Education by Embarrassment and Mortification: Character Development in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*

by

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DEDICATION

To my parents who make it all matter
and
to my brother and sisters
who may want to do this some day

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ABSTRACT

The undertaking of this thesis is to demonstrate that in Jane Austen's novels mortification and embarrassment are central to the thematic and structural organization, and its purpose is to analyze these as the method by which her characters are educated. The Introduction establishes the critical and literary contexts by considering embarrassment and mortification in works by Burney, Goldsmith, and Richardson. What Austen's characters are educated in is also the focus of this discussion, and the purpose of the three chapters, centred on Pride and Prejudice, Emma, and Persuasion, is to explore the topic along these lines and through a selection of both major and minor characters. The thesis examines the patterns of similarity and difference in the processes of mortification and embarrassment, and the function of the Conclusion is to highlight such patterns and to clarify the type of knowledge and maturity which Austen's characters attain. Finally, the thesis endeavours to convey the depth and complexity of Austen's understanding of embarrassment and mortification both in her work as a whole and within specific novels. Notes and a Selected Bibliography are included.

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INTRODUCTION

Establishing the Context: Embarrassment in Eighteenth-Century Literature

Things matter in Jane Austen's novels. By "things" I mean both the social events like the Netherfield ball, or the picnic at Box Hill, or the outing to Lyme, and the personal events such as Elizabeth's behaviour to Darcy at the ball, or Emma's to Miss Bates, or Anne's on the Cobb. What is important about these events, both public and private, is that they are a means of highlighting the decisions that Austen's characters are continually called upon to make about themselves and each other. What one does, how one behaves, indeed the moral rendering one gives of oneself are the "things" to which I refer. When these things matter, it means that these decisions have consequences, and that Austen's characters must take, or learn to take, responsibility for them. It is a question not only of what they do, but also of what they choose to do. They must, in fact, give a moral accounting of themselves.

Another way to consider this point is in terms of distance. Since Austen's works were first published, critics have reflected on the narrowness of the society and on the restraints on the characters she depicts, in short on the

extent of spatial distance in society and for individuals within this society. Alistair M. Duckworth, for example, in his study of Austen entitled The Improvement of the Estate draws attention to the social and personal differences that distance Elizabeth from Darcy in Pride and Prejudice. He suggests that "Elizabeth's journey through the park [at Pemberley], from its boundary to the house, is a spatial recapitulation of her association with Darcy from her first prejudiced impressions of his external appearance, through a recognition of other (and seemingly contradictory) views, to a final arrival at the central core of his character."[1] The limitations and definitions of Austen's fictional world are also the focus of Stuart M. Tave's opening chapter in his book, Some Words of Jane Austen. He refers to the necessity of her characters having a correct knowledge of geography, both actual and metaphorical, and of their defining themselves according to the spatial and temporal co-ordinates of the world in which they live.[2] When I suggest that things matter in Austen, I am talking about a moral distance, i.e., the distance between what one ought to do or ought not to do, and what one actually does. It is the overstepping and the understepping of certain ethical boundaries that matters, for it is with the "oughtness" of behaviour that morality is concerned, and it is in her attention to the oughtness of things that Austen, though rarely moralistic in her mature work, is most definitely a moralist.

Things matter to her.

So it seems to me that the major task of all Austen's characters is to recognize and measure and reduce this distance. Such criteria apply not simply or exclusively to her heroines. Anne Elliot has less to learn than Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse, and certainly heroes like Darcy and Captain Wentworth and even Mr Knightley advance in self-knowledge. The minor characters, too, are not exempt: a Lydia Bennet or a Sir Walter Elliot are held up to the same standard, and are eventually condemned for failing to meet it, and for not even trying to meet it. This process of measuring moral distance is often spoken of in terms of maturation or education, and it is a topic that has interested other readers of Austen. D.D. Devlin in his discussion, Jane Austen and Education, remarks that Austen's characters are educated in the classical sense of having their eyes opened to see themselves and their actions more clearly.[3] However, though Mansfield Park receives extended treatment in his book, Devlin has less to say about the rest of Austen's fiction, and he is more concerned with clarifying her conception of education as it is influenced by Locke and Johnson than with analyzing the process of it in her characters. For readers like myself who are largely interested in exploring the development of character, growth and change and improvement are also paramount, but no less so is how these are brought about. The purpose of this study is to claim that

the primary symptoms of a change in understanding, as well as the primary impetuses that effect this change are embarrassment and mortification. They are not exactly the same, and I will speak more about their differences later. We should mark well the moments of awkwardness and of shame in Austen's novels, for these are the moments of crisis in the lives of her characters. They are also usually moments of pain, because they are the times when a character catches a glance of or sees clearly in its entirety the intellectual and emotional fallibility of the self. For embarrassment is an implicit recognition of wrong-doing, and in many ways it is a positive force since it indicates that one sees the faults in oneself that should be mended. For Austen, embarrassable characters are capable of growing. It will be the business of this discussion to trace the development of Austen's characters as people along the paths of embarrassment and mortification.

My approach to Austen is not unique among existing critical literature, although I believe my focus is. One of the givens in appreciating Austen now is that she is concerned in all her novels with the moral or emotional, social or intellectual coming of age of her men and women. It is this assumption that directs and supports Tave's work in Some Words of Jane Austen and Duckworth's in The Improvement of the Estate. It is the acceptance of this as a thematic preoccupation for Austen that underlies the thrust

of such diverse critical articles as those by Grete Ek, Jane Nardin, and Ann Molan. In her essay, "Mistaken Conduct and Proper 'Feeling'," Ek is interested in pointing out the essential affinities between Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet; among them she cites their mutual immaturity and the fact that they mature by being mortified.[4] For Nardin, Persuasion has a Christian focus, and while Anne remains a consistent Protestant heroine, Wentworth develops in the course of the novel into a true Christian hero worthy of her.[5] Molan in "Persuasion in Persuasion" is less sympathetic to Anne Elliot and argues that she must learn to release the self-defense mechanisms that protect her from the loneliness of her world and to become open to the persuasion of fulfillment and happiness.[6] The fact that Austen's characters develop and change or, in other words, are educated provides a foundation for many divergent points of view. It is perhaps the facile acceptance of it that causes Susan Morgan to remark in her fascinating study of romanticism in Austen entitled In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction that the advantage of her approach is that Austen's oeuvre is no longer divided between the "novels of education" and the "problem novels."[7]

In focusing on mortification as the method by which Austen's characters mature, I am indebted to such critics as Stuart M. Tave and Mark Schorer, whose independent interest in the subject has led to their respective

publications, "Affection and the Mortification of Elizabeth Bennet"[8] and "The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse."[9] The value of these two essays lies in their concern to discuss not simply mortifying events in the novels, but mortification as a process. Tave claims that mortification is an important part of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship from the beginning, that it is part of an extended learning process for them, and that they eventually learn to rise above it. As his title suggests, he confines his comments largely to Elizabeth, although he insists that Darcy's mortification is genuine, even if the reader does not share it. In turn, Schorer writes that the humiliation of Emma involves making her a moral person, one whose intellectual awareness and conduct are morally aligned.

My main criticism of these commentators is that they have perhaps focused on the heroines to the detriment of other characters in the novels. Elizabeth and Emma are not the only ones to be mortified, and there are other people's stories besides their own that Austen contrives to tell. Indeed I hope to demonstrate that the reader actually sees a great deal more of Darcy's mortification than Tave, for example, implies. I am also concerned in this discussion to emphasize that mortification is a pervasive force in Austen's work as a whole, and so this study proposes to look in detail at mortification as it appears consistently and significantly in the texture and structure of Pride and

Prejudice, Emma, and Persuasion. By choosing these three, my remarks are by no means intended to be exclusive of Austen's other novels, and indeed the value of what I say would be considerably reduced were it pertinent only to these. My choice is mainly arbitrary because these happen to be my favourite of Austen's novels, although obviously mortification is important in the lives of Catherine Morland, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, and Fanny Price. It is my hope that the similarities of situation and development between the novels I discuss and those I do not will present themselves automatically to the reader. The shame of Catherine strikes me as comparable in many ways to Elizabeth's, especially the terms in which it is expressed, and Fanny's endurance is much like Anne Elliot's. Unfortunately, I can be explicit about only half of Austen's mature work and must leave implicit comparison to the reader.

To speak of embarrassment in conjunction with mortification is, I believe, my only claim to originality of focus. Embarrassment alone has generated little critical discussion among readers of Austen, although in one of the earliest full-length studies of her, Mary Lascelles refers to it in passing. In her chapter on "Style" in Jane Austen and Her Art, Lascelles notes that Austen often uses fragmentary speech to convey strong feeling such as embarrassment,[10] but it is Lascelles' own tantalizing use of "to embarrass" in a later chapter that prompts me to think she just misses

a fertile field of study. Lascelles writes:

> The problem which Mrs Bennet presents is a little different; she is not the sort of character that is likely to embarrass its creator by uncontrollable vitality--as Mrs Jennings had just done, and Mrs Smith was to do later . . .[11]

This is another sort of embarrassment besides that felt by the characters within the story, and though I will not attempt to expand Lascelles' brief mention of author embarrassment, the importance of reader embarrassment will occupy some of my attention. While concentrating on the embarrassment internal to the novels, I nevertheless hope to point out the significance of the reader's response to such embarrassment. Frequently our embarrassment is an empathetic one as we sympathize with the victim of it in the story, but at times it is left solely to us to feel the embarrassment that the characters themselves should feel and do not.

Though Austen criticism specifically contains little mention of embarrassment, Christopher Ricks has written a fine study on the subject relating to Keats. It is indeed his book, Keats and Embarrassment, that has prompted my own interest in the area.[12] Ricks maintains that, as a man and a poet, Keats used awkwardness to his advantage by confronting it rather than fliching from it. In his poetry, particularly in Endymion, embarrassment is depicted as a tender and subtle human emotion, while in the letters, Keats shows that the best way to minimize embarrassment is to

admit it. Many of the whimsical passages in Keats's letters to his publishers are an attempt to handle an embarrassing financial situation. Ricks's observations on the nature of embarrassment in general are helpful and in particular are often applicable to Austen, for especially in Persuasion, where Anne and Wentworth will not confront it, embarrassment becomes a malignant rather than a beneficial force.

It is my aim in the rest of this introduction to set the literary context by considering some examples of embarrassment and mortification in the work of Burney, Goldsmith, and Richardson, but perhaps it would be well to clarify these terms before proceeding. The two are sometimes used interchangeably, but they derive from different roots. According to the OED, to "embarrass" is an etymological adaptation of the French embarrasser, meaning literally to "block" or to "obstruct." To be embarrassed, then, is to be hampered or encumbered, such as by debts or by one's own inner confusion or perplexity. "Embarrassment" is explained by the OED as "Perplexity, sense of difficulty or hesitation with regard to judgement or action; constrained feeling or manner arising from bashfulness or timidity." Thought and feeling are what combine in the best of Austen's characters and plots, and it is part of the beauty of Persuasion that Anne's embarrassment is felt and thought to be, quite literally, an obstruction: "For a few minutes she saw nothing before her. It was all confusion. She was

lost . . ."[13] Embarrassment is usually a recurring distress--at least it is in Austen--but it is also usually temporary in its effects. By contrast, the early meanings of "mortification" indicate that its results are more permanent. In the religious sense of the word, "mortified" means "dead to sin or the world" (OED) and, in a now obsolete definition, simply "dead" or "slain." In its original force, to mortify someone is to kill him, either literally or figuratively. In pathology, mortification is "the death of a part of the body while the rest is living," and in its transferred sense, the destruction of "the vitality, vigour, or activity" of a person. Only recently has mortification acquired its modern meaning of a "feeling of humiliation caused by a disappointment, a rebuff or slight, or an untoward accident," and it is interesting to note that some sense of the original meaning lingers in the colloquial expression of vexation, "I could have died."

In the eighteenth century, the theme of embarrassment proved to be of exceptional interest to creative writers. One of Austen's closest contemporaries, Fanny Burney, exploits in Evelina or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World[14] the embarrassment to an ignorant, though well-meaning, girl as she becomes acquainted by error and mismanagement with society. In the early chapters, Evelina's inadequacies in social etiquette are the main cause of her discomfort, and not only she but those of

superior social behaviour around her recognize her faux pas. At the balls and assemblies where she is first introduced into society, Evelina's ignorance and not any essential viciousness makes her offend Mr Lovel by laughing at him and then by dancing with Lord Orville after refusing him. Austen's heroines, on the other hand, are from the start secure in their social setting, and if they are embarrassed by social lapses, it is because they are associated with socially vulgar people. Elizabeth Bennet, although sometimes too gaily impertinent, behaves well in her own right, and when in company winces for her mother and father and younger sisters. Anne Elliot behaves just as she ought, though her gallant efforts at tact and sincerity are more often than not unsuccessful in neutralizing the arrogance of her father and sister. Embarrassment by association comes to Evelina later in her novel. Once she herself is more socially assured, then she must cope with the distress and shame and helplessness of being connected against her will with Mme Duval and the Branghtons.

Part of what distinguishes Austen from Burney is the insight with which Austen understands the mechanism of embarrassment. In Persuasion especially she depicts so compellingly the terror and the panic and the feeling "an hundred things in a moment" (P, p. 391) that make it such a miserable emotion. Evelina's embarrassment, however, is very much externally perceived by both herself and her

author, for Burney is more concerned with observing cause and effect than in relating physiological distress. Evelina, like Anne Elliot, is almost continually embarrassed, and yet the reader receives a limited sense of the sensation itself. When Evelina meets Orville unexpectedly in the park, for example, she is embarrassed to be seen by him with the Branghtons and also ashamed of being embarrassed. Her reaction is convincing, however, not because of Burney's superior presentation of it, but because it is the most plausible response of a virtuous girl caught in an awkward situation. Evelina's embarrassment is believable because it is predictable.

Although embarrassment prompts Evelina to improve her manners, there is no fundamental change in character as a result of mortification, and embarrassment seems to have no other purpose than to indicate unhappiness. Intentional mortifiers in Evelina like Captain Mirvan use awkwardness not to encourage growth but to inflict pain, and his cruelty to Mme Duval has no goal but to make her life as wretched as possible. His practical jokes and insulting obscenities are simply and solely malicious. The function of embarrassment in the novel as a whole, though, is not as clearly defined as Captain Mirvan's motives with Mme Duval; the aim of embarrassment actually evolves as the novel progresses. In the beginning, Evelina's embarrassments are the painful but just deserts of her social mistakes,

but as she becomes more socially adept, she is often punished with embarrassment for situations which are not her fault. During Evelina's time with Mme Duval and the Branghtons, she is tossed about by their whims and is frequently mortified and blameless of the cause of mortification. The awkwardness between Orville and Evelina in the last third of the book is occasioned by Sir Clement's fabricated answer in reply to one of Evelina's letters which he has intercepted. Evolution often means ambiguity, and one of the weaknesses of Evelina is that, for all the descriptions of embarrassment, the function of it is not clearly conceived. The novel moves from simplicity to complexity, from the difficulty of ballroom etiquette to the difficulty of keeping another person's confidences, and yet as it poses more and more serious problems for its heroine, it makes her less and less mistress of her own fate. The existence of embarrassment becomes unfair in the novel, and Evelina's marriage is a reward for integrity and suffering, and not an achievement for maturing through embarrassment.

Burney uses laughter more successfully than embarrassment to define and structure Evelina. Like Austen's handling of embarrassment, Burney uses laughter to outline character and to establish her moral basis. Laughing at and laughing with characters create tensions and alliances between them, and it is in laughter that the personal and

moral compatibility of Evelina and Orville is recognizable. Spontaneous laughter, like a spontaneous blush, shows where one's priorities lie, and withholding laughter demonstrates sensitivity and maturity. Laughter is a significant element in Evelina's education, as embarrassment is in Austen's characters'. The derisive laughter of Lovel and Captain Mirvan, on the other hand, is used to hurt and to mortify and, because of its aim, the reader frequently cannot share their mirth.[15] We must look, therefore, to Burney's focus on laughter to appreciate the artistry of Evelina, and yet I believe that in Burney's handling of this motif we can also see the inferiority of her technical skill. The reader is not meant to share Captain Mirvan's abrasive laughter at Mme Duval during the hijacking episode or at Lovel as he confronts his "twin-brother," a monkey, and so his laughter deliberately alienates him from us. Unfortunately, his rudeness also forces us to ally our sympathies with precisely those characters like Mme Duval and Lovel for whom we have already formed a dislike on other grounds. Burney makes the mistake of placing them in the position of the underdog, and the underdog is always certain of gaining some sympathy. Burney's ability to direct the reader's sympathy is thus less sure and less consistent than Austen's, for Austen is careful that those characters she does not want us to like are never shown in the appealingly vulnerable state of embarrassment.

She Stoops to Conquer: or, The Mistakes of a Night displays one of those jovial worlds of farce and burlesque that Goldsmith's audience, and audiences ever since have delighted in. The first half of the title recalls Kate Hardcastle's deliberate lowering of herself for the purpose of engaging Mr Marlow; she endures a sort of self-inflicted mortification to catch a husband. The second half informs us of a significantly short length of time for the action, from which we may infer that the mistakes will be because of haste, and that the enlightenment from them will be equally speedy. There is a greater range of time in Austen. Most of the novels span at least one year in their immediate action, and in Persuasion, for example, the use of memory and of time past is complex indeed. Of course, Elizabeth Bennet's mistakes are caused by a too-hasty judgement, but the difference between her and Marlow is that Elizabeth's awakening develops more slowly and over a long period of reflection and consideration. Perhaps it is because of the difference in genre, but nevertheless the very title of She Stoops to Conquer tells us that we cannot expect to find a process of revelation. Humiliation and self-discovery are instantaneous, and Marlow is teased into and out of embarrassment rather than suffering greatly from it. The whole merriment of the play is that it is really an elaborate practical joke. Things do not matter all that much. It is a game, a frolic, a cheerful manipulation,

and in the main, the most serious worry is that Charles be good-humoured and mature enough not to resent the lesson. Yet in Emma, Austen explores some of the devastating results of such games and frolics and manipulations; the fun almost turns sour, and part of the problem is the reader does not quite know who the practical joker is.

Many of the characters in She Stoops to Conquer are types recognizable in Austen's novels. The sprightly, intelligent Kate Hardcastle resembles Elizabeth Bennet, and both of them carry the action of the story by their freshness and vigour. There are also shades of Kate in Emma, for both of them direct as well as sustain the action, though Miss Hardcastle is by far the more successful manipulator. The father-daughter tête-à-têtes between Kate and Mr Hardcastle are like the frank, easy conversations between Elizabeth and Mr Bennet, although the novel offers Elizabeth the opportunity to grow beyond her father's satirical limitations while Kate remains essentially static. The fact that Kate never loses her self-confidence, for instance, points to the basic stasis her character enjoys. Beginning with her retort to the possibility of Marlow mortifying her, through to her deft handling of him in the proposal scene, Kate never loses control. Yet it is an important part of being embarrassed that one is not at all sure of oneself, as Elizabeth is not in the second half of Pride and Prejudice, and as Anne is not in most of Persuasion,

and as Charles Marlow is not when he throws himself on his knees and cries, "Does this look like security? Does this look like confidence?"[16] Naturally in this last example, the confusion of love as much as of embarrassment contributes to uncertainty, and for Austen as well as for Goldsmith, the two are closely connected.

Mr Marlow is in many respects a predecessor of Mr Darcy, in being awkward before strangers and in having an "unaccountable reserve" (p. 119). It also seems that Darcy shares Marlow's fate when he is completely nonplussed by "a single glance from a pair of fine eyes" (p. 129). Both these characters by their own awkwardness bring awkwardness into life, and part of their development is to be educated out of it by embarrassment. In other ways, Marlow is like Elizabeth or Emma when he says, "My stupidity saw everything the wrong way" (p. 185). Though Hardcastle insists that Marlow's errors are "a trifle" (p. 197) and though the other characters will not allow his confusion to overwhelm him, yet Charles' deceived understanding points to the difficulty of interpreting others' behaviour that structures the play and Austen's novels too. The business of deciphering people is discussed at some length by Kate and Mr Hardcastle when they compare their "first sights" (p. 159) of Marlow. Hardcastle is "confounded" (p. 158), and his bewilderment revealed by questions like "What can it mean . . .? To me he appears . . ." (p. 157). Kate,

too, is aware that first impressions are a delicate matter, but she knows Marlow's reputation and can reconcile his seemingly contradictory behaviour. She thinks that she and her father may both be right, and that "there may be many good qualities under that first appearance" (p. 160). Elizabeth Bennet and Emma and Anne Elliot do not have the advantage of knowing another person's character so fully, and must struggle with perplexity. Indeed, for Elizabeth and Emma, the first step is actually to become perplexed, to ask, let alone answer, the questions that Mr Hardcastle poses.

Chance plays a greater role in She Stoops to Conquer than in any of Austen's novels. Statements such as "Pshaw, think no more of him, but trust to occurrences for success" (p. 115) have no place in Austen's world, and nor even does Tony's opportunistic scheme for embarrassing the travellers and revenging himself that generates the rest of the action. If there is any "seizing of the moment" in Austen, it comes to those characters who are willing to take the chance when it is offered, but not willing to wait on chance itself. All the proposal scenes in the three novels I will be discussing, for example, owe their form, though not their existence, to a certain amount of unpremeditation. Darcy first speaks in the haste of concern for Elizabeth's ill-health; Mr Knightley surprises even himself by proposing; and Wentworth seizes a pen and composes a letter on the spur of the moment.

There is every indication, however, that these characters are ready to speak, and that they speak when they do because the opportunity has presented itself. Austen's main characters cannot rely on escape mechanisms like chance or fate.

The pace of life in The History of Sir Charles Grandison[17] is that curious Richardsonian mixture of melodrama and ordinariness. Harrowing adventures such as the kidnapping of Harriet Byron in volume I and Clementina's running away from home in volume VII are interspersed by sedate morning visits and polite conversation. Wicked Italians and lovers' duels combine with balls and genteel social intercourse to create a texture in many ways so similar to Austen, and in other ways so different. There is more dialogue in Sir Charles Grandison than in either Pamela or Clarissa and, knowing Austen's own deft use of conversation within narrative, it is not surprising that this was her favourite of Richardson's novels.[18] Her fondness may also be accounted for in the many appealing minor characters. John Greville, rather than the more exotic Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, is the sort of smooth talker that Austen herself creates in Wickham, Frank Churchill, and Mr Elliot. Sir Charles' sister, Charlotte Grandison, has a brisk, independent character that is very like Emma Woodhouse's, and perhaps she is one of the sources for Emma. Like Emma, Charlotte

> has a way of saying ill-natured things in such a good-natured manner, that one cannot forbear smiling, though one should not altogether approve of them; and yet sometimes one would be ready to wonder how she came by her images. (III. 21)

So Emma sits mimicking before Mrs Weston and mocking on Box Hill.

In terms of embarrassment, Austen and Richardson agree that it is an emotion of leisure and reflection. Harriet's letters are really a series of reflections, and are not quite as to-the-moment as Clarissa's. Harriet ponders, whereas Pamela and Clarissa are so busy keeping clear of Mr B and Lovelace that they have little free time left for anything else. Naturally, I am referring here to the period before the crisis of the novels, before the marriage to Mr B or Sir Charles, before the rape by Lovelace. Leisure is an important consideration. When Harriet must unexpectedly assist Emily Jervois to escape from her embarrassingly vulgar mother, Mrs O'Hara, in volume III, it is to-the-moment living with no time for awkwardness or confusion. In Persuasion, with Louisa Musgrove lying like as dead on the Cobb, there is no time for Anne and Captain Wentworth to maintain an angry and embarrassed distance. When Elizabeth Bennet sits shattered in the inn after reading the news of Lydia's elopement, there is barely time for her to register the mortification of it; the real pain will follow later. In these struggles that seem to loom larger than life and death, embarrassment has little place. Its role is in the

subtle, intricate areas of life, and is perhaps why it is of such significance in Austen whose art is so finely wrought.

The Harriet Byron of the first two volumes of Grandison is a lively girl, who knows exactly what she thinks of her many suitors and rejects them all. There is no record of embarrassment in these situations, because her affections are not engaged, and because her admirers are so pompous and sure of themselves as to be impervious to mortification. Harriet is rather disgusted than embarrassed by their attentions, much as Anne Elliot is by Mr Elliot's in the revised ending to Persuasion.[19] After Sir Charles rescues Harriet from Pollexfen and she goes to stay with the Grandison family, Harriet is just as sure that he is the only man she can love. In Harriet's mind, there is no question of Grandison being the one, but for Elizabeth and Emma and Anne, Wickham and Frank Churchill and Mr Elliot are, at least briefly, very real choices. Harriet's task in the early stages of her attachment is to cope with her confusion and awkwardness in front of the Grandisons, and to be careful that her love is reasonable. Her aunt, Mrs Selby, warns her about the potential humiliation of falling in love with a man who may already love another.

As it turns out, Grandison does love another, and from the moment Clementina enters, Harriet loses much of her liveliness to lovesickness. Like Pamela and Clarissa, she

endures with the stoical fortitude that all Richardson's heroines must have. She suffers the mortification of being the confidante to a tale of frustrated love for another woman told by the man she herself loves, and gallantly acknowledges Clementina's prior claims. Like Austen's heroines, she must accept the possibility of an unhappy ending. The playful distinction Harriet makes in volume II between the "would" and the "should" of life (II. 378) becomes a painful reality she must live out on the practical level. She takes on the aura of being the best of women as Charles is the best of men, and until the final awkwardness of the proposal scene and future married bliss, her goodness is a matter of how much of what she ought to do she can bear to do.

Richardson's own description of Sir Charles Grandison in the "Preface" as "A Man of Religion and Virtue; of Liveliness and Spirit; accomplished and agreeable; happy in himself, and a Blessing to others" (p. 4) does not seem to leave much scope for the educative influence of embarrassment. Indeed, Grandison's role in the first two volumes is that of an intentional, though not malicious, mortifier of others. Simply by his goodness, he embarrasses those less worthy. His "mercy" and "justice" to his late father's mistress mortifies his sisters, for while they were making the best of Mrs Oldham's "mortified situation" (II. 373) to torment her, Charles strives to soothe her anxiety. He

later discountenances Harriet and Charlotte for matchmaking him and discomforts Charlotte by discovering her secret love affair. Of course, his motives are always the noblest, for he mortifies to reform.

For himself, Grandison calls the business with Clementina "the affair which, of all others, has most embarrassed" him (III. 118), and on the misunderstanding with Olivia, he says, "I had the mortification of being obliged to declare myself to the Lady's face: It was a mortification to me, as much for her sake as my own" (III. 117). However, there are several factors which contribute to softening these embarrassments. His own delicacy and frankness always smooth awkwardness, the reader is told, and part of the blame for the embarrassing separation of Grandison and Clementina lies in the difference of religion and the hostility of some branches of her family. Austen's characters do not have the luxury of blaming embarrassment on such obstacles. My main problem with Grandison's embarrassments is that they are not quite convincing. In discussing with her grandmother the possibility of proposing to Harriet, he admits that he is mortified at Clementina's final refusal, and says that he realizes the delicacy of offering to marry the runner-up, Miss Byron. But I wonder how much of the embarrassment of the actual proposal scene he senses. He is earnest and ardent, but Harriet is much more disturbed by it. She blushes and is confused and does not know whether to be angry or

pleased (VI. 100). In the event, Grandison's embarrassment is really more an intellectual awkwardness, and despite the fact that Richardson tells us these things matter very, very much and that this is mortifying for Sir Charles Grandison, it becomes ultimately a leap of faith for the reader. Either we believe it or we do not. I myself have not been persuaded to believe Grandison's mortification, although in the end I am willing to take Richardson's word for it.

The question of things mattering in Austen's novels is a question for her characters of deciphering what things matter. What they learn is directed by what they ought to do, and oughtness for Austen involves not trifling with others and having the courage to lose confidence. Unlike in Goldsmith, the mistakes that cause mortification in Austen are not a trifle, and unlike Richardson's Grandison, her main characters experience genuine loss of self-esteem. For the reader, the question is one of being convinced by Austen's presentation that certain things matter and of believing in her understanding of embarrassment in ways in which we cannot quite believe in Burney's or Richardson's. The task is really finding out how much Austen herself matters as a novelist.

CHAPTER ONE

Achieving Possibility Through Mortification: Becoming in Pride and Prejudice

An analysis of the sense of embarrassment which I now feel on reading the first chapter of Pride and Prejudice is perhaps the best way of introducing a discussion of how embarrassment and mortification function in the novel itself. The familiarity with which we approach any story after the first reading obviously colours our rereading of it, and our expectations for the characters themselves are usually curtailed by the fact that we know what will happen to them. Returning to Pride and Prejudice this time, I had little expectation of being surprised by any of the characters, and yet Austen's presentation of Mr and Mrs Bennet in Chapter One has surprised me. The Bennets are different at the beginning of the chapter from what they are at the end of it and from what they are indeed for the rest of the novel, which means that they are also different from what I remember. Austen allows them to introduce themselves:

> "My dear Mr Bennet," said his lady to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?"
>
> Mr Bennet replied that he had not.
>
> "But it is," returned she; "for Mrs Long has just been here, and she told me all about it."[1]

The Bennets begin in good humour and tolerance: she is enthusiastic about the news concerning Netherfield and he seems willing to indulge her by at least some sort of answer. There is, however, a strange sense of disorientation from the timeless and placeless quality of the phrase, "said his lady to him one day," and one of the difficulties in pinpointing the characters of Mr and Mrs Bennet in this first exchange of dialogue is that there is no indication of tone. The woman we associate with Mrs Bennet later is at this moment simply the lady of an unknown Mr Bennet, and her "My dear Mr Bennet" and "But it is" could conceivably be read with the rapturous excitement of a bride. It helps that Mr Bennet does not speak directly. The reader gets words, probably even exact words, but no tone, and Mr Bennet could conceivably be the loving husband. Once clues like "impatiently" enter at the close of Mrs Bennet's third statement, though, her words are qualified retroactively, and immediately following Mr Bennet speaks with typical emphatic harshness, "You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it" (P&P, p. 3). Mrs Bennet must now speak with nagging irritation and her husband with satirical complacency, and any sense of a newly-wed tone disintegrates instantly. They begin to quarrel, first when he will not visit Mr Bingley and then over their children, and we can see how their marriage has decayed over the years.

It is always awkward to observe a marital squabble, and

I believe that this is the longest one in the book. Yet I think the embarrassment I feel is prompted mainly by disappointment and by a sense of loss as soon as Mrs Bennet is called impatient and as soon as Mr Bennet opens his mouth. This sense of loss is felt most keenly at the end of the chapter where, in the last paragraph, they are cast in the moulds in which they will remain for the rest of the novel. I am disappointed that he has turned out to be "so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice" and she "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper" (P&P, p. 5). I am embarrassed because I see at the beginning another Mr and Mrs Bennet existing somewhere else that never really come into being. In the rigidity of the description in the last paragraph, they are condemned to tiresomeness and vexatiousness, and have lost their chance for growth and for becoming anything other than what they are.

The disclosure of the characters of Mr Bingley and Mr Collins and Mr Darcy follows a similar pattern in moving from vague potentiality to realized actuality. Bingley, as a matter of fact, is introduced in the first sentence as "a single man in possession of a good fortune" (P&P, p. 3), and in this general description lies the potential for Bingley to turn out to be anything at all. It is part of the appeal of Bingley's character, though, that he never really loses this flavour of anonymity. When he is met in

person at the Meryton assembly, he is discovered to be as handsome and polite as a single man in possession of a good fortune should be. His looks, his manners, and his bearing are basically very nice, and I use the word in its most colloquial sense, as it confers on Bingley the everymanness that he essentially embodies. He disappoints no one and fulfils his opening potential by being "just what a young man ought to be" (P&P, p. 14).

The arrival on the scene of Mr Collins is heralded with the same sort of anticipation that accompanies Bingley. At breakfast one morning, Mr Bennet amuses himself by telling his family to expect a visit from "a gentleman and a stranger" (P&P, p. 61), and for the only time in his existence as the reader knows it, Mr Collins has a clean slate. His personality is soon understood by his style of letter writing, and in proving to be "a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility" (P&P, p. 70), Collins fulfils Elizabeth's expectation that he cannot be "a sensible man" (P&P, p. 64).

The view proposed by Marvin Mudrick in his study of Austen that Darcy "hardly differs from the stiff-jointed Burneyan aristocratic hero"[2] has largely been refuted by later criticism. Kenneth L. Moler comes to terms with this accusation by maintaining that Austen first intended Darcy to be a parody of the patrician hero favoured by Richardson and Burney, but decided that by humbling him, he could become

a character in his own right.[3] Howard S. Babb defends Darcy most convincingly by pointing out not only the various motives of pride and shyness that govern his behaviour, but also the means by which the reader becomes acquainted with him.[4] In his analysis of the character, Babb explains how Darcy is distorted by the perspectives of Elizabeth and Meryton society, and argues that the reader's impressions of him are necessarily biassed as they are filtered through a heroine who is both prejudiced and more emotional than she thinks. My own interest in the early potential of characters in Pride and Prejudice compels me to agree with Babb and also to say more. Like the Bennets and Bingley and Collins, Darcy is for a time completely unblemished. In the brief moment when he first enters the Meryton assembly room, Darcy is simply "another young man" (P&P, p. 10). With "his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien" (P&P, p. 10), Darcy might become another Lord Orville or another Sir Charles Grandison, except that public opinion alters radically in the course of the paragraph and by the end of it he has "a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance" (P&P, p. 10). For the Hertfordshire families, Darcy's "character was decided" (P&P, p. 10), and he becomes, in the course of a single evening, fixed like the Bennets.

My purpose in establishing these claims about potential and expectation is that mortification is essentially concerned with potential, not only with what characters are, but also

with what they can become. It has to do with breaking the moulds that fix character and with freeing the other selves that the Bennets might have been and that Darcy is first denied by Elizabeth and Meryton. What interests me about the opening chapters is the tentativeness of the characters' personalities which are, whether for a chapter or a paragraph or a sentence, open-ended and full of possibility. What is also interesting in the opening is the tendency towards a completion of character by others. When someone with Elizabeth's intelligence says of Bingley the very evening they are acquainted, "His character is thereby complete" (P&P, p. 14), we may wonder whether she realizes, jesting or not, that she has just denied him the potential to change. The course of the novel is to explore the possibility of characters breaking the limits imposed on them so early and becoming, or seeming to become, something different.

A similar approach to Austen is taken by Susan Morgan when she aims to locate Austen historically and intellectually in the romantic tradition. Focusing on intelligence in Pride and Prejudice, Morgan emphasizes Austen's choosing "to speak of the possible, the continuous, the incomplete,"[5] and she sees in Elizabeth's progress the movement of an intelligence reliant on the freedom of uninvolvement to one that enjoys a sense of commitment and a willingness "to reach for hopes and suggestive meanings rather than killing finalities."[6] These ideas are indeed the premise of my own

observations on the novel, but I am concerned more with discussing the possibilities for and within the characters themselves than with possibility as a general intellectual principle. I am also concerned with mortification as the means by which this possibility is achieved, for it is one of the weaknesses of Morgan's argument that she takes the process of Elizabeth's humiliation as a fait accompli. While acknowledging the fact of Elizabeth's growth, Morgan says nothing about how it occurs and mentions nothing about Darcy's development. If one is going to speak about possibility in Pride and Prejudice, however, one must speak about Darcy as well as Elizabeth, and about mortification as well as the change that is the result of it. For mortification is the fulfilling of potential. It is people becoming better people.

Much of what appears to be mortification is actually a shifting in the perceptions of other characters. The sense of relativity that organizes the vision of Mrs Bennet allows her to shift characters in implicit mortification up and down the scale of worthiness. She inflates and deflates everything to make it matter more or less as it suits her fancy. Lydia is her favourite child for most of the story and is especially so after her marriage, but with Jane's engagement, "Wickham, Lydia, were all forgotten. Jane was beyond competition her favourite child" (P&P, p. 349). Yet even Jane is supplanted when Elizabeth catches a man

with ten thousand a year, for she now becomes "My sweetest Lizzy! . . . My dearest child" (P&P, p. 378). It is the same relativity that advances Jane's cause with Bingley by making her other daughters "nothing" compared to her (P&P, p. 42), and by cutting Charlotte Lucas down to not "so very plain" (P&P, p. 44). The chill that forces Jane to stay at Netherfield is likewise adjusted to become a "little trifling cold" (P&P, p. 31), and it is an indication of how unreliable Mrs Bennet's system is that Mr Bennet sees the possibility of Jane dying and that Elizabeth, realizing that sickness matters in this world, walks to Netherfield to discover that Jane is indeed very ill. But for Mrs Bennet the very great and the very small are simply extensions of her own wishes, and the "ought" in her language really a barometric reading to her own convenience. When Mr Bingley cannot keep a dinner invitation at Longbourn because of business in town, she is

> quite disconcerted. She could not imagine what business he could have in town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear that he might be always flying about from one place to another, and never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be. (P&P, p. 10)

This is foolishness. There is no ought in the matter at all, and the only reason she thinks that Bingley ought to be at Netherfield is because she wants him to be at Netherfield.

Lydia is her mother's daughter in having the same kind of shifting perspective. Until the arrival of Wickham, she

flirts with the other officers, but by comparison with him, they "become 'stupid, disagreeable fellows'" (P&P, p. 74). When she reminds Bingley of his promise of holding a ball at Netherfield, she uses such phrases as "the most shameful thing in the world if he did not keep it" (P&P, p. 45), and yet shame here is merely a way of expressing Lydia's resentment and disappointment if the ball does not come about. Lady Catherine de Bourgh is another character who manipulates shame and oughtness to suit her own personal standard. She tells Elizabeth that marriage between her and Darcy "ought to be" impossible (P&P, p. 354), which means that she wants it to be impossible and is determined to make it impossible if she can.

With characters the calibre of Lady Catherine and Lydia and Mrs Bennet elevating and mortifying the world, the reader needs to be careful to distinguish between genuine mortification and such self-interested mortifying of others. The false mortifiers in Pride and Prejudice, among them these three and others like Miss Bingley, hope to shame people by slighting them, but they usually only succeed in shifting them in their own perception. In true mortification, characters not only change within themselves, but also acknowledge this change. Perhaps nowhere is it more essential to keep the relativity of others' perspectives in mind than in the portrayal of Darcy. He shifts absolutely when he is truly mortified, but he also shifts relatively when others'

opinions of him change. Few of the descriptions of Darcy are given the solid authorial backing that is apparent in the descriptions of the Bennets, and from the beginning the method of evaluating him is comparison and relative measurement. At first, he is "much handsomer than Mr Bingley" (P&P, p. 10) and then, he is "unworthy to be compared with his friend" (P&P, p. 10) and then, "What a contrast between him and his friend!" (P&P, p. 11). He is called "the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world" (P&P, p. 13) and accused of being "So high and so conceited" (P&P, p. 13), and Elizabeth likes him "too little" (P&P, p. 51). Such comparative extremes indicate the failure of others to find the absolute value of Darcy's mind and character. Elizabeth wishes at the end of the novel "that her former opinions had been more reasonable, her expressions more moderate" (P&P, p. 376), because she finds that Mr Darcy is not so very high and so very conceited, that at Pemberley he is "a contrast" to the last meeting at Rosings (P&P, p. 252), and that one can come to like him very much indeed. Much of the restoration of Darcy at the conclusion is actually a retrieval of his reputation, because it is his reputation and not his person that is mortified by all of Hertfordshire in the beginning.

Prolonged or momentary embarrassment is indicated in Pride and Prejudice by a sense of exposure. The word recurs often and is always a sign of the seriousness of a situation.

Mr Collins is as delightful a spectacle of pomposity as we might care to witness, but when he presents himself before Mr Darcy at the Netherfield ball, Elizabeth is "vexed . . . to see him expose himself to such a man" (P&P, p. 98), and from her distressed point of view we can appreciate the danger of having too many relatives like Collins. He himself is oblivious to the possibility that he might embarrass others, let alone himself, and Mrs Bennet is another of the same type. When Jane is ill at Netherfield, Mrs Bennet interrupts Elizabeth because she is afraid that her daughter will embarrass the family by her chatter, and yet Mrs Bennet herself throws the conversation off-course by taking offence at Darcy and by creating an awkward misunderstanding. Her continual mortifying jibes at him are practically unbearable they are so pointed, and it is with good reason that Elizabeth trembles in an ensuing pause "lest her mother should be exposing herself again" (P&P, p. 45). It matters if one exposes one's follies to ridicule and embarrassment, and it matters if one exposes others to the distress of sharing this embarrassment.

There are other instances of exposure. Elizabeth threatens at Rosings to give a detailed exposé of Darcy as the somebody she knew in Hertfordshire, and Darcy exposes himself every time he smiles at Elizabeth. The theme of exposure as a revelation of true character, however, is given its most prolonged treatment in the case of Mr Wickham.

His story of Darcy's treachery convinces Elizabeth that Darcy "deserves to be publicly disgraced" (P&P, p. 80), but Wickham himself rejects this option with an appeal that "Till I can forget his father, I can never defy or expose him" (P&P, p. 80). In the end, it is Wickham who deserves to be exposed, though the main question for Elizabeth and Jane is not whether he deserves it, but whether they ought or ought not to do so. For their own reasons they conclude "That it ought not to be attempted" (P&P, p. 226). Unfortunately, as Anne Elliot knows in another case at the beginning of Persuasion, this is one of those situations where the oughtness is determined only by the outcome, and by being unwilling to embarrass Wickham here, Jane and Elizabeth leave themselves open to the acute embarrassment of Lydia's elopement with him.

