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HEROES AND ANTI-HEROES IN

JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

All the Good will be unexceptionable in every respect—and there will be no foibles or weaknesses but with the Wicked, who will be completely depraved & infamous, hardly a resemblance of Humanity left in them. . . . Heroine must meet with the Hero—all perfection of course—and only prevented from paying his addresses to her, by some excess of refinement. . . . Often carried away by the anti-hero, but rescued either by her Father or the Hero . . . having at least 20 narrow escapes of falling into the hands of anti-Hero—& at last in the very nick of time, turning a corner to avoid him, runs into the arms of the Hero himself, who having just shaken off the scruples which fetter'd him before, was at the very moment setting off in pursuit of her. (Jane Austen: "Plan of a Novel".)¹

A novel, in the convention which Jane Austen accepted, invariably required a heroine and a hero, in that order of importance, and usually a villain as well. Of the alternative types of hero offered by the eighteenth-century novel, her moral code withheld her from presenting a good-humored young rake like Tom Jones, or an amoral adventurer like Smollett's protagonists. Fortunately her wit and her sense of reality equally restrained her from following Richardson's example in "the great Sir Charles Grandison", described by Richardson himself in his preface as "a man acting uniformly well through a variety of trying scenes. . . . A man of religion and virtue, of liveliness and spirit, accomplished; happy in himself and a blessing to others . . . a man of TRUE HONOUR." In her juvenile "Jack and Alice" she wrote the definitive satire on this type, when the hero declares "My temper is even, my virtues innumerable, myself unparalleled. . . . I expect nothing more in my wife than my wife will find in me—Perfection." (26)

Still another possibility existed—the amiable nonentities, the Delviles and Valancourts, who populated the sentimental and Gothic novels of the late eighteenth century, and later the Waverley novels as well. Jane Austen consistently avoids this easy solution. (Bingley is her nearest approach to the type, but he is

not the hero, and of course it is his *character* to be handsome and vacillating, agreeable and insignificant.) Readers have never admired her heroes greatly, but even the hostility which Edward Ferrars and Edmund Bertram so often arouse is a kind of tribute to the author; at least we know them well enough to dislike them. The one real failure of characterization appears to be Colonel Brandon, the second hero of *Sense and Sensibility*, and his acceptance by Marianne, even a repentant Marianne, is incredible. Jane Austen's heroines are far more sharply individualized than those of earlier fiction, creating a corresponding necessity for her heroes. A Delville, handsome and well-bred and nothing more, might do very well for a Cecilia, but hardly for an Elizabeth Bennet or an Emma Woodhouse. She plays with this conventional type in the final chapter of *Northanger Abbey*. The husband of Eleanor Tilney "was really deserving of her; independent of his peerage, his wealth, and his attachment, being to a precision 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." (251) But Henry Tilney, the actual hero, is not at all "the most charming young man in the world", but rather a clearly defined individual.

The function of the conventional villain is obvious enough: to threaten the chastity of the heroine and create complications in the action and obstructions to her love for the hero, thus building suspense and providing the character interest usually lacking in the hero himself (and also, no doubt, satisfying the reader's unacknowledged desires). Jane Austen follows the convention, but with important variations. The word "villain" itself is misleading when applied to her novels and should be avoided because of its melodramatic connotations and the simplistic morality which it suggests. It is a serious critical error to say, for example, that "Henry Crawford is meant to be a villain."² Henry Crawford is not a villain and the author never calls him one; he is considerably more interesting and complex than the word "villain" allows for. It therefore seems preferable to use Jane Austen's own term, "anti-hero", which accurately describes the role of such characters without implying a heavy moralism that does not exist in the novels themselves and without reducing them to a single stereotype. Willoughby and Wickham, Henry Crawford and Frank Churchill, may have traits in common, but they are no more to be confused with each other than are the heroes of their respective novels. On the contrary, in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, the characters of hero and anti-hero are precisely adapted to the heroine of each novel, and complement each other as well. *Northanger Abbey* and

Persuasion are omitted from consideration here: *Northanger Abbey* because its anti-hero, John Thorpe, is simply a buffoon (although a buffoon is what that novel requires); *Persuasion* because, although it offers one of Jane Austen's most attractive and convincing heroes in Frederick Wentworth, the character of the anti-hero, William Elliot, is not really created.

