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THE AMERICAN RECEPTION OF JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS
FROM 1800 TO 1900

THESIS

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This thesis considers Jane Austen's reception in America from 1800 to 1900 and concludes that her novels were not generally recognized for the first half of the century. In that period, she and her family adversely affected her fame by seeking her obscurity. From mid century to the publication of J.E. Austen-Leigh's Memoir in 1870, appreciation of Austen grew, partly due to the decline of romanticism, and partly due to the focusing of critical theory for fiction, which caused her novels to be valued more highly. From 1870 to 1900 Austen's novels gained popularity. The critics were divided as to those who admired her art, and those who found her novels to be dull.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF AUSTEN'S RECEPTION IN AMERICA (1800-1900)

Until 1950, historical opinion of Jane Austen's reception was firm in maintaining that her novels did not achieve substantial recognition until at least fifty years after her death. C. B. Hogan attempted to dispel this view in 1950. Hogan published an article listing responses from that fifty-year interval which had not been noted. This thesis will show that in the fifty years following Jane Austen's death, her novels were little recognized in America, and that from that time to the end of the nineteenth century her stature and reputation as a novelist increased. The causes of her lack of recognition in America in the early half of the century were several: the general popularity of romantic literature, the low critical status of the novel, Jane Austen's desire for secrecy about her authorship, and her family's reticence in publishing details of her life and correspondence. Her gradually increasing recognition reflected the decline of romanticism and the development of more rigorous standards for the criticism of

novels.

American response to the novels of Jane Austen in the nineteenth century can be divided into four time periods: 1.) 1832-1851--characterized by a relative lack of critical response; 2.) 1852-1869--noted for the beginning of a reevaluation of the author and interest in the developing standards of novel writing; 3.) 1870-1881--a period when critics reevaluated Austen's works, and esteemed her highly, also characterized by a growing awareness of the historical values of her age, in contrast to those of the early 1800s; and 4.) 1882-1900--a time when views of Austen polarized, some critics considering her a great artist, and others surprised at her current popularity, believing her to hold a narrow view of life and finding her novels to be a little dull--a dichotomy which persists today.

From 1832 to 1851, there is a lack of critical response to her novels, which can be explained in terms of the popularity of romantic authors such as Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, and Washington Irving. Also contributing to Austen's lack of notice were the sentimental and gothic novels which drew American readers. Action and adventure, sentiment and morality were all elements of literature sought by the reading public. Austen's sophisticated and often rhetorical techniques did not appeal to an audience that sought a more emotional, didactic, and moralistic tone than that in her novels.

These factors, along with the ambivalence Americans had for the rigid class structure of England, explain the absence of a major response to the author's work in this period.

From 1852 to 1869, criticism of Jane Austen's novels was characterized by praise of her realism, and a low estimation of sentiment and heavy morality in works by other novelists. A thread weaves throughout these reviews concerning the art of novel writing and what its standards are to be. This forming of standards for criticism of fiction had the effect of raising Austen's stature in relation to that of other contemporary writers. Adding conviction to this reestimation of the author, a collection of comments appears, by writers who had praised her work in earlier years.

From 1870 to 1881, most of the articles on Jane Austen were occasioned by the publication of her nephew's Memoir (1870). In discussing the Memoir, none of the reviewers is very skeptical of the author's objectivity, and most take the opinions of the nephew as facts, which are repeated up to the present as such. Jane Austen is depicted as remarkably kind and loving, and isolated from the world beyond her community. Several critics allude to the incompleteness of the Memoir, and the desire for more knowledge about Jane Austen. These articles share the attitude of reevaluating the author and praising her highly, adding names to the list of literary men who admired her.

Also recurrent is the wonder at the lack of popularity of Austen's novels in the previous years. Some articles show their authors' awareness of the difference in temperaments of the recent age as compared to Jane Austen's time; the word romantic is never used, although several of its distinct characteristics, such as the love of adventure and focus on feeling, are mentioned in contrasting her work to that of other writers.

Criticism from 1882 to 1900 is divided. Those critics who admired Austen praised her fourfold genius--for constructing her stories, for presenting situations dramatically to make the reader come to a psychological perception of characters, for her comic genius, and her perception of human character. Her detractors thought that she showed little imagination or inventiveness in her plots, that her scope was too narrow, and her tone too self-controlled. The immense popularity of her novels was disconcerting to this group. To the present, this dichotomy persists in Austen criticism.

Before now, no one has approached Austen criticism by looking through the prism of the American perspective. From this view, a cultural bias against English upper and middle-class society becomes apparent, as well as salient aspects of Austen's rise in critical acclaim.

Also striking is the problem caused by the concealment of Austen's life by her family. During her life, both she

and her family sought to maintain her personal privacy, to the extent that her personality became a mystery to the public. This concealment has caused problems for critics who seek to describe her personality and to interpret her novels. Not only has it presented problems for her critics, but it adversely affected her fame in her own time and afterward. There may be many reasons why Austen did not want to be famous. To speculate on them is an exercise in futility, since we cannot know the answer for certain.

CHAPTER II

AMERICAN SOCIETY AND READING TASTES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the 1830s, America's population was growing rapidly. The number of newspapers expanded, as did the literate public. In 1835, there were 1200 newspapers in America, as compared to only 200 that existed in 1800. In the 1830s 91% of the adult white people became literate. Although there were no public libraries, there were Mechanic's and Apprentice's Libraries, and booksellers' shops, which sold mainly English works (Hart 67).

The ideas which characterized American culture were the ideas that Americans sought in the books that they read. One characteristic strain in their lives was idealism. Americans believed in manifest destiny and the dream of perfecting society (68). With the appearance of railroads and steamboats, criss-crossing the open spaces, and the movement westward, came a sense of hopeful belief in the limitlessness of man's ability to conquer and improve his world.

The delight in the boundlessness which characterized American terrain and the Americans' reverence for personal

freedom, were sentiments shared by many (Hart 68).

Individualism was another idea that Americans believed in--the ability of one man to affect his world and change its destiny--the examples being inventors, thinkers, explorers, those on the frontiers both physical and mental.

Imagination was highly valued. Grand hopes and dreams, and grand open spaces were the basis of the vigorous and romantic temper of the people.

Before 1830 Americans had been reading the poetry of Scott, Thomson, and Burns (Hart 68). Thomson's nature poetry suited their appreciation for nature, and the society which Burns focused on, country folk, also pleased them. And Scott, whose romantic impulses and love of scenery paralleled their own, was also very popular (68).

The romantic temper called for heroic action (Hart 69) in literature, and this Walter Scott and Lord Byron delivered in the 1830s. Byron's poetry was more passionate than Scott's, and he replaced Scott as the nation's popular favorite (69); but reminders of Scott's overwhelming popularity remained in the South, where thirty-five towns, from Virginia to Texas, were named Waverly, steamboats were called Lady of the Lake, or Rob Roy, and children were named Ivanhoe, Walter Scott, and Rowena (76). The romance with Byron included a fascination for his style of living glamorously, his proud nature, and his eccentric morality (70).

Forty-eight editions of Byron's writings were presented in America between 1811 and 1830. And contributing to the sales of the works of Byron and Scott were the copyright laws which required no royalties to be paid to authors who were not American residents, allowing book prices to drop.

There were many imitators of Byron and Scott, in the search for America's own chauvinistic literature, but the only author whose writing labeled him the Walter Scott of America was James Fenimore Cooper. Cooper's books dealt with the rugged terrain of America, and like Scott's novels, were based on national history. The Spy and Lionel Lincoln were published in 1821, about the American Revolutionary War.

Cooper was popular until the 1840s (Hart 80) when he lost favor in America. No longer writing romantic historical fiction with a sympathetic attitude to America, he attacked two contradictory values of the nation: the glamour of caste, celebrated in Scott, and aspired to particularly in the South, and the efficacy of democracy. The former, he accomplished in a trilogy about European feudalism (The Bravo [1831], The Heidenmauer [1832], The Headsman [1833]), and the latter in satirical novels on the abuses of democracy (The Monikins [1835], Homeward Bound [1838], and Home as Found [1838]) (Hart 81).

Another American writer who stole the hearts of the nation was Washington Irving. His Diedrich Knickerbocker's

A History of New York (1809) included raillery at the city's history and delight in quaint folk ways that were disappearing with its growth (81). The public liked the creation of tradition he provided, the idea of an American past (81). In *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835) he celebrates the rugged individualism of the pioneer spirit.

The more popular writers in the 1830s--Burns, Thomson, Byron, Scott, Cooper, and Irving--shared some common characteristics. Passion, drama, heroic action and adventure, love of nature, rugged settings, country living, and a rigid caste social structure recur in varying combinations in each of their works. In Jane Austen's novels, however, one finds little heroic action, drama, display of passion, love of rugged settings or nature, and finds instead a focus on middle-class society--which none of these authors treated. The English society of Austen's novels is not one early America was very familiar with, or interested in, as it was one lacking in all the ingredients which made for romantic life, but Austen wanted to portray her society realistically. Not only was her approach to her subject antithetical to America's temperament, but her subject was remote. She wrote about a type of society which had not yet developed in America, but which would, in time. And as it developed, so would American appreciation of Jane Austen's novels.

In the 1830s there are no articles on Jane Austen's

novels, except for a biographical notice appearing in Female Biography (1834), by Samuel Knapp. This is striking, because the 1832 and 1833 edition of her novels did sell. There were at least forty American periodicals, none of which noticed her work. What caused the American reviewers to overlook her novels? The popularity of Byron and Scott, who were unquestionable favorites, explains much of Austen's obscurity. In estimating Austen's popularity, it is useful to look at other writers whose works were read in the 1830s. The gothic romances, so popular in America in the first decade of the nineteenth century, were still being read, and Austen's popularity ranks with these writers, who had seen a larger reading public at the turn of the century than they now did in the 1830s.

Poole's Index lists reviews and articles written about authors and their works from 1802 to 1881. In this period, Jane Austen and her novels appear as a subject in thirty-three articles of the journals indexed. This number places her in the middle range of critical notice if it is compared to the notice of other gothic novelists of the time; there are fifty-three articles on Maria Edgeworth's works, forty-four articles on Mary Mitford's, twenty-seven on Fanny Burney's, twenty-five on Elizabeth Gaskell's, and eight on Monk Lewis's. In comparison to the critical acclaim these novelists received, it is clear that Scott, Byron, Cooper and Irving enjoyed wider critical notice.

Compared to Austen's thirty-three notices and Edgeworth's fifty-three, are Cooper's eighty-seven, Irving's one hundred and seven, and articles on Byron and Scott numbering in the hundreds. If Austen were in a category with the gothic novelists with regard to popularity, then Irving and Cooper fell between them and the most widely noticed, Scott and Byron.

Jane Austen was probably not as popular as Maria Edgeworth. Edgeworth's books were issued more often than Austen's. Edgeworth's works were issued twenty-nine times from 1820 to 1852 (Roorbach 171), and Jane Austen's works only seven times (35). Edgeworth had four publishers (171), and Austen had two (35). Fanny Burney's novels and Mary Mitford's were issued four and five times respectively (82, 371), from 1820 to 1852, and works of each of these novelists were printed at least once in the 1830s--placing them in Jane Austen's category. Monk Lewis's work saw one issue (321). There is only one American review of any of these gothic novelists in the 1830s; Maria Edgeworth's novel Helen was reviewed by the North American Review in 1834, the year the novel was published. The reviewer's tone is complimentary of Edgeworth, and he praises her morality, saying her works "tend to elevate and purify the mind" (Helen 167); the reviewer contrasts Edgeworth's and Scott's high moral tone with the offensive "indecent and sensual immorality" of other writers (171). The author of the

article says that he had wondered if Edgeworth's novel would disappoint the reader accustomed to the excitement of Scott's romances (167).

This concern over action in the novel points to one reason Austen was overlooked by critics and the public. To find other reasons for Austen's lack of popularity, one can examine the book market and the American economy to discover how these could have affected the sales of her novels.

The economy in the 1830s experienced rapid growth. Farming was prevalent, and canals and railroads were increasing prosperity and spreading it westward. Mining, whaling, and textile manufacturing were some of the industries developing in the North and Northeast, while cotton and tobacco planting were developing in the South. The fur trade continued throughout the country during these years. The technological advances taking place are probably best exemplified by the development of the steamboat and the locomotive.

The growth in technology and the general prosperity of the time affected book sales. Availability of books to the average American was increasing, along with American literacy. In the 1830s the American bookselling market was becoming a "competitive scramble" (Tebbel 1: 207). Transportation and communication were improving and were less costly than they had been before. There were radical changes in printing technology; the appearance of the

steam-powered cylinder press, stereotyped plates, and cheaper methods of making paper and bindings contributed to the low-priced editions of books. Up until this time English booksellers filled the demand for books, and America served as an international dumping ground for the overstock which the English booksellers would otherwise have to take losses on at home (208). The industry of book publishing in America was filled with the drive for quick profit; in the early years of the century, booksellers opposed tariffs on printed matter because America could not furnish enough books for the expanding reading public (Hart 68). The American government's refusal to recognize copyrights on foreign works resulted in what is called the "Age of Piracy" (1800-1865) (Tebbel 208), in which English novels were published in large quantities, flooding the market for a time (208). Without payment of copyright and royalties, English books in America were sold at a profit (Hart 68). In this setting, the possibility for success of a novel would be great. It had to be that it was the subject and the treatment of it in Jane Austen's novels that Americans did not like. In general, American readers were eager to read, and to buy English books, which they could do cheaply.

CHAPTER III

1832-1851: A RELATIVE LACK OF CRITICAL RESPONSE TO AUSTEN

Jane Austen's complete novels were first published in America in 1832 by Carey and Lea. Before then Carey had published an edition of Emma in 1816, of which three known copies remain (according to Gilson in his articles in Book Collector). In the 1830s Austen's novels did not become popular in America, but found an audience, however small. Her obscurity was increased by her reticence about her authorship and by her family's reluctance to divulge details of her life to the public in the early nineteenth century. During these years America grew and experienced immense optimism; its idealistic and romantic temperament welcomed the works of Scott, Byron, Cooper, and Irving. While the majority was enthralled with the romantic spirit and subject matter of these writers, a few of the literati saw and praised Austen's novels. These novels treated a society and subject matter that most Americans found less compelling, since they did not include adventuresome quests, or glorious scenery, and rather focused on the small society of the English upper and middle class, which mostly confined itself

to drawing rooms and country inns.

From before 1832 there is little information on the American reception of Jane Austen's work. Carey published only one edition of Emma in 1816, of which little is known (Gilson 18: 340). In an 1856 article on Austen, one reviewer says that the first reprinting of Jane Austen's novels came after Sir Walter Scott and the Quarterly Review praised her in 1816, and that those copies wore out, got borrowed, and vanished (Eclectic 37: 197) Jane Austen was probably unaware of the reprinted edition, as she makes no mention of it in her letters (Gilson 18: 340). It was listed in an 1818 catalogue as selling for \$2.50 for a two volume set (340). This price compares similarly to price listings for more popular books in America; the Works of Byron and Burns sold for \$2.00 and \$2.25, respectively (Roorbach 83, 86).

A more revealing measure of the difference in popularity among Austen and some of her contemporaries is the number of publishers who issued their works. From 1820 to 1850 Byron had at least nine different American publishers (86) and Thomson had ten (83), while Austen had only two (35). Of Emma's reprinting in the 1830s one notices that the number of issues was small, but there was an increase from 1000 to 1250 copies after the printing of Elizabeth Bennet, indicating that the demand was greater than had been anticipated (Gilson 18: 349).

One reason her poet contemporaries found a larger audience was that the novel was not taken seriously in Jane Austen's lifetime (1775-1817). Jane Austen's dismay at this situation can be seen in her complaints in *Northanger Abbey* (1818):

I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding--joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. . . . Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. (Austen 1019)

But there is striking evidence to show that--whatever critics thought--the public liked novels, and read them. Hart's studies of American literary tastes in The Popular Book show that Sir Walter Scott's novels were the most

popular pleasure reading in America from 1814 to 1832 (73). His popularity can clearly be seen by the number of editors and publishers listed under his name in catalogues of American publications.

In order to dispel the notion that Jane Austen's novels were not much read in the early nineteenth century, C. B. Hogan has written an article (in 1950) that lists the comments of several of the English literati about her novels, which he found in diaries and letters. Some of them include: Lady Byron, Maria Edgeworth, Mary Mitford, the Earl of Dudley, Sir Walter Scott, Bulwer Lytton, Robert Southey, and Harriet Martineau (41). Hogan also cites at least eight references to her work before her death including articles in such magazines as the British Critic, and the Critical Review, in 1812 and 1813; the Quarterly Review, the Monthly Review, and Gentleman's Magazine in 1816; and in 1817 a mention in the Literary Panorama (40-41). He concludes by saying that she was probably more popular in America than she was in England in the early 1800s. He mentions that the first formal notice and criticism of Jane Austen was published in America in a book entitled Female Biography in 1834, written by Samuel Knapp (54). Hogan's article shows that critics and educated readers were familiar with Jane Austen's novels, but he fails to convince the reader of her widespread popularity, or even general recognition.

Of early American responses to Austen, there are four that I have noted as responses of educated individuals. There was a story about Chief Justice Marshall who wrote to Judge Story in 1826. His letter complained of Story's not mentioning Jane Austen in an address to the Phi Beta Kappa Society, in which Story praised the works of some women writers (Gilson 18: 343). A contemporary, Miss Eliza Quincy of Boston, wrote to Sir Francis Austen in January of 1852, saying that the Chief Justice and Judge Story both thought highly of Jane Austen, and that to them "we owe our introduction to her society" (343). Another indication of her recognition by Americans was suggested by B. C. Southam, in his introduction to his Jane Austen: the Critical Heritage (1968), when he said that Cooper's first attempt at a novel in 1820, a book entitled Precaution, or Prevention is better than cure (sic), was modeled on Persuasion, Austen's last novel (343).

None of these early American responses to Austen's novels contradict the claim that Austen's popularity was not widespread; they support the belief that she may have been at least recognized among the educated. It has been said that a writer who does not respond to the human call for heroic action and adventure is not likely to find a wide audience, and this applies to Jane Austen (Living Age 62: 430). Her audience in the early nineteenth century was small.

There are many reasons for Jane Austen's lack of fame in the nineteenth century, one of which originated in her family life. She and her family did much to keep her fame from spreading. While she was alive, she always wanted her authorship to remain a secret. Her asking the publisher to print "By a Lady" on the title page of Pride and Prejudice signifies her desire to be perceived as a lady rather than as an author; maybe the two were mutually exclusive in her own mind. Her fear of being seen as unladylike may have caused shyness about her authorship. Her brother Henry told a story, which may or may not be true, about her reaction to a dinner invitation. Henry was approached in November of 1815 by a nobleman who was giving an evening party and wanted Jane Austen to attend. Madame de Stael, one of his guests, had expressed a desire to meet Jane Austen. The author replied that she would not go; she disliked the idea of going into public as an author (Halperin 286).

Jane Austen's reticence to admit her authorship, and her discomfort with the role probably stemmed, not merely from lack of self-confidence and insecurity (190), but from a belief, grounded in society, that to enter into a traditionally male sphere was unladylike, if not morally wrong (Lenta 29). The male sphere also included politics and military matters, which Austen never directly mentions (29). Criticism of her for not treating these topics shows an ignorance of social attitudes of her time, and of her

personality, which tended to be outwardly conforming. Her inward imaginative life reveals more fulfillment.

Although Austen's fear of fame may have increased her obscurity, it did not prevent her from expressing her own moral independence, which she did in her creation of the character Emma. Through Emma, Austen vicariously experiences confidence in the self's autonomy. Emma, following her own moral sense rather than following moral prescription by society, has innate self-confidence (35), and is loved by all in her society, despite her unconventionality; she was everything Jane Austen would have loved to have been, but in reality Austen knew her society was not ready to accept such independence in women, so the author opted for a lower profile in her world, fearing rejection. She says of the character Emma, "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like" (36). Since she thought a real Emma could not be popular, she thought people would reject the fictional character. But they did not, and possibly the reason was that Austen had placed a damper on Emma's moral independence, the figure of Mr. Knightly--an expression of the author's conformity to the popular belief that women needed guidance and counsel by their male counterparts.

Austen's writing was always from a position of moral authority, about the male characters as well as the females in her novels. This she feared would be thought a

presumption on her part. She feared that her society would not accept a bold assertion of moral independence on the part of a woman author, or character; that they accepted it from her was probably surprising to the author. Although she wrote from a position of moral authority, her real purpose was not to teach. As an artist she viewed her task as creative and rhetorical, rather than as mimetic with the intention of teaching (Lanham 1-9). Her shyness about coming to terms with her authorship shows that unconsciously she expected someone to realize she was asserting an independence of mind associated with man's role, and she expected someone to call attention to her unspoken challenge. The challenge, or the assertion of woman's moral independence by the author's own assertion of hers, was not obvious. It was not obvious because it was couched in an overt message that contradicted it: that woman's role in society is circumscribed by more powerful men--this is the unintended overt message of her novels. Her authorship asserted the independence of mind of a free woman. Her novels, if taken seriously, urge women to use their independence of mind to catch good men, which implies subordination, if the economic reality for women is admitted as an influencing factor in marriage choice. Her obscurity in her own time was a result of her consciousness of the challenge to society which she asserted through her books; she must have been aware that she herself contradicted her

challenge with the implied instructive message of her novels.

The 1840s was another decade of silence with regard to Austen criticism. In the 1840s America was developing a middle class that was interested in philanthropic endeavors and reform of society. It was the middle class that donated Mechanic's libraries to improve the level of education in America, and it was the middle class that began the drive against slavery, that spurred the temperance movement, and that initiated other social reforms. Tracts and pamphlets served to get their message across, and moral stories were charged with sentiment. It was in this environment that the novel of domesticity developed. Some striking similarities and differences appear, if one compares Jane Austen's canon to the more popular works of that time.

The novel of domesticity was generally written by women, and taken from family life. Home life in the 1840s was an environment wherein a woman was supposed to provide guidance. The ideal woman or mother in a family was expected to have superior knowledge of running a household. Moral superiority was also attributed to her, since her husband was likely to face the challenge of life in the world of business and politics. The home was considered a purer sphere than the world. In the home, and especially in the parlor, the social world, the world of art and culture, and the domestic sphere coincided. It was in all these

realms that woman was thought to enjoy a superior knowledge and appreciation. In the home, women read to their families. Etiquette books were popular; thirty-six different manuals were published in this decade (Hart 88). Domestic novels were also popular, as were any books that would elevate the mind and improve morals. To be successful, a book had to be appropriate for a woman to read aloud, and for a child to hear (88).

Novels were concerned mostly with the sphere of women since novels were read by women in the home setting (Hart 90). Novels began to exclude business, politics, and social movements; and ethical and theological problems were viewed in simple terms (90-91). Women were the writers of many domestic novels, and their subjects concerned the life of the household (91). From family life they constructed stories that revolved around two basic themes: 1.) submission to God's will brings happiness; 2.) virtuous deportment brings a happy home and better social status.

The novels of Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, and Elizabeth Gaskell, popular at that time, all had domesticity as a background (91). The domestic novels and the works of Dickens shared three characteristics that Austen's novels lacked: 1.) sentimentality; 2.) a focus on the common man; 3.) active plots. Even though there were many differences among these novels, Austen's shared some traits with novels of domesticity: 1.) the domestic setting 2.) instruction

and improvement of manners.

The reasons that America did not appreciate Jane Austen's literary works in the 1840s may be surmised. The English middle-class culture was probably foreign to many readers. Also important is the fact that no event happened to resurrect her acclaim; no publisher or critic touted her work. Third, her irony was sophisticated, and her attitude toward her subject objective and emotionally removed; audiences preferred less subtlety and sophistication, and more direct appeal to their emotions. Finally, she focused on characters rather than on exciting plots.

CHAPTER IV

1852-1869: APPRECIATION OF AUSTEN GROWS

In the 1850s, novels of domesticity grew in popularity as did reform movements. In this decade American critics began to notice Austen's work again. Beginning with the earliest comments, I will review the articles published in America on the author from 1852 to 1869, a period noted for a rediscovery of the author and a focus on the newly forming standards for novels and their criticism. The articulation of standards for novel writing probably influenced the critics in their rediscovery of Austen, since her novels were structured so as to contain only necessary elements, and critics valued this aspect of her art.

In the review of Austen in Littell's Living Age in 1852, the reviewer says he hopes to encourage renewed interest in Austen, and that to be more appreciated she needs only to be more widely read (480). He begins by defending the female sex as capable authors, and lists a number of female writers, including Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Mitford, Fanny Burney, and Ann Radcliffe, none of whom he says is as good at her craft as Jane Austen (477). He praises the likeness of her characters to real people, and says of those who fail

to appreciate her realism and wish for more romantic and active plots that they are superficial readers (478). In defense of her approach to novel writing, he refers to Sir Walter Scott's review in the Quarterly in 1815, which calls her stories "sketches of spirit and originality" (478), pointing out that we miss a "narrative of uncommon events" (478) because of her treatment of "minds, manners, and sentiments so greatly above our own" (478). The reviewer records Scott's saying that we can relate to her society because it is like our own (478), and here one notices Scott's assuming that his society is our society; of course, not all of Jane Austen's readers belong to the English upper-middle class.

Next, the reviewer considers the amount of "love-making" (479) in her novels and finds fault with her for being too concerned with the theme of love; in this point, he agrees with other contemporary critics, but in her defense he expresses appreciation for her satire of what we call gothic romances and sentimental novels (479). He also admits to her having no plot (479), but applauds her "artist-like management of her story" (479), hinting at the subject of later twentieth-century criticism, what he calls "the skillful evolution of processes, . . . the tactics of a gradually-wrought denouement, . . . the truthful and natural adaptation of means to ends" (479), or what we call the art of novel writing.

In 1852 the dominant critical attitude toward the novel was not so "receptive" that a reviewer would call novel writing an art, but it is significant that he notices this aspect of the craft, and praises her for it--although he spends more time in the article expounding on her talent for characterization. He also praises her for a lack of sentimentousness (479) and for "sparing us the infliction of sage aphorisms and doctrinal appeals" (479). It was the opposite of these qualities that characterized much of the popular American literature of that time. Evidence of reform literature and moralistic sentiment in America in the 1850s explains why the sophisticated taste of this reviewer was not shared by Americans. Books and tracts on slavery, alcoholism, and improving manners were prevalent and their tone was sentimental, hard-hitting, and moralistic, in opposition to Austen's style of improving the mind and heart.

J. F. Kirk, in his 1853 article in the North American Review, esteems Thackeray, Fielding, and Austen for both revealing human motives and unraveling the resulting actions. He characterizes the art of each of the novelists with an eye to the authors' purposes and their methods of construction. Striking to a twentieth-century reader is Kirk's viewing the author's ability to achieve his purpose as more important than whether a book was traditional in its treatment of its subject. In articles predating this one,

an assumed set of standards emerges, which placed a premium on instructing the reader, and the exaggeration of human feelings and actions.

When Kirk discusses Austen he recognizes that not many would join with him in ranking her novels with those of Fielding and Thackeray (201). He asserts that her claim to this ranking is due to "the perfection of her art" (202); this is the first time an American reviewer has acknowledged her claim to greatness for this reason alone. He also claims that she is limited because of her depiction of her society's manners. He values her realism, and her "constructive genius," applauding her plots for containing no diverting labyrinths (202). He characterizes her talent for revealing human character through dialogue and incident, as dramatic (202). While he does not believe that her characters are given full delineation so that we remember them as if they had lives of their own, he admits that her characters live in relation to one another and form part of the picture of life she depicts. He also recognizes Austen's humor as "rich and suggestive" (202), valuing her tendency to make fun of individual types of human nature, rather than to satirize a class (202). His review of Austen's novels is the most thorough and detailed American comment up to this time.

This article may have raised Austen's value among the educated, but it had no serious influence on the majority of

the American reading public, as far as one can tell by looking at the publishing history of Austen's novels.

The 1855 Littel's Living Age review of Austen's novels included a reprinting of Henry Austen's biographical notice of his sister's death, which was originally printed with *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in 1818. Attached to the notice is a two paragraph preface which concerns the publishing of her novels in America, and suggests that the reader may esteem her novels above Sir Walter Scott's (205). This opinion signifies the rise in both popular and critical acclaim which her work was to capture, in the coming decades. The biographical notice clearly does not present Jane Austen as a human being, but rather as a demi-goddess. "Faultless herself, as nearly as human nature can be, she always sought in the faults of others, something to excuse, to forgive or forget" (206) says Henry Austen. The notice is not revealing of Jane Austen, other than to observe that she did not like the idea of going into public as an author (206). In noting her reticence about authorship, her relative does not cite her lack of self-confidence. Also noteworthy is his pain to present Jane Austen as accomplished in the sense of the ordinary woman's role--proficient at dancing, drawing, and music, earmarks of the ideal picture of a successful upper-middle class woman (206).

Another interesting comment is his mention that Jane

Austen wrote no letters unworthy of publication (207). None of her letters was published till over fifty years after her death, and the bulk of them were not published until 1932, when most of her nearest relatives had been dead for some time. Of those letters that were edited for publication, it is known that her sister destroyed more than she preserved (Halperin 190), and there is a noticeable gap of four years in Jane Austen's letter writing. This notice is worthy of comment mainly because it depicts her brother and the attitude of the family. Also interesting is the brother's modest appraisal of her work, ranking her, tentatively with Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth (205), revealing the same modesty of estimation of her work that Austen herself demonstrated.

The Living Age review of Jane Austen's novels published in 1859 is chiefly concerned with criticism of novels in general. More time is spent acknowledging the different values readers place on various aspects of novel writing than on discussion of particular works by Jane Austen. The critic accurately estimates Jane Austen's position among great artists as one whose art is great; although her purpose was never moral or serious, she instructs those who mistakenly look at her novels as serious in tone. Her works lack passion, and her subject is limited in scope, but this is not to claim that none of her characters ever experiences a passionate feeling, or that her writing does not

realistically portray a great range of human nature. But the omissions of the tragic aspect of life, and of a reality beyond the English middle class are important ones in judging her position among great writers.

The reviewer begins by remarking how little notice Austen has received by critics, and how she has not been republished by the prominent publishing houses. He adds that cultivated readers recognize her name, but that while her books were extensively read (424) in England and abroad, few knew of the author's name. He claims that people were reading her novels, but does not list any of his sources of information, assuming them to be obvious. Bentley's edition of her works includes a "meagre notice" (425) about the author; the writer of the article repeats details of her life before comparing her to other famous novelists.

This writer of the Living Age review (1859) places Jane Eyre below the works of Austen, and Fieldings's Tom Jones as well, in the representation of character (426). It appears from this review that one category by which novelists were valued was in "attainments" (426), and in this category he found Austen wanting. "Vigor of mind" (426) and experience were also categories by which authors were judged, and he found Austen beneath Fielding in all of these categories (426). But in "truth and subtlety" (426) he found Austen to be above most of her contemporaries. Today, the categories of attainments, vigor of mind, and experience

would not be applied to a novelist to rate his work; the work itself would be judged rather than the author. The bias in this criterion is clear; it would be very difficult for a woman to achieve success as a novelist under these terms. Attainments for women were usually in the skills of painting, dancing, or singing and playing music, and these kinds of attainments were probably not the kind the reviewer refers to when he lists attainments as a criterion for great novelists. Experience is listed as another criterion, but is a somewhat ambiguous one; if the reviewer means experience as a novelist is necessary in order for one to be considered a great novelist, then all beginning writers are automatically excluded from being great. For a woman to be a great novelist according to these standards would be difficult. She would have to publish a great deal, and also have a vigorous mind (a subjective criterion), and have attainments of a kind which she would not likely possess.

In describing Austen's audience, the reviewer in the 1859 issue of Living Age admits that those who look for "breadth, picturesqueness, and passion " (431) will not be included, and calls her works "miniatures" (424), referring to the often-quoted remark she made about painting on a bit of ivory. Now, when we look at her remark to her nephew we can see the irony and self-effacement characteristic of her novel writing and of her correspondence. In Jane Austen's letter to her nephew in 1841, she jokingly suggests that she

might steal his work, except that their two styles of writing are so different that she expects that the theft would be too obvious because a merging of their work would seem disjunctive. She said in reference to his attempt to write a novel:

What should I do with your strong manly,
spirited Sketches, full of Variety and Glow:
--How could I possibly join them onto the
little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on
which I work with so fine a Brush, as
produces little effect after much labour?

(318)

I agree with Halperin when he says, "It is in fact only a little piece of modesty and probably of irony, suggesting that her fiction is perhaps less flamboyant, more subtle, than much contemporary popular fiction" (318-319).

The Atlantic Monthly printed a review of Jane Austen's novels in 1863 which focused on the high regard many of the English literati had for her work. The reviewer does not spend much time in portraying her personality in glowing terms, but devotes several passages to her characters, which appear to him like real people. He particularly praises Anne Elliot in Persuasion. Another focus of his article is the opinions of some of the English literati. He points to Macaulay's opinion that no two of her characters are "insipid likenesses of each other" (239), noting

particularly her clergymen--Edward Ferrars, Henry Tilney, Edward Bertram, and Mr. Elton. In comparing her to Pope, Macaulay approved of none of her characters having ruling passions (239).

In summarizing her novels, the reviewer notes that according to good authority Mansfield Park was an accepted favorite among the company of Hallam and Maacauley (236). He praises Persuasion for the perfection of Austen's style evidenced there, and for the character of Anne Elliot. Of Emma he notes many characters of interest and comments that Emma was the author's favorite (237), but he does not analyze her work in depth. Neither does he analyze Pride and Prejudice, which he states is hard to enjoy because of the appearance of so many disagreeable characters (237). He touches on the irony of Northanger Abbey, and also praises Ann Radcliffe's works. He also mentions the absence of description of nature in Austen's novels, and sees it not as a fault, but as a result of Austen's unity of purpose (239).

His most original contribution to Austen scholarship is his collection of famous men whom he quotes as praising Austen. Scott, Southey, Lewes, and Macaulay are among the most famous. Scott is noted not only for the journal entry in which he praises her, but for reading her novels when he was in unhappy circumstances. Macaulay is noted for his discussion of Austen, which compares her to Shakespeare:

Shakespeare has neither equal nor second;

but among writers who, in the point we have noticed, have approached nearest the manner of the great master, we have no hesitation in placing Jane Austen, as a woman of whom England is justly proud. (239)

Lewes called Austen one of the greatest novelists in English because of her realistic delineation of characters (238), and Southey said to Sir Egerton in a letter,

her novels are more true to Nature,
and have (for my sympathies) passages of
finer feeling than any others of this age.
She was a person of whom I have heard so
much, and think so highly, that I regret
not having seen her, or ever had an
opportunity of testifying to her the
respect which I felt for her. (236)

In the author's testimony to Austen's popularity with the discriminating, he acknowledges a class of readers that does not appreciate her work, but does not specify its reasons (239). He merely snubs them by saying, "So be it" (239), and adds that others will recognize her genius.

The reviewer, in the 1863 issue of Atlantic Monthly, comments about a visit to Jane Austen's brother at his home in the English countryside, which he describes as like a scene from one of her books in its quiet beauty (240). The only hint of the family's facade about the life of the

author is given when the reviewer notices the Admiral's tone in speaking of Jane's life, "Of his sister's fame as a writer the Admiral spoke understandingly, but reservedly" (240).

This review shows the trend toward appreciation of Austen's novels among educated people in England, and his personal regret that her life was spent in such a removed setting from the intellectual life of the country's more famous literary circles. His purpose in writing this review seems to have been mainly to present opinions of those famous and educated men of England whose opinions about novels were highly regarded. The Atlantic's publishing the review seemed to be an effort to encourage Americans to read Jane Austen, on the recommendation of these men, but just as Scott's recommendation in 1815 had little effect on America's taste, neither did this one. Americans preferred romantic novels to the kind of fiction Austen offered.

It may be important to notice that during the "Age of Piracy" (1800-1865), it is possible that more editions of Austen's novels were published than we are aware of. Before copyright laws were enacted the market was open to piracy, and records on publishing were not faithfully kept. It is impossible to know if editions appeared that are not today recorded; however, from the records that are available it appears that Austen was not widely read during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER V

1870-1881: CRITICS REEVALUATE AUSTEN AND CHARACTERIZE HER AGE

From 1870 to 1881 most of the criticism on Austen appears in reference to the publication of James Edward Austen-Leigh's Memoir. During these years criticism is characterized by a rise in the critical estimation of Jane Austen's novels, especially in ranking her work with that of other great novelists, such as Thackeray and Fielding. Also noteworthy is the acceptance of the image of the author which the nephew portrayed in his Memoir. Since there was no information other than this sketch to portray Jane Austen, no critics thought to question it; in fact, rather than question it, some of her detractors used the Memoir to support their own suppositions about Jane Austen, calling her narrow in intellectual outlook. Some of her admirers have also used that information to depict her according to the "Janeite" myth still prevalent, which sees her as a maternal figure, capable of only benevolent thoughts and actions. Many misconceptions about the author are due to the publication of the Memoir; ironically, at a time when her personal image was becoming somewhat distorted, her

position among artists was coming more clearly into focus.

Also apparent in these reviews is a growing awareness of the elements which we now refer to as romantic, in the literature of the early 1800s. Critics contrast Austen's heroines to melodramatic ones, and find Austen's refreshingly common-sensical. They notice the self-control which distinguished her writing, as well as the age in which she lived, and contrast it to the wild imaginings of other writers, and the presence of passion that penetrates their pages.

"If you ask at the libraries you will find that her works are still taken out; so that there must still be a faithful few who, like ourselves, will have welcomed the announcement of a Memoir of the authoress"(Rev. of Memoir 124). These words are part of the introduction to the review of J. E. Austen-Leigh's Memoir and reveal the writer's awareness of Jane Austen's lack of general popularity in America in 1870. The author is quick to comment that Jane Austen's following was not large but of first-rate quality (124). He lists some of her famous admirers, including Scott, Macaulay, and Guizot, and echoes Macaulay's comparison of Jane Austen to Shakespeare, calling them both really creative and purely artistic, each holding up a clear mirror--Shakespeare to the moral universe, and Jane Austen to the world in which she lived (124). His review covers the life and manners of the society which Jane

Austen knew, as explained in the Memoir, but comments that the Memoir is only one-third biography; the rest is description of places, manners and customs, genealogy, and testimony of admirers (124). He calls the outline the biographer gives "pretty perfect though faint" (124). The lack of information about the author still exists. The review includes details of the Memoir which are no longer accepted as definitive, such as her being a favorite of children, and her caring for relatives in crises (125). The part of the review which covers the Memoir echoes the glowing terms used by her nephew to describe Austen and her life. But the reviewer's portrait of the author characterizes her as a snob, identifying her with her character Emma, and quoting a famous line from the novel Emma, in which Emma says that she has nothing to do with the yeomanry because they have such differing interests. The reviewer concludes:

Decidedly she believes in social caste, in gentility, and its connection with affluence and good family; in its incompatibility with any but certain very refined and privileged kinds of labor; in the impossibility of being at once a gentleman and a trader, much more a yeoman or mechanic. (125)

This is the first articulation by an American reviewer of a

reason that so many Americans were uninterested in her novels, many being of the yeoman class themselves, and disbelieving in a social caste. He never says that this is why many Americans do not read Austen, but he notices what he calls Jane Austen's "narrow and rather vulgarly aristocratic" (125) society, and reproaches her for a focus on it in her books (125).

S. S. Conant's review of A Memoir introduces Jane Austen with comments about her obscurity. Conant compares her lack of recognition to the notoriety of other women writers such as Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth, and regrets the lack of notice Austen has received (226). The glowing tone the author uses in describing her personality resembles that of Austen's nephew in his Memoir; however, Conant admits to being ignorant of how far her family life conformed to the general picture her biographer left (229), suggesting doubt about the relative's reliability. Having little information to rely on, the reviewer uncritically accepts the portrait of the author presented by the nephew. In Conant's mainly biographical glimpse of Austen he states an often repeated opinion about Austen, found in the nephew's Memoir, "She was always very careful not to meddle with matters she did not understand" (227), here assuming that her choice not to include politics, law, or other worldly topics was on account of ignorance. That she was not ignorant of these subjects is hinted in the reviewer's

remark, taken from the opinions expressed in the Memoir, "When a girl she had strong political opinions, especially about the affairs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (231). It is striking that she would have political opinions in youth, and leave off having them as an adult, and also that her strong political opinions were confined to the past. This alleged fact about Austen suggests perhaps timidity rather than ignorance; growing into a woman's role may have taught her to keep her opinions of current affairs to herself, as they may have been unwelcome, or have seemed inappropriate.

The portrait of her suggests that she lived a happy, quiet life, amidst a family who very much appreciated her fine qualities. The accuracy of that portrait is subject to some question. Conant notes that "Her literary fame was of slow but certain growth. At first received with but little favor by the public or the reviewers, her novels have won an honorable and permanent position in English literature" (232). Following this claim he quotes Southey's, Coleridge's, and Scott's praise of her, as well as Sir Henry Holland's. While it seems probable that her fame did grow from the beginning of the nineteenth century to 1870, it appears to have been most certain among the highly educated.

This review of James Edward Austen-Leigh's Memoir serves to disclose, with an uncritical eye, the opinions and facts which the nephew possessed about Jane Austen. It

presents the problems her twentieth-century critics face: the question of the validity of the relatives' view of her life and personal opinions, and the lack of sources available to scholars to answer these questions.

An article in the Living Age published in 1870 is entitled "Miss Austen and Miss Mitford." Of most interest are the terms used to refer to Jane Austen's family and life: her "singularly happy and united family" (558), her mother, who may have been a source of irritation to Jane, described in the nephew's Memoir and quoted here, as uniting "strong common sense with a lively imagination" (558). The terms which refer to Jane's family remain glowing, and probably taken from the Memoir.

The notion that Jane Austen did not write about law, politics, and medicine because she did not understand them is repeated again, probably borrowed from the nephew's Memoir (559), and remains unquestioned by most today, except feminist critics. The writer expressed regret that the sketch that the Memoir left is incomplete (559) as well as an affirmation that it was not a good idea to print her earliest fragments (560).

Next, Austen is excused for her shyness with regard to society (561). The author explains Jane Austen's lack of self-assertion as understandable, suggesting either physical inability or nervousness as a possible source, and one which characterized other great people in moments of trial like

Admiral Nelson (561).

What distinguishes this review from predecessors is its tracing the publishing history of her novels. The reviewer is surprised and regretful in tone about Austen's lack of popularity when her novels were first received. He perceives them to have been thought by the public as "poor and commonplace" (558), and only admired by a few better critics, a clearer perception of how America approached her work in the early 1800s than evidenced by Hogan and others in the twentieth century, and by nineteenth-century critics who maintained that the author was both popular among her circle and as a novelist in her own time.

In contrast to the life of Mary Mitford, treated in the second half of the article, Jane Austen's life appears singularly uneventful and peaceful, as portrayed by this reviewer, and others of this time period. This image is altered by a reading of Halperin's biography of Austen, which is based on her letters. Halperin's depiction of Austen characterizes her as personally less warm and loving than the Janeite image of her, and suggests that her life included periods of loneliness and unhappiness which are not usually observed, because to observe them requires one to infer from circumstances and to read between the lines of her correspondence.

One further note regarding this article arises not from the reviewer's comments, but from a quotation from one of

Jane Austen's letters. In the quotation she puts herself down, in the same vein that she did when she spoke of her art as painting on a bit of ivory. One sees the same willingness to praise the opposite of her style and achievement, in this letter to Cassandra, the same anxiety that what was popular and well thought of was not what she herself admired, and strove for in her creations. Of *Pride and Prejudice* she says:

The work is rather too light and bright, and sparkling; it wants shade; it wants to be stretched out here and there with a long chapter of sense, if it could be had; if not, a solemn specious nonsense, about something unconnected with the story; an essay on writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparte or something that would form a contrast, and bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and epigrammatism of the general style. (561)

The anxiety is like that of a proud parent who is hopeful that his child will be well appreciated and fearful of seeming immