century reader had many moments of excitement and nightmares with seduced girls, dying parents, starving families in garrets, beggars, repentant sinners, wringing streams of tears. It is a

¹⁵Foster, p. 17.

¹⁶MacCarthy, p. 37.

¹⁷Marvin Mudrick, Jane Austen, Irony As Defense and Discovery (New Jersey, 1952), p. 7.

world where emotions run wild, where "speech becomes rhodomontade, and action, passing rapidly through every phase of convulsive behavior, reaches the limit of human endurance and is intermitted. Thus the characters sob, groan, scream, beat their breasts, tear their hair, fall into a frenzy, rave and become insensible."¹⁸

These were the characteristics of the novel of sensibility. The poorer sort of author had to cater to the tastes of the circulating library and to hold the reading public's attention, he pandered to the yearning for excitement by providing material that grew more and more stimulating, and so ran the scale from the bizarre to the pathetic, ending in melodrama. What these authors turned out was a fixed blend of Richardson, Sterne, and the picaresque and moralistic elements of Fielding and Smollett. Clarissa's trials and Sterne's pathos aroused a literary craving that was prodigally indulged in by more or less ingenious imitators - with ruthless directness, thereby making their readers suffer much. This kind of novels won immediate applause however, and like an epidemic, the reading public feasted on such stock theses as: "the prodigal's return, the benevolent tableau, the call of the blood, the tearful farewell, the fainting fit, and tear tracking."¹⁹

The fiction of sensibility had little or no relation to reality; false notions of nobility and villainy precluded characterization, melodramatic orgies in plot and style completed the artificiality. It was all unnatural and even hysterical. The Gothic novel carried these tendencies even farther.

¹⁸MacCarthy, p. 38.

¹⁹Foster, p. 18.

The last half of the eighteenth century was an era of immense expansion. "Men found their hearts and sobbed like children; they formed for themselves ideals of conduct and visionary schemes for their social amelioration. Their sympathies were enlarged; they described the impressions that the sights and sounds of nature made upon them in words trembling with enthusiasm and passion; their imaginations enfranchised, they were swept away from the world around them into a romantic past and future."²⁰ The novel which from Richardson downward was a record of this dilation of heart and imagination, became in the closing years of the century, the novel of "crime, insanity, and nightmare. Romanticism was aglow but it drunk immoderately of new emotions."²¹

The development of the romantic trend in the eighteenth century was "an extremely complex phenomenon, covering several decades and spreading over Western Europe. It was related to industrial, social, political, intellectual and literary changes. It was a form of protest against the stereotyped, or against the tendency of life and society to harden into fixed forms of custom, privilege, convention, and established authority."²² It was a state of intellectual ferment that wrought profound changes, changes as profound as those produced by the French Revolution and incidentally produced stories about old ghost-haunted castles." It was a manifestation of the recurring contention between the forces of stability and the forces of change. On the one side were ranged tradition, pro-

²⁰Wilbur L. Cross, The Development of the English Novel (New York, 1942), p. 114.

²¹Cross, p. 114.

²²Bruce McCullough, Representative English Novelists: Defoe to Conrad (New York, 1946), p. 86.

priety, restraint, authority, and experience; on the other side was the restless, inquiring spirit of mankind - impatient of restraint, hating tyranny, seeking liberty and progress toward the fulfillment of its dream of perfection."²³

The English people, incurably romantic, reacted against neo-classicism and indulged in novels that offered a romantic escape. These novels are now known as "Gothic Novel." "This novel was at once a part of the Romantic Revival and a prolongation of the cult of sensibility and emotion."²⁴ It was more or less a conscious protest against the rational, realistic creed of Richardson and Fielding and their followers, which asserted the superiority for literary purposes of things familiar and contemporary. This reaction represented one phase of that "revival of interest in medieval life and art which descended from a scholarly antiquarian zeal to become a fashion, and bore strange fruit in pseudo-Gothic castles and artificial ruins; in ballads ancient and modern; in Gothic Chippendale chairs; and in a new species of romantic fiction."²⁵

This new interest manifested itself first in poetry and essays. Research in the poetry and romances of the Middle Ages attracted attention. The work of the antiquaries, the revival of ballads and other old literature, and even imitations and forgeries, gave the new trend fresh sustenance. Architectural approach to medievalism was to prove the main channel by which olden times were to influence the new literary fad. A Gothic cathedral or castle was the nucleus of great imaginative activity;

²³Cross, p. 86.

²⁴Baker, p. 175.

²⁵Robert M. Lovett and Helen A. Hughes, The History of the Novel in England (Boston, 1932), p. 103.

it became the symbol of ruin and romance. Old buildings, which had been treated so contemptuously and with so little understanding, came to be treasured as relics of a past age. "To the Gothicism's eye, a ruin was in itself a thing of loveliness - and for interesting reasons. A mouldering building is a parable of the victory of nature over man's handiwork, of the impermanence of human life and effort and it expresses the triumph of chaos over order...."²⁶ Hence, the word "Gothic" came to connote almost anything that was medieval, and referred to almost any period until the middle or even the end of seventeenth century.

Although the impetus to this kind of story-telling was first noted in poetry, novelists of the period did not long delay in seizing upon inspiration so suited to their craft. It opened unlimited freedom of invention and was an escape from the gamut of domestic themes. Why not invent a novel that stressed terror, a twofold terror compounded of physical dangers and the more paralyzing fear of the supernatural? The Gothicismists were quick to seize upon this theme and selected those aspects of medievalism which would prove most terrifying. "The primary source of terror was the ruin itself, the second, was the tyrant who inhabited it."²⁷ The novelists did not burden themselves with the task of historical accuracy, "they had only to expand their minds in the direction of antiquity, to unleash their imaginations."²⁸ Their primary aim was to terrorize the reader and the "more morbid and coarse the sensibilities to be stirred the more heady the variations and exaggerations of these stimulants."²⁹

²⁶Michael Sadleir, "The Northanger Novels," Edinburgh Review, Vol. 246, (July, 1927), p. 95.

²⁷Bertrand Evans, Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley (Berkeley, 1947), p. 89.

²⁸MacCarthy, p. 132.

²⁹Baker, p. 175.

From the following stuff, the Gothic Novel of romance was made: dark, winding stairways, grated windows, secret panels, dizzying battlements, dark dungeons, haunted chambers, groans and gouts of blood, secret passages, and antique tapestries. "No wonder that minds long shackled to sensible themes cast reason to the winds, and played the Gothic game of make-believe - a game in which anything might happen so long as one began 'Once upon a time.' This flight from the present into the past was really a romantic quest - an effort to discover strange aspects of beauty, to give a loose to the restlessness, the curiosity, and the sense of wonder which excessive normality had stifled."³⁰

In the Gothic novel, sensibility was still the index of virtue and the motive of action. The difference from the Novel of Sensibility lay in the atmosphere created. Extravagances of pathos, poverty, suffering and parental misunderstanding are replaced by strangeness and terror - a change of atmosphere rather than character or motive. "For the reader, the only difference is that the gasp replaces the tear as the measurable unit of response."³¹ So in the Gothic thriller we meet old friends from the Novel of Sensibility: the importunate suitor, the tyrannical father, the hero and heroine of mysterious but noble birth, the confidante and the chaperone, only this time in a new setting.

The key to the relationship of the Gothic novel to the novel of Sensibility is the "heroine." This trembling girl who now endures every variety of terror is the same one who formerly suffered more normal vi-

³⁰MacCarthy, p. 133.

³¹Mudrick, p. 40.

cissitudes. The heroine has to endure all the horror and anxiety achieved as the reader will gain a knowledge of these dread adventures through a perception of the trembling girl. As we read, we become identified with her, and since her sensitiveness is extreme and her reactions intense, we are caught up in a mounting wave of sensibility. But even though the persecuted heroine is extremely sensitive, she is not weak. She weeps and faints, but she does not succumb.

Most Gothic heroines are too virtuous and refined to be very human. Most of them have a morbid craving for frightening experiences and are never content until they have visited the haunted chambers and investigated all the spooky rumors and folk tales that have reached their ears. They are highly impressionable and possess nerves so sensitive that the most fleeting or the slightest sound relating to something dreaded, strikes them with terrific impact. "The half-revealed, the barely suggested, any hint or sign is sufficient to set their nerves in violent vibration and their hearts pounding."³² The heroine too, was melancholy and "when alone upon the seashore, in the mountains, at sunset or twilight, or under the midnight moon, or when the wind is blowing, she overflows into stanza or sonnet, 'To Autumn,' 'To the Bat,' 'To the Nightingale,' 'To the Winds,' 'To Melancholy,' 'Song To The Evening Hour.'"³³

The heroes are handsome, melancholy, passionate, respectful but desperate, "a user of most choice English, with large black eyes, smooth white forehead, and jetty curls...."³⁴ They love passionately, often at

³²Foster, p. 265.

³³Henry A. Beers, A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1926), p. 251.

³⁴Ibid., p. 251.

first sight and always forever. They always are victims of an ill-disposed destiny, and the misfortunes they undergo are not normal.

The characteristic figure of the Gothic novel however, was the restless villain. "He is the progenitor of the Byronic type, who with years develops a personality dominating and saturnine, in later novels approaching the satanic."³⁵ He is usually gloomy, ambitious, and plots the undoing of the heroine.

These novels were very long, very much alike, and very much overloaded with description and sentiment. The complicated plots abounded in the wildest improbabilities and incidents. Atmosphere is always being drawn upon to contribute its share to the effect. The reader soon grows accustomed to the banditti, gypsies, monks, smugglers, old chests, instruments of torture, which serve as backdrops of the Gothic theater. "Monks sing chants at midnight; lamps burn blue, presumably when spirits are close at hand; a goblet filled with poisoned wine bursts as it is being lifted to the lips. Papers bearing secrets have to be destroyed in compliance with a dying father's wishes."³⁶

The fountainhead of these novels of romance, was Horace Walpole's "Castle of Otranto," published in 1764. The author was a dilettante and man of wit who having purchased a small property at Twickenham to serve him as a retreat, decided to make a little Gothic castle out of his house and thereafter spent several years converting it into a villa of fantastic stucco-Gothic style and storing it with medieval bric-a-bac. Thus, his novel, in Ernest Baker's own words, was "like the mansion in which he

³⁵Lovett and Hughes, p. 112.