Commenting on Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon, the primary and secondary heroes of *Sense and Sensibility*, Ian Watt remarks "It is clear that both heroes are intended to combine the prudence, responsibility, and practical intelligence of sense with the goodheartedness and emotional delicacy of sensibility" but that in fact they are "rather dull fellows."³ Probably most readers would agree. Certainly it is flattering to identify ourselves momentarily with a Knightley, or even a Darcy, but hardly with an Edward Ferrars. If we share qualities with him, his paralyzing shyness for example, we may not wish to be reminded of the fact. As for Colonel Brandon, Willoughby's comment that "Brandon is just the kind of man . . . whom everybody speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to" (50) is meant to indicate his own unfairness, but seems perfectly justified. "My present forlorn and cheerless gravity" (205) is Brandon's accurate self-description to Elinor. To interest us in him, Jane Austen must convince us that there is feeling or the possibility of feeling, suffering, profound unhappiness—something!—beneath. But she fails; "forlorn and cheerless gravity" sums up his character.

But the case of Edward is really quite different. If he fails to "combine prudence, responsibility and practical intelligence with goodheartedness and delicacy of feeling", it is not because these qualities are incompatible with each other, as Watt implies (Knightley, in fact, successfully combines them), but because he was never intended as such a model of perfection. Prudence and practical intelligence are not shown in his secret engagement to Lucy Steele, nor in the twisted sense of honor which would preserve that engagement against all obstacles, even the threat of disinheritance, and against the absolute certainty of misery to himself and Elinor in case of his marriage to Lucy. He even fails to take advantage of the opportunities which are offered to dissolve the engagement. Such behavior seems wildly quixotic rather than sensible. In Jane Austen's novels, this excessive scrupulousness and moral refinement is found only in Edward.

The limited kind of sense that he can display is shown in his conversation on landscape with Marianne:

"Now, Edward . . . here is Barton Valley. Look up it, and be tranquil if you can. . . ."

'It is a beautiful country,' he replied; 'but those bottoms must be dirty in winter.'

'How can you think of dirt, with such objects before you?'

'Because,' replied he, smiling, 'amongst the rest of the objects before me I see a very dirty lane.'

'How strange!' said Marianne to herself as she walked on." (88) Clearly, Marianne's romantic enthusiasm is being gently satirized, but so is Edward's prim neo-classicism. We really ought to assume (the later novels give evidence) that the limitations of such a taste were as apparent to Jane Austen as they are to the modern reader.

In fact, Elinor alone in the novel consistently thinks and acts with sense (whether we are convinced of the depth of her feeling is not the question here), and Edward, first by his melancholy reserve, then by his determination to honor his engagement to Lucy, imposes almost as severe a trial upon her as Willoughby's unfaithfulness does upon Marianne—thus allowing Jane Austen to present the sisters' contrasting styles of bearing disappointment.

Edward's dullness should not be exaggerated, of course. He has a modest wit—"I was therefore entered at Oxford and have been properly idle ever since" (103)—and a recognition of his own deficiencies of "foolish shyness" and "natural awkwardness" which reveals greater self-awareness than Willoughby ever attains. Nevertheless, he is overshadowed by Willoughby as inevitably as Elinor by Marianne. (Colonel Brandon, Willoughby's nominal rival for Marianne, is too vaguely characterized to enter into consideration at all). The point is not that Edward is an unsuccessful characterization, but that a character like Willoughby's, apparently open, whole-hearted, and energetic, will seem more attractive than one that is hesitant, reserved, self-divided. The naive but primary response of identification forms part of even the most sophisticated reader's reaction to a novel, and who would not rather identify with a Willoughby than with an Edward?

As Willoughby enters the Dashwood home, carrying the injured Marianne in his arms, the first impression is irrevocable, for the reader and even for the cautious Elinor: "Elinor and her mother rose up in amazement at their entrance, and while the eyes of both were fixed on him with an evident wonder and a secret admiration which equally sprung from his appearance. . . ." (42) We soon discover that he is "a young man of good abilities, quick imagination, lively spirits, and open, affectionate manner . . . with all this he joined not

only a captivating person, but a natural ardour of mind" (48), and our image of Willoughby is almost complete. And indeed it is surprising how strong the impression is, how in memory he seems to dominate so much of the book, when in fact he figures continuously in the action for only some forty pages at the opening, and makes no other long appearance until, near the end, he tells his story to Elinor. In the interim, he has sunk continuously in the reader's opinion, with his coldness toward Marianne at their meeting in London, the heartless insolence of his letter to her, and finally Colonel Brandon's account of his seduction and abandonment of Eliza: "he had left the girl whose youth and innocence he had seduced, in a situation of the utmost distress. . . . He had left her, promising to return; he neither returned, nor wrote, nor relieved her. . . . His character is now before you—expensive, dissipated, and worse than both." (210) If Willoughby had indeed done all this, he would truly be the "conventional eighteenth-century villain"⁴ that he has been called. But Willoughby is something more, or other, than a diminished Lovelace, and while his actions remain, in his confession to Elinor he succeeds in explaining away his guilt to a remarkable degree, and is as interesting at his final departure ("'God bless you!' And with these words, he almost ran out of the room.") (332) as at his first appearance. His "punishment" consists in his choice of a shrewish wife and his realization that by marriage to Marianne he might have been forgiven by his wealthy cousin Mrs. Smith and so have been happy and rich together. For a Willoughby, the punishment of regret might be severe, but this is not the note on which we leave him: "But that he was for ever inconsolable, that he fled from society, or contracted an habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart, must not be depended on. . . . He lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself. His wife was not always out of humour, nor his home always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity." (379)

Willoughby is no conventional rake, no "villain", but a complex and seriously presented character. He may be considered a study in selfishness and the blighting effects "which too early an independence and its consequent habits of idleness, dissipation, and luxury, had made in the mind . . . of a man who, to every advantage of person and talents, united a disposition naturally open and honest, and a feeling, affectionate temper." (331) Far more strongly than any of the other anti-heroes, Willoughby arouses a sense of pathos, the pathos of waste not only for himself but for Marianne who is forced by the author to settle for the obvious second-best of marriage to Brandon. The charac-

terization is entirely successful, but at the cost of destroying the balance of *Sense and Sensibility*. Willoughby is so much more interesting than the two heroes of sense and the emotions he arouses—of sympathy and admiration, of actual hatred, then of regret—are so much stronger than anything we ever feel towards them, that he displaces them in our attention as completely as Marianne does the cool and rational Elinor.

The anti-heroes of the later novels—Wickham, Crawford, Frank Churchill, William Elliot—have significant qualities in common which distinguish them sharply from Willoughby. All of them possess charm, and charm of a particular kind, a premeditated, universal agreeability. (The charm of Willoughby is quite different, the pleasure of overflowing vitality.) This agreeability consists of good manners, not only polite but easy, and, even more important, of the ability to adapt their conversation to the taste of everybody, as Emma remarks of Churchill. The essential masculine qualities, for Jane Austen, included integrity and openness (in the sense of being above deceit and maneuver, rather than of effusively displaying one's feelings), and these are necessarily lacking in the anti-heroes. The power, and the willingness, to adapt one's self so completely to almost any situation or company implies the lack of any stable centre or self. What is the truth of Henry Crawford's nature? Only his endless variability. Frank Churchill is equally skilled at role-playing, and delights in it equally, perhaps taking an even greater pleasure in the game for its own sake. Wickham's opportunities are more limited, but he convincingly plays his part of the innocent victim oppressed by a haughty and vindictive aristocrat.