Mr Collins thinks that the "death of [Lydia] would have been a blessing in comparison of this" (P&P, pp. 296-297), and though the Bennet family themselves would not go this far, her elopement is a humiliating thing for them. It exposes them all to the disgrace of being related to someone who has become socially disreputable and who has proven to be morally deficient, and it exposes Mr Bennet and Elizabeth and Darcy to the humiliation of self-reproach. When at last the couple is found and an agreement reached, Elizabeth and her father are further humiliated by the family's inability to pay the sum Wickham demands in return

for marrying Lydia, and it is Darcy, feeling that his own silence has precipitated the fiasco, who lowers himself to negotiate with Wickham and cancel his debts. The efforts of those who feel the embarrassment most keenly are directed towards recovering Lydia. Darcy first asks the question, "And what has been done, what has been attempted, to recover her?" (P&P, p. 277), and it is significant that the word "recover" should occur here and indeed in other instances of embarrassment in the novel (See P&P, p. 251). It is as though one's first reaction to exposure is literally to re-cover oneself, or to cover up again the vulnerable spot laid open by embarrassment. During the elopement, the Bennets and the Gardiners and Darcy work for the re-covering of Lydia as a means towards at least partial recovery from embarrassment. This re-covering of the Wickhams, however, is done for the sake of the family, (in Darcy's mind, for the sake of Elizabeth), because Lydia and Wickham do not appreciate what is done for them. Their "easy assurance" (P&P, p. 315) when they return to the family disgusts and shocks and distresses others, but they are unmoved. Elizabeth blushes and Jane blushes, "but the cheeks of the two who caused their confusion, suffered no variation of colour" (P&P, p. 316). Even Elizabeth's cool set downs like "I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands" (P&P, p. 317) have no effect. Lydia and Wickham are unembarrassable; they cannot be exposed.

These embarrassing but unembarrassable characters, like Collins and Mrs Bennet and, on a more profound level, like Wickham and Lydia, are a real concern for Austen. Someone like Mr Collins who is unaware even of the existence of embarrassment, or like Mrs Bennet who is peculiarly sensitive to the "slights" and "vexations" of the marriage game and whose only mortifying aggravation is the entailment, are an inescapable part of her world. People like Lydia and Wickham whose very nonchalance to life is essentially immoral are inescapable too, and simply doing what one ought or ought not to do is no safeguard against embarrassment from them. These characters behave in an unbecoming fashion, but it seems to me that they also <u>are</u> fundamentally unbecoming people. They do not change; they do not grow or fashion different lives for themselves; they do not become anything. Marvin Mudrick points to a similar distinction as mine between becoming and unbecoming characters in <u>Pride and Prejudice</u> when he proposes that Elizabeth sees the world divided into simple and intricate characters. The similarity of our readings of the novel ends here, however, for I disagree with Mudrick's conclusion that the simple characters

> are not sufficiently complex or self-aware to be taken at the highest level of seriousness. Elizabeth's judgement of them is, then, primarily psychological, not moral: they have not grown to a personal stature significantly measurable by moral law.[7]

For my part, I think that "unbecomingness" is measurable

and is blamed for falling short of the standard. The very point of characters like Collins and Lydia is that they are less than the becoming ones. One of Austen's most dismissive words for them is "still." When Lydia returns to Longbourn as Mrs Wickham, she is "Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless" (P&P, p. 315). And having three daughters married does not make Mrs Bennet "a sensible, amiable, well-informed woman for the rest of her life"; she is "still . . . occasionally nervous and invariably silly" (P&P, p. 385). How unbecoming.

Characters like Bingley and Jane, and Elizabeth and Darcy are central to any discussion of embarrassment and mortification, for it is in their handling of these elements of stress that the reader can determine their merit. One of Mr Bingley's laudable qualities is his ability to work against humiliation and awkwardness. At the first ball he attends in Meryton, Bingley makes himself universally popular by dancing every dance, but he does more by trying to persuade Darcy to dance too. He points out Elizabeth, but Darcy is not impressed and makes an insulting comment which Elizabeth overhears and repeats. The episode does not really end here, however, as we may infer from something Mrs Bennet lets drop in her reel of chatter:

> Then, the two third he danced with Miss King, and the two fourth with Maria Lucas, and the two fifth with Jane again, and the two sixth with Lizzy, and the Boulanger-- (P&P, p. 13)

It is noteworthy that after he has finished dancing with Jane, and as soon as he can after Darcy has spoken rudely, Bingley asks Elizabeth. Naturally at a ball one must expect the minor humiliation of sitting out a dance as well as the minor elevation of being asked twice, but Bingley's behaviour reveals an unusual sensitivity to these matters. He is not merely an exemplar of social grace, but of social graciousness; as the first shows him to be at his ease, so the second shows him placing other people at their ease. In his civility lies also a basic regard for the oughtness of things. When Elizabeth must stay to nurse Jane at Netherfield, Bingley is the only one who makes her feel welcome, and he always remains supremely tactful. At Lambton, his "same good-humoured ease" (P&P, p. 261) is a blessing and later, in the midst of his own happiness, he does not forget Darcy and Elizabeth. A walk to Oakham Mount "may do very well" for Elizabeth and Darcy, says Bingley, but "it will be too much for Kitty. Won't it Kitty?" (P&P, p. 375). Finally, it is because he is persuaded that Jane is indifferent and that he ought to break off the acquaintance for her sake that he removes from Netherfield.

This is not to say that Bingley himself cannot be embarrassed. He is aware of the awkwardness in reopening an acquaintance at Longbourn and initially looks "both pleased and embarrassed" (P&P, p. 335). But he is soon enamoured of Jane again, and they are soon engaged and become the

happy couple they should have been earlier. Postponement for him does not mean any change in his character, for although Bingley can be embarrassed, he cannot be mortified. What he appears to be at first sight, he actually is, and he is the same in all places, whereas Darcy seems different at Longbourn and Rosings and Pemberley. Perhaps it is part of his characterization as the young man of good fortune that resists development, but perhaps Bingley cannot be mortified because he has no desire to improve. A telling comment on Bingley's good-humoured ease at Lambton is that it is the same good-humoured ease, and the reader is told that he "never appeared dissatisfied" with his own character (P&P, p. 16). Yet a basic dissatisfaction with one's personality is part of the process of mortification, and hence Bingley never experiences it.

Jane suffers the humiliation of rejected love. A carefully worded letter from Miss Bingley, and "Hope was over, entirely over" (P&P, p. 133). Jane takes all the blame on herself and excuses everyone by saying that she had read too much into Bingley's regard, but the mortification is painful. It is the pain of mortified affection, because Jane has become something since she met Bingley: she has become in love with him. In the first dreadful days she vows to "try to get the better" of it: "He will be forgot, and we shall all be as we were before" (P&P, p. 134). Elizabeth is amazed, and Jane colours, which shows that she knows this

is but a token gesture, for in mortification there is no moving backwards to "before," only forwards with a "little time" (P&P, p. 134). Jane never actually gets the better of this, though, and she rather copes and endures and suffers it as the heroines of the Richardsonian stamp do. Her spirits are fluttered and she will not expect too much when Bingley returns, and she is "anxious that no difference should be perceived in her at all" (P&P, pp. 337-338). She survives this humiliation rather than changing through it, and her character is deepened rather than altered. Like the man she marries, Jane remains what she was and is--beautiful and good--and in her marriage is Suffering Rewarded.

It is not fair to say only this about Jane, and I am indebted to Susan Morgan for first drawing my attention to the importance of her.[8] Jane's philosophy of people indicates her intelligence and range of perception. One of the first things that Jane says of herself is "I would wish not to be hasty in censuring any one" (P&P, p. 14), and she consistently thinks the best of people. In speaking of Mr Bingley and his sisters after the ball, she tends towards superlative commendation: "I never saw such happy manners!--so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!" (P&P, p. 14). It is as if Jane gives the Bingleys the opportunity or allows them the possibility of being superlative, and whether it is the Bingleys or Darcy or Wickham, Jane encourages the probability

of them all being different, even radically different, from "at first" (P&P, p. 15). She leaves them heaps of potential to be whoever they can, and only after much evidence and much consideration will she be conclusive and say "case closed." It is Jane's policy always to give others the benefit of the doubt, and if something seems to be an impossibility, she herself has failed to understand it. Only once does she falter: "You are joking, Lizzy. This cannot be!--engaged to Mr Darcy! No, no, you shall not deceive me. I know it to be impossible" (P&P, p. 372). In the main, everything is possible for Jane, and everyone can do and become all sorts of things. The only weakness in Jane's point of view is that she cannot provide the process by which they can realize their potential; she will not embarrass them.

In the early chapters of Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth is skilful at averting or adapting to embarrassment. Her response to Darcy's discourtesy at the Meryton assembly is to pass it off as a joke and to laugh at her own expense, "for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous" (P&P, p. 12). When she makes that well-known statement the next day, "I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine" (P&P, p. 20), I do not think she intends this to be anything other than a witty retort. As a matter of fact, her pride has not been mortified, because what she prides herself on is her understanding

and her "quickness," and Darcy has not mortified these--yet. His remark is confined to her lack of physical beauty, and Elizabeth herself already knows that Jane is "about five times as pretty" (P&P, p. 14). The reader should not take this comment about mortified pride too seriously, except as an indication of Elizabeth's confidence and buoyancy and utter uninvolvement with Darcy at this point.[9]

Elizabeth's way of handling the situation at the Lucases', when she thinks that Darcy is trying to discountenance her, is to quench awkwardness with impertinence. The wonderful quality of impertinence is that it sweeps aside embarrassment; it devalues things relatively by making them matter only as much as sauciness lets them. Later at Rosings, she wills not to be embarrassed by Darcy's stares. If impertinence does not work, Elizabeth's graciousness prevents a difficult scene, and silence, too, gets its fair share of use. Elizabeth often relies on these, rather than on vocal abrasiveness, to give a polite set down or overthrow a scheme (P&P, p. 52). During her early acquaintance with Darcy at the balls and assemblies, and at Netherfield when Jane is sick, Elizabeth is delightfully unembarrassable.

The Netherfield ball is a great strain for Elizabeth since she is exposed to a number of vexations. The ball begins badly and does not improve as the frequent recurrence of such words as "distress," "shame," and "misery" through-

out Chapter Eighteen indicates. Elizabeth is disappointed that Wickham is not there and in her ill-humour is barely civil to Darcy and Bingley. She endures the "dances of mortification" with Collins (P&P, p. 90) but is then caught off-guard by Darcy and engaged to dance, in mutual awkwardness, with him. Later in the evening, Mr Collins makes a horrendous social gaffe by introducing himself to Darcy, and Mrs Bennet's loud comments at supper of her expectations for Jane's engagement cause Elizabeth "inexpressible vexation" (P&P, p. 99), and she "blushed and blushed again" (P&P, p. 100). After supper, "she had the mortification of seeing Mary" sing (P&P, p. 100), and she is "in agonies" (P&P, p. 100) until her father speaks up, and then she feels worse. Collins' lengthy speech on the duties of the clergy is "stared" at (P&P, p. 101), and Elizabeth decides "that had her family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more spirit, or finer success" (P&P, pp. 101-102).

Elizabeth is trying to be her normal vivacious self at the Netherfield ball, and she often forces herself to be cheerful in an effort to overcome disappointment and recover from embarrassment. Underneath, though, she is irritable and humiliated and is more than once overwhelmed by "gravity." The ball is really one of a series of challenges to Elizabeth's understanding of the way things work, indeed of her

perception of the possibilities of things. During Jane's illness at Netherfield earlier in the novel, the reader first senses the limits of Elizabeth's liveliness and wit. In one of the drawing-room conversations, Caroline and Charles Bingley discuss the kind of house he should eventually buy. Naturally, Miss Bingley recommends Pemberley as a model, and Bingley offers to buy Pemberley itself, to which his sister replies, "I am talking about possibilities, Charles" (P&P, p. 38). In truth, the whole Netherfield episode is a mapping out of possibilities, a debating of what possibilities there are, of what possibilities one sees, and of what possibilities one accepts. When the conversation turns towards defining a truly accomplished young lady, Elizabeth is surprised that Darcy would know any since his definition is so strict. "Are you so severe upon your own sex, as to doubt the possibility of all this?" asks Darcy (P&P, p. 40) and, yes, Elizabeth does doubt it because she has never seen it. Later in the week, she hopes that she is "not one of them" who laugh at "what is wise or good" (P&P, p. 57), and yet there is always the possibility that she may become one of them. She will have to consider whether she does not actually ridicule what is wise and good in Darcy.

Elizabeth is definite about what people, including herself, are capable of becoming. It is not so much that she is totally deficient, for she has "a lively imagination" (P&P, p. 158); it is rather that she imagines the worst

possibilities for people and that certain things are impossible for her. Things tend to be absolute to Elizabeth's mind. Collins' proposal is "absolutely impossible" (P&P, p. 109), and the reader may be thankful that Elizabeth is absolute in her refusal. It is also absolutely impossible for Elizabeth that Bingley will not return from London when he said, though Jane doubts it and is right in the end. The appeal to Elizabeth of Wickham's story is that it satisfies her tendency at this point towards cynicism. His tale centres on what he has become and on how he ought to have been in the church. According to him, there is a thwarted oughtness about his life, and Elizabeth is convinced because it makes Darcy worse than she had thought possible. Her reaction to Charlotte Lucas's acceptance of Collins is "impossible!" (P&P, p. 124), and when she believes it she sees only a dismal future for her friend. For Elizabeth, Charlotte's marriage is the death of mortification without any hope of rebirth: "It was impossible for [Charlotte] to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen" (P&P, p. 125). Yet it is not impossible that Charlotte can be "tolerably happy," and clearly Austen can imagine the possibility of Charlotte's marriage to Mr Collins, even if her heroine cannot. When Elizabeth visits Hunsford, she finds that Charlotte has arranged her home neatly and conveniently, and that she manages very well by not hearing or by forgetting Collins most of the time. It is by no means the bleak pic-

ture that Elizabeth had anticipated.

When Elizabeth is puzzled by Darcy at the ball, then, and when she says she is "trying to make out" his character (P&P, p. 93), she is trying to imagine other possibilities for him beyond the slanderous ones she has been cherishing. Bingley's desertion and Charlotte's marriage dishearten her considerably, and by the time she visits Hunsford she is, as Stuart M. Tave claims, disappointed and cynical.[10] When Charlotte suggests during Elizabeth's stay "the possibility of [Darcy] being partial to her" (P&P, p. 181), Elizabeth laughs, but there is no laughing during the proposal scene. Nor is there the kind of satirical detachment that she enjoys in Lady Catherine de Bourgh's company, because Elizabeth is involved in this scene, and primarily through Jane.

The importance of Jane and particularly of her letters in creating the mood with which Elizabeth encounters the first proposal scene has not been sufficiently appreciated. Much of the bitterness and anger that Elizabeth feels towards Darcy even before he speaks is a result of her maintaining close ties with Jane by mail. In one of the early tête-à-têtes with Darcy in the parsonage, Elizabeth is writing to her sister when he enters unexpectedly and, with Jane's unhappiness fresh in her mind, Elizabeth speaks with an undertone of resentment (P&P, pp. 177-179). On the day she meets Colonel Fitzwilliam and hears of Darcy's triumph in separating Bingley from the Bennets, she has just been re-

reading Jane's latest letter, and that same evening she sits down to examine Jane's letters "as if intending to exasperate herself as much as possible against Mr Darcy" (P&P, p. 188). Letters play a primary role in preparing Elizabeth for the actual event of her mortification, and for this reason it seems odd to me that some readers of Austen claim that Darcy's letter of explanation is little better than a novelistic device.[11] The letter is an appropriate means by which Elizabeth changes her mind, because letters persuade her to her former convictions in the first place. While Jane's misery speaks in every line she sends to Elizabeth, Darcy is a villain.[12]

Darcy times his proposal badly but he is not to blame for this, and it is his speaking of "apprehension and anxiety" and looking secure (P&P, p. 189), like Sir Charles Grandison, that infuriates Elizabeth as much as his "shameful boast" (P&P, p. 188) of his part in the affairs of Jane and Wickham. She strives to be composed but is enraged at him, and so they proceed to the point when she says, "You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it" (P&P, pp. 192-193). These words and the ones she delivers a few minutes later, "I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry" (P&P, p. 193), express the absolute certainty characteristic of the pre-mortified Elizabeth. She does not

maintain their conviction, however, for Pride and Prejudice is a novel about potential expected and unexpected, and through mortification it becomes possible for Elizabeth to accept Mr Darcy's hand gladly and to marry the last man in the world.

Darcy's letter provokes the crisis for Elizabeth. She works backwards in it, and her understanding is first mortified in the case of Wickham where she has not the blindness of emotional commitment. Then she cannot discredit Darcy's assertions about Jane if she accepts those about Wickham, and so she wanders about for two hours in which time her study of the letter becomes a "mortifying perusal" (P&P, p. 205). She begins by looking for a "sense of shame" in him (P&P, p. 204), but in the end "her sense of shame was severe" (P&P, p. 209). She is "depressed beyond any thing she had ever known before" (P&P, p. 209) to discover that her own family is to blame for Jane's disappointment, but this is not all. Her own understanding of people and of life is proven to be so fallible and basically so wrong:

> "How despicably have I acted!" she cried.--"I who have prided myself on my discernment!--I, who have valued myself on my abilities! . . . How humiliating is this discovery!--Yet, how just a humiliation! . . ." (P&P, p. 208)

Elizabeth is mortified and, as an indication of her growth because of it, she no longer "knows exactly what to think" (P&P, p. 86). She had believed it to be "impossible" that any contrivance could render Mr Darcy's conduct to Wickham

as "less than infamous" (P&P, p. 205), and yet it becomes possible for her to be convinced in his favour. The letter and later the housekeeper's commendation and Darcy's behaviour at Pemberley obviously call for a major rearranging of her ideas on Darcy, and from now on Elizabeth sees new possibilities not only in others, but also in herself. It is important that she sees she herself has the potential to be unbecoming. When she can become "shocked to think" that she is capable of "coarseness of sentiment" (P&P, p. 220), then Elizabeth is on her way to becoming a woman who sees possibility in the world.

Mr Darcy is "continually giving offence" (P&P, p. 16) which means that he is always making people feel mortified and awkward. His unexpected encounter with Wickham in the street shows that he is capable of feeling embarrassed himself, but the most compelling fact about Darcy is that his falling in love with Elizabeth is a mortifying experience for him. He does his best to remember not to encourage her, but her own attractiveness is always making him forget "the inferiority of her connections" (P&P, p. 52), and his attempts to crush her expectations, if she has any, are fraught more with the discomfort of his self-denial than with any discomfort to Elizabeth. The experience is mortifying because one part of Darcy is disobeying the commands of another:

> . . . no sooner had he made it clear to himself

> and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. (P&P, p. 23)

Something is in the process of becoming in Darcy, and he does not like it. There is a new and independent self within him, and it is this new self that is always peeping through in the many smiles he has for Elizabeth. Darcy fights the tug of war within him, however, which is why he is often described as looking "divided." When Elizabeth appears at Netherfield after having walked from Longbourn, Darcy is "divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion's justifying her coming so far alone" (P&P, p. 33). Later Charlotte cannot decide if he is in love with Elizabeth, because "the expression of [his] look was disputable" (P&P, p. 181).

When Darcy proposes for the first time, he has not come sufficiently to terms with this mortifying dilemma. His two selves have contracted a truce, and the new self lives in co-existence with the old, rather than in its stead. The words Darcy chooses to explain himself indicate the disharmony of person that is still troubling him. "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed" (P&P, p. 189) is the cry of a man who has surrendered to mortification with a bad grace. He thinks that Elizabeth is disgusted because he does not hide his "struggles"

(P&P, p. 192) from her, but it concerns more the fact that the struggle is plainly not over. A measure of how little he has actually conquered his feelings of pride is that he can say, while professing love for Elizabeth, "Nor am I ashamed of the feelings I related" (P&P, p. 192). In complete mortification, one is ashamed of former feelings, as Emma is when she is "ashamed of every sensation but the one revealed to her--her affection for Mr Knightley--Every other part of her mind was disgusting."[13] The struggle for Darcy is only over when he can feel with sincerity what he ought to feel, and when he can say, "Painful recollections will intrude, which cannot, which ought not to be repelled. I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle" (P&P, p. 369).

Austen's proposal scenes in general have prompted a critical debate which centres on the fundamental question of her artistic skill. T. Mildred Wherritt argues that Austen does not present a single proposal scene in detail,[14] which is true if one accepts her qualifications that it must be in dialogue between hero and heroine. Mary Alice Burgan, however, emphasizes Austen's psychological density and, in tracing the development of her art from the "mechanical" descriptions in Pride and Prejudice through to Persuasion, finds that Austen learned the language for expressing love.[15] Janis P. Stout's defense of Austen points to the limitations not of the novelist but of language itself and praises

Austen for realizing the inadequacy of language to express deep emotion.[16]

The emotion in the first proposal scene in Pride and Prejudice is as much mortification as love. Even before Elizabeth responds, it is a "wounding" scene for Darcy, because it wounds his self-consequence, and whenever she speaks he is wounded again. Elizabeth is the real aggressor here, because this is the event of Darcy's mortification as the letter is of hers. We can determine the significance of this scene for Darcy in a future we do not share by the effect it has on him at the time. Austen does have a language to express the emotions of love and extreme embarrassment that are so important to her; it is called body language.[17] The fact that the reader receives almost no sense of Elizabeth's physical presence, except in her voice, emphasizes that this is Darcy's scene. Elizabeth only colours once on his first proposing, and after this she apparently has no physical reaction. At least we do not hear of any. One of the main difficulties in dramatizing this scene accurately, however, is to find an actor who can change his colour as often as Darcy does here. As he is pushed back on the defensive, Darcy is continually starting and colouring, looking astonished or incredulous, and walking about the room, composing himself. His facial expressions of surprise and resentment and of "mingled incredulity and mortification" (P&P, p. 193) indicate that Darcy feels this scene keenly at

the time, and words like "had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner" (P&P, p. 192) are beneficial to him in the long run. In Elizabeth's exposing of the part of him that deserves to be mortified, Darcy learns to conquer it. The man we see next at Pemberley has come to terms not only with himself, but with mortification.

When Elizabeth and Darcy meet again at Pemberley, they are both acutely and continually embarrassed. This is a positive development since it indicates that they have both changed. It is remarkable how much embarrassment and shame there is in the last quarter of the book, and not only Darcy and Elizabeth, but also Jane and Bingley and Georgiana Darcy are embarrassed. Mrs Bennet to the last causes her elder daughters shame in her deferential treatment of Bingley and then of Darcy, only now Jane and Elizabeth feel it more because they are in love. The increased involvement with each other in general increases the amount of embarrassment among the characters. Georgiana is "at least as much embarrassed as [Elizabeth] herself" on their first meeting (P&P, p. 261), and when Elizabeth unintentionally interrupts Bingley's proposal to Jane, everyone feels awkward. When Mr Bennet shares his pleasure in Collins' suspicions for Darcy and Elizabeth, Elizabeth is forced to assume a mask of satirical detachment when she is, in fact, feeling far from detached and far from satirical: "Her father had most cruelly mortified her, by what he said of Mr Darcy's

indifference" (P&P, p. 364). Even after the awkwardness and reconciliation of the second proposal, exposure and embarrassment still exist in the text. Indeed, the presence of these elements at this point in the novel increases its stature in comparison with Sir Charles Grandison, in which there is no embarrassment whatsoever after Grandison's marriage to Harriet Byron. Even in the midst of happiness, Elizabeth Bennet must cope with her mother's "effusions" (P&P, p. 378), and most of her energy after the announcement of her betrothal is directed towards shielding Darcy from the embarrassing vulgarity of some of her relatives: she "was ever anxious to keep him to herself, and to those of her family with whom he might converse without mortification" (P&P, p. 384).

The purpose of embarrassment at this stage of the novel is to show that an awareness of one's own weaknesses and insecurities is a sign of maturity. For a man who rebelled against mortification, Darcy reveals considerable development when he voluntarily takes on "so many mortifications" (P&P, p. 366). And for a woman who saw too much impossibility in the world, it is a measure of Elizabeth's own progress that she can toss back to Lady Catherine her word "impossible" without meaning it at all:

> ". . . Has he, has my nephew, made you an offer of marriage?"
> "Your ladyship has declared it to be impossible."
> (P&P, p. 354)

Before the final reconciliation in the second proposal, Elizabeth says, "It is impossible that he should still love me" (P&P, p. 255), but this is just a safeguard against hoping too much. Darcy claims that his aunt's news "taught [him] to hope" (P&P, p. 367), and the sense of hope at the end of Pride and Prejudice is a promising sign, because after all hope is really a faith against all odds in the possibility of things. In the end, Darcy and Elizabeth can marry because they have become worthy of one another. Mr Darcy's stateliness "is not unbecoming" (P&P, p. 257), and part of what makes Elizabeth's mortification so convincing is that she must convince others of it--her father and Jane and, with admittedly little effort, her mother. When this is done, she can become Mrs Darcy.

CHAPTER TWO

Finding Out How Much Embarrassment Matters: Littleness in Emma

One of the great difficulties in coming to *Emma* from *Pride and Prejudice* is the necessity of adjusting our sense of scale. Though there is a secret engagement, *Emma*'s foundational structure does not rely on brazen elopements or slanderous tales or large, sweeping exposures of character. Even the ordinary occurrences of daily life are much more confined. Elizabeth Bennet can travel to Kent and to London and to Derbyshire, but Emma has never been to the seaside or even to Box Hill in her own neighbourhood. Indeed we may wonder exactly what the perimeters of this world are if half a mile to Randalls is a great distance, and the sixteen to London, "though comparatively but little" (*E*, p. 5), put it at the end of the earth. The perimeters are limited, and the world is small. In *Emma* we are in the sort of environment where little distances are significant, where gradations are slight, and where shades of difference mean all the difference in the world. A "narrow footpath, a little raised on one side of the lane" (*E*, p. 80) is enough distance for Emma to leave Harriet and Mr Elton for their lovers' vows, and in general just a little distance

or a little drawing back creates sufficient space both literally and figuratively. Mrs Weston, for example, with fond hopes for the future, judges it best to "move a little farther off" (E, p. 180) when Frank Churchill and Emma discuss such "delicate subjects" (E, p. 180) as Jane Fairfax. Little or not, she has just given Emma enough room to embarrass herself most dreadfully.

In all things in Emma, fineness is paramount. The novel begins and ends with small family weddings and throughout, "all those little matters on which the daily happiness of private life depends" (E, p. 106) hold first concern. With its emphasis on domestic trivia, Emma is, in fact, the example of things mattering in Austen's novels, and yet this is taken so much for granted that the questions become how much do things matter, and what things among all the varied littleness of life really do matter. Why is it that Elizabeth Bennet can jump mud puddles and dirty her petticoat with "wild" abandon, but Jane Fairfax turns Highbury upside down when she steps across the road to the post office in the rain? Or why is a little snow a blizzard, and a silly little thing like Mr Perry's getting or not getting a carriage a dangerous topic for conversation? What sort of a world are we in when the death of somebody, albeit a peripheral Mrs Churchill, is of less moment than the cancellation of a ball, or where a trip to London for a haircut lowers one just enough to make a great difference

in the world's estimation of one's character? We are in a world where little things matter not merely in themselves, but in what they reveal about one's commitments, personal and moral, to people and to life.

With distances as a whole so slight and with slightness yet so important, the task of judging moral distance in Emma becomes more challenging. Emma herself is a case in point, since from the start there is no easy understanding her. When we learn in the first sentence that she "had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (E, p. 3), we may gather that the ebb and flow of her life is not to be measured in tidal proportions. By what do we measure it therefore? When we hear that her main failings are "having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (E, p. 4), we are left holding a measuring stick so precise that it deals with degrees like "rather" and "little." Austen begins this same passage with "The real evils," and we may think we are approaching solid moral ground, but when "evils" become equated with "disadvantages" and "danger" mixed with "misfortunes," we are abandoned again on some sort of plane a little distance between cosmic catastrophe and human fallibility. This problem of finding our ground with Emma is indeed the problem that the novel itself poses for Emma. It is the problem of finding that distance between too much and too

little, of measuring up to a very fine standard and of measuring other people too. It is the problem of finding not only the space to stand in, but also the right space to stand in, the space from which one can see how much things matter.

The weakness of a character like Mr Weston, then, is that he is not fine enough. A man who makes a confidante of everyone from Emma to Mrs Elton cannot expect his "just between ourselves" to be taken seriously, as Emma comes to realize: "a little less of open-heartedness would have made him a higher character" (E, p. 287). Despite his sociability, Mr Weston is not really receptive to other people. The little snow that distresses the party at Randalls is for him "a mere joke" (E, p. 114), and his triumph in keeping it a secret so long lest his company be broken up indicates a basic lack of understanding of the relative importance of things. Perhaps the snow is a joke, but the feelings of Mr Woodhouse and Isabella are not; they matter. Concerning his son Frank, Mr Weston is hopeless at discerning slight differences of opinion, which is why he can talk enthusiastically about him to Mr Knightley and include him, uninvited, in the invitation to Donwell. Likewise does his scheme for uniting the two Box Hill parties betray an insensitivity to the nuances of social intercourse. "One cannot have too large a party," he says (E, p. 319), and yet one can, especially in Emma

where a large party is always too large. Richard Poirier, in a brilliant comparison of Mark Twain and Jane Austen, notices that it is Mr Weston who picks up the game immediately after Emma's insult to Miss Bates at Box Hill. Poirier is concerned to emphasize Weston's "capacity to deal only with [life's] surface, with the games that can hold it together,"[1] and it seems to me that Weston's blindness to such things as embarrassment comes down to a basic thoughtlessness and a basic lack of seriousness. He does not measure up because he himself uses too gross a scale to determine the value of people and the significance of situations.

Mr Woodhouse, on the other hand, is too fine. He literally lives on littleness, with his "little gruel" and his "little carrot or parsnip" (E, p. 153) and his "little bit of tart--a very little bit" (E, p. 21). Only once does his perpetual fire bother him, and then it is only "rather too much" and when he moves his chair "a little, a very little" it does not disturb him (E, p. 152). The flaw with Mr Woodhouse's perspective is the extreme relativeness of it. Within the space of two sentences the distance between Hartfield and Randalls shrinks from too great to too small as it suits his temper and preoccupations: "Randalls is such a distance. I could not walk half so far. . . . The carriage! But James will not like to put the horses to for such a little way" (E, p. 6). How can

we argue with a logic like this that distinguishes so precisely or lay hold of a distance so precariously balanced between great and small? We cannot, and all Emma can do is to step firmly over such acrobatics and say, "we have settled all that already" (E, p. 6).

In his understanding of matters like mortification, Mr Woodhouse is equally nice. He hates change so much that every alteration is a devastation. He feels the loss of Miss Taylor for himself, but also for her sake as a degradation, and he is so busy mourning "poor Miss Taylor that was" (E, p. 226) that he cannot see the happy Mrs Weston she has become. He has a great deal of "ceremony" about him which means he is careful no lapse of manners should cause offence. He frets about not paying the new Mrs Elton a visit: "I ought to have gone before. Not to wait upon a bride is very remiss. . . . I ought to have paid my respects to her if possible" (E, p. 251). It is partly this concern for social oughtness in Mr Woodhouse that has led Joel C. Weinsheimer to praise him both for his recognition of social lapses in general and for his moral perceptions.[2] Woodhouse probably is indeed the guardian of etiquette that Weinsheimer suggests, and it is appropriate that such a fine man should represent a code equally fine. For etiquette is a matter of fineness and delicacy and nuance and is usually only a concern in very civilized societies like Mr Woodhouse's. Yet with such an exponent

as him, oughtness becomes nothing more than the niceties of social behaviour, and mortification nothing but a distressing change in marital status. The danger of Mr Woodhouse is that the significance of these terms sinks to the level of his own littleness.

Emma herself begins promisingly. In the opening scene of the novel, when Mr Knightley quarrels with her use of the word "success" to describe her own part in the Weston match, Emma has this to say:

> You have drawn two pretty pictures--but I think there may be a third--a something between the do-nothing and the do-all. If I had not promoted Mr Weston's visits here, and given many little encouragements, and smoothed many little matters, it might not have come to any thing after all. (E, p. 11)

This is a very nice distinction, and an imaginative one that can see the subtleties of in-between activity, yet it is certainly not my intention to argue that Emma is, at eleven pages into the book, at the apex of social harmony and individual clear-sightedness. There is a hint of her weakness in this passage already, in the pronoun "I": "If I had not promoted . . ." The "I" in Emma's speech will become more and more insistent as the novel progresses, and as she sets herself up as the apex of society.

It is part of Emma's charm, however, that she never actually loses this promise of the opening, and so I cannot agree with Marvin Mudrick, for example, who claims that Emma has not changed at all by the end of the novel. He

believes that she is still essentially the same willful, snobbish manager she is at the beginning, and that she still denies self-knowledge and the responsibility it entails even when Harriet rouses her by the confession of her own love for Mr Knightley.[3] Mudrick's views are not held by the majority of readers, for most assume that the point of Emma is the education of the heroine, and that Austen succeeds in this intention. To name one, David Monaghan in his study, Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision, suggests that the reason Emma is not mature at the start is because she has been given little opportunity to become so, and he points to the increasing activity of balls and parties in Highbury itself as indicative of Emma's own development and widening perspective.[4] My own response to Mudrick is this essay itself, although a brief answer is to emphasize the attractive or amusing qualities in Emma which are apparent even when she is being most obnoxious. Kenneth L. Moler states that "it is certainly true that Emma has the reader's sympathy, and sometimes his admiration, throughout the novel."[5] The Emma I like is the one who can hardly keep from laughing at Mr Elton's speechifying (E, p. 75) and who "dexterously" tosses her shoelace into a ditch (E, p. 81); both of these incidents occur in the midst of her worst manipulative schemes for Harriet.

Mudrick accuses Emma of being a snob;[6] this is severe, but perhaps she is, because the difference between a snob

and someone rightly proud and distant (a reformed Darcy, for example) is that a snob makes much of the little differences between people. The fault with snobbery is that it is not great-hearted enough, and that its focus is too little. The word Emma prefers is "fastidious," and this will do very well to describe her perspective, because its fault lies in being over-nice. She is always distinguishing herself from other characters who are "not fastidious." Mr Elton will suit Harriet, though not Emma, for "he was really a very pleasing young man, a young man whom any woman not fastidious might like" (E, p. 31). Miss Bates "is very much to the taste of everybody" (E, p. 78) but Emma, who condemns her for being "so silly - so satisfied - so smiling - so prosing - so undistinguishing and unfastidious" (E, p. 77). So Emma may indeed be a snob at the beginning, but she also changes.

Miss Bates is not to Emma's taste, and for Emma, taste is everything. In one respect, then, she is like her father in being refined, for taste is another matter that is only an issue in very civilized societies. Characters in Pride and Prejudice speak of exposing themselves or each other, and part of the nature of the process is its blatancy. But in Emma sophistication is the standard and taste, particularly for Emma herself, the invisible slide-rule. Good taste reveals one's understanding of the nuances of things and secures one forever; the awkwardness of bad taste is

delicately felt, and one may not even be aware that one has slipped, and slipped irredeemably. The height of good taste is to know when something is enough, and when a little may be all that is needed. Tasteless people will not stop with a little bit and do not know when enough is enough. Like Mrs Elton, they are always wearing a few too many pearls and a little too much trimming.

Emma, who has "the highest value for elegance" and who sees "so little [of it] in Highbury" (E, p. 149), values taste above all. With the complacency of a tasteful person, she regards her own performance on the pianoforte. Having neither the execution nor the repertoire of Jane Fairfax "she wanted [nevertheless] neither taste nor spirit in the little things which are generally acceptable" (E, p. 204). When Harriet Smith, searching for something she does not like in Robert Martin's letter of proposal, concludes that it is a short letter, "Emma felt the bad taste of her friend, but let it pass" (E, p. 48). It is such a little slip, and Harriet is useful in other ways. The problem with Martin in the first place is that he affronts Emma's sense of taste. The yeomanry as a whole are both "a degree" too high and "a degree" too low for Emma to notice them (E, p. 25), and, operating in degrees of gentility, she cuts Martin down to within a sliver of respectability. There is no denying the fact that Emma is a mortifier. She does not approve of Robert Martin, and to show her disapproval she

peppers her speech with such threats to taste as "loudness," "coarseness," and "awkwardness" (E, p. 29). Mr Elton is always spoken of as Mr Elton, because Emma thinks he is a gentleman, but with the deft use of the indefinite article, Robert Martin shrinks into mortifying lowliness as "a Robert Martin" (E, p. 31). In Emma's voice, the word "little" assumes such a damning quality; she judges that "it might be very desirable" for Martin to marry, "if he could meet with a good sort of young woman in the same rank as his own, with a little money" (E, p. 26). Using taste and using the nicety of her world to its fullest advantage, Emma mortifies Robert Martin by making him little. Emma belittles people, and it seems to me that this, too, is what mortification is. It is the business of belittling people, of making them be little.

One of the little people in the novel is Harriet Smith, and it is important in understanding Emma's relationship with her to realize that she is physically short. Very quickly in the novel, Harriet assumes the epithet "little." Emma thinks of her as being her "little friend" (E, p. 24), and calls her "my dear modest little Harriet" (E, p. 50). Emma is not the only one, for it appears that most of Highbury thinks of Harriet in this way. Mr Elton obviously regards Harriet only as Miss Woodhouse's little companion; Mr Weston identifies her as "your pretty little friend, Miss Smith" (E, p. 108); and Frank remembers her as being "Miss Woodhouse's beautiful

little friend" (E, p. 239). In the circles in which Emma moves, Harriet will always be little and always be an appendage to the elegant mistress of Hartfield. For little Harriet is created by Emma and placed at just the right distance between obscurity and equality. With a "little more knowledge" (E, p. 20) and a "little polish" (E, p. 34), Harriet is quite a suitable companion, but she will always be inferior and always be "a Harriet Smith" (E, p. 22).

While Emma is busy making Harriet fit one type of littleness, she misses the real littleness in her.[7] Emma may say, "There can be no doubt of your being a gentleman's daughter" (E, p. 26) as much as she likes, but Harriet cannot claim with the same assurance as Elizabeth Bennet, "I am a gentleman's daughter." Harriet's is the "stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth" (E, p. 438) or greatness of any sort. Emma sniffs down her nose at the thought of Martin's future wife probably being "some mere farmer's daughter, without education" (E, p. 27), and Harriet agrees cautiously, because she does not think that "Mr Martin would ever marry any body but what had had some education" (E, p. 27). How crafty Austen is. One little word--"what"--and all Emma's pretensions for Harriet are shattered. Mrs Goddard's school has not educated the "whats" out of her or taught her that it is incorrect to say "as well educated as me." (E, p. 27). In other instances, too, Austen is wiser than Emma. At the end of the introductory

meeting at Hartfield, when Emma is full of plans and schemes for juggling little bits of distance and when the reader has seen nothing of Harriet but through Emma's eyes, Austen draws a picture of a "humble, grateful, little girl" skipping back home with Mrs Goddard (E, p. 21). "Little" here is a shock, since it jerks us out of Emma's mind into the reality where Harriet's only littleness is in being a little girl at a village school.

Whether Harriet realizes it or not, Emma's friendship is a mortifying experience for her. It is indeed a humiliation for her to be always so grateful for Miss Woodhouse's condescension, and when Harriet speaks "in a mortified voice" (E, p. 28), it is because Emma has squashed enthusiasm for Martin by chilling superiority: "I had imagined him, I confess, a degree or two nearer gentility" (E, p. 28). Refusing the letter of proposal is mainly productive of unhappiness for Harriet, but Emma is ruthless. How uncomfortable it is for the reader to watch Emma here in Chapter VII. Her artfulness and complacency are extremely embarrassing, and for someone who prides herself on her taste, Emma's behaviour is exceedingly distasteful. Yet I believe the reader is meant to flinch from Emma in this scene and is meant to feel the embarrassment that she herself does not. In her mouth, ought becomes a measure of taste and ought not of coarseness, and "doing just what you ought" (E, p. 47) really means "doing just what I want."

Her selfishness--"Now I am secure of you for ever" (E, p. 47)--is distressing, because Emma should be something better than this, and because it is mortifying for Harriet to be under Emma's thumb. Emma is manipulating people and morality here and it is very unpleasant. Yet the unpleasantness must be registered, by the reader here if not by Emma, because it is only when she begins to feel it herself or when it is no longer there to feel that Emma will have grown.

Perhaps what is most unpleasant is Emma's view of her own manipulativeness. Howard S. Babb's reading of Emma in his Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue emphasizes the fact that one's verbal mannerisms dramatize one's moral commitments,[8] and Emma's use of the word "little" as applied to herself, for example, is revealing. When Mr Elton congratulates her on Harriet's improvement, Emma modestly disclaims credit: "I have perhaps given her a little more decision of character" and "I have done very little" (E, p. 37). This is false modesty, however, and "little" actually means a great deal as an indication of her superiority of taste. The word is a tactic to reduce her own role in order to magnify it, a sort of inverse self-mortification. It is a word of self-flattery, because Emma will suffer the mortification of secondariness only as long as she and Harriet and Elton know that she is first. "I come in for a pretty good share [of compliments] as a second," Emma says (E, p. 44), but the only person she will allow to call

her a second is herself. She cannot bear to have the word "little" used against her in earnest, as indicated by her angry "pet" and forsaking of painting when Isabella calls Emma's portrait of John Knightley "a little like" (E, p. 40). When the Coles reverse the roles of social mortifying, Emma is displeased, first that they should do so and then, when apparently uninvited, that she can do nothing about it. Like the simpering and self-belittlement of the Mr Elton who flatters her, Emma's modesty and little disclaimers are insincere.

That she should be in the habit of regularly disclaiming credit at all is a serious fault in Emma. She will not take the consequences for her behaviour. When Mr Knightley confronts her with what she has done to Robert Martin and Harriet, Emma will not be responsible: "I will not pretend to say that I might not influence her a little; but I assure you there was very little for me or for anybody to do" (E, p. 58). She wishes Knightley to go away, and would rather avoid the issue than blame herself. This interview is disagreeable for her, but not painful or humiliating, and there is no growth as in the end they forget rather than make up the quarrel. The triviality and littleness of Emma's life is emphasized by the fact that riddles and charades figure so prominently in it. Elton's "little tribute" to courtship and "other little gallantries and allusions" are "nothing serious" (E, p. 82) to Emma as she

stands directing the action and playing the role of the self-assured Miss Woodhouse. Her manipulation of circumstances such as Harriet's cold to promote the cause with Elton smacks of Mrs Bennet, and indicates a fundamental care-less-ness about things. So too does her passing off Harriet's upsetting meeting of the Martins at Ford's (a set piece of embarrassment employed by Austen later in Persuasion) "as a mere trifle" (E, p. 161). In this particular instance, Emma is "not thoroughly comfortable" (E, p. 160), but she will not tackle the discomfort and this is what is wrong. Her decisive bossiness which brings awkwardness into the lives of Harriet and Martin and Elton is distasteful; it is, however, her unwillingness, not significantly her inability, to be sensitive to embarrassment that is at fault. Emma has a reckoning to pay on the score of responsibility.

She starts paying with Elton's profession of love and proposal of marriage. The scene itself is fun for the reader as Emma finally gets some sort of come-uppance and as Elton is so ludicrous he may be safely laughed at, but it is hardly fun for the participants. Emma feels awkward on first entering the carriage, because she has John Knightley's suspicions of Elton's intentions fresh in her mind, but a few minutes later both she and Elton are affronted and are too busy nursing injured pride to reflect that perhaps they should be embarrassed:

> . . . in this state of swelling resentment, and mutually deep mortification, they had to continue together a few minutes longer, for the fears of Mr Woodhouse had confined them to a foot pace. If there had not been so much anger, there would have been desperate awkwardness; but their straightforward emotions left no room for the little zigzags of embarrassment. (E, p. 120)

That Austen should speak of embarrassment as consisting of "little zigzags" shows that she regards it as a very fine, very precise emotion, and the fact is that neither Emma nor Mr Elton is fine or precise on this occasion. Elton bulldozes ahead as only a confident, affected lover can, and Emma's feelings are in such a confusion that she does not know whether she is more angry at his supposed inconstancy to Harriet, or at his presumption in addressing her, or at her own folly and self-deception. A general anger and "swelling resentment" must be sufficient response to all of these.

With reflection Emma's reaction becomes focused, and she begins to separate the "pain and humiliation" (E, p. 121) for herself and for Harriet. Much of her own misery stems from her blindness to Elton's purpose, and she is annoyed that her good taste has been so badly misled. It is also "dreadfully mortifying" (E, p. 122) to be shown up by the Knightley brothers' "penetration" (E, p. 122), and although she now sees that Elton is "very full of his own claims, and little concerned about the feelings of others" (E, p. 122), it will not be until much later that she will tell Mr Knightley this. It is Elton's unpardonable

mortifying of Harriet at the Crown ball and Knightley's gallant rescue that will prompt Emma to admit, "There is a littleness about him which you discovered, and which I did not" (E, p. 298). In the aftermath of the proposal, Emma's use of "ought" becomes more just as she realizes that matchmaking makes "light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple" (E, p. 124). She is convinced that she has "blundered most dreadfully," and is "quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more" (E, p. 124).

Why do these sensations not last longer, for indeed they do not? By the next morning, Emma has bounced back and is her old self in depending on "getting tolerably out of it" (E, p. 125), and in remembering the inferiority of the Mr Eltons and the Harriet Smiths of the world. Though she does keep her resolution against matchmaking, she remains true only to the letter and not to the spirit of it, and I think that it is Harriet herself who helps cushion the mortification for Emma. The "hour of explanation with Harriet" becomes "an evil hanging over her" (E, p. 126) and a tedious damp to the "cheerfulness" Emma would rather be getting on with feeling. As her own sense of mortification is lessened by remembering Harriet's, so the "penance of communication" becomes a bothersome necessity Emma would much rather dispense with. In the event the task is "a severe one" (E, p. 127), but how deeply the severity is

felt is questionable as the passage reverberates with echoes of Sir Charles Grandison protesting too much and of petty irritation. Emma tries to bear the business of Harriet's disappointment well because she thinks it is her duty and her punishment, not because she feels it to be her source of shame. After a morning's talk on the subject of Mr Elton, Emma decides to change the topic: "She could not think that Harriet's solace or her own sins required more" (E, p. 137). Like her Richardsonian namesake, Harriet Smith endures and nurtures idolatry and disappointed love to the point of infatuation. Richardson would have, and does, make her the heroine, but for Austen the interesting problem is Emma, and the fact that Harriet's mooning about in volume II becomes a tiresome nuisance rather than an embarrassing reminder to Emma indicates that she does not feel the shame she should for her own part in creating the situation. As she eagerly looks forward to forgetting it all in the arrival of Frank Churchill, there is a littleness in Emma's emotions still. She does not feel embarrassed enough.

The arrivals in Highbury of Frank Churchill, Jane Fairfax, and Mrs Elton make major additions to the little community and broaden the social sphere considerably, and artistically they are essential in providing comparisons to Emma. By the end of volume I, I think the reader is in danger of losing sympathy with Emma, but the injection of new life in the form of these three characters puts Emma's

strengths and weaknesses in perspective. It is no coincidence that critics in general agree with Mudrick's assertion that "Mrs Elton--for all Emma's heartfelt aversion to her--is Emma's true companion in motive,"[9] or that Emma and Jane are continually compared by other characters in the novel, or that Emma herself says to Frank, "I think there is a little likeness between us" (E, p. 435). The similarities these characters have to Emma make them a necessary part in understanding and appreciating her mortification, for in understanding them we can see the wholeness of Emma herself.

When Frank Churchill first arrives at Randalls, he seems to be another Mr Bingley. He treats his father's new wife with respect and affection, admires Highbury in general and Hartfield and Emma in particular, and is ever anxious not to give slight to the Bateses, though he and Miss Fairfax are but "a little acquainted" (E, p. 151). Yet Frank is a humiliator like Emma. His delay in paying the visit in the first place is a failure in doing what he ought to do "as a most proper attention" (E, p. 14). Mr Weston, of course, does not feel the full force of his son's neglect, but Mrs Weston does despite her efforts to excuse him. Both Mr Knightley and Emma see the various postponements for what they are. Knightley says "It ought to have been an habit with him by this time, of following his duty, instead of consulting expediency" (E, p. 134), and Emma

pronounces the same sentiment with the same deliberation earlier, "He ought to come . . . If he could stay only a couple of days, he ought to come" (E, p. 111).

Frank Churchill's behaviour in general has received a bad critical press. Weinsheimer places him at the opposite extreme from Mr Woodhouse, and claims that Frank's signing his name as "F.C. Weston Churchill" is symbolic of his divided loyalty and rootlessness. For Weinsheimer, the question in Emma is how to unite these two poles of stasis and restlessness.[10] Alistair M. Duckworth says that Frank is not a true gentleman because he is unpredictable,[11] and Mudrick writes that Frank, like Emma, is egotistical and calculating, but less self-deluded.[12] I quarrel with this last point only, because I hope to show that Churchill is actually more self-deluded than Emma. For my immediate purpose, the relevance of Frank's inattention to the Westons is in its resemblance to Emma's own neglect of the Bateses and of Jane Fairfax. His excuses and delays are an exaggeration of Emma's, and his conduct magnifies her own. Naturally Emma can censure Frank's failure to do his duty because it is always easy to see an exaggeration, but she must learn to see the importance of her own duty, to heed the naggings of her own conscience, and to censure her own neglect. She must learn that Miss Bates's and Jane's claims on her are as strong as Mrs Weston's on Frank Churchill. It is a matter of seeing the nicety of things and of recognizing in the old

and the familiar an equal importance with the new and the fresh.

Frank's selfishness also mirrors and magnifies Emma's, and we should beware of his application of the words "little" and "ought." Such a statement as "I had known the Campbells a little in town" (E, p. 180) can be passed off in the tentativeness of early acquaintance with Emma, but its vagueness is designed and conceals the alertness of one carefully testing the waters. His use of oughtness is suspicious as well. When he says outside the Crown, "They ought to have balls there at least every fortnight through the winter" (E, p. 177), he is really saying "I want to dance with Jane again." In Frank's mouth, "I ought" always translates into "I want," and at Donwell, in the heat of a summer's day and of a secret lovers' quarrel with Jane, this interchangeability is glaringly evident: "I ought to travel. I am tired of doing nothing. I want a change" (E, p. 330). His present of the pianoforte is a selfish gift, as Mr Knightley realizes, and creates not a little awkwardness for Jane in explaining it.

Indeed, Frank Churchill seems to thrive on confusion and embarrassment. He himself is susceptible to it: he "seemed quite embarrassed" (E, p. 235) on taking leave of Emma because he is debating whether or not he should reveal the engagement. After letting it slip about Mr Perry's carriage, Frank is conscious again, and Knightley sees

"confusion suppressed or laughed away" (E, p. 313). Embarrassment is key to the central triangle of Jane-Frank-Emma, and Frank exploits it primarily for his own amusement, because neither Jane nor Emma is fully aware how intricately they are connected. The purpose of the game between Emma and Churchill over the Dixon affair is to make Jane "colour," and, having "little mercy" (E, p. 217), Frank delights in distressing her every time the three of them are together. Even after the happy ending with Jane, he continues to "court" embarrassment (E, p. 436) and to be entertained by the conscious blushes of his fiancée.

Frank Churchill never grows up and never loses his adolescent attitude towards embarrassment. He is a child of fortune, and things always work out the best for children of fortune. He need never confront himself or the consequences of what he has done, and he never really feels shame as he ought. He trifles with Jane but is confident he can explain everything. He trifles with Emma, too, but excuses himself by saying he is sure she knew the real situation all along. He disapproves of his own behaviour at Box Hill but will not dwell too long on it, and it is not part of a process of mortification for him. Though in the end he acknowledges his "abominable" blamefulness (E, p. 400), it is done in the ecstasy of love united, a privilege Austen's main characters are not granted. For them there is no "shift[ing] off in a wild speculation on the future" (E, p. 425), and they must

admit their culpability before they can be happy. Where Emma blushes at the mention of Mr Dixon in the last chapter and cannot think of the affair "without extreme shame" (E, p. 433), Frank says "with laughing eyes," "The shame . . . is all mine, or ought to be" (E, p. 433). In other words, he does not feel it at all.

That Emma does learn to feel shame is the point of the novel, and Frank, despite his own incorrigibility, is part of the events that teach her things matter. His pointed comments on Weymouth and Ireland create a mixture of emotions in both Emma and Jane, though it is only Jane's that Frank notices. Yet with Churchill pursuing the game so relentlessly, Emma becomes increasingly uneasy participating in it, and it ceases to be a joke for her. In short, she becomes embarrassed by it. When Mr Knightley asks where lies the entertainment of the words given to Jane during the alphabet game,

> Emma was extremely confused. She could not endure to give him the true explanation; for though her suspicions were by no means removed, she was really ashamed of having ever imparted them.
>
> "Oh!" she cried in evident embarrassment, "it all meant nothing; a mere joke among ourselves." (E, p. 316)

Emma is being insincere here, and the reader should rejoice that this is so, because it means that she is on her way to taking life seriously. Knightley thinks that her affections are engaged, but they are not, and indeed Emma is beginning to see that one cannot toss around people's affections the

way she and Frank are tossing around Jane's, or even the way she had tossed around Harriet's and Martin's and Elton's earlier. She has moved a great distance in being able to appreciate now both the obvious wrongness of matchmaking and the less obvious wrongness of mere speculation and gossip. When the secret engagement is in the open at last, Emma will not have "too calm a censure" (E, p. 360) and will insist that Frank is to blame and that it is irrelevant whether or not there is any permanent damage. This is sound policy and a mark of Emma's maturity that she can condemn Frank for not possessing "that disdain of trick and littleness" which a man should have (E, p. 360). An even greater mark of her development, however, is that she should see her own littleness. The belittlement of realizing she has been Churchill's pawn means less when placed beside her own natural failings: "with common sense, . . . I am afraid I have had little to do" (E, p. 365).

The mortification of Jane Fairfax is known and anticipated by all Highbury, though it is probably only Jane herself who realizes the full extent of its grimness. Emma pities her; Miss Bates mourns the loss of her company; and Mrs Elton considers the pain of an inferior position, but Jane, and the author who created her, feel it in these terms:

> With the fortitude of a devoted noviciate, she had resolved at one-and-twenty to complete the sacrifice, and retire from all

> the pleasures of life, of rational intercourse, equal society, peace and hope, to penance and mortification for ever. (E, p. 147)

This is a very sobering mortification, and the expectation of it involves a living with it constantly of the sort that Emma never experiences. Nor does Emma know what it is like to be Jane Fairfax condescended to by Mrs Elton, and what it is like "to chuse the mortification of Mrs Elton's notice and the penury of her conversation" (E, p. 256). Not even Emma can imagine how Jane is able to endure and bear it all, although in Jane's illness at the Donwell party and after, she can glimpse what it means to suffer. Emma cannot ever know what it is to say, "I shall remain where I am, and as I am" (E, p. 272) not because, in complacent self-satisfaction, one believes one cannot change for the better, but because the change is too horrible to be adopted sooner than necessary.

Undoubtably Jane's presence in the story is a sobering influence. Critics like Susan Morgan and Kenneth L. Moler have noted that her physical appearance and her love story belong more to the romance tradition in novels than to Austen's world,[13] and I wonder if, in fact, Jane's romantic appeal is dangerous to Emma's cause. The unhappiness of Jane's situation is a mortification of such an appalling type that it might possibly make Emma's seem slight or little. The threat of it is so much more horrible than anything that happens to Emma that perhaps it inclines the reader to

undervalue her development. On the whole, I think that Jane's plight should not command the reader's entire sympathy simply because her mortification is on a grander, more obvious scale than Emma's. If we admire Jane at the expense of the heroine Austen chooses, then we are falling into the same trap with Emma herself in failing to perceive the nicety of her gradual mortification in favour of the once-and-for-all break of Jane's.

Like Frank, Jane is part of the gradual mortifying of Emma. Mr Knightley calls Miss Fairfax "a little" reserved (E, p. 152) and believes her to be more so than she formerly was, and it is this reserve that Emma resents most of all. Emma honestly acknowledges that Jane is a more accomplished young lady than she is herself, and indeed she regrets the difference so much that she is spurred to practise her music "an hour and a half" (E, p. 208). Her resolution on this point, however, and on many points concerning Jane Fairfax, does not last, because there are Frank Churchill and Harriet Smith to flatter her penetration and taste. After an hour and a half of vigorous practise and feeling inferior and belittled, Emma is assured by Harriet that "Mr Cole said how much taste you had; and Mr Frank Churchill talked a great deal about your taste, and that he valued taste much more than execution" (E, p. 208). Emma's relationship with Jane progresses along this pattern of advance and retreat for most of the novel.

Sometimes Jane's "odious" composure (E, p. 236) determines Emma to stop trying to be friendly, and indeed Jane's reserve is a kind of a slap in the face. Neglect or not, it is mortifying for Emma not to know from one day to the next whether Jane is going to be "animated" and "open-hearted" (E, p. 232) or odiously composed. The fluctuations in Jane's distancing from others are disconcerting. Sometimes Emma is "conscious-stricken about Jane Fairfax" (E, p. 262) and then she invites her to dinner parties at Hartfield and goes to visit at the Bateses'. What Emma is beginning to do, even before Box Hill, is to be more understanding of Jane, to try harder with her, and to go the full distance. It is a promising start, for it points to a heart enlarging and to a mind growing out of pettiness, and it is a promise that Emma fulfils after the crisis at Box Hill. Her many attentions to Jane after the picnic are all met with rebuffs, but Emma has grown out of resentment and blames only herself and her past neglect for the mortification of being little appreciated:

> it mortified her that she was given so little credit for proper feeling, or esteemed so little worthy as a friend: but she had the consolation of knowing that her intentions were good, and of being able to say to herself, that could Mr Knightley have been privy to all her attempts of assisting Jane Fairfax, could he even have seen into her heart, he would not, on this occasion, have found any thing to reprove. (E, p. 355)

It is a measure, therefore, as much of Emma's great-heartedness as of Jane's admirable and strict use of ought and

moral culpability that, in final reconciliation, they stand on the Bateses' stairs, insisting that the other is blameless, and they themselves entirely in the wrong.

"I am Lady Patroness, you know," says Mrs Elton (E, p. 320), and so she lives in the novel--bossy and familiar, and tasteless and unmortifiable. Like her husband, Mrs Elton is a little person: "She had a little beauty and a little accomplishment, but so little judgment that she thought herself coming with superior knowledge of the world, to enliven and improve a country neighbourhood" (E, p. 252). Needless to say, she is blind to her own littleness--like an unreformed Emma--and sets about organizing everything from musical clubs and picnics to Jane Fairfax's life. She cannot be embarrassed because she has "too much ease" (E, p. 243), and her shame is false because it always comes too soon. "I really am ashamed of always leading the way," she says (E, p. 268), even before she is approached to lead the way. She cannot be mortified either, and I think that part of the reader's enjoyment with Mrs Elton is that she is unmortifiable. She is "rather mortified" (E, p. 320) on supposing that Mrs Weston and not herself is to invite the guests to Donwell, but on hearing that Knightley means Mrs Knightley, she is much relieved. A flesh-and-blood rival would have been a disgrace for her, and yet Mr Knightley's reply is actually a greater set down than if he had meant Mrs Weston. He attempts to embarrass her

again in the same conversation by saying, "I would wish every thing to be as much to your taste as possible" (E, p. 321), and Mrs Elton, deaf to the implication, accepts his compliment, "That I am sure you would" (E, p. 321). Though her bossiness and familiarity cannot prevail with "Knightley," neither can they be brought down, and this is where the reader's delight lies. What supreme fun it is to watch Mr Knightley say these outrageous insults to Mrs Elton's face, and to see that she misses the point altogether. What fun it is also to witness Austen's exuberance in laughing at Mrs Elton, as she does in mimicking Mrs Elton's description of the "desirable situation" with Mrs Bragge: "Delightful, charming, superior, first circles, spheres, lines . . ." (E, p. 324). I wonder how Austen managed to contain herself enough not to put down "squares" and "triangles" too. So there is laughing at Mrs Elton, but there is no mortifying her, even in ridicule.

The pleasure of following the exchanges between Emma and Mrs Elton is in seeing them busy themselves in belittling the other while asserting their own superiority, and all in vain. To do her justice, Emma will not form an opinion of Mrs Elton on their first visit as she realizes that it would be coloured by the embarrassing recollections of the fiasco with Harriet and Elton. But the second visit brings Mrs Elton to Hartfield, and so begins her belittling of Emma Woodhouse. Mrs Elton's very familiarity in itself

attacks Emma where she is most particular--in maintaining a proper distance. In the larger, albeit more vulgar, world of Maple Grove and the Sucklings, Hartfield sinks to being "small, but neat and pretty" (E, p. 244) and Emma to the reliance of an introduction from the once great Augusta Hawkins: "The dignity of Miss Woodhouse, of Hartfield, was sunk indeed!" (E, p. 247). Emma is affronted by this outrage and tries to squash it with cold politeness, but Mrs Elton cannot be squashed. What can Emma say when Mrs Elton, with more incisive conviction than even Emma has herself, closes all speculation on which county is called the garden of England? "Emma was silenced" (E, p. 246), and probably for the first time in her life. And how can Emma respond effectively to a woman who claims to live that perfect medium between "too much" and "too little" (E, p. 247), or who says with magnified false modesty, "my firends say I am not entirely devoid of taste" (E, p. 248)? She cannot respond effectively because Mrs Elton plays Emma's game better than Emma does herself. In this scene where taste confronts tastelessness, Emma does not come out well at all, and it is amusing to the reader and amazing to her how little she is able to affect the tone or turn of conversation. In the second round, taste loses to a "little upstart" (E, p. 250).

In their correspondence in the rest of the novel, Mrs Elton is almost always the victor, mainly because she

knows no limits and Emma does. Emma's continued polite, but pointed, set downs with implications like "when you have been here a little longer" or "when you have known us a little better" have no immediate effect, but Mrs Elton soon begins to withdraw into offended hauteur. From Mrs Elton's point of view, Emma is as much below her as Emma thinks she is above Mrs Elton, and it is in the awkwardness of their meetings at balls and parties that we can see the real superiority of Miss Woodhouse. It is in Emma's "forbearance" when Mrs Elton is putting forward that we must look for a relative equivalent to Jane Fairfax's endurance. To stand second at the ball "she had always considered . . . as peculiarly for her" (E, pp. 292-293) is humiliation enough for Emma, but she must also endure the added disgrace of the first being Mrs Elton. It is in Emma's forbearance to "submit" (E, p. 292) in a situation most tempting to petty irritation that promises the growth of a better, more tolerant Emma. In willingly taking on humility here, Emma neutralizes humiliation, and in agreeing to be belittled, rises above belittlement. Behaviour like this earns Emma the reward at the end of her mortification of seeing Mrs Elton be wrong for sure. They are sitting at the Bateses', waiting for Mr Elton, whom Mrs Elton insists is at a meeting at the Crown, which Emma had understood to be for the following day. Mr Elton arrives at last from a hot walk to Donwell, and the facts are against Mrs Elton. Naturally,

she redirects her consternation towards indignation at Knightley's absence, but she is still wrong. We know it, and Emma knows it, and with her new broadmindedness, a little detail like Mrs Elton not knowing it does not matter at all.

Emma's mortification comes in bits and pieces, and she is gradually changing throughout the second and third volumes, but the Box Hill party and the events that follow it are the crises that synthesize her mortification. Many readers of Emma have set themselves to determine exactly what happens at Box Hill, for clearly Emma has lost sight of what things matter and how much they matter. Poirier sees a similar pattern of insult and apology in Emma and Huckleberry Finn, and argues that the Box Hill scene is one of several in the novel depicting the "unnaturalness" that Twain condemns in his society and that threatens to undermine Austen's.[14] He emphasizes the theatrical fakery and game-playing of both Frank and Emma at the picnic. Stuart M. Tave interprets Emma's behaviour as unladylike and says that she is not really proper or elegant here or throughout the novel.[15] In terms of this discussion, Emma is tasteless to such an extreme on the Hill that even she begins to notice it.

I am curious about why it is Miss Bates, and not someone like Mrs Elton or Jane Fairfax, who is insulted on Box Hill. E. Margaret Moore, in a psychoanalytic study

of Emma, gives one answer: she relates Austen's early separation from her own mother and foster-mother to Emma's fear of commitment and attack on Miss Bates's sexual and intellectual inadequacy.[16] John Lauber calls Miss Bates a "holy fool" and says that her "saintly simplicity" exists solely to be insulted by Emma.[17] For me, Miss Bates is the victim because she can be victimized; she is mortifiable. The reason Miss Bates is Emma's victim is that she represents a difficulty or an exception to Emma's perspective. Emma cannot understand Miss Bates because there is no room for her in her view of taste and littleness. We are told that Miss Bates is "a great talker on little things" (E, p. 18), and that with a small income, no beauty and no cleverness, she has a little of most things, nothing of some things, and plenty only of good will. The distance between what Miss Bates is and what her situation should produce is vast, and the combination of the "good" and the "ridiculous" in her incongruous (E, p. 339). Emma has never been very adept at handling vast distances or incongruous combinations. She is confounded, for example, to find Martin's letter of proposal better than she had anticipated, and that there is so little fault to find in it. Miss Bates's generosity also creates a problem for Emma. In always belittling herself and exalting her kind and bountiful neighbours, Miss Bates's very goodness, like that of Sir Charles Grandison, makes others feel ashamed of themselves. It

may be that what irritates Emma most about Miss Bates is that she is, in forever thinking well of Miss Woodhouse, a reminder of Emma's faults in not visiting and in not liking her well enough.

In any reading of Emma after the first, I think the reader brings to the Box Hill chapter such a degree of anticipation and apprehension that the horror of the blow itself is a relief. The build-up to the insult is almost unbearable. Secret jealousies and rivalries separate not only Frank and Jane, but also Mr Knightley and Emma. Emma and Churchill flirt audaciously though no one, not even themselves, derives much amusement from it, and when we hear that Emma's taste is appeased, I lose hope that she will see where the game is heading. Taste has always been Emma's Achilles' heel. A game is proposed--Miss Woodhouse "desires to know what you are all thinking of" (E, p. 334)--and falls flat. It is revised:

> she only demands from each of you either one thing very clever, be it prose or verse, original or repeated--or two things moderately clever--or three things very dull indeed, and she engages to laugh heartily at them all. (E, p. 335)

Miss Bates joins in the fun and, as she has been doing so consistently throughout the novel, humbles herself by admitting her fault of gabbing. It is the admitting that is crucial; it is her "looking round with the most good-humoured dependence on every body's assent" (E, p. 335) that is central. For to insult Miss Bates after this is to

insult her humility and to belittle her cheerful mortification of herself. What Emma cannot resist doing when she says, "Pardon me--but you will be limited as to the number--only three at once" (E, p. 335) is disclaiming Miss Bates's own self-mortification. Emma's wisecrack is, in fact, redundant, a totally uncalled for attack on someone who has just admitted her vulnerability. Emma looks very bad here and very little.

It is painful to see Miss Bates insulted, but even more so to realize that Emma is oblivious to the pain she has inflicted. She feels no immediate shame or awkwardness, and it is left to the reader to feel embarrassed for her. Mr Knightley's rebuke reminds her later of the incident, and she blushes and tries to pass it off as just a little rudeness: "It was not so very bad" (E, p. 339). She tries to make the belittlement and her responsibility for it a little thing. Knightley will not allow her to do so, and the main thrust of his argument to Emma at the carriage door is that it is Miss Bates's sunk degree and little income which make what Emma did wrong. His rebuke deals with comparativeness and degree and distinguishing slight social distances; he basically says he could excuse Emma if Miss Bates were rich and independent. Emma's moral delinquency is relative to Miss Bates's littleness, because in Emma littleness out-weighs everything else.

As Emma drives home that day, she is extremely vexed

and angry with herself: "Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved at any circumstance in her life. She was most forcibly struck" (E, p. 340). In the days to come she will live through a prolonged mortification and bear the several humiliations of Jane Fairfax's rebuffs, Frank Churchill's engagement, and Harriet Smith's hopes for Mr Knightley. The business with Harriet is the most distressing to Emma, and the most significant in teaching her to know her own heart. As the two girls grope towards clarity of understanding, it is Emma who is on the defensive, and Emma who is the more bewildered, and Emma who feels the more consternation once it is achieved. The tables have turned in this scene, for where is Miss Woodhouse's superiority when little Harriet speaks "with some elevation" (E, p. 368) and "not fearfully" (E, p. 369)? Where is Emma's merit when Harriet can claim to "have a better taste" (E, p. 367) than her in preferring Mr Knightley to Frank Churchill? Harriet's hopes and securities strike to the core of Emma's personality, and she will suffer, for several chapters, before being secure of Knightley herself.

Emma's belittlement at the hands of Harriet and Jane and Frank is to realize fully her own essential littleness in conducting all the affairs of her life, and her penitence is to experience the embarrassment she has felt so little of before. She has to pay an awkward visit to Jane when Jane does not want to see her, and has to face Miss Bates

who remembers Box Hill and who yet says "you are always so kind" (E, p. 344). Part of the sting of Emma's mortification is to have people like Miss Bates and Churchill still thinking her always so kind and always so perceptive. Part of her development is to see her true behaviour through the flattery.

Some readers of Emma are dissatisfied with the resolution as a whole or feel that Emma does not change sufficiently to deserve the happiness of marrying Mr Knightley. Mark Schorer thinks that the novel ends in "moral shade" and "social twilight,"[18] and for Mudrick, "there is no happy ending, no easy equilibrium, if we care to project confirmed exploiters like Emma and Churchill into the future of their marriages."[19] For Mudrick, Emma's actual discomfort is so little as to be imperceptible, and her share of sacrifice so slight as to be negligible. Yet in the nicety of Emma's world, we must expect a nicety in her mortification. To those who think that Emma is mortified relatively little, I say that she is mortified a little, relatively. Always in Emma a little adjustment is all that is necessary, and I am inclined to think that Emma's is, in fact, more internal than external. Compared to Pride and Prejudice and Persuasion, for example, the actual change in Emma's circumstances is next to nothing. She marries an old family friend, continues to live in her own home, and becomes indeed someone who already exists in

the minds of the characters and the reader. She becomes the Mrs Knightley that we have heard of before. Elizabeth Bennet, however, becomes Mrs Darcy and Anne Elliot Mrs Wentworth, and these names never appear in Austen's text. Their unfamiliarity accounts for the shock I always feel on hearing Austen refer to "Mrs Darcy" in a letter to Cassandra.[20] For a moment, I have no idea who she is talking about because, unlike Mrs Knightley, I have never heard the name before and cannot associate it with Elizabeth Bennet.

Perhaps the difficulty in appreciating Emma's mortification, then, is that it is indicated more by a change in thought than in situation. The fact is that Emma is not "always" anything, and because we as readers spend most of our time with Emma's thoughts, it may be hard for us to know what she actually does in the event. Her treatment of Miss Bates generally is a case in point. We are acquainted with how little Emma thinks of her personally, and yet Miss Bates herself would not be aware of this. Emma actually pays her several visits in the course of the novel, and her politeness is always at hand to inquire after Miss Fairfax. The Bateses are frequently invited to Hartfield for the evening, and Emma is a very good hostess in making up for her father's deficiency in feeding his guests. To Miss Bates, Emma is "dear Miss Woodhouse" who is always "so very much concerned" (E, p. 297). But she is not always, at least not always in her heart and in her mind, and this is

what she condemns herself for after the "wretchedness" of Box Hill: "She had been often remiss, her conscience told her so; remiss, perhaps, more in thought than in fact; scornful, ungracious" (E, p. 341). What Emma's mortification does is to shrink the distance between her "usual self" as "the attentive lady of the house" (E, p. 393) and her inner self that thinks slightingly of the people she is attending. What it does is persuade her not only to do no evil, but also to think no evil. It puts her on a consistent moral ground. To be precise, little Emma grows up.

CHAPTER THREE

Feeling the Cost of Mortification: Pain in Persuasion

The progress of Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse is directed towards an understanding both of themselves and of the circumstances in which they live, and they learn not only what they ought to do, but also what they ought to be. For them, embarrassment and mortification are the means by which they are educated as well as the indications by which the reader can tell that they have been educated; embarrassment is as important after the period of crisis and self-revelation as before it. The same basic criteria apply to Anne Elliot but with differences, because her case is so obviously different at the start of the novel from either Elizabeth's or Emma's. The facts of Anne's life are that she is living, and has been living for the past eight years, in the period after. Her life is the result of having done already what she ought to have done in obeying Lady Russell at the age of nineteen. The story of Persuasion cannot be the story of Anne's learning the oughtness of things or realizing that certain things matter, for she already knows this; her life is testament to the fact. What Anne learns, or perhaps more accurately experiences,

is how very, very much it costs to live in a world or to live a life where things matter and where doing what one ought to do is no guarantee of happiness. Anne's experience, and the reader's too, is to know and to feel the pain of these facts. In no other novel does Austen so convincingly evoke the power of pain, for Persuasion asserts that not only do embarrassment and mortification exist in Austen's world, but also that they hurt. They have always been the price that her characters must pay to grow; in this, her last completed novel Austen tells us what the price costs in suffering.

These observations apply with equal relevance to Captain Wentworth, for though the reader's attention is focused almost exclusively on Anne, I think we cannot underestimate the sense of humiliation and awkwardness that they both feel on account of their broken intimacy. In the moment of estrangement, Anne is misunderstood and Wentworth ill-used; in the years that follow, she loses her "bloom and spirits" (P, p. 249), he fosters resentment, and they are both lonely. It is the humiliation of having to deny all that familiarity of knowing and living well means. Breaking the engagement is mortifying to both Anne and Wentworth because they, far more so than Harriet Smith and Robert Martin, are emotionally pledged to each other beyond the point of no return. This commitment means that they ought not to have been separated in the first place, and it is

this commitment that embarrasses them eight years later. Time past is an important factor in determining their present embarrassment, and Susan Morgan in her study, In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction, recognizes the complexity of Austen's use of time. She maintains that the present in Persuasion is a reshaping and a reliving of the past, and that Anne's story is a revision of another story eight years ago.[1] All this is true, but it fails to appreciate the significance for Anne and Wentworth of the time in between past and present. They are dealing not simply with the two courtships as separate blocks of time to be fitted together, but also with the vast period of pain in between them. Loneliness and estrangement inform and accentuate their embarrassment as much as an association between past and present, and indeed the arduousness of their reconciliation can only be accounted for by the fact that Anne and Wentworth must overcome eight years of heartbreak. Wentworth himself expresses all that is felt as a result of the in-between years when he says, "It is a period! Eight years and a half is a period!" (P, p. 430).

Pain is a central part of Persuasion but so also is joy, and the two are so closely connected for Anne that they are inseparable. When Captain Wentworth enters the White Hart Inn near the end of the story, Anne is "deep in the happiness of such misery, or the misery of such happiness,

instantly" (P, p. 434). The fault of not feeling enough that is often laid to Emma's door can never be said of Anne Elliot, for she is a heroine with super-consciousness in feeling and in thought. As a matter of fact, it is characteristic of the Elliot family in general to have a highly developed awareness of their persons. In Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot, this sensitivity takes the form of egoism and a jealous regard for physical appearance and prestige, but Mary's hypochondria and Anne's susceptibility to embarrassment show them to be inheritors of the same preoccupation. I believe that it is Anne's ability to feel extremes of emotion like happiness and unhappiness, and to feel them in combination, that creates the tone of Persuasion itself. Douglas Bush begins his discussion of the novel by reminding the reader "of what critics so often call its autumnal tone,"[2] but Morgan denies that Persuasion is particularly more autumnal than Sense and Sensibility,[3] and it seems to me that words like "autumnal" and "poignant" give far too muted a quality to the book. It is if anything a compelling emotional experience for the reader as well as for Anne, and to speak of it in mellow terms is to ignore, for instance, the power of embarrassment to distress, but also to invigorate and rejuvenate the heroine. Anne's heightened sense of awareness, manifested in her embarrassments, sets the tone of her novel as much as Elizabeth's high spirits and Emma's taste do theirs. The reader, too,

shares this experience, for he feels Anne's embarrassment and distress not for her or instead of her, but in every instance with her, simultaneously. The word I prefer to use in connection with Persuasion, both because it recognizes what the traits of Anne's personality entail for the novel and because it is not mine at all but Austen's, is "electrifying" (P, p. 268).

Anne's presence as an acutely sensitive character is clear from the opening chapters. For Anne, life at Kellynch means that she is "shut out" (P, p. 239), and it is significant that we do not even hear her voice until the third chapter. The beginning of Persuasion focuses exclusively on Sir Walter Elliot; it is he whom Mrs Clay flatters, and he whom Mr Shepherd tries to soothe and appease, and to him that Lady Russell offers her genuine concern. Anne's words have no weight in the discussion of the lease that troubles all the characters at the start. Stuart M. Tave centres his reading of the novel on "Anne Elliot, Whose Word Had No Weight" and, in emphasizing her fortitude, gentleness, and exertion, he notes that the story "ends when her word pierces a man's soul."[4] Yet if Anne's word has no weight at the beginning for the other characters, it has a great deal of weight for the reader. The few words she does say are heavy with meaning, because they reveal what her preoccupations are and what exactly she is aware of. They tell us what things matter to her. When Mr Shepherd suggests

the possibility of having an Admiral Croft as a tenant, he can only describe him vaguely as "being of a gentleman's family" (P, p. 244). Anne knows exactly who he is:

> He is rear admiral of the white. He was in the Trafalgar action, and has been in the East Indies since; he has been stationed there, I believe, several years. (P, p. 244)

This is not the sort of information that every young lady has at her fingertips, and it is Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove, rather than Anne, who are typical in having to refer to the navy-list to see which ships Wentworth has commanded (P, p. 282). Yet it is the sort of information that Anne Elliot keeps at her fingertips, just as it is she who remembers that Mrs Croft's brother is Mr Wentworth. The effect of shutting Anne out of the family circle is to shut her into herself, and while all around her are absorbed in their own egoism, she lives a life of private interests and private attentiveness. In this scene she is literally and figuratively sitting up with her ears pricked, and from her "flushed cheeks" and "gentle sigh" after it (P, p. 247), we may gather that she is, for her own reasons, affected by an affair she has no part in arranging.

This episode sets the pattern for the many scenes of embarrassment that follow. When Mrs Croft comes to pay her respects at Uppercross Cottage, Anne's attempts at being calm and unruffled appear to be succeeding, and she has just finished congratulating herself on her composure,

when she is

> for a moment electrified by Mrs Croft's suddenly saying,--
>
> "It was you, and not your sister, I find, that my brother had the pleasure of being acquainted with, when he was in this country."
>
> Anne hoped she had outlived the age of blushing; but the age of emotion she certainly had not.
>
> "Perhaps you may not have heard that he is married," added Mrs Croft.
>
> She could now answer as she ought; and was happy to feel, when Mrs Croft's next words explained it to be Mr Wentworth of whom she spoke, that she had said nothing which might not do for either brother. She immediately felt how reasonable it was, that Mrs Croft should be thinking and speaking of Edward, and not of Frederick; and with shame at her own forgetfulness, applied herself to the knowledge of their former neighbour's present state, with proper interest. (P, p. 268)

The electrified moment in Austen is one of those moments in human life of sheer terror, and Anne must apply all her intellectual will-power to drive down her panic and retrench her self-control. By encouraging a sense of shame for a preoccupation that reads everything in relation to Frederick Wentworth, Anne enforces a deliberate mortification on herself. She focuses on the humiliating fact of her own relative perspective, which might have betrayed her into not answering as she ought. She scolds her feelings into submission and regains equilibrium by dwelling on the fact that her obsession with Wentworth is degrading to her self-esteem. Her punishment is self-inflicted, and Mrs Croft knows nothing about it; the process is entirely internal. Anne embarrasses herself in order to survive electrification and in relief at having narrowly missed

embarrassing herself in a way that Mrs Croft would recognize.

To speak of embarrassment and to describe it as an electrifying experience is one of Austen's finest achievements in Persuasion. In the other novels, as here, it is the response demanded in certain fundamental situations, but nowhere does Austen convince the reader more of its force than here. She comes close to succeeding at the end of Pride and Prejudice when Elizabeth Bennet is miserably ashamed of her mother's behaviour, but Anne Elliot demonstrates more consistently the sense of exposure that acute embarrassment brings. Anne persuades us not simply of what it means to be embarrassed, but also of what it means to feel embarrassed. The inner electrifying and the light-headedness, and the oblivion and the sense that the world, like oneself, has stopped dead in its tracks are the insights into embarrassment that Persuasion offers. In Anne Elliot, embarrassment is intense, unalloyed self-consciousness. At the initial meeting between Anne and Wentworth, we are inside Anne, feeling the electric current passing between them, feeling her zapped mentally and emotionally, feeling the closeness of the atmosphere: "the room seemed full--full of persons and voices" (P, p. 278). When they meet unexpectedly in a Bath shop later in the novel, they are both self-conscious, though again it is conspicuous only to themselves. Moments earlier, Anne has had a glimpse of Wentworth in the street and loses

contact with the world, though the world continues to circulate around her:

> Her start was perceptible only to herself; but she instantly felt that she was the greatest simpleton in the world, the most unaccountable and absurd! For a few minutes she saw nothing before her. It was all confusion. She was lost; and when she had scolded back her senses, she found the others still waiting for the carriage, and Mr Elliot (always obliging) just setting off for Union-street on a commission of Mrs Clay's. (P, p. 383)

This is the electrified moment in its essence: isolating, self-absorbing, and very embarrassing.

The strict social conventions that constrain Austen's characters are often as frustrating to themselves as to some readers. David Monaghan believes that during the Bath section of Persuasion Austen "begins to suggest that were it not for the demands of formality, communication would be easy."[5] Certainly at times in Bath, Anne regrets the formality of society that contributes to gaps in understanding or, as she says, to "misconstructions of the most mischievous kind" (P, p. 427). Indeed, to say she regrets it is to be too mild, for the Bath section is informed by a feeling much akin to panic. Anne does not know that all will be well in the end when she says, "Surely, if there be constant attachment on each side, our hearts must understand each other ere long. We are not boy and girl, to be captiously irritable, misled by every moment's inadvertence, and wantonly playing with our own happiness" (P, p. 427). At the moment of utterance, these sentiments read not with

the confidence and assurance of a happy conclusion, but rather with the anxiety and insecurity of one trying to keep down terror. The rest of Anne's family and friends are sure that Wentworth will come to the Elliots' evening party, but "with her, it was a gnawing solicitude, never appeased for five minutes together" (P, p. 432). She cannot rely on the hope that he will come simply because "she generally thought he ought" to come (P, p. 432). The tenor of panic in the chapters immediately preceding the reconciliation is amplified by a dreadful feeling that perhaps Anne will remain mortified and that perhaps after eight years she will not be reborn after all. Perhaps Anne's mortification is the cost of living in a world where things matter and where they do not necessarily resolve in justice and happiness.

In many ways, however, the formality of social intercourse is a blessing to Anne and Wentworth, because it means that society is inattentive at the most convenient moments. Anne herself is frequently thankful to be spared the double embarrassment of having everyone notice her suffering. After overhearing Wentworth's conversations with Louisa on the walk to Winthrop, Anne is glad to have "the solitude and silence which only numbers could give" (P, p. 305), and so anxious is she to read Wentworth's letter that she decides to risk not being observed in the busy largeness of the room: "Mrs Musgrove had little arrangements of her

own at her own table; to their protection she must trust" (P, p. 441). The only time other characters notice Anne's private shock is when she is so overcome by the letter that she cannot recover, and even then, she herself brings it to their attention.

The moments of panic and embarrassment and electrification that come and go unobserved on the surface of society in Persuasion are really a subtext to life in general. Juliet McMaster in her book entitled Jane Austen on Love explores the "surface and subsurface" of dialogue in the novels. Her purpose is "to show how polite conversation, conducted on matters of apparently general import, and within the bounds of decorum, can be informed with a subsurface level of intense personal emotion,"[6] and she focuses on the extent to which Wentworth's conversations with Louisa are directed towards Anne. There are other examples of subtexts in Persuasion: both Anne and Wentworth derive a special meaning from Mrs Musgrove and Mrs Croft talking about long engagements, and the letter of proposal would not have been possible had Wentworth not applied to himself Anne and Harville's remarks on constancy in love. It seems to me, therefore, that as Austen points to the nuances of meaning beneath speaking, so she reveals the nuances of feeling beneath living. Within the texture of ordinary language lie expressions of deep emotion; under the smooth regularity and seeming banality of social

interaction exist moments of blinding confusion and embarrassed electrification. For Austen's main characters, "nothing-saying" rarely means saying nothing, and composure rarely implies feeling nothing. Jane Fairfax in Emma knows these truths, and so does Anne Elliot.

There are characters in Pride and Prejudice and Emma who are in some way impervious to embarrassment; either they do not see it at all, or do not confront it if they do. In Persuasion, these characters are Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot. In one of those succinct statements with which Austen frequently addresses character, she says of Sir Walter: "Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation" (P, p. 228). Indeed, Sir Walter is so consistently and undeviatingly vain that he verges on caricature, Vanity embodied. Despite the distortion of satire, however, Sir Walter Elliot and his eldest daughter accurately portray the way vanity handles embarrassment. Self-approval is the essence of vanity and is also what protects characters like the Elliots from embarrassment. For embarrassment presupposes the understanding that one can be wrong and, like Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Sir Walter and Elizabeth never even consider the possibility. It is a measure of how little they will allow themselves to be affected by embarrassment that they are "disappointed" in their expectations for marriage:

> Be it known then, that Sir Walter, like a good father, (having met with one or two private

> disappointments in very unreasonable applications) prided himself on remaining single for his dear daughters' sake. (P, p. 229)
>
> [Elizabeth] had had a disappointment, moreover, which that book, and especially the history of her own family, must ever present the remembrance of. The heir presumptive, the very William Walter Elliot, Esq. whose rights had been so generously supported by her father, had disappointed her. (P, p. 231)

The euphemism is a way of skirting the issue. Sir Walter avoids the mortification of rejection by focusing on his own generosity and sense of what is due to the family, and Elizabeth redirects it by resenting Mr Elliot's slight to the family. Their regard for the family would be noble were it not for the fact that they use it to hide from personal discomfort. Sir Walter is a proud man, and he uses pride to buoy him up and assure him of the rightness of his behaviour. Though the fact that she is twenty-nine and unmarried is in itself an implicit mortification, Elizabeth avoids confronting the reproach just as she averts her eyes and closes the Baronetage. She relies on "heartless elegance" (P, p. 431) and her sense of importance as mistress of Kellynch to minimize the threat of embarrassment. Far more so than Mrs Bennet or Frank Churchill, the Elliots avoid the issue of embarrassment by a deliberate effort of will. They will not commit themselves to life below the surface; they will not commit themselves to emotions like embarrassment and, incidentally, love. They are both superficial and selfish. Marvin Mudrick says that the

Elliots "pain [Austen] by their very existence,"[7] and perhaps they do, for they are ugly people, unrelieved in presentation by either humour or charm.

The only type of embarrassment that Sir Walter and Elizabeth even acknowledge is financial. Their growing indebtedness is cause for concern in the opening chapters because it makes their dignity vulnerable. Their response is typical, for again they will not be embarrassed by their embarrassments:

> Their two confidential friends, Mr Shepherd, who lived in the neighbouring market town, and Lady Russell, were called on to advise them; and both father and daughter seemed to expect that something should be struck out by one or the other to remove their embarrassments and reduce their expenditure, without involving the loss of any indulgence of taste or pride. (P, p. 234)

True embarrassment is an acknowledgement of blamefulness, and yet Sir Walter maintains that he is "blameless" (P, p. 233) and Elizabeth feels "herself ill-used and unfortunate" (P, p. 234). Their energy is directed into scheming how to avoid the shame of social reduction, rather than into considering how to remove the source of embarrassment by retrenching, as Anne wants to do. For Sir Walter and Elizabeth, to lower their expenditure would be to lower themselves in such a way that financial embarrassment becomes personal embarrassment, and neither of them is prepared to countenance a public mortification. Reductions, both literal and figurative, are not permitted. Sir Walter is pleased that Admiral Croft's name is not too large and

not too small, and that his own largeness does not suffer by letting Kellynch to him. Sir Walter Elliot has no occasion ever to use the colloquial expression of embarrassment, "I felt so small," because his vanity always makes him larger than he is and always saves him from the sense of inferiority that accompanies embarrassment.

The Elliots remain purposefully self-deluded for the rest of the novel. Technically they are given their set down at the end when Austen rather quickly informs us that "Sir Walter and Elizabeth were shocked and mortified by the loss of their companion [Mrs Clay], and by the discovery of their deception in her" (P, p. 454). Austen has dismissed them long before this, though, for failing morally. In Sir Walter's speech, "ought" reveals his own whining selfishness; he resents Mr Elliot's first marriage, because "As the head of the house, he felt that he ought to have been consulted" (P, p. 232). Elizabeth Elliot will not feel the degradation of living in a small house in Bath; Anne wonders "at the possibility of [Elizabeth], who had been mistress of Kellynch Hall, finding extent to be proud of between two walls, perhaps thirty feet asunder" (P, p. 348). The fact is that Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot will not do what they ought to do. They ought to be personally embarrassed, for their financial extravagance has made them so. They ought to feel the "regret" of losing "the duties and dignity of the resident land-holder" (P, p.

348), and they ought to feel degraded when they cannot host a proper dinner in Bath for the Musgroves. They ought to feel, or at least express, happiness at Anne's betrothal, instead of merely making "no objection" and doing "nothing worse than look cold and unconcerned" (P, pp. 451-452). They ought to be ashamed of themselves. Perhaps it is as much the fact that the Elliots do not have a proper regard for oughtness as that Persuasion is not completely revised which makes Austen toss them aside so perfunctorily in the conclusion. They do not matter to Anne very much throughout the novel, except in creating the atmosphere of loneliness in which she lives, and after her release from them is assured, they do not matter at all.

Lady Russell is mortified by Anne and Wentworth's engagement: "There was nothing less for Lady Russell to do, than to admit that she had been pretty completely wrong, and to take up a new set of opinions and of hopes" (P, pp. 452-453). This is mortification in a nutshell, and we must accept it as such, for though we are told that Lady Russell "must be suffering some pain" (P, p. 452), Austen asks us to believe it on faith. Mudrick suggests that Austen does not develop the potential of the minor characters like the Elliots and the Musgroves because she is exasperated with them.[8] The lack of development in Lady Russell's mortification, however, is indicative not of exasperation, but of the extent to which embarrassment can comprehend certain

situations. For how can Lady Russell cry with sincerity, "How despicably have I acted"? Her advice was given so long ago, and it is not absolutely wrong, but simply proven to be wrong relative to the outcome and circumstances of Anne and Wentworth's attachment. Lady Russell was wrong, but she cannot be blamed for the situation anymore than she can be embarrassed by the tenacity of Anne's love. The episode is beyond the reach of culpability.

There would not seem to be much similarity between Sir Walter and Elizabeth, and Anne and Wentworth, but in the beginning the latter two handle embarrassment in the same manner as the former. Especially in the section at Uppercross, both Anne and Captain Wentworth are actively and studiously anxious to avoid embarrassment. They go out of their way before they meet again to anticipate awkwardness and to organize themselves in such a way that it can be evaded. When the Crofts come to inspect Kellynch, "Anne found it most natural to take her almost daily walk to Lady Russell's, and to keep out of the way till all was over" (P, p. 252), and when little Charles dislocates his collar-bone, she grasps at the opportunity of missing dinner with Wentworth. The "joy of the escape" (P, p. 274) informs most of Anne's sensations at this time, and it is mainly through her own efforts in manipulating and managing circumstances so adroitly that she enjoys this relief. From what is said of Wentworth's movements we may infer that he

is equally concerned to avoid the embarrassment of re-acquaintance. He obviously thinks about Anne as much as she does about him, if only to note her as an exception to the fact that his heart is open to any young lady. And obviously he is the one who redirects plans for a shoot with Charles Musgrove in order to miss breakfast at the Cottage:

> He was to come to breakfast, but not at the Cottage, though that had been proposed at first; but then he had been pressed to come to the Great House instead, and he seemed afraid of being in Mrs Charles Musgrove's way, on account of the child; and therefore, somehow, they hardly knew how, it ended in Charles's being to meet him to breakfast at his father's. (P, p. 277)

Anne believes she understands Wentworth: "He wished to avoid seeing her" (P, p. 277) and he has the "same view of escaping introduction" as she has (P, p. 278). Moments before they finally meet again, Wentworth sends Charles "running on ahead to give notice" that he is coming (P, p. 278), and the child's "inconvenient state" is the least of his motives.

Between the two of them, Anne and Wentworth contrive to put off the pain of the initial introduction several times, but it cannot be avoided forever. No amount of preparation can prevent it and no amount of "anxious feelings . . . wasted" (P, p. 340) can prevent the unexpected meetings that follow in Uppercross Cottage and Bath shops. There is always some stiffness in renewing

acquaintance after many years, as Anne discovers with Mrs Smith: "The first ten minutes had its awkwardness and its emotion. . . . but all that was uncomfortable in the meeting had soon passed away, and left only the interesting charm of remembering former partialities and talking over old times" (P, p. 363). The problem with Anne and Wentworth at Uppercross, I think, is that they cannot move beyond this first stage of re-acquaintance; they are stuck in the first ghastly ten minutes. For Anne, the distance between them once she attends the Musgroves' evening drawing-room parties is "worse than anything." They are "worse than strangers, for they could never become acquainted" (P, p. 281), and Wentworth's "cold politeness, his ceremonious grace, were worse than any thing" (P, p. 290). Formal manners do not necessarily prevent communication, for Captain Wentworth's studied civility communicates perfectly well his resentment and embarrassment.

There is no fault to find in Wentworth's formal behaviour; he does everything he ought to do and sometimes more. McMaster asserts that Wentworth's lifting little Walter off Anne's back is truly heroic, and writes that the "real rescue, the one that deserves the return of love, is a moral act, a matter of choice, like Wentworth's with Anne and little Walter, or Knightley's with Harriet on the dance floor."[9] From the perspective of this discussion, the real rescue is the one that sees the oughtness of things

at their most fundamental level. Wentworth does what he ought in trying to avoid hearing her thanks by "studiously making" a noise with the child (P, p. 297). He does what he ought in persuading Anne to accept a ride in the Crofts' carriage, but the tension they both feel in the simple gesture of handing her in shows that he has not done all that he ought. Wentworth's consideration on these occasions indicates that he is watching Anne, that he is sensitive to her needs, and that he cares about her. However, like Darcy, he will not admit his regard either to himself or openly, and in doing only half of what he ought to do by Anne, he creates embarrassment between them. At heart, Wentworth's avoidance not only of Anne but of his feelings for Anne is a serious problem. It speaks of a state of mind that will not confront the humiliation of the past. It means that Anne and Wentworth are trapped in the moment of mortification and cannot work through the embarrassment of it towards renewed vitality. Wentworth says that Anne is as much as dead to him, and he has not forgiven her (P, p. 280), and yet to forgive is to have new life and to leave mortification behind. Because he cannot pardon, they are condemned to a cycle of embarrassing moments. Their relationship at Uppercross is a repetitive "worse than" experience; it is a stalemate.

In many points the courtship between Henrietta Musgrove and Charles Hayter parallels that between Anne and Wentworth,

but in their handling of embarrassment and mortification, they demonstrate what is wrong with Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth. In the same chapter that Anne is relieved of Walter's pestering, Charles is mortified, and as a matter of fact, the chapter's main concern is Charles Hayter. He is a favourite of Henrietta before the arrival of Captain Wentworth, and when he returns after a two-week absence, he is dismayed by her "altered manners" (P, p. 291). He had assumed that they would pick up their friendship on the same easy footing as he had left it, but he "had met with much to disquiet and mortify him in his cousin's behaviour" (P, p. 294). Charles is not angry at this point, only apprehensive, and it is in this context of insecurity and rivalry that he is mortified. He is also in the room when Wentworth rescues Anne, and he also realizes that something should be done to help her. Yet he registers only a minimum amount of effort by speaking sharply to Walter over the top of his newspaper. Unlike Wentworth, he does not move from his comfortable position to be directly involved, and from his peevishness afterwards, he realizes his lapse:

> [Anne] had a strong impression of his having said, in a vext tone of voice, after Captain Wentworth's interference, "You ought to have minded me, Walter; I told you not to teaze your aunt;" and could comprehend his regretting that Captain Wentworth should do what he ought to have done himself. (P, pp. 297-298)

This is standard mortification. Charles fails to behave, fails to do what he ought, and is uncomfortably aware of it.

He is ashamed, and his shame is given pungency by his jealousy of Wentworth. It is a small incident--even Anne is too preoccupied to be interested in his feelings--but it is of great personal importance to him. Henrietta has shown that she thinks him unworthy and unequal to Wentworth and he has just been proven so.

At the same time, Henrietta is misbehaving. Her interest in Wentworth is rather mercenary, and her "divided attention" (P, p. 295) emphasizes that she is really sitting on the fence, waiting to jump into whichever field looks greener. She is trifling with both Charles and Wentworth in what Austen calls "lightness of conduct " (P, p. 294), and the oughtness of her behaviour is highly questionable. Henrietta does not mean any harm, but neither does Frank Churchill, and the fact that Anne does not "attribute guile to any" involved in the various love triangles (P, p. 298) does not make the situation any less wrong. At some point, however, (which the reader does not share), Henrietta comes to realize the implications of her actions and to be ashamed. The walk to Winthrop is contrived for the purpose of "accidentally" meeting Charles and making up for her neglect of him. When the rest of the walking party are surprised how far they have travelled, "Henrietta, conscious and ashamed, and seeing no cousin Charles walking along any path, or leaning against any gate, was ready to do as Mary wished" and turn back (P, p. 302). Louisa's

prodding, though, persuades her to go down and call on the Hayters, and when Henrietta returns, she brings Charles with her:

> The minutiae of the business Anne could not attempt to understand; even Captain Wentworth did not seem admitted to perfect confidence here; but that there had been a withdrawing on the gentleman's side, and a relenting on the lady's, and that they were now very glad to be together again, did not admit a doubt. Henrietta looked a little ashamed, but very well pleased;--Charles Hayter exceedingly happy, and they were devoted to each other almost from the first instant of their all setting forward for Uppercross. (P, p. 305)

Naturally both Charles and Henrietta feel awkward at restoring a familiarity that should not have been interrupted in the first place, but Henrietta makes the extra effort to be nice to Hayter, and Charles for his part lets resentment fade into the past. Both of them try very hard to ensure a smooth reconciliation, which Anne and Wentworth fail to do at Uppercross. Indeed, it does take courage to admit that one has misbehaved and to work through embarrassment towards a happy ending, but Henrietta and Charles do it, and Anne and Wentworth have yet to learn this. A shamefaced reunion is a painful experience, but a little "withdrawing" and a little "relenting" make it much easier. The Henrietta we see on the beach at Lyme (P, pp. 317-319) is striving to promote Charles's interests and to show herself behaving as she ought.

By the time they go to Lyme, Anne is "hardened to being in Captain Wentworth's company" (P, p. 315), which

says something for the lack of softening in attitudes between them, and though "the interchange of the common civilities . . . was become a mere nothing" (P, p. 315), the fact that "they never [get] beyond" them shows that there is very little real improvement in their relations. It takes the horror of a greater occurrence like Louisa's concussion to make estrangement superfluous. The moment of the fall is similar to Anne's electrified moments, because everyone is frozen with shock, and perhaps her experience with such sensations explains why she is the first to recover and act. The accident is too grave to be comprehended by the subtleties of embarrassment and it is not until later in the day that Wentworth feels the shame of his own imprudence on the Cobb. Then, like Emma concerned not only for herself but for Harriet, Wentworth is dismayed by what the incident says about his own conduct and by what it means for Louisa: "Oh God! that I had not given way to her at the fatal moment! Had I done as I ought! But so eager and so resolute! Dear, sweet Louisa!" (P, p. 331).

David Monaghan objects to Louisa's fall from the Cobb, seeing in it both the breakdown of the novels' social order and the collapse of Austen's art. He asserts that in a better ordered world, Anne would not be dependent on freakish accidents to prove her moral worth.[10] It may be that Anne Elliot relies more on chance than Elizabeth

Bennet or Emma Woodhouse, but her situation previous to the fall is of a completely different order from theirs. She is trapped in embarrassment as they never are; she and Wentworth are deadlocked because he will not be easy and natural and unresentful--a Mr Bingley. What can they do if fortune will not help them as much as it helps Elizabeth and Emma? After all Elizabeth and Darcy meeting at Pemberley is pure coincidence, and Mr Knightley's return to Hartfield is prompted by a few lines of parish business from Weston. Jane Nardin calls the fall from the Cobb a fortunate fall in the Christian sense,[11] and it is fortunate for Anne and Wentworth because it breaks the cycle of embarrassment between them. As it is the turning-point in Louisa's life, so it is the turning-point in the renewed relationship between Anne and Captain Wentworth. After her firm and decisive action during the emergency, Wentworth regards Anne with new respect and treats her with a kindness and a frankness which, significantly, do not discompose her. The warmth and consideration with which he approaches Anne during the ride home from Lyme indicate the emergence of a new self in him, a self that acknowledges the truth about his affections and himself. He later describes his progress to Anne as one consisting of two parts: "only at Uppercross had he learnt to do her justice, and only at Lyme had he begun to understand himself" (P, p. 446).

When Anne learns from Mary's letter that Louisa and

Benwick are to be married, her reaction is that mixture of joy and shame that lies at the heart of Persuasion: "She had some feelings which she was ashamed to investigate. They were too much like joy, senseless joy!" (P, p. 377). Anne's quickened pulse and coloured cheeks tell of a glorious sense of hope, and the shame is mainly that of being too happy and hoping too much. She will keep her expectations down, but from now on Anne wants more than ever to pursue a reconciliation with Wentworth, and so does he with her. One of the most moving aspects of the Bath section is that Anne and Wentworth are just as embarrassed as earlier, indeed more so, but are now supporting one another by recognizing their mutual discomfort and are now working out and through the awkwardness of their situation. When they meet suddenly at Mollard's, Anne suffers the familiar shock of electrification, and Wentworth's manner cannot be called "either cold or friendly, or any thing so certainly as embarrassed" (P, p. 384). It is not, however, an embarrassment that is only remembering the pain of eight years ago, as was the case at Uppercross; it is one that is also recalling the recent coldness at the Musgroves' and the returning warmth at Lyme. The reason why Wentworth's confusion is the more evident is that he is the more embarrassed. He is ashamed because he knows that he has misjudged Anne, that he has failed "to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will,

between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind" (P, p. 446). He is also ashamed because he is beginning to understand mortification. He was mortified before by their broken engagement, but now he is keenly conscious of having misused mortification to resent Anne and hide from self-knowledge. At Lyme he is mortified again, and yet he uses the incident to grow. It is a measure of how much Wentworth has developed that he approaches Anne in Mollard's, though he is certainly not very much recovered from the shock of seeing her, and that they stand together, suffering and enduring and not remembering a single word of what they say.

In the octagon room before the concert, Anne is determined to do as she ought for Wentworth and to counteract somehow her father and sister's behaviour which is designed to embarrass him. Both she and Wentworth are self-conscious and conscious of each other, but both are trying hard for the other's sake. Anne makes the first advance with "her gentle 'How do you do?'" (P, p. 389), and Wentworth introduces the difficult topic of Lyme. They are electrified enough to feel reddened cheeks but they plunge in, in spite of it. He stammers and clears his throat, and she racks her brains to keep the conversation on topic. No longer do they suffer from blinding self-consciousness; they can remember what they discuss, and can speak on things that matter to them. They are still confused and "feel an

hundred things in a moment" (P, p. 391), but they are immensely attentive and pushing on towards reconciliation. When at the White Hart, Wentworth talks of "formerly" it is the first time they have reached back to confront together the past of eight years ago. The letter of proposal itself is the fulfillment of this progress towards reunion. It speaks of agitation but at least, at last, it is open, and if it is not easy, it is at least honest. It is the final courageous step, for Wentworth is leaving himself vulnerable to the supreme embarrassment of a second rebuff. He is prepared now to take the chance of being mortified. Here is the end of resentment, the beginning of life. Anne and Wentworth meet Henrietta and Charles.

The cancelled chapter of Persuasion is undoubtably inferior to the revision. The original introduces too many new characters in the form of a butler/footman called Stephen and a mantuamaker, and the Crofts have not been such good friends that they deserve so important a place in the reconciliation scene. Yet perhaps the main problem with the first version is that it is full of the wrong kind of embarrassment. Anne frets about meeting Wentworth unexpectedly if she interrupts Mrs Croft, as though she does not want to see him. Her behaviour at the concert, however, shows her anxious to communicate with him. When Admiral Croft flings open the door to what Anne believes is an empty room saying, "you will find nobody to disturb you--

there is nobody but Frederick here" (P, p. 457), it is the perfect electrified moment. But these types of moments no longer exist for Anne and Wentworth, and in the second version, Anne is not at all surprised to find him coming in and out of the White Hart Inn. The original scene is full of embarrassment, but it is regressive in being more like Uppercross than Bath. Austen's adjustment in the second draft is to make the tone of the letter, and of the two chapters in general, match exactly the tone of embarrassment as it has developed to this point. It is a brilliant adjustment, too, showing as it does Austen's understanding of embarrassment as an evolving process of human acceptance and devotion. This is what Persuasion is about: mortification as evolution and embarrassment as love, because these are the things that matter to Anne and Wentworth as much as they do to Austen herself.

CONCLUSION

Knowing the Context: Absolutes and Oughtness in Austen

Austen's novels are concerned with similar situations and problems, but this does not mean that they are all the same. Embarrassment is a common denominator in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* and *Persuasion* and the function of mortification identical, but it has been the aim of this thesis to stress the differences as well as the similarities in Austen's handling of these elements of maturation. The focus of each novel on embarrassment is distinct since it is controlled and defined by the personality of the heroine, and my own discussion in each chapter follows the heroine's focus and applies it to other characters and to the novel as a whole. Elizabeth Bennet is an embarrassable character, and yet she is limited by her inability to perceive possibility in the world and within herself. This inability in Elizabeth is an unbecoming quality and, in a novel where mortification is a process of becoming, it is essential that this limitation be overcome and that she become a better, because more just, person. The littleness of Emma herself sets the focus for her novel, for it is precisely this characteristic that enables her to embarrass others without feeling

embarrassment and to belittle people without feeling belittlement. Emma has matured when she can feel these things, and she is a bigger person at the end of the novel than she is at the beginning. The focus for Anne, and therefore for Persuasion, is the emotional impact of embarrassment, and the context of this novel is set in Anne's feeling the pain of mortification and the electrification of embarrassment.

Embarrassment and mortification are central to Austen's artistic structure, but to speak of a development or a change in the nature of either through the course of her writing would be misleading. The function of embarrassment as an educative force is fixed in the early novels and remains fixed throughout the later ones. There is, however, variation in Austen's presentation of embarrassment, and one of the conclusions of this thesis is that Pride and Prejudice, Emma, and Persuasion are really variations on a theme. Instead of considering each novel as a reworking of the conception of embarrassment, I prefer to read each one as a discovery of a particular quality of it. The reason Austen speaks about mortification and embarrassment so often is that she has so much to say about them and, in shifting her focus and in modulating her tone, she achieves a definition of some scope. Embarrassment and mortification do not circumscribe Austen because they mean many things to her, among them becomingness and exposure, and distasteful

littleness, and pain and electrification. Each novel sets a new dimension and describes a new boundary, and together they comprise a total definition. Though Austen certainly refines her understanding of embarrassment through her career, her novels overlay and enhance one another rather than advancing in a line of linear improvement. For this reason, I believe that a reading of Northanger Abbey or Sense and Sensibility or Mansfield Park can only strengthen the observations on the topic made here. Naturally, a fuller study would include all the novels and would reveal all Austen's insights into embarrassment, but by no means would it alter the remarks made in this one. This thesis is a partial definition but valid, for it is not the conception but the tenor of embarrassment that Austen develops in her fiction.

Finding some of the boundaries of embarrassment is the organizing principle behind this study; the difficulty of finding the boundaries of things in general structures Austen's novels. To say that things matter in Austen is not to assert that her fictional world is absolute. There are very few absolutes in Austen, and what there are, are obscured by relativity and shifting perspective. Characters like Mrs Bennet and Lydia materialize in Mrs Elton and Frank Churchill and again in Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot. Though they differ from one another in their individual concerns, they are the same in essence. Because their

opinions and ambitions are either tied to the self or fluctuate with circumstances, they cannot be trusted, and the only definite fact about them is that they never become anything different. They are absolutely relative.

The characters who attain the standard Austen demands are not absolute, because this is not what the standard is. Indeed, Elizabeth Bennet's lesson is to learn to be less absolute and to see possibility and to realize that only an open mind can become an open-ended character. The very fabric of Emma, and of Persuasion too, is based on relativity. In the course of her novel, Emma develops into a more precisely relative character, and Persuasion is the story of a life lived in relation to another person whose movements touch and control it: so Anne with Wentworth, and so Wentworth with Anne. These characters differ from the Mrs Eltons of the world not by being less relative, but by recognizing relativity within and around themselves. It is by seeing their own unbecomingness and their own littleness and their own embarrassing obsessions that the heroes and heroines step beyond the limits of the absolute. Clear vision is what matters.

Hidden beneath relativity, however, lie certain absolutes and certain boundaries. These are the similarities among the novels that I have stressed throughout. Oughtness is one of them. It matters not because it offers rewards for good behaviour and not because it assures that one will live

happily ever after, but because it is an absolute. It is one of those things that count in Austen, and characters rise and fall on the merit of doing or not doing what they ought to do. Oughtness is not a simplistic approach to the world, however, and the complexity of it throughout Austen's oeuvre is perhaps most concisely exemplified in Captain Benwick of Persuasion. The death of Benwick's fiancée leaves him "deeply afflicted" (P, p. 312), and when Anne meets him, he has "a pleasing face and a melancholy air, just as he ought to have" (P, p. 313). By the end of the Lyme episode, though, Captain Benwick is sufficiently recovered to want to marry Louisa Musgrove, and the superficiality of his oughtness is made manifest in his engagement. Yet I believe that the reader can discern his shallowness even before this time. To show to the world one's melancholy is perhaps doing what one ought to do according to the etiquette of formal mourning or the conventions of bereavement, but there is something very predictable about Benwick's grief and about his having a melancholy air, just as he ought to have. The public oughtness of Benwick's regret cheapens it, for real sorrow and real oughtness in Austen cannot be paraded. Genuine oughtness is Darcy doing as he ought for Lydia and Wickham and not wanting the Bennet family to know. Genuine oughtness is Emma feeling twinges of guilt about Harriet when Mr Knightley approves of the openness of their relationship

during their betrothal. And genuine oughtness is Captain Wentworth willing in the end to "forgive every one sooner than [himself]" (P, p. 451).

The characters in Austen who abuse oughtness are dismissed but continue to exist. They are Mr Wickham, plaguing the Bingleys and the Darcys for the rest of his life, claiming the allegiance of kin, just as he ought to do. They are Mrs Elton, left at the end of Emma to set the tone of the parish according to her taste and elegance, just as a clergyman's wife ought to do, and are Elizabeth Elliot, continuing to be ashamed of Lady Russell's hideous dress, just as a daughter of Kellynch Hall ought to do. The word "ought" for Austen, then, contains a whole world of meaning and when she applies it with sincerity, it is the highest praise she can give. The characters who learn to do and to say exactly what they ought are a very special species, for they are Austen's heroes and heroines. Anne Elliot, for example, does not retract her former decision to break the engagement; it was wrong, but it was ought. Elizabeth Bennet weeps to convince her father that she loves Darcy as she ought, and Emma's response to Knightley's proposal is incredibly apt: she speaks "Just what she ought, of course" (E, p. 391).

Love is another thing that matters in Austen. When Lady Russell prevents Anne's marriage to Captain Wentworth on the grounds that Anne would be throwing herself away

grievously at nineteen--"Anne Elliot, so young; known to so few, to be snatched off by a stranger without alliance or fortune" (P, p. 248)--she sounds suspiciously like Emma asserting, "Oh! Harriet may pick and choose. . . [I]s she, at seventeen, just entering into life, just beginning to be known, to be wondered at because she does not accept the first offer she receives? No--pray let her have time to look about her" (E, p. 57). Looking about one seldom works in Austen, for there is hardly anything she is more definite about than love. Jane Bennet in Pride and Prejudice exclaims from the heart of Austen's priorities when she says, "Oh, Lizzy! do any thing rather than marry without affection. Are you quite sure that you feel what you ought to do?" (P&P, p. 373). I hesitate to make sweeping generalizations, but Austen's characters, for better or for worse, tend to marry their first loves. No attempt to separate Jane and Bingley succeeds, and I think that Elizabeth is the first woman to completely captivate Darcy. Frank Churchill only contemplates marrying Jane Fairfax, and Emma and Mr Knightley marry the person they have loved for years. Harriet Smith, after much re-routing, returns to her first love and the man who has been steady to her. Henrietta and Charles, and Anne and Wentworth follow the same pattern in Persuasion. The characters who do not marry their first loves usually do not marry for love. Like Mr Elton and Collins, they are emotionally shallow, and their

affection worth little. They break one of Austen's cardinal rules and violate one of the few absolutes that matter to her.

Austen is absolute about embarrassment and mortification also. These are closely connected to love, for it is often in being mortified that characters realize that they are in love and that love itself is realized, its potential fulfilled. Embarrassment, in turn, is often proof both that one is in love and that one has been mortified. It is significant that where there is not the commitment of affection, there is seldom embarrassment, even in a heroine's dealings with her former suitors. Elizabeth is preoccupied and embarrassed at Pemberley but visits Mr Collins and Charlotte at Hunsford without the least awkwardness. When Emma figures out her emotions concerning Frank Churchill, she is "soon convinced that it was not for herself she was feeling at all apprehensive or embarrassed; it was for him" (E, p. 283). There is no awkwardness between Anne and Charles Musgrove, despite the fact that he has once asked for her hand in marriage, and Anne is amused by suggestions that Benwick is falling in love with her. She can talk comfortably about him to Lady Russell, which she cannot do about Wentworth, "till she had adopted the expedient of telling her briefly what she thought of the attachment between him and Louisa" (P, p. 336). Mrs Smith's arch innuendoes about Mr Elliot do not dismay Anne either, because her affections are not engaged

by him.

So mortification is the catalyst to encouraging a character's recognition of love, and embarrassment is its symptom. Genuine emotional responses like tears and laughter are also the signs that characters have changed. Elizabeth Bennet's tears and Emma's tears reveal how severely they are mortified, and the increasing frequency of Anne's laughter in the course of the novel points to her increasingly hopeful love. Both Mr Knightley and Anne Elliot prefer the open character, and it is the open character that is capable of growth. It is the Elizabeths and the Emmas and the Captain Wentworths of the world who can be mortified and who can love and who are worth loving. The embarrassment of love and of mortification is worthwhile to Austen, because it educates and strengthens and matures. Maturity is another of the things that matters to her, for the mature characters are her reformed heroines and heroes. They are embarrassable and mortifiable and see the oughtness of things and know the importance of love. These are the qualities that count. These are the things that matter.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Alistair M. Duckworth, The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 125.

2. Stuart M. Tave, Some Words of Jane Austen (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 1-35.

3. D.D. Devlin, Jane Austen and Education (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 1-7.

4. Grete Ek, "Mistaken Conduct and Proper 'Feeling': A A Study of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice," in Fair Forms: Essays in English Literature from Spenser to Jane Austen, ed. Maren-Sofie Rostvig (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), pp. 178-202.

5. Jane Nardin, "Christianity and the Structure of Persuasion," Renascence, 30 (1977), 43-55.

6. Ann Molan, "Persuasion in Persuasion," The Critical Review, 24 (1982), 16-29.

7. Susan Morgan, In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 5-6.

8. Tave, "Affection and the Mortification of Elizabeth Bennet," Chapter Four in Some Words of Jane Austen, pp. 116-157.

9. Mark Schorer, "The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse," in Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 98-111.

10. Mary Lascelles, Jane Austen and Her Art (1939; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 95.

11. Lascelles, Jane Austen and Her Art, p. 151.

12. Christopher Ricks, Keats and Embarrassment (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

13. Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, ed. John Davie (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 383. Subsequent references to Persuasion are to this edition and will be indicated by P in parentheses in the text.

14. Fanny Burney, Evelina or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World, ed. Edward A. Bloom (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

15. I am indebted to Katherine Zelinsky for these observations on the function of laughter in Evelina.

16. Oliver Goldsmith, She Stoops to Conquer, in Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), V, p. 211. Subsequent references to She Stoops to Conquer are to this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

17. Samuel Richardson, The History of Sir Charles Grandison, in three parts, ed. Jocelyn Harris (London: Oxford University Press, 1972). Subsequent references to Sir Charles Grandison are to this edition and will be given according to volume and page number in parentheses in the text.

18. This seems to be one of those "facts" about Jane Austen that has no identifiable source, though her own dramatization of Sir Charles Grandison is proof of a more than ordinary interest in the novel. See Jane Austen's 'Sir Charles Grandison,' ed. Brian Southam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

19. It is interesting to note that in the first draft of the conclusion to Persuasion, Anne worries about the embarrassment of seeing Mr Elliot once she knows his history. See the Appendix to the Oxford edition, p. 456.

Chapter One

1. Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, ed. R.W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 3. Subsequent references to Pride and Prejudice are to this edition and will be indicated by P&P in parentheses in the text.

2. Marvin Mudrick, Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 122.

3. Kenneth L. Moler, Jane Austen's Art of Allusion (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), pp. 75-108.

4. Howard S. Babb, Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1962), pp. 113-144.

5. Morgan, In the Meantime, p. 80.

6. Morgan, In the Meantime, p. 104.

7. Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 104.

8. Morgan, In the Meantime, pp. 98-102.

9. It is worthwhile to note that this reference to mortified pride is the only example from Austen's works quoted by the OED and that, in fact, it seems to be assigned to the wrong category of definition. It is cited as an example of the eighth definition of "to mortify," meaning "to cause to feel humiliated; to cause (a person) mortification" and the other examples under this heading are indeed mortified persons, such as "that court," "a man," and the "Queen's Dwarf" from Gulliver's Travels. Yet Austen's mortified pride more accurately illuminates the second definition, meaning "to destroy the vitality, vigour, or activity of; to neutralize the effect or value of." All the examples cited by the OED for this category are things like pride, such as "mind," "wildness," and "faith."

10. Tave, Some Words of Jane Austen, p. 154.

11. For a discussion of the inadequacy of the letter, see Lascelles, Jane Austen and Her Art, p. 162 and Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 118. For a defense of Darcy's letter, I refer the reader to Douglas Bush, Jane Austen (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 96 and to note #1 in Babb, The Fabric of Dialogue, p. 142.

12. Incidentally, Jane's letters continue to function in the novel after the crisis of Elizabeth's and Darcy's mortification; it is she who sends word of Lydia's elopement. On the whole, the function of letters in Pride and Prejudice is an intriguing topic. Miss Bingley's letter, for example, triggers Jane's humilia-

tion; Lydia's scribbled lines are proof of her unembarrassability; and Mr Bennet's enjoyment of Collins' third letter to the family pains Elizabeth.

13. Jane Austen, Emma, ed. David Lodge (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 374. Subsequent references to Emma are to this edition and will be indicated by E in parentheses in the text.

14. T. Mildred Wherritt, "For Better or for Worse: Marriage Proposals in Jane Austen's Novels," Midwest Quarterly, 17 (1976), 229-244.

15. Mary Alice Burgan, "Feeling and Control: A Study of the Proposal Scenes in Jane Austen's Major Novels," in The English Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Essays on the Mediation of Human Values, ed. George Goodin (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), pp. 25-51.

16. Janis P. Stout, "Jane Austen's Proposal Scenes and the Limitations of Language," Studies in the Novel, 14 (1982), 316-326.

17. For a discussion of the physicality of love in Austen, see Juliet McMaster, Jane Austen on Love (Victoria: English Literary Studies, 1978), especially Chapter I, "The Symptoms of Love," and Chapter IV, "Love and Marriage."

Chapter Two

1. Richard Poirier, A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 173.

2. Joel C. Weinsheimer, "In Praise of Mr Woodhouse: Duty and Desire in Emma," Ariel, 6 (1975), 81-95.

3. Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, pp. 181-206.

4. David Monaghan, Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 115-142.

5. Moler, Art of Allusion, p. 156.

6. Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 185.

7. Morgan makes a similar observation about Emma's treatment of Jane Fairfax. She notes that Emma is so busy

creating romance in Harriet's life that she misses the real romance of Jane's. See In the Meantime, p. 34.

8. Babb, The Fabric of Dialogue, p. 202.

9. Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 194.

10. Weinsheimer, "In Praise of Mr Woodhouse," pp. 85-86, 90-91.

11. Duckworth, The Improvement of the Estate, pp. 166-167.

12. Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 197.

13. Morgan, In the Meantime, pp. 31-32 and Moler, Art of Allusion, pp. 166-169.

14. Poirier, A World Elsewhere, pp. 144-207.

15. Tave, Some Words of Jane Austen, pp. 205-255.

16. E. Margaret Moore, "Emma and Miss Bates: Early Experiences of Separation and the Theme of Dependency in Jane Austen's Novels," Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, 9 (1969), 573-585.

17. John Lauber, "Jane Austen's Fools," Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, 14 (1974), 511-524.

18. Schorer, "The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse," p. 109.

19. Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 206.

20. The passages from the letter dated 24 May 1813 are:

> Henry & I went to the Exhibition in Spring Gardens. It is not thought a good collection, but I was well pleased--particularly (pray tell Fanny) with a small portrait of Mrs Bingley, excessively like her. I went in hopes of seeing one of her Sister, but there was no Mrs Darcy;--perhaps however, I may find her in the Great Exhibition which we shall go to, if we have time . . . We have been both to the Exhibition & Sir J. Reynolds', and I am disappointed, for there was nothing like Mrs D. at either. I can only imagine that Mr D. prizes any Picture of her too much to like it should be exposed to the public eye. I can imagine he w^{d} have that sort of feeling--that mixture of Love, Pride & Delicacy.

See Jane Austen, Letters 1797-1817, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 139, 142.

Chapter Three

1. Morgan, In the Meantime, pp. 166-198.
2. Bush, Jane Austen, p. 168.
3. Morgan, In the Meantime, p. 170.
4. Tave, Some Words of Jane Austen, p. 256.
5. Monaghan, Structure and Social Vision, p. 159.
6. McMaster, Jane Austen on Love, p. 32.
7. Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 216.
8. Mudrick, Irony as Defense and Discovery, p. 216.
9. McMaster, Jane Austen on Love, p. 74.
10. Monaghan, Structure and Social Vision, p. 157.
11. Nardin, "Christianity and the Structure of Persuasion," pp. 43-55.

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