³⁶McCullough, p. 92.

wrote it, a dilettante's exploit in Gothicism, a pseudo-antique in the one and in the other, Walpole let antiquarian taste and fantasy have free play, with less seriousness in the case of the story than he felt for his architectural hobby."³⁷

The events of this romance, though assigned to Italy and to the twelfth or the thirteenth century, have no definite background; all is built up in the imagination. A castle with a black tower, long dark stairways, airy chambers where doors slam and screech on rusty hinges, trap doors, subterranean caverns leading to a great church - this is the scene of the medieval tragedy. Within the castle, Walpole places the tyrant Manfred, a patient and long suffering wife, domestics, two romantic girls of exceeding beauty, and a "lovely young prince, with large black eyes, a smooth white forehead, and manly curling locks like jet."³⁸

The plot is not very new; it has all the stock properties of romantic fiction. Alfonso, the original lord of Otranto, had been poisoned in Palestine by an ungrateful chamberlain named, Ricardo, who later forges a will making himself heir of Otranto. The usurper making his peace with God, builds a church and convent in honor of St. Nicholas who "appeared to him in a dream and promised that Ricardo's posterity should reign in Otranto until the rightful owner should be grown too large to inhabit the castle."³⁹ When the story opens, this prophecy is about to be fulfilled. Then the "Gothic horrors" begin. A great, gloomy, upper chamber is haunted by a giant in armor, who in shaking himself stupefies

³⁷Baker, p. 178.

³⁸Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto (London, 1929), p. 25.

³⁹Ibid., p. 102.

the domestics with terror. The portrait of Manfred's grandfather "utters a deep sigh, heaves its breast, quits its panel, descends on the floor with a grave and melancholy air."⁴⁰ A statue bleeds at the nose, and a helmet is far from being impressive in proportion to its huge size. A monstrous gauntlet is laid upon the banister of the great staircase; a mailed foot appears in one apartment and a sword is brought into the courtyard on the shoulders of a hundred men.

The novel feature in the "Castle of Otranto" was its Gothic setting, as we see in Isabella's escape through a secret trapdoor: "an awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness. The wind extinguished her candle, but an imperfect ray of clouded moonshine gleamed through a cranny in the roof of the vault and fell directly on the spring of the trap-door."⁴¹

The supernatural elements in "The Castle of Otranto," are presented with such violence and credulity, that they seem ridiculous rather than impressive. Walpole took some pains with the description of some passages and events but they are poor in detail. Henry A. Beers believes that "Walpole's medievalism was very thin...Walpole knew little about the Middle Ages and was not in touch with their spirit."⁴² In spite of these glaring defects, the "Castle of Otranto" was widely read, and it was not long in

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 10.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 12.

⁴²Beers, p. 240.

finding imitations. It did not start a new line of ghost stories immediately or arouse a keener interest in the middle ages until later, when Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, "the Great Enchantress,"⁴³ came to the fore with her wild romances.

⁴³Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York, 1943), p. 117.

CHAPTER II

JANE AUSTEN'S CHARACTER

Jane Austen's character and environment, "dictated the scene and scope of her novels but did not restrict their power."¹ Every line she wrote, is stamped with an individuality all her own; but that individuality might have been expressed differently, had her life and family been other than they were. They have their part in the spirit, form and matter of her books and it was the "spirit of Steventon in Northanger Abbey, in Pride and Prejudice and in Persuasion."²

It is obvious to the reader that Jane Austen used her family in more than one situation in her six novels. The deep love and understanding she experienced in her relationship with Cassandra, we see in Elinor and Marianne in Sense and Sensibility. In Mansfield Park, Fanny's love for sailors and enthusiasm for the Navy, was surely inspired by her brothers, Frank and Charles, who were both sailors. The sympathy she had for young men who are going into the church is not surprising, since her own father and two brothers were clergymen. The opening description of Catherine Morland's family in Northanger Abbey is a clear echo of life at Steventon with the Austens:

"Her father was a clergyman, without being neglected or poor, and a very respectable man, though his name was Richard, and he had never been handsome. He had a considerable independence, besides two good livings, and he was not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters. Her mother was a woman of useful plain sense, with a good temper, and, what is more remarkable, with a good constitution.

¹"Jane Austen: Artist On Ivory," Saturday Review of Literature, XIV (August 15, 1936), p. 4.

²R. Brimley Johnson, Jane Austen (London, 1930), p. 10.

She had three sons before Catherine was born; and instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as anybody might expect, she still lived on - lived to have six children more - to see them growing up around her, and to enjoy excellent health herself. A family of ten children will be always called a fine family, where there are heads, and arms, and legs enough for the number; but the Morlands had little other right to the word for they were in general very plain, and Catherine for many years of her life, as plain as any..."³

Jane Austen's intellectual heritage was good. Her father had been a scholar and later a fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, where he was known at one time as the "handsome proctor."⁴ Mrs. Austen's father was a fellow of All Soul's and one of her uncles, a Master of Balliol, was celebrated in the University for his wit. She herself, was a clever woman full of epigram and humor in conversation and rather famous in her own coterie for improvised verses and satirical hits at friends.

The life of the Austens was the life of thousands dwelling in the depths of the country at a time when the excitements of the town were almost as remote as in the Middle Ages. The rector at Steventon was a man "worthily held in high respect by all who knew him; but he was not an influential landed proprietor, or a man of acknowledged genius, or otherwise of such note as to be on familiar terms with the great or courted by society."⁵ The liveliness of a large family of seven, made Jane Austen's childhood a very happy one. A cheerful home, indulgent parents, the companionship of Cassandra and the constant comings and goings of her brothers, contributed to this happy family atmosphere where she found all that was needed for the growth of her particular mental powers. It was a

³ Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey (New York, 1933), p. 1063.

⁴ Muriel Masfield, Women Novelists (London, 1934), p. 36.

⁵ Baker, VI, p. 58.

a family, "blessed with a sense of humor and the love of life."⁶

Every available opportunity of instruction was made use of, in this household. According to the ideas of the time she was well-educated, though not highly accomplished, but she certainly enjoyed that important element of mental training, associating at home with persons of cultivated intellect. "The general love of literature that prevailed in Steventon Rectory, is sufficient security that Jane could not suffer from any intellectual poverty in her home."⁷ The Austens were great novel readers, even if the novels than were treasuries of incongruities. That a bookish family atmosphere was familiar to Jane Austen, is seen in her novels. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny had a "fondness for reading."⁸ *Marianne Dashwood* in *Sense and Sensibility*, always spoke of literary and artistic topics, "the beauties of Scott and Cowper, the limitations of Pope, second marriages and picturesque beauty."⁹ In *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen shows her acquaintance with prevailing Gothic romances, in the conversation of Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe:

"Dear creature! how much I am obliged to you; and when you have finished *Udolpho*, we will read the Italian together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you."

"Have you, indeed! How glad I am! What are they all?"

"I will read you their names directly; here they are in my pocketbook. "*Castle of Wolfenbach*," "*Clermont*," "*Mysterious Warnings*," "*Necromancer of the Black Forest*," "*Midnight Bell*," "*Orphan of the*

⁶Johnson, p. 12.

⁷Mary Augusta Austen - Leigh, Personal Aspects of Jane Austen, (London, 1920), p. 41.

⁸*Mansfield Park*, p. 481.

⁹Chapman, p. 40.

Rhine," and "Horrid Mysteries." Those will last us some time."¹⁰

Catherine Morland, though ignorant, had learned from books the spell of romance, "Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney - and castles and abbeys made usually the charm of those reveries which his image did not fill."¹¹ Even Elizabeth in "Pride and Prejudice," was always ready to talk about books. She was not only transported by the prospect of a picturesque tour, but resolved to write an account of her travels.

Literary allusions in the novels are not so numerous as in her letters. Most of the references she makes are to novels. She had read "Tom Jones" before twenty, and mentions "Tristram Shandy" and "A Sentimental Journey." She was familiar with Madame D' Arblay and Maria Edgeworth. "She was an early victim of Mrs. Radcliffe and her school; the horrid novels named by Isabella Thorpe are real books and Jane had read them all."¹² Richardson, she studied closely and for the most part, she read like other people, the current poems and novels. To show her enthusiasm for fiction, she wrote that well-known and spirited defense of novel reading and novel writing in Northanger Abbey, where for the first and almost the only time in the history of her art, she breaks the silence of impersonality and steps forth boldly in justification of her much loved and most abused profession.

Outside the novel, her reading was wide. She delighted in authors who still delight us - Pope, Johnson, Addison, and Cowper and Crabbe. She took her history from Goldsmith and Hume and Robertson. She knew

¹⁰Northanger Abbey, p. 10 F9.

¹¹Ibid., p. 1140.

¹²Chapman, p. 38.

her Shakespeare rather well, as we see in her novels. In Mrs. Dashwood's drawing room, "Hamlet" was read aloud and Henry Crawford in "Mansfield Park," assumes that a knowledge of Shakespeare is instinctively imbibed from the atmosphere of every educated household.

R. W. Chapman gives us a list of the books Jane Austen possessed. They included: "Goldsmith's History of England, with her youthful marginalia and Dodsley's Collection of Poems and Fanny Burney's Camilla, for which she was a subscriber in 1796. A more recent accidental dispersal revealed her ownership of Hume's History, Thomson's Works, Goldsmith's Animated Nature, Hayley's Poems and Plays. These volumes contain her signature, and the dates of acquisition, always before 1800. Some of them have also the bookplate of her uncle, James Leigh Perrot, who must have given them to her."¹³

Although Jane Austen may have been temperamentally unresponsive to romance, the reading of such books could not always have been burdensome. Many of her letters prove that she often was amused and enjoyed a poor novel, if only to make fun of it. Indeed she seems to have derived much of her inspiration from these mediocre and more than mediocre works. "She was born in a happy hour, for hers was a genius that flourished best in discouraging soil. On trashy novels she was nourished and this nourishment helped to produce a great novelist and sane critic."¹⁴ This fictional environment helped in the making of a satirist already endowed with genius and innate gifts.

Jane Austen was born with great natural gifts. She had keen powers of observation, common sense in a high degree, a lively wit, a strong

¹³Chapman, p. 37.

¹⁴"Jane Austen the Critic," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America XL (June, 1925), p. 402.

sense of the ridiculous and an instinct for proportion. "She was equipped by nature with level eyes, steady nerves, invincible irony, an untroubled knowledge of her scope and an unfailing knack of selection."¹⁵

The range within which Jane Austen gathered her experience and beyond which her "artistic integrity never let her stray..."¹⁶ was more limited than the varied world in which her contemporaries, Fanny Burney or Maria Edgeworth, gained their material. She never went abroad, she even knew little of her own country. Kent and Hampshire were her territories, with visits to Lyne, Dawlish and Sidmouth, a week or so with brother Henry in London now and then; some years at Bath with her rich uncle and Aunt - the Leigh - Perrots. It was a narrow field indeed, but in it she was supreme. That anyone should have been able to extract so much from so slight a material is matter for wonder. Though her world was tiny, it gave her complete control of her material and trained in her powers of minute observation. Meeting with few people, she had leisure to study microscopically the mainsprings of character. This power of observation, few novelists have ever possessed. Many critics believe that this one quality is the very essence of her charm and for recording the points of an average woman's observation, she stands unsurpassed. "Nothing escapes her, nothing baffles her, nothing deceives her"¹⁷ for hers is that "rare observation which concentrates on the unchanging."¹⁸

¹⁵Carl Van Doren, (New York, 1928), p. X.

¹⁶Baker, p. 58.

¹⁷David Cecil, Poets and Story-Tellers (New York, 1949), p. 111.

¹⁸Laura Kinkley, Ladies of Literature (New York, 1946), p. 86.

Jane Austen's keen power of observation, made her see through the affectations of society and the incongruities of life as plainly as did Thackeray later. As a little girl at Steventon, as a gay butterfly leading a cotillion, as a woman with but a month to live - at every stage is evident her absorption in human behavior and at the giving of judgment in tones mocking and even merciless. She was not content just to dash down her intuitive impressions of people; her "lucid knife-edged mind was always at work penetrating beneath such impressions to discern their cause, discover the principles of her subject's conduct, the peculiar combination of qualities that go to make up this individuality."¹⁹

This critical faculty in Jane Austen, has caused critics to brand her "heartless." She did have a heart, a heart that revolted scornfully at all that was pretentious, hypocritical, or silly. She despised all ideals however lofty, that were not practical, all emotions however soul stirring, if they did not contribute to the happiness of mankind. Emotional exuberance she detested, and she reserved some of her most mischievous mockery for extravagant maternal affection and sentimental rhapsodising over nature. Love itself, though she understood its workings admirable, did not rouse her enthusiasm unless it was disciplined by self-control. She had little sympathy for romantic imprudence or credulous good nature; she was impatient of people with hearts of gold and heads of wood. G. K. Chesterton believes that her power came from "the control and direction of exuberance. But there is the presence and pressure of that vitality behind her thousand trivialities; she could have been extravagant if she liked. This is what gives an infallible force to her irony. This

¹⁹Cecil, p. 110.

is what gives stunning weight to her understatement. At the back of this artist also, counted as passionless there was passion; but her original passion was a sort of joyous scorn and a fighting spirit against all that she regarded as morbid and lax and poisonously silly."²⁰

Common sense was the foundation of Jane Austen's mind. This was what she hungered for - truth and sanity. Even as a child she felt impelled to reject all that was false in literary symbolism as we see in her "juvenilia." Her common sense does not mean the exclusion of beauty and romance from life, but by it she meant, "the repudiation of uncontrolled emotionalism, of grandiose clap-trap and melodrama, of hypocrisy and self-deception."²¹ Extremeness in everything - except modesty, seems to have been disgusting to her. From Elizabeth and Darcy's conversation in "Pride and Prejudice," we see the things she hated most:

Darcy: "The wisest and the best of men - nay, the wisest and best of their actions - may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke."

"Certainly," replied Elizabeth - "there are such people, but I hope I am not one of them. I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and Nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can."²²

Jane Austen's common sense was a passion for reality which made her hate anything false in life. Honesty was a fundamental trait with her. Thus the falsity of the novels of her time aroused her, and the "mad world" presented by the Gothic novel and the Novel of Sensibility, did not escape her satiric scrutiny and mockery.

²⁰Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Preface to Love and Friendship (London, 1922), p. XV.

²¹MacCarthy, p. 236.

²²Pride and Prejudice, pp. 264-265.

It was Jane Austen's humor though, that gave point to her observation and a kind of prim liveliness to her sentiment. Her sunny temper combined with her common sense, produced that "continuous ebullition of humor in which so many have delighted for so long."²³ As a young girl she loved to laugh and liked to make others laugh. A keen appreciation of other's absurdities, pretentiousness, affectations and insincerities afforded Cassandra and Jane, moments of laughter and amusement. "She hardly ever wrote a letter that had not a smile or a laugh in it,"²⁴ and there is hardly a page of her writing, which does not afford a striking illustration of her good sense, her good temper, or her fun, and usually all three at once. In the tranquil and delightful world that she created, we find her laughing mischievously behind her heroines. In sheer adolescent fun, she created the hilarious burlesque, "Love and Friendship," mocking the school of sentiment and sensibility, with bubbling exaggeration. However, beneath the whims and nonsense that bubble to the surface of her novels, there is always that undercurrent of common sense and respectable thinking. "So consummate an artist as Jane Austen certainly did not make her characters a mere mouthpiece of herself, and yet in the selection and in the treatment of her material she spoke plainly her opinions and ideals."²⁵

From Jane Austen's six novels, we get the following opinions and ideals that she believed in: "Young women had better marry husbands who can support them. Gentlemen suffering from ennui may find a very useful occupation in looking after their tenants. Her ideal of manhood was the

²³Hinkley, p. 73.

²⁴W. Somerset Maugham, Great Novelists and Their Novels, (Philadelphia, 1948), p. 79.

²⁵Cross, p. 118.

heroism of the sea. In her most careful character-building, she considered, and gave due weight to, the bearing of early education, environment, wealth, and poverty; and on the subject of heredity, she went somewhat beyond current humors and ruling passions."²⁶

These fine sense of values which gave Jane Austen's mind its characteristic bent, made her revolt against the terrific convulsions of melodrama and emotionalism enveloping the literary world of her time and so, she freed herself by laughter, "laughter that was ironic because she was no fool."²⁷ "She rebelled, because she could not tolerate unreality taken to excess. It was not in her nature to join the wild romantic exaggerations, the insincerity and lack of proportion, the distortion of everyday life, so, she not merely evaded these conceptions, she revolted with gales of ironic merriment that brought these "pasteboard erections"²⁸ of the school of sensibility and the Gothicists, to the ground.

²⁶Cross, p. 118.

²⁷MacCarthy, p. 237.

²⁸Ibid., p. 237.

CHAPTER III

JANE AUSTEN'S REACTION TO THE NOVEL OF SENSIBILITY

Jane Austen, reading the novels pouring off from the presses into the circulating libraries, felt that these authors, in their adherence to conventions altogether remote from the probabilities of human behavior, had no artistic right to make their readers suffer so much. She registered her protest against the epidemic and "sharpened her quill," giving her reaction in the novel "Sense and Sensibility."

Typical of the novel of sentiment is Mackenzie's, "Man of Feeling," which enjoys the distinction of being the most sentimental of all English novels. The limitations and absurdities so characteristic of novels of sensibility are clearly shown in this novel that it serves as a specific model for Jane Austen's parody of sensibility.

"The Man of Feeling," is a series of glimpses of life from one point of view, that of a deeply feeling and compassionate man who finds supreme happiness in ecstasy of feeling. It is a medley crammed with "sentimental motifs, such as the loneliness of the delicate soul, unhappy love, the hardness of life for a private soldier and for the victims of business trickery..."¹ and the customary glorification of benevolence. This set of episodes purporting to be taken from an "important manuscript" is explained by Mackenzie in his preliminary chapter. The discontinuity is supposed to be caused by pages lost from the original manuscript, for the curate, from whom the author obtained it, had used them for gun wadding. The episodes are chosen, not for the sake of excitement they offer but solely

¹Baugh Albert, A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), p. 1027.

"to make call upon the virtuous, if ill-regulated feelings, and still more, upon the tears of the hero."²

The raw plot of this novel is "sentiment" and in extravagant and absurd scenes, the reader sees the effect of contact with life on a lonely and delicate soul. Harley, the hero, had such a soul. He is the "man of feeling" and "no more mawkishly - sentimental hero ever appeared in print..."³ He possesses all the qualities of the conventional novel-of-sensibility hero; sentimental background, sensitive and retiring nature, with feelings too fine for his surroundings. He was so over sensitive to beauty that his notions of the beautiful could not be clearly defined. To him, "a blush, a phrase of affability to an inferior, a tear at a moving tale, were to him, like the Cestus of Cytherea, unequalled in conferring beauty..."⁴ With this extra sensitive temperament, Harley experiences the most penetrating sensations. He sighs and weeps at the least provocation that tears flow in torrents in consecutive pages. He is always on the verge of collapsing and liable to die at any moment. At every contact with life, Harley undergoes suffering that is pleasing to him.