There is an appearance of "amiability" in all but Elliot, but it is deceptive. As Knightley observes of Frank Churchill, "No, Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very 'aimable,' have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him." (149) And so the apparently universal adaptability of the anti-heroes is limited after all. Lacking "delicacy", that intuitive understanding of the feelings of others, Henry Crawford commits blunder after blunder in his pursuit of Fanny Price, never realizing that he has already revealed himself completely to her and that she has formed an irreversible judgment of him. Frank Churchill wounds Jane Fairfax constantly, sometimes knowingly and sometimes not, but never guessing the depth of the hurt. They have neither delicacy nor principle to guide them. "Manners" they may possess, in the limited sense of "good breeding, refinement and courtesy . . . the ceremonies

of life" (*Mansfield Park*, 93) but there is a more serious meaning that Edmund Bertram goes on to describe: "The *manners* I speak of, might rather be called *conduct*, perhaps, the result of good principles." It is a concept which the Crawfords cannot grasp, but which the reader of Jane Austen must. If her novels are comedies of manners, they are so only in a sense of the word which includes all of the meanings that Edmund lists, but primarily the meaning of conduct.

Cleverness and wit are other qualities which the anti-hero may have, but the hero lacks (with the exception of Henry Tilney). Wit is inseparable from irony, and irony involves a sort of duplicity which is incompatible with Jane Austen's maculine ideal. Wit is playful, and the male must be essentially serious. Wit is potentially subversive of principle and decorum, and therefore is suspect in a man, who in the society of the novels has so much greater a power and scope of action than any woman. Emma Woodhouse is clever, Frank Churchill is clever, but although Knightley is the most intelligent and best-judging character of *Emma*, he is never witty and it would seem demeaning to call him "clever".

Wickham is probably the most complete scoundrel of the anti-heroes (one might call him a villain, except that to do so would give him a kind of moral dignity, a seriousness of evil, that he hardly deserves). At first sight, however, he "wanted only regimentals to make him completely charming." (72) He immediately displays "a pleasing address" and "a happy readiness of conversation" with strangers; both being qualities in which he is precisely opposite to Darcy. He has also the appearance of openness, again in striking contrast to Darcy's aristocratic reserve, and is ready—too ready, as she later realizes—to relate the history of his life and grievances to the sympathetic Elizabeth as soon as he has assured himself of her dislike for Darcy. "To his other recommendations was now added that of general unreserve," (138) and soon the whole countryside knows of his claims on Darcy and takes his part.

His most distinctive quality, though, is his frequently mentioned "impudence", consisting of an almost imperturbable assurance in the most embarrassing circumstances. He can observe to Elizabeth, after he has eloped with Lydia and been bribed to marry her, that a country parsonage would have suited him ideally and that he should have delighted in making sermons: "The quiet, the retirement of such a life, would have answered all my ideas of happiness!" (328) Obviously he is a consummate hypocrite, and there is a touch of Uriah Heap in his air of gentle goodness and long-suffering patience. While his elopement with Lydia belongs to eighteenth-century convention, his

hypocrisy distinguishes him from the traditional rake. It suggests the nineteenth century, and Wickham, as a literary type, looks both forward and back.

Unlike Willoughby, Wickham in himself is not of major interest, but his role is essential. His story and his charm increase Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy and make her refusal of him more severe. Still more importantly, Wickham gives a necessary blow to her intellectual pride, which is as great as Darcy's pride of class. She is taken in completely, momentarily fancying herself in love with him, and accepting his whole story and becoming a violent partisan of him against Darcy. The embarrassment she suffers when she learns the truth and the humiliating recollection of her attraction to such a man demonstrate her own fallibility and prepare for her reversal of attitude:

"Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

'How despicably have I acted!' she cried.—'I, who have prided myself on my discernment!' 'I, who have valued myself on my abilities!'" (208) That Wickham's rascality is so vulgar and commonplace adds to the humiliation. It is a painful lesson in the danger of first impressions (the original title of the novel).

Wickham's elopement with Lydia, which apparently dooms Elizabeth's hopes of Darcy just as she had begun to love him, actually has the opposite effect by involving him actively in the affairs of her family. Finally, Wickham serves as anti-hero in the most literal sense by exhibiting the exact opposite of each of Darcy's qualities: his apparent openness, humility, gentleness and good-humor against Darcy's reserve, pride, bluntness and disagreeability, and his real falsehood and hypocrisy against Darcy's absolute integrity.

The hero is not overshadowed by the anti-hero, as in *Sense and Sensibility*, but while it is easy to see what Darcy is intended to be, the author's intention is not quite fulfilled. As an embodiment of the pride of caste, he succeeds admirably; as a human being, he does not quite convince, or at least not consistently. Too much information of importance is given by the rather clumsy device of his letter to Elizabeth, in which, as Mudrick has pointed out, the author not only employs one of the favorite techniques of the sentimental novel, but tends to fall into its conventional language as well.⁵ The Darcy who reappears at Pemberley is hardly recognizable as the Darcy of the Netherfield ball or of the proposal scene, and the transformation occurs entirely offstage. Not that the characterization is an entire failure, like that of Colonel Brandon (the novel would be doomed if it were, Darcy's role is so much greater). It is probably in recollection, or in critical analysis, that we find Darcy unsatis-

factory. In the actual experiencing of *Pride and Prejudice* he gains enough life from a few episodes and passages of dialogue, largely with Elizabeth and occurring in the first volume, to at least compel a suspension of disbelief for the duration of our reading. The shock of his initial rudeness at the assembly—"She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*" (12)—the reader's amusement at his gradually increasing interest in Elizabeth and her unawareness of it, the conversational duels between the two at Netherfield, and his asides with Miss Bingley—these create a character, and a belief on the reader's part, which carry through the novel.

These scenes are admirably handled. We share Elizabeth's early dislike, but our prejudice is never allowed to rise as high as hers and to our amusement at Darcy is added further amusement at Elizabeth's blindness concerning his feelings towards her and her wilful misinterpretation of his words. Darcy is saved from our total dislike by his honesty—the blunt sincerity, for example, with which he rebuffs the obsequious flattery of Miss Bingley—while Elizabeth is unconsciously increasing her power over him by her genuine indifference. "The fact is", as she tells him, "you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking and looking and thinking for *your* approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike *them*." (380). This uncompromising honesty is the essential quality that Darcy shares with Elizabeth, different as his way of expressing it may be, and that makes their union credible. The Darcy of these scenes is certainly comic in his pride and self-satisfaction, yet formidable in his dignity, his intelligence, and his sincerity—the only male in the novel that we can conceive of as a husband for Elizabeth.

The difference in tone between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* is as great as the difference between Elizabeth and Fanny Price, or Mr. Bennet and Sir Thomas Bertram. In *Mansfield Park*, irony and wit occur only in the speeches of Henry and Mary Crawford, the anti-hero and anti-heroine. Fanny and Edmund are characterized by integrity and sincerity, and in this novel those virtues seem incompatible with wit. Objections to Edmund have been frequent, but again it is easy to confuse dislike of a character with a critical response. (This reaction is not exclusively modern; the first complaint that Edmund is excessively "cold and formal" is recorded in the opinions of *Mansfield Park* collected for Jane Austen by her family.) The character of Edmund is developed fully and consistently; coldness and formality are just what should be expected from the younger son of Sir Thomas Bertram. Readers who dislike Edmund usually dislike Fanny also, but they should admit that at least

the hero and heroine are well matched. His love for Mary, his opposite in every respect, seems as appropriate as his final return to Fanny. The contrast between Edmund and Mary has its similarities to that between Elizabeth and Darcy, but it is not a repetition, even apart from the reversal of sexes. Edmund lacks Darcy's pride, as Darcy, on the whole, lacks Edmund's moralism. It is a more common and more serious mistake to confuse Mary Crawford with Elizabeth Bennet. Mary is cynical and worldly, Elizabeth is witty and independent—she really is the free spirit that Mary imagines herself to be. The apparent freedom of the Crawfords, in contrast to the moral and social constraints of Mansfield Park, is deceptive; Henry is enslaved to his own boredom and restlessness, and Mary is unthinkingly obedient to the standards of the "world"—i.e., fashionable London society. It is natural that Edmund should be attracted by her, inevitable that he should reject her. The attraction that Edmund and Fanny exert on the Crawfords is the attraction of stability of self and principle for uncertainty and confusion.

Mary Crawford at least has the goal in life of making a "good" marriage (that is, to a man of rank and wealth): Henry lacks even that. "To anything like a permanence of abode, or limitation of society, Henry Crawford had, unluckily, a great dislike." (41) He proves to be the best actor in the theatricals, but he is always an actor, he hardly has a sense of self. He has intelligence and "moral taste", but moral taste is not morality, and these qualities are curiously divorced from his conduct. "Crawford has too much sense to stay here if he found himself in any danger from Maria," (116) remarks Edmund, but Crawford is not guided by his sense. He differs from Wickham and Frank Churchill in his devouring egotism, and the sadism that accompanies it, as though he could be convinced of his own reality only by exerting power over others, and the surest proof of power is the infliction of pain. When he decides to make Fanny fall in love with him, she is to "keep a chair for me by herself, wherever we are, and be all animation when I take it and talk to her; to think as I think, be interested in all my possessions and pleasures . . . and feel when I go away that she shall never be happy again." (231) He fails with Fanny, but accomplishes exactly this with Maria Bertram.

But *Mansfield Park* would be a less interesting and less disturbing book if the issues were as simple as this. The Crawfords are not to be summed up by their deficiencies. Their attractiveness springs primarily from their abounding energy of mind and body. "Energy is the only life, and is from the body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy," writes Blake, and in this novel only the Crawfords have energy. Edmund and Fanny have

principle instead. (It is surely no coincidence that Fanny is not only the most priggish and consciously principled of Jane Austen's heroines, but the sickliest among them as well.) *Mansfield Park* has structure—principle and decorum—without informing life; the Crawfords have a meaningless vitality. The principles of Edmund and Fanny, the energy of Henry and Mary, are both necessary to full human life, but *Mansfield Park* implies that they cannot co-exist. In this sense it is the darkest of Jane Austen's novels.

The union of Reason and Energy, of principle and vitality, is impressively achieved at last in the character of Knightley, the fully civilized man. Jane Austen's choice of his name is daring, but successful. "Knightley" seems perfectly appropriate and entirely believable. No one could be less an allegorical figure, yet the name carries its resonance of meaning. It is certainly a triumph of characterization that he is not only the most nearly perfect of her heroes, but also the most credible. Humanizing qualities—his bluntness, his occasional exasperation, his jealousy of Frank Churchill—prevent him from seeming a figure of impossible goodness, but even more important is the fact that he is so solidly planted in the world of Highbury, that we see and hear of him in so many relations (he is involved with every character in the novel). Although, luckily, we are not aware while reading of any didactic intention, he is what Richardson had intended Sir Charles Grandison to be, the model of a gentleman and a completely admirable man. He is not merely a gentleman, but emphatically an *English* gentleman, and this national quality seems quite deliberately intended. It is hinted at in his comment on Frank Churchill, already referred to, contrasting the English "amiable" with the French "*aimable*." Knightley himself is genuinely amiable. In the description of the view from Donwell Abbey, the intense Englishness of the whole scene, and of the owner whose existence is implied, is stressed: "It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive." (360) Knightley is unthinkable apart from Donwell Abbey. Never described in detail, its image nevertheless exists in our minds, with its "ample gardens" and "abundance of timber", "covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular, with many comfortable and one or two handsome rooms. It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was." (358) Unpretentious yet impressive, the house suggests its owner.

Knightley is convincingly masculine—it has been remarked that he is the only character in the novel who goes outdoors in all weathers.⁶ Every speech is clear and direct, every action is vigorous—the characteristic word

that one associates with him. His energy is at least equal to Emma's and a great deal more wisely directed because he understands himself and Highbury so much better. Emma is an "imaginist" who always sees her little world as it is colored by her own hopes, wishes, fears, prejudices, while Knightley has a firm grasp on reality (again, he is the only character in the novel who possesses it; even the sensible Mrs. Weston is biased by her devotion to Emma). As might be expected, he is completely "open" both in the sense of being above deceit of any kind, and of revealing himself frankly. (Openness in the first sense only characterizes the earlier heroes.) "Oh, if you knew how much I love everything that is decided and open," (460) remarks Emma, and the words fit Knightley perfectly, although his name is not mentioned. His own comment on Frank Churchill characterizes both men: "Mystery; Finesse—how they pervert the understanding! My dear Emma, does not everything serve to prove more and more the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other?" (446) It is a proof of the author's success that the remark seems not a platitude but a deeply experienced truth.

Knightley is thoroughly masculine in these conventional senses, but he also possesses the supposedly feminine qualities of almost intuitive understanding of others—in which he considerably surpasses Emma—and of consideration for their feelings. If he is not easily disturbed by small things, such as the garrulity of Miss Bates or the hypochondria of Mr. Woodhouse, this proceeds not from indifference or insensitivity but from his own firm self-assurance and perception of their genuine goodness.

Knightley is not only admirable, he is the only really admirable man in *Emma*. He is set off to his own advantage not only by Churchill, the anti-hero, but by his equally honest but disagreeable brother, by the too amiable and indiscriminately gregarious Weston (in contrast to both, Knightley represents a norm of intelligent sociability), by the old-maidish Mr. Woodhouse, and by the vulgar and essentially stupid Elton. It is necessary for him to be the impressive figure that he is, if he is to seem a fit husband for Emma, the most dominating of the heroines. His realism and tolerance contrast with and correct her fancifulness and her snobbery. Only a Knightley could marry her (who else would be willing or able to live with Mr. Woodhouse?) His authority—of age, presence, intelligence and principle—is required for Emma to accept him as a mentor, the necessary step before she begins to consider him as a lover and a husband. The transition occurs during the ball at the Crown: "She was more disturbed by Mr. Knightley's not dancing, than by any thing else. There he was, among the standers-by, where he ought not to be; he

ought to be dancing . . . so young as he looked!" (325) Only with a Knightley as husband would it be possible to accept the author's conclusion: "the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union." (484)

Emma and Frank Churchill have a good deal in common, as Emma herself comes to recognize. Both practice "Mystery" and "Finesse"; both attempt to manipulate others, both share a "destiny which bids fair to connect us with two characters so much superior to our own." (478) The difference is that while Emma deceives herself, Churchill deceives others. He is not to be considered "wicked" or a "villain", but clearly he functions as anti-hero, seemingly Knightley's rival for Emma and sharply contrasting with him in character. Frank also displays a strong likeness to the other principal anti-heroes. His charm is of the same type, based on infinite adaptability and therefore not to be trusted. His lack of "delicacy", shown particularly in his occasional cruelty to Jane Fairfax, resembles Crawford's, although his egotism exhibits itself less destructively. Again like Crawford, he possesses a "moral taste" which enables him to value Jane properly and risk a secret engagement with her.

Churchill's deceitfulness is apparent on his first appearance, recognizable both to the reader and to Emma herself. Complimenting his father's house, Highbury, and Hartfield (all being seen for the first time), he "professed himself to have always felt the sort of interest in the country which none but one's *own* country gives, and the greatest curiosity to visit it." (191) It is obviously suspicious, but "if it were a falsehood, it was a pleasant one, and pleasantly handled." (191)

On rereading, one quickly recognizes something more in his character—his pleasure in playing a part and taking in his audience (particularly anyone as proud of her own intelligence as Emma), the flourishes and disclaimers of knowledge in regard to Jane Fairfax which are really quite unnecessary, his deliberate skirting of discovery, acknowledging much but never the essentials, his delight in leading Emma on to more and more blunders—most memorably in their discussion of the source of the mysterious piano-forte, anonymously presented to Jane. An accomplished game-player, he can mislead with truth as well as with lies. Apparently open and impulsive (and actually honest at times in revealing his moods), the appearance of youthful frankness is one of his most effective weapons. Even his gift of the piano-forte to Jane, while partly done to give pleasure (which it does, although the pleasure is mixed

with apprehension), provides the further satisfaction of mystifying all Highbury. As Emma recognizes, "in the midst of your perplexities at that time, you had very great amusement in tricking us all. . . . I think there is a little likeness between us." (478)

Frank Churchill is younger than Henry Crawford, less sophisticated and less mature (which provides some hope for thinking that he may improve after marriage to Jane) and more concerned with the pleasures of mystery and deceit than with the infliction of pain (it results, but is incidental and unintended). He is also luckier, obtaining at once all his desires. He truly seems, as Knightley puts it, "the favourite of fortune. Everything turns out for his good. He meets with a young woman at a watering place, gains her affection, cannot even weary her by negligent treatment—and had he and his family sought round the world for a perfect wife for him, they could not have found her superior. His aunt is in the way. His aunt dies. . . . He has used everybody ill—and they are all delighted to forgive him." (428) Poetic justice is most conspicuously not inflicted; it almost never is in Jane Austen's novels. While the other anti-heroes are not exactly children of good fortune, like Churchill, not one of them is severely punished. Willoughby does not die of regret and remorse; he even has his moments of happiness. Lydia and Wickham simply go on being themselves, although perhaps that is punishment enough as they grow older. Maria Rushworth ruins her life by her elopement with Crawford, but the double standard protects him. The morality of the novels is clear and firm, but it is not at all a punitive morality.

Jane Austen's anti-heroes owe surprisingly little to the rakes of sentimental fiction. A traditional episode survives, clearly out of context and seeming inappropriately melodramatic, in the elopements of Lydia with Wickham, Maria with Henry Crawford, but in the fragmentary "Sanditon" she finally reduces the whole tradition to farce in the figure of Sir Edward Denham, with his fantasies of abduction and seduction (he dreams of carrying his victim to "Tombuctoo"). Even Crawford, with his gallantries, is a far more sophisticated type, aiming at the refinements of psychological conquest rather than the crudity of seduction or rape. Although a greater likeness exists among them than among the heroines and heroes, each is individualized and unmistakably adapted to the particular context of his novel.

It is a sign of Jane Austen's increasing maturity as an artist that her most attractive and convincingly masculine heroes (not, of course, "masculine" in any trite sense) are found in her two last novels. In the character of Knightley she creates one of the most memorable heroes in the whole range

of the English novel. The earlier heroes are less successful; no doubt Edward Ferrars and Edmund Bertram were intended to seem rather more sympathetic than they do, perhaps Darcy's character is not fully realized (but even these would seem a good deal more impressive if we measured them against, for example, the almost indistinguishable heroes of the *Waverley Novels*). But on the whole, the heroes serve their purpose effectively; they are individualized sufficiently to be convincing in themselves and also as lovers and future husbands for the heroines of their respective novels—a fact which not only prevents the effect of a merely conventional “happy ending” but enriches the experience of reading and increases our understanding of the heroines. In fact, the heroines can reveal themselves fully only in relation to both heroes and anti-heroes. We cannot imagine Elizabeth without Darcy and Wickham, or Emma Woodhouse apart from both Knightley and Frank Churchill.

NOTES

1. *The Works of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman (London, 1965), vol. 6, p. 15. (All further quotations from Jane Austen's novels are from this edition. Subsequent references will appear in the text).
2. Andrew Wright, *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure* (London, 1961), p. 130.
3. Ian Watt, “On *Sense and Sensibility*” in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1963), p. 49.
4. Henrietta Ten Harmsel, *Jane Austen: A Study in Fictional Convention* (The Hague, 1964), p. 50.
5. Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton, 1952), p. 118.
6. Mark Schorer, “The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse,” *Literary Review II* (Summer, 1959), p. 110.