The author places the hero in various scenes and traces the effect which each produces in his character. First he is brought into contact with a party of sightseers that goes to Bedlam and there, Harley indulges freely in the "luxury of tears." After being acquainted with a melancholy

²A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, The Cambridge History of English Literature, X (New York, 1933), p. 62.

³Kunitz and Haycraft, British Authors Before 1800 (New York, 1952), p. 331.

⁴Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling (London, n.d.), p. 14.

summary of a mad-woman's life, he kisses her hand with tears falling in streams between them. Then he risks ridicule and scandal by befriending a prostitute, whose story of her betrayal, evokes the usual tears and benevolence from him. The restoration scene to the broken-hearted father soaks two consecutive pages with tears and the melodramatic dialogue is played to the hilt by the three characters:

"His daughter was now prostrate at his feet. 'Strike,' said she, 'strike here a wretch, whose misery cannot end but with that death she deserves.'

Her hair had fallen on her shoulders! her look had the horrid calmness of out-breathed despair! Her father would have spoken; his eyes lost the lightning of their fury! there was a reproach in them, but with a mingling of pity. He turned them up to heaven, then on his daughter. He laid his left hand on his heart, the sword dropped from his right, he burst into tears."⁵

This tearful trend is kept on to the last hysterical scene. This scene is to be remembered for its dripping sentimentality. Too shy and poor, Harley loves an heiress, but he cannot confess his love until he is bedfast. In her presence, he experiences a thousand sentiments that gush so impetuously on his heart, that he cannot utter a syllable. When finally Miss Walton acknowledges his love for her, the frail hero:

"seized her hand - a languid colour reddened his cheek - a smile brightened faintly in his eye. As he gazed on her, it grew dim, it fixed, it closed - He sighed and fell back on his seat - Miss Walton screamed at the sight - His aunt and the servants rushed in the room - They found them lying motionless together. His physician happened to call at that instant. Every art was tried to recover them - With Miss Walton they succeeded - But Harley was gone forever."⁶

It is not difficult to smile at the convulsive style of the most exacting passages, nor do our tears flow in time with Harley's but Mackenzie

⁵Ibid., p. 72.

⁶Ibid., p. 143.

does succeed in glorifying the cult of sensibility. In Jane Austen's "Sense and Sensibility," the follies of exaggerated sensibility, like that of Harley, is satirized. She shows the reader that, "strong feeling is not necessarily incompatible with self-restraint,"⁷ and it is always wise to behave sensibly.

In this novel, we meet two sisters who stand for the characteristics of "sense" and "sensibility." The plot hinges upon the evils inflicted by the heroine upon herself and her family through too violent indulgence in sensibility. Both sisters have their trials to go through and the identical situations they are in, bring out the contrast clearly and furnishes excellent openings for Jane Austen's satire. The immediate target is the sensibility of Marianne Dashwood who was:

"sensible and clever; but eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was everything but prudent."⁸

In contrast, Elinor, who stands for clear-eyed sanity:

"possessed a strength of understanding and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother, and enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong: but she knew how to govern them..."⁹

Marianne, indeed, is the very personification of that sensibility so dear to the heroes and heroines of the novel of sensibility. She loves pain, misery, and tears. She possesses the romantic temperament of Harley, his love for beauty and delicate sensibility. When her father dies, the mis-

⁷Martha Egelston, A Study of the Evidences of Romanticism in the Novels After 1812 and in the Fragments (M. A. Thesis, Okla. A & M College, 1940), p. 26.

⁸Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility (New York, n.d.), p. 3.

⁹Sense and Sensibility, p. 3.

fortune overwhelms and her mother, between whom there is "a strikingly great"¹⁰ resemblance. In the face of this great loss, Elinor sees:

"the excess of her sister's sensibility; but by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued and cherished. They encouraged each other now in the violence of their affliction. The agony of grief which overpowered them at first, was voluntarily renewed, was sought for, was created again and again. They gave themselves up wholly to their sorrow, seeking increase of wretchedness in every reflection that could afford it, and resolved against ever admitting consolation in the future..."¹¹

And when the Dashwoods are required to leave Norland, the over-sensitive Marianne sheds many tears, and in bidding adieu to a place much loved, waxes poetic:

"Dear, dear Norland!....when shall I cease to regret you? When learn to feel at home elsewhere? O happy house! could you know what I suffer in now viewing you from this spot, from whence perhaps I may view you no more! and you, ye well-known trees! but you will continue the same; unconscious of the pleasure or the regret you occasion, and insensible of any change in those who walk under your shade! But who will remain to enjoy you?"¹²

This tearful farewell is highly reminiscent of Harley's departure for London. Bidding Peter, his faithful servant, goodbye, he shakes him by the hand as he passes:

"smiling, as if he had said, 'I will not weep! He sprung hastily into the chaise that waited for him; Peter folded up the step. 'My dear Master,' said he, shaking the solitary lock that hung on either side of his head, 'I have been told as how London is a sad place.' He was choked with the thought, and his benediction could not be heard:- but it shall be heard honest Peter! where these tears will add to its energy."¹³

Marianne's ardent pursuit of the most romantic ideas and notions, ranging from worship of the picturesque in literature and art, to the firm belief of the impossibility of "second attachments" in the field of love,

¹⁰Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹Ibid., p. 3.

¹²Ibid., p. 16.

¹³The Man of Feeling, p. 18.

brings her to an unromantic end. She thrives in her misery and her sufferings involve all those who love her in great embarrassment, in great unhappiness, because she never tries to hide her feelings. Her many prostrations drives her friends and loved ones to her side. In the end, this passionate, lovely girl who did not believe in marrying old bachelors who had "outlived all acuteness of feeling and every exquisite power of enjoyment,"¹⁴ finally finds contentment with a colorless, aging bachelor whose tastes did not coincide with her own and who had a partiality for flannel waistcoats. Sentimentality, emotion for emotion's sake, the luxury of woe, were not at all in Jane Austen's way, so she was hard, as a kind woman can be on poor Marianne.

In the two sister's love affairs, Jane Austen shows us clearly what an oversensitive heroine merits. In punishing Marianne and sparing Elinor from her ironic sting, she censures the cult of sensibility and all its trappings. To further impress the reader with her hatred for excessive sentiment, she draws a clear parallel between the attentions paid the sisters by their suitors: Edward Ferrars and John Willoughby. In consonance with Elinor's coolness of disposition, her friendship with Edward is conducted on the level of the mind. As she tells Marianne:

"I have seen a great deal of him, have studied his sentiments, and heard his opinions on subjects of literature and taste; and, upon the whole, I venture to pronounce that his mind is well informed, his enjoyment of books exceedingly great, his imagination lively, his observation just and correct, and his taste delicate and pure. His abilities in every respect improve as much upon acquaintance as his manners and person. At first sight, his address is certainly not striking; and his person can hardly be called handsome, till the expression of his eyes, which are uncommonly good, and the general sweetness of his countenance is perceived."¹⁵

¹⁴Sense and Sensibility, p. 22.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 11.

Elinor does not even seem to feel Edward's neglect to visit them when he comes to Devonshire. This calmness in Elinor's temperament is incomprehensible to Marianne. She thinks Edward docile and spiritless and remarks to her mother: "...the more I know of the world, the more I am convinced that I shall never see a man whom I can really love. I require so much!"¹⁶ And so, she sets the stage for her dramatic meeting with handsome John Willoughby, who rescues her after she has sprained her ankle while walking on the downs near Barton. She is completely under his spell and succumbs to an enchantment, that she forgets to study his sentiments and taste. When Marianne saw "that to the perfect good breeding of the gentleman, he united frankness and vivacity, and above all, when she heard him declare that of music and dancing he was passionately fond,"¹⁷ she falls completely in love with him, thereby forgetting convention, sisterly advices, and sensible behavior. This enchantment comes to a climax, when Marianne, defying convention and the expense of up-keep, accepts as a gift a horse named "Queen Mab" from Willoughby. Ignoring Elinor's admonitions, she visits Willoughby's estate, Allenham. His sudden departure for London, leaves her in hysterics, allowing her violent grief to overpower her. Her behavior on Willoughby's departure makes her a true Mackenzian heroine of Sensibility:

"They saw nothing of Marianne till dinner time, when she entered the room and took her place at the table without saying a word. Her eyes were red and swollen; and it seemed as if her tears were even then restrained with difficulty. She avoided the looks of them all, could neither eat nor speak, and after some time, on her mother's silently pressing her hand with tender compassion, her small degree of fortitude was quite overcome - she burst into tears and left the room."¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 49.

As the days went on, she allows grief to shatter her and give her sleepless nights. "She was awake the whole night, and wept the greatest part of it."¹⁹ Forbidding any consolation from her family, she spends her days playing over every favorite song she used to play to Willoughby, walking about the countryside by herself and, "indulging in the recollection of past enjoyment and crying over the present reverse for the chief of the morning."²⁰ After the first shock of Willoughby's departure, Marianne does not seem despondent at all. The uneasiness remains, but it is tempered by hope. A remark by a friend, that Willoughby's estate is near her home at Cleveland, arouses interest in her. Hoping to see him again and renew their former attachment, she eagerly accepts Mrs. Jenning's invitation to her home in London. Still grieving, her behavior on the way to London is suggestive of Harley's melancholy and retiring nature in "The Man of Feeling." She sits in silence most of the way, "wrapt in her own meditations, and scarcely ever voluntarily speaking, except when any object of picturesque beauty within their view drew from her an exclamation of delight exclusively addressed to her sister..."²¹

In London and meeting with Willoughby again, she is not only disappointed but greatly humiliated. Willoughby ignores all her notes and behaves coldly towards her when they finally meet. In wild, desperate tones, Marianne asks him if he has received her notes:

"Here is some mistake I am sure - some dreadful mistake. What can be the meaning of it? Tell me Willoughby - for heaven's sake, tell me, what is the matter?"²²

¹⁹Ibid., p. 49.

²⁰Ibid., p. 50.

²¹Ibid., p. 94.

²²Ibid., p. 104.

But Willoughby only murmurs a feeble reply and turns away. Her grief reaches its height the next day, when she receives Willoughby's letter wherein he denies ever having serious intentions with her. Elinor tries to comfort her in her sorrow, but she is inconsolable:

"...leave me, leave me if I distress you; leave me, hate me, forget me; but do not torture me so. Oh! how easy for those who have/ no sorrow of their own to talk of exertion! Happy, happy Elinor, you cannot have an idea of what I suffer."²³

When Willoughby's engagement to an heiress is revealed soon after, Marianne is beyond comfort and thereby falls ill. Here, Jane Austen impresses us with the fact that Marianne's emotional excesses has made her unhappy, greatly impairing her judgment, for it is her sensibility that has caused her unhappiness and a misjudgment of Willoughby. Only in giving up this sensibility as a guide will Marianne be happy again.

Her illness leads her to reflect on her past behavior; her impetuosity, her utter disregard of others feelings except her own, her oversensitiveness. She resolves to govern her feelings in the future and then suffers herself to be led to the altar by a gentleman old enough to be her father. Jane Austen ends her comedy with this ironic statement:

"Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favorite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give her hand to another! and that other, a man who had suffered no less than herself under the event of a former attachment, whom, two years before, she had considered too old to be married, and who still sought the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat."²⁴

Elinor on the other hand, ends with a glorious fulfillment of her deepest wishes; "she was oppressed, she was overcome by her own felicity;

²³Ibid., p. 109.

²⁴Ibid., p. 227.

and happily disposed as is the human mind to be easily familiarized with any change for the better, it required several hours to give sedateness to her spirits, or any degree of tranquility to her heart."²⁵ Against the foolishness of Marianne is based the self-respect and sincerity of Elinor. She is just and always endeavors to hide her own suffering. With good principles and good sense for guides she preserves a balance between her emotions and judgment, never turning from fact even when it is most painful. Thus, she is spared by the author from any satiric sting.

In marrying Marianne off to a hero like Colonel Brandon, Jane Austen mocks the conventional hero of sensibility. He is old, lifeless instead of dashing, unappealing instead of being handsome. His many appearances are a series of grave silences, pensive allusions to Marianne's opinion against "second attachments," hesitations and abortive beginnings in conversation, that even Elinor gets irritated at his inarticulateness. His speechless devotion during Marianne's sickness, finally moves the changed girl to regard him with pity, which is exactly what he deserves. In only one instant does he really speak and that is when he tells all that he knows about the villain, Willoughby, in a lengthy account that affects the reader with boredom and hilarity. At this particular part of the novel, Jane Austen satirizes the sentimental, flashback narrations and the salacious core of the novel of sensibility. Colonel Brandon's story is littered with those tear-jerking elements we came across with in Mackenzie's novel: the ruined female victims and the bastard offsprings of wicked gentlemen. Jane Austen must have laughed at the prostitute's story in Mackenzie's "Man of Feeling" to which Colonel Brandon's descrip-

²⁵Ibid., p. 217.

tion of his poor Eliza, draws a clear parallel:

"...My first care, when I did arrive, was of course to seek for her; but the search was as fruitless as it was melancholy. I could not trace her beyond her first seducer, and there was every reason to fear that she had removed from him only to sink deeper in a life of sin.... At last, however, and after I had been six months in England, I did find her...So altered - so faded - worn down by acute suffering of every kind! hardly could I believe the melancholy and sickly figure before me, to be the remains of the lovely, blooming, healthful girl, on whom I had once doted. What I endured in so beholding her - but I have no right to wound your feelings by attempting to describe it - I have pained you too much already. That she was in the last stage of consumption, was - yes, in such a situation it was my greatest comfort. Life could do nothing to her, beyond giving time for a better preparation for death; and that was given..."²⁶

In Willoughby we find the regular villain although a less complete and interesting version of Mackenzie's villains, whom he greatly resembles in his carefree ways and gaiety, propensity to seduction and final repentance. His repentance speech is Jane Austen's attack on the monotonous novel of sensibility tales of extravagance, loose living, and debts. This repentance speech was an important ingredient of novels of sentiment and provided Jane Austen with an excellent target. In mocking tones she makes Willoughby repent:

"...Let me be able to fancy that a better knowledge of my heart, and of my present feelings, will draw from her a more spontaneous, more natural, more gentle, less dignified forgiveness. Tell her of my misery and my penitence, tell her that my heart was never inconstant to her, and if you will, that at this moment she is dearer to me than ever."²⁷

There is a sharp contrast between Willoughby and Edward Ferrars.

Jane Austen definitely condemns Willoughby and justifies Edward. The calm, sensible Elinor is married off to a man who lives by form, whose wishes are all centered in the quiet of domestic life. Although Marianne sees him as

²⁶Sense and Sensibility, p. 123.

²⁷Ibid., p. 197.

a "spiritless and tame" creature, his general behavior is above reproach. He did not care one bit for Lucy Steele yet he preferred to be disinherited rather than break an honorable engagement.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen was careful to mark these differences between her heroes and heroines, in order to bring out clearly the parody better. The chief points of Jane Austen's attack were: excessive sensibility, artificial situations, pathos for its own sake, melodrama, improbability and emotional flatness. The high-flown tradition by which love-lorn maidens fall into a decline in novels of sensibility, is deliberately shattered by Jane Austen's careful explanation that Marianne's illness was a result from a careless indifference to wet shoes:

"Two delightful twilight walks on the third and fourth evenings of her being there, not merely on the dry gravel of the shrubbery, but all over the grounds, and especially in the most distant parts of them, where there was something more of wildness than in the rest, where the trees were the oldest, and the grass was the longest and wettest, had - assisted by the still greater imprudence of sitting in her wet shoes and stockings - given Marianne a cold so violent, as, though for a day or two trifled with or denied, would force itself by increasing ailments on the concern of everybody, and the notice of herself..."²⁸

Hating excesses of any kind, Jane Austen delighted in satirizing the excessive snobbery of Mrs. Ferrars and her cohorts. The dinner party at the house of Mrs. Ferrars, is an ironic situation where Jane Austen shines brilliantly. The arrogant Mrs. Ferrars and her daughter were set to ignore Elinor, who they suspected was engaged to Edward. Nothing would satisfy her but a great match for her son with a lady like Miss Morton who is "Lord Morton's daughter."²⁹ To show coldness towards Elinor at the dinner party, t

²⁸Ibid., p. 182.

²⁹Ibid., p. 141.

Ferrars shower attention on Lucy Steele, unconscious all the while of her secret engagement to Edward. Lucy Steele is extremely flattered at all this attention from the old dowager, little dreaming that when her engagement to Edward comes to light a few days later, she will be turned out of the house and treated with humiliation until she faints. Mrs. Ferrars' behavior in choosing to be kind and gracious to the more unsuitable daughter-in-law is satire at its best. In rewarding meanness later, Jane Austen directs us to the fact that she despised hypocrisy and mean-spirited people like: Mrs. Ferrars, Mrs. Middleton, Mrs. John Dashwood and Lucy Steele. With this ironic statement she rewards Mrs. Ferrars:

"They settled in town, received very liberal assistance from Mrs. Ferrars, were on the best terms imaginable with the Dashwoods; and setting aside the jealousies and ill-will continually subsisting between Fanny and Lucy, in which their husbands of course took part, as well as the frequent domestic disagreements between Robert and Lucy themselves, nothing could exceed the harmony in which they all lived together."³⁰

It is not difficult to reach a conclusion as to Jane Austen's attitude towards the Novel of Sensibility. She reacted with an unflinching sense of humor, satirizing the conventional characters and the improbable and untrue situations they are in. With delight she exposed the paraphernalia of the Novel of Sensibility to ridicule, exposing their absurdities on the plane of her common sense and reality. She repudiated with disdain the uncontrolled emotionalism of heroes and heroines, their great propensity to tears, melodrama, and final repentance. Grandiose clap-trap and dramatics, self-deception and hypocrisy and false standards in Mackenzie's novels, did not escape her satiric sting. The unreal world created by Mackenzie and his followers, she attacked with ironic laughter

³⁰Ibid., p. 226.

and feeling of superiority. With her fine sense of values and instinct for proportion, she rebelled from the conventional literary fashion, freeing herself by laughter and slashing attack. In *Sense and Sensibility*, we see that what she hated in romantic sentimentalism was actually what she disliked in the Gothic novel. Extreme emotionalism like a love for the fantastic was contrary to her standards, and she saw underneath all their exciting and glamorous world, ridiculous tendencies which brought delight and unending laughter to her ironic mind.

CHAPTER IV

JANE AUSTEN'S REACTION TO THE GOTHIC NOVEL

The applause with which Ann Radcliffe's novels were received were evil signs of the times and instead of feasting upon scenes of passion like those of Richardson or of life and manners as in the works of Smollett and Fielding, contemporary novelists were coming back to the fare of the nursery, and the reading public banqueted upon the wild and improbable fiction of overheated imaginations. This type of books overflowed the countryside, and surely some of them must have found their way into quiet country parsonages. Jane Austen was reared in such a parsonage, and it must have been her contact with these novels that made her register her protest, "a comic artist's protest of burlesque"¹ against the prevailing literary fashion of her day. The temptation to dismantle the surging Gothic enthusiasm became too strong for Jane Austen so she sat down to write and the result was "Northanger Abbey."

When Northanger Abbey was first written, Mrs. Radcliffe was at the height of her popularity. Her "Mysteries of Udolpho" written in 1794, captured the reading public for her and the Gothic Novel. It is typical of the novels of terror that Jane Austen was familiar with so she chose this particular book as the specific model of her burlesque of the Gothic tale.

The Mysteries of Udolpho is a novel that can be divided into two parts. In the first part, Emily St. Aubert, the heroine, accompanies her

¹Mudrick, p. 5.

aunt to the Castle of Udolpho. This aunt had just made the terrible mistake of marrying a mysterious Italian, Signor Montoni. Definitely a villain, Montoni from the start had:

"...an air of conscious superiority, animated by spirit and strengthened by talents, to which every person seemed involuntarily to yield. The quickness of his perceptions was strikingly expressed on his countenance; yet that countenance could submit implicitly to occasion; and more than once in this day the triumph of art over nature might have been discerned in it. His visage was long, and rather narrow; yet he was called handsome; and it was perhaps, the spirit and vigour of his soul, sparkling through his features that triumphed him. Emily felt admiration, but not the admiration that leads to esteem; for it was mixed with a degree of fear she knew not exactly wherefore."

He later shows his real character by trying to gain possession of his wife's property and trying to marry off Emily to one of his evil friends. When his wife and Emily refuse to bow to his wishes, he brings them to his castle in the Apennines. Here Emily shudders in the dark, eerie apartments assigned to her, while her aunt suffers under Montoni's cruel treatment of her. Emily is mystified by midnight music, trembles on the nocturnal excursions she takes accompanied by her talkative and superstitious maid, Annette, and faints dead away in a dark chamber when she lifts a black veil and sees the horrible wax figure of a cadaver. Emily finally escapes from this supernatural terror to France.

In the second part, Emily finds out the causes of her father's melancholy moods and the weird happenings at Udolpho and Castle le Blanc. She is finally restored to her hero and lover, Valancourt and marries him. The love story is no more than a frame for old adventure novel themes, travel description, and situations of suspense and terror.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen instead of reproducing Gothic characters and situations, presents their anti-types in the actual world and

²Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho (London, n.d.), p. 61.

organizes a novel that parallels the Gothic tale to which it diligently corresponds. By writing a realistic and Gothic novel at the same time, she tries to show the absurdity and falseness of the Gothic romance and against this Gothic world, she sets up her anti-types in a real setting.

Emily St. Aubert, the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, possesses all the superb qualities of the conventional Gothic heroine. She is exquisitely beautiful with "elegant symmetry of form, delicacy of features, and blue eyes full of tender sweetness."³ Of a very sensitive temperament, she cannot bear to see the moon, hear a guitar or the murmur of pines, without weeping and fainting:

"...the melancholy gloom of evening, and the profound stillness of the place, interrupted only by the light trembling of leaves, heightened her fanciful apprehensions, and she was desirous of quitting the building but perceived herself grow faint, and sat down..."⁴

She is of a very romantic nature and whiles away the melancholy hours by playing on the lute or writing poetry. Under her father's vigilant care she becomes a highly accomplished and educated heroine:

"St. Aubert cultivated her understanding with the most scrupulous care. He gave her a general view of the sciences, and an exact acquaintance with every part of elegant literature. He taught her Latin and English, chiefly that she might understand the sublimity of their best poets. She discovered in her early years a taste for works of genius; and it was St. Aubert's principles, as well as his inclination, to promote every innocent means of happiness...."⁵

In the romantic hour of twilight she meets a handsome stranger, and they fall in love at first sight. Valancourt is just as idealistic and sensitive of temperament as she is. He also sighs at the beauties of nature, weeps but does not faint. From the start he captures St. Aubert's admiration who was much "pleased with the manly frankness, simplicity, and keen

³Ibid., p. 7.

⁴Ibid., p. 9.

⁵Ibid., p. 7.

susceptibility to the grandeur of nature which his new acquaintance discovered."⁶ His love for Emily never wavers, and it is the strength of this love that reunites them in the end.

Jane Austen, in the first chapter of *Northanger Abbey* forwards every reason to show how impossible it is that anything of importance could happen to an unimportant, young creature. Satirizing the absurdities of the conventional gothic heroine, she makes her heroine almost everything that Emily St. Aubert was not.

Catherine Morland is the child of ordinary but respectable parents. In her earlier years she was thin and awkward with:

"a sallow skin without color, dark lank hair, and strong features... She was fond of all boy's play and greatly preferred cricket, not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a door-mouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush. Indeed she had no taste for a garden, and if she gathered flowers at all, it was chiefly for the pleasure of mischief, at least so it was conjectured from her always preferring those which she was forbidden to take."⁷

Even when she starts to be conscious of her looks, curl her hair, gain color and plumpness, her looks still are not above average. Her abilities were not extraordinary:

"She never could learn or understand anything before she was taught, and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid. Her mother was three months in teaching her only to repeat the "Beggar's Petition," and, after all, her next sister Sally could say it better than she did."⁸

She had not the slightest ability in music or drawing and up to the age of fifteen loved nothing so well in the world as "rolling down the green slope at back of the house."⁹ She is a most unpromising focus for ro-

⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷ Northanger Abbey, p. 1063.

⁸ Ibid., p. 1063.

⁹ Ibid., p. 1064.

mance too. The love for dirt and romping at fifteen finally gave way to an inclination for finery; From fifteen to seventeen she is training for a heroine but alas!

"without having seen one amiable youth who could call forth her sensibility; without having inspired one real passion, and without having excited even any admiration but what was very moderate and very transient. This was strange indeed! But strange things may be generally accounted for if their cause be fairly searched out. There was not one lord in the neighborhood; no, not even a baronet. There was not one family among their acquaintances who had reared and supported a boy accidentally found at their door; not one young man whose origin was unknown. Her father had no ward, and the squire of the parish no children."¹⁰

But if Catherine is to be a heroine, "the perverseness of forty surrounding families cannot prevent her. Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way."¹¹ So Jane Austen sends her commonplace heroine on a journey to Bath, to amend her unromantic ^{situation} background. She is invited by a Mr. and Mrs. Allen, owners of the property where the Morlands lived. In Bath she is allowed to see the depraved society of the great world, so unlike Emily who was too refined and ignorant of the ways of the world. But Catherine is denied the satisfaction of ever indulging in heroic performances.

Catherine leaves home without a mother indulging in hysterics and anxiety. Mrs. Morland has no dark forebodings for her departing daughter, no counsels were forwarded either. Her cautions are limited to the following points:

"I beg, Catherine, you will always wrap yourself up very warm about the throat when you come from the Rooms at night; and I wish you would try to keep some account of the money you spend; I will give you this little book on purpose."¹²

¹⁰Ibid., p. 1065.

¹¹Ibid., p. 1065.

¹²Ibid., p. 1066.

Even the other members of the family did not register excitement over a sister's departure:

"Everything, indeed, relative to this important journey was done on the part of the Morlands with a degree of moderation and composure, which seemed rather consistent with the common feelings of common life, than with the refined susceptibilities - the tender emotions which the first separation of a heroine from her family ought always to excite. Her father, instead of giving her an unlimited order on his banker, or even putting a hundred pound's bankbill into her hands, gave her only ten guineas, and promised her more when she wanted it."¹³

So Catherine leaves for a journey which was performed with "suitable quietness and uneventful safety."¹⁴ They went on calmly to Bath meeting with no robbers or tempests and not one lucky overturn "to introduce them to the hero."¹⁵ The only alarm they had was when Mrs. Allen feared of "having left her clogs behind her at an inn, and that was fortunately groundless."¹⁶

In Bath, Catherine's experiences are a combination of what might be expected of a Gothic heroine and the opposite. The Allens are an ordinary, unexciting couple, and Mr. Allen is definitely not a wicked, vigilant Gothic chaperone. In contrast to Emily's aunt who was vulgar, unfeeling and ambitious, Mrs. Allen was:

"one of that numerous class of females, whose society can raise no other emotion than surprise at there being any men in the world who could like them well enough to marry them. She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner. The air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind, were all that could account for her being the choice of a sensible, intelligent man like Mr. Allen."¹⁷

¹³ Ibid., p. 1066.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 1067.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 1067.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 1067.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 1067.

She allowed Catherine to go wherever she pleased, brought her to balls and always sat quietly by, once in a while deploring Catherine's inability to get a dancing partner. She sits gossiping forever with another aging woman, Mrs. Thorpe. Mrs. Allen all placid, a submerged inertia and unconcern, is the Gothic chaperone reversed.

Among Catherine's first acquaintances at Bath are the Thorpes. An unquestioning friendship develops between her and Isabella Thorpe, a regular Gothic ^{like} confidante. Unlike the sensible, sympathetic and thoughtful Annette, Emily St. Aubert's confidant, Isabella is the ^{opposite} opposite. She is vulgar, egocentric, frivolous and a man-chaser. She parades herself as a heroine, and Catherine dazzled is willing to play the best friend to this paragon of beauty and sensibility. She is an expert on such topics as:

"...dress, balls, flirtations and quizzes...These powers received due admiration from Catherine, to whom they were entirely new; and the respect which they naturally inspired might have been too great for familiarity, had not the easy gaiety of Miss Thorpe's manners, and her frequent expressions of delight on this acquaintance with her, softened down every feeling of awe, and left nothing but tender affection."¹⁸

She indoctrinates Catherine on Gothic thrillers and induces her to read the "Mysteries of Udolpho" and a list of horrid books. Catherine's youthful and natural credulousness led her to make this friendship with Isabella, but she later sees Isabella's true character when she meets the Tilneys.

For all the hypocrisy, rancor, deceit and general wickedness at Udolpho, Jane Austen gives satisfactory counterparts at Bath. Her satire here is to shatter the pompous pretensions of Gothic villains and to show

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 1075.

how villainy is when transferred to the everyday, middle-class, social world.

In John Thorpe, Isabella's brother, we see Jane Austen's anti-type for the Gothic unwelcome suitor. In his Gothic role, there is nothing mysterious or sinister about him; he is simply rude, vulgar, foolish and irritating. He has a great propensity for boasting, profanity, and a relish for financial transactions. His favorite quotation is: "rich as a Jew"¹⁹ which he applies to whoever he suspects has money. These qualities prepare the reader for his villainy. He neither kidnaps or tortures Catherine when she refuses his vulgar attentions, he does not even connive with her mother or father at marrying him against her will. He is a Gothic villain on a much smaller scale, but he creates as much trouble as he can. He keeps forcing his presence on Catherine in spite of her hatred for him. His general offensiveness is so marked that later, his boasting, lying and treachery are all involved in his confidences to General Tilney, upon which the following Gothic adventure of Catherine and its realistic aftermath depend.

Meanwhile, Catherine meets her hero. He is not a silent seducer from Southern Europe, nor a handsome young man who falls in love with her at first sight, not even of mysterious birth, but a talkative, sardonic clergyman from Gloucestershire, with a delightful sense of humor. Henry Tilney does not even treat Catherine with respect, nor rescue her from the clutches of a villain; instead his witty, didactic common sense finally rescues her from delusion. His affection for her originated in nothing better than gratitude and a didactic delight in her ignorance.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 1094.

Catherine meets her hero not in the romantic hour of twilight in a dark country road, but in a Bath ballroom where they are introduced by the master of ceremonies.

Henry Tilney is never sentimental and anything falsely emotional inspires him to irony and burlesque, as when his sister asks him to apologize to Catherine upon a misunderstanding on women's intelligence:

"Miss Morland, no one can think more highly of the understanding of women than I do. In my opinion, nature has given them so much that they never find it necessary to use more than half."²⁰

And when Catherine is of the opinion that history is a torment to little children he retorts ironically:

"That little boys and girls should be tormented...is what no one at all acquainted with human nature in a civilized state can deny; but in behalf of our most distinguished historians, I must observe, that they might well be offended at being supposed to have no higher aim; and that by their method and style, they are perfectly well qualified to torment readers and the most advanced reason and mature time of life. I use the verb "to torment," as I observed to be your own method, instead of 'to instruct,' supposing them to be now admitted as synonymous."²¹

He always counteracted Catherine's ecstatic delights and exclamations with didactic regularity and he was always irritated at her use of the words, "nice" and "amazing," which to Catherine always signified a general approval of everything from looks to people. But the relationship between them deepens and added to her increased intimacy with his sister Eleanor, an invitation to visit with them at Northanger Abbey is forwarded to the excited Catherine. An ardent admirer of ruined castles and Mrs. Radcliffe's "Mysteries of Udolpho," she is all breathless anticipation and excitement at the prospect of seeing a real abbey with "long, damp passages...narrow

²⁰Ibid., p. 1126.

²¹Ibid., p. 1123.

cells and a ruined chapel...with some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun."²²

Before the party leaves for Northanger Abbey, Henry Tilney engagingly readies Catherine for the terrors of the place. He knows her Gothic illusions so he teases her:

"And are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that a building such as 'what one reads about' may produce? Have you a stout heart? Nerves fit for sliding panels and tapestry?...Will your mind not misgive you, when you find yourself in this gloomy chamber, too lofty and extensive for you, with only the feeble rays of a single lamp to take its size, its walls hung with tapestry exhibiting figures as large as life, and the bed of dark green stuff or purple velvet, presenting even a funeral appearance. Will not your heart sink within you?"²³

Catherine assured him that her stout heart will survive the horrors awaiting her, so Henry amused by the interest he had raised, carried it no further. Of course, Northanger Abbey, does not live up to her Gothic expectations. When Emily St. Aubert first beholds Udolpho, she is awed at its grandeur:

"...As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From these, too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely, and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity; and Emily continued to gaze, till its clustering towers were alone seen rising over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon began to ascend."²⁴

In contrast, Catherine's first view of Northanger Abbey was a great disappointment. Her excitement started to wane, when she found out that the trip was made not on rough mountain roads with lush vegetation and beautiful scenery all around but on pleasant, level roads, and she was impatient

²²Ibid., p. 1140.

²³Ibid., p. 150.

²⁴The Mysteries of Udolpho, p. 109.

for a glimpse of the Abbeys "massy walls of grey stone, rising amidst a grove of ancient oaks with the last beams of the sun playing in beautiful splendour on its high Gothic windows."²⁵ Finally, the abbey came into view but; "so low did the building stand, that she found herself passing through the great gates of the lodge, into the very grounds of Northanger, without having discerned even an antique chimney."²⁶ Her disappointment increases when she is actually within the walls of the abbey itself, for she could see nothing of what Emily observed at Udolpho. As she looked around, she saw furniture in all profusion and elegance of modern taste. Although the windows were of Gothic form, there were no painted glasses, no dirt or cobwebs, and the difference was distressing. Her bedroom, however, offered one parallel with Emily's situation. Although far from horrifying in most respects, it contained a mysterious, cedar chest, "raised a foot from the ground on a carved stand."²⁷ With fearful eagerness and trembling hands she opens the lid only to be disturbed by a knock on the door. It was just a maid sent by Miss Tilney to be of use to her. But the chest makes her impatient with curiosity, and a great temptation to know what it contained consumed her. With resolute effort she throws back the lid and to her astonished eyes "a white cotton counterpane, properly folded"²⁸ comes into view. But another "Gothic surprise" awaits her. She discovers another high, old-fashioned black chest which had escaped her observation before. She could not sleep until she had examined

²⁵Northanger Abbey, p. 1152.

²⁶Ibid., p. 1152.

²⁷Ibid., p. 1154.

²⁸Ibid., p. 1155.

it. With comic-anti-climax, Jane Austen describes Catherine's sensations at opening the chest:

"...placing the candle with great caution on a chair, she seized the key with a tremulous hand, and tried to turn it, but it resisted her utmost strength...The wind roared down the chimney, the rain beat in torrents against the windows, and everything seemed to speak the awfulness of her situation...Again therefore, she applied herself to the key, and after moving it in every possible way, for some instants, with the determined celerity of hope's last effort, the door suddenly yielded to her hand...With a cheek flushed with hope, and an eye straining with curiosity, her fingers grasped the handle of a drawer and drew it forth. It was entirely empty..."²⁹

With further exploration however, she finds a roll of paper, yellowed with age. Picking this up with a fluttering heart and trembling knees, she was on the point of unrolling it, when a sudden gust of wind extinguished her candle. Catherine was motionless with horror in the dark and the mysterious paper was left unread till morning. In the darkness, she trembled from head to foot and in the silence that engulfed her she seemed to hear "a sound like receding footsteps and the closing of a distant door struck on her affrighted ear."³⁰ With great agitation she jumps into bed and closed her eyes in troubled sleep.

When Catherine awakes the next morning, she eagerly collected every scattered sheet from the roll and eagerly perused the manuscript. A quick glance over a page revealed it to be, "an inventory of linen, in coarse and modern characters"³¹ and the other sheets were only washing bills. The absurdities of her fancies had robbed her half of her night's rest! Her romantic illusions were shattered but not entirely. In General Tilney, a widower of nine years standing, she discovers a Montonian villain. His

²⁹Ibid., p. 1157.

³⁰Ibid., p. 1158.

³¹Ibid., p. 1159.

curious behavior and solitary rambles in the gardens of Northanger were to Catherine evil signs of a mind ill at ease. To increase her suspicions, he kept postponing a tour of the whole house which he promised. And why had the general asked to be removed from his room, his wife's portrait, though an excellent likeness? All these she peices together into a romantic story of a general murdering his wife. The desire to find out by what means his wife reaches her end, becomes an obsession to Catherine:

"...the probability that Mrs. Tilney yet lived, shut up for causes unknown, and receiving from the pitiless hands of her husband a nightly supply of coarse food, was the conclusion which necessarily followed...The suddenness of her reputed illness, the absense of her daughter, and probably of her other children, at the time, all favoured the supposition of her imprisonment. Its origin - jealousy, perhaps, or wanton cruelty - was yet to be unravelled."³²

Her curiosity worked up to a frenzy makes her determine to visit the baffling apartment alone, in the hope of discovering some "fragmented journal, continued to the last gasp."³³ She enters the dead woman's rooms with no irate general, no officiously friendly Eleanor, no stiffly resisting lock hindering her progress. To her astonishment she finds:

"...a large, well-proportioned apartment, a handsome dimity bed, arranged as unoccupied, with a housemaid's care, a bright Bath stove, mahogany wardrobes and neatly-painted chairs, on which the warm beams of a western sun poured through two sash windows."³⁴

Her humiliation is complete, and sick with exploring, she hastily leaves the room only to run into her adored Henry Tilney who explodes the whole fantastic bubble. Such delusions could not be suffered to go unpunished. Nor were they, but having arisen from nothing worse than wonderful folly, the penalty is abridged. Still Catherine has to undergo a period of sharp

³²Ibid., p. 1169.

³³Ibid., p. 1172.

³⁴Ibid., p. 1172.

anguish, brought upon her by a not unreasonable remonstrance on the part of her hero:

"Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English; that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?"³⁵

Its effect was immediate. Catherine was "completely awakened...Most grievously was she humbled. Most bitterly did she cry...She hated herself more than she could express..."³⁶ And so at last she is purged of her Gothic illusions:

"Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation...But in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist."³⁷

Her visions of romance and crime over, Catherine returns to the anxieties of common life. The affectionate kindness that General Tilney showers on her is suddenly changed to hatred upon the general's return from a short trip to London. She is dismissed without explanation and the poor girl is stunned and almost overcome with grief. Making the trip in a stage-coach unprotected by a chaperone, she returns home to Wilshire in deep humiliation.

³⁵Ibid., p. 1174.

³⁶Ibid., p. 1175.

³⁷Ibid., p. 1176.

Here Catherine, in her role of Emily, meets with her villain. The tyranny that General Tilney imposes on her is on parallel with Montoni's cruelty. His changed behavior towards Catherine, springs from the fact that, after all, she is a penniless nobody. This disappointment makes him turn out the young girl out of his house at a moment's notice, unchaperoned. At that period the necessity for chaperonage would make such an enforced trip an outrage against conventions. Jane Austen attacks the absurdity of Gothic villains and their behavior so that General Tilney is made to act outrageously towards Catherine but in so improbable a manner. This was the best that Jane Austen could do in subjecting Catherine to a tyranny which would establish a parallel to Gothicism.

Another point in the Gothic novel that Jane Austen parodies, is romantic love. A Gothic heroine in love, loses appetite, sleep, and is so sensitive to nature. Catherine, having fallen in love with Henry Tilney, fails to lose either appetite or sleep; on the contrary, her reaction takes the form of an

"...extraordinary hunger, and when that was appeased, changed into an earnest longing to be in bed; such was the extreme point of her distress; for when there she immediately fell into a sound sleep which lasted nine hours, and from which she awoke perfectly revived, in excellent spirits, with fresh hopes and fresh schemes."³⁸

And so, with very little anguish and suffering, she marries Henry Tilney, who faces the dragon, the General, and lives happily ever after with his heroine who was devoid of beauty or brains but had an unassuming charm that was lovable. With mocking delight, Jane Austen forwards the explanation, that the General who was adamantly opposed to such a marriage, yielded, not because of repentance but because, Eleanor finally married a

³⁸Ibid., p. 1092.

Viscount:

"The anxiety which this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine, and of all who loved either, as to its final event, can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity. The means by which their early marriage was effected can be the only doubt; what probable circumstance could work upon a timper like the General's? The circumstance which chiefly availed was the marriage of his daughter with a man of fortune and consequence...."³⁹

In a mocking manner Jane Austen goes even further to explain that Eleanor's husband, the Viscount:

"...was really deserving of her; independent of his peerage, his wealth and his attachment, being to a precision of the most charming young man in the world. Any further definition of his merits must be unnecessary; the most charming young man in the world is instantly before the imagination of us all. Concerning the one in question therefore I have only to add - (aware that the rules of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected with my fable) - that this was the very gentleman whose negligent servant left behind him that collection of washing bills, resulting from a long visit at Northanger, by which my heroine was involved in one of her most alarming adventures."⁴⁰

Another point Jane Austen satirizes in *Northanger Abbey*, is Gothic scenery. She completely ignores that feature of Mrs. Radcliffe's art which appears so essential to Gothic novels. There is no "Terror" scenery in *Northanger Abbey*, no gloomy turrets or waving pine forests. She merely borrows her torturous situations from *Mysteries of Udolpho*. She knew that without these melodramatic "nature" scenes the Gothic novel is robbed of half of its potency.

Jane Austen also hated melodramatic scenes, hence Henry Tilney's exposure of Catherine's suspicious mind is followed by no explosion on his part. "The only difference in his behaviour to her was, that he paid her

³⁹Ibid., p. 1206.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 1206.

rather more attention than usual,"⁴¹ which is very unnatural, but Jane hated scenes so! She also disliked sentimentalism so much that the didactic nature of her work is betrayed by the over insistence on the anti-sentimentalism motive:

"A heroine returning at the close of her career to her native village, in all the triumph of recovered reputation and all the dignity of a countess...is an event on which the pen of the contriver may well delight to dwell...But my affair is widely different; I bring back my heroine to her home in solitude and disgrace, and no sweet elation of spirits can lead me into minuteness. A heroine in a hackpost-chaise is such a blow upon sentiment as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand."⁴²

In *Northanger Abbey* then, one can see Jane Austen's reaction to the Gothic Novel. She hated the wild exaggerations and literary flights from reality. The exploitation of emotion and bizarre by romantic terror and romantic sentimentality, she considered as deviations from the norm. We see her anti-types shatter the illusion created by Mrs. Radcliffe and her followers. We see trampled to the ground Gothic equipment such as: artificial and melodramatic situations, excessive imaginative incidents and character, terror and pathos, ruined castles and wandering ghosts, fainting fits and tears, villains, monks and banditti. All these she presented as false and absurd. Beneath the glamour of terror tales, she saw "affectation" which to her is the only true source of the ridiculous. She makes the reader understand, that these writers simply took refuge in another world, and in fiction, their stunted minds expressed their romantic conceptions in wild and improbable tales. All these were a prostitution of the art she loved so well, and it is of no wonder that Jane Austen reacted with gales of satiric merriment, bringing their pasteboard Gothic illusions to the ground.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 1175.

⁴²Ibid., p. 1195.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

One hundred and thirty-eight years have passed since Jane Austen's death, and yearly the applause of fame has grown louder. Critics admire her books, many educated readers enjoy them, her popularity of all English writers is most secure. She stands apart, portraying intensively very simple forms of domestic life, which yet, permit of a highly complicated series of emotional relationships; ironic; full of sensible sympathy; an artist without a failure even among her unfinished stories.

Jane Austen was not popular during her lifetime, and the glare of fame did not bother her. Besides, how could her books become really popular, even in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, when with total indifference to the literary fashions of her day, she constantly ignored the romantic trend and the romantic habit of the mind? Instead she chose sincerity as the foundation of her art. She proved to us that no popular madness ever carries people of medium taste off their feet and that there are still people of medium taste in every age. Thus, she created novels that neither alarmed credulities nor amused imaginations by wild exaggerations or by scenes of romantic affection and sensibilities among people who actually lived and died. Those who love romanticism, will look in vain for passion, ecstasy and the marvelous in her six novels. Hers are the stories that are farthest from the scene of violent actions and passions, no enormous situations exist, neither are there passionate developments. To substitute for these excitements, she copied from nature incidents which really existed in the common, everyday life and presented

to the reader, instead of splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which daily happened. Her view of the world is that of a clear-sighted and somewhat satirical spectator, loving what deserves love, and amusing herself with the incongruities and affectations of humanity. She was a realist, so she painted the world she really knew; she painted it with fidelity, sympathy and with a consciousness of its blemishes coupled with an ever-present satire. It is not her fault that romance and sentiment have no place in her art; these things were not found in the world she knew.

That Jane Austen led the satiric reaction in the eighteenth century and started it all when just a young girl, is the wonder. It is true that even the vulgar supporters of sensibility and gothicism threw in an occasional burlesque of their work and doubtless the more instructed public soon recovered its balance. But she was there with a masterpiece before even the great had recovered. That she was a satirist from her first literary impulse to the end of her life cannot be denied. Some of her critics have advanced the fact that her satiric vein is lifted after *Sense and Sensibility*. Mudrick states:

"Her earliest, and always her characteristic, defense is irony: throughout her letters and extravagantly in her juvenilia, she observes and defines, without moral or emotional engagement, the incongruities between pretense and essence, between the large idea and the inadequate ego. Here, indeed, irony becomes for her a positive agent and appears as the only possible interpreter of life. Later, as with age and authorship she grew increasingly aware of the pressure by which society directs its members out of interpretation of convention into convention itself, she turned away from irony more and more often to her alternative defense, convention, until her grand-though temporary-apostasy from irony in *Mansfield Park*..."¹

Although her artistic powers developed, her mental attitude at fourteen

¹Mudrick, p. 1.

is the same as it was at forty. At times, it is true, this artistic balance was disturbed by the strength of her ethical convictions, but such hesitations were only momentary and partial. Throughout her short life, the contradictions and inconsistencies of romance and sensibility, never failed to arouse her sense of the ridiculous. She has always been a foe to sentimentality and vulgarity. Antipathy to them runs through all her works. The solid foundation of her character was good sense, and her type of excellence as displayed in her heroines is a woman full of feeling, but with feelings thoroughly under control. Affected sentiment never gets quarter. Thus, she remained anti-romantic to the last. Her last work, Sanditon, which was left unfinished by her death, is a mild satire on the fashionable rage for seaside resorts. The satiric vein in her earlier novels is still present here. In describing Sir Edward Denham's "pseudo-sentimental tirades," Jane Austen shows that she is having as much fun and as much as she enjoyed twenty years or more ago, from the literature parodied in *Love and Friendship*. To the end, she hated false passion, and she preferred men and women not only to "pictures," but to "music," "books," and "nature." She was an intellectual person with an intellectual's hatred for all distinctions except those of the intellect. She detested the homage paid to rank and its pleased acceptance by the rich and titled, who were not always intellectually great. Her sense of humor did the rest.

Lovers of Jane Austen will always continue to read behind her six novels, the laughing irrepressible nature, which made them bright with unending and almost irrepressible mirth. She once remarked:

"But I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not seriously sit down to write a serious romance under any motive than to save my life, and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or at other peo-

ple, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter..."²

This is the conscious statement of a spirit naturally comic and ironical. Her contemporaries give her sentiments she did not have and they failed to analyze her nature. They thought her well-behaved when she was really coy; thought her shy when she was really sly; thought her inexperienced when she was most experienced; thought her a simple interpreter of the world of which she was a part when she was really much above it. To her, the novel was a medium through which she made a lovely escape from reality - not into fantasy, but into a different kind of reality. Her deep concern for the novel as an art makes her unique among the novelists. This concern has brought her unending praise from her many critics and in the words of Lord Macaulay:

"Shakespeare has had neither equal nor second. But among the writers, who, in the point which we have noticed, have approached nearest to the manner of the great master we have no hesitation in placing Jane Austen, a woman of whom England is justly proud...."³

Thus she stands, unsurpassed among writers of prose and poetry, within the limits she imposed on herself, for clear and sympathetic vision of human character. It is no wonder, therefore, that the absurdities, falseness and exaggerations glorified by the Novel of Sensibility and the Gothic Novel, made Jane Austen react vigorously in satiric merriment, befitting a great artist endowed with "common sense."

²Brimley Johnson, p. 207.

³The Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction, Vol. 3 (New York, 1917), p. 150.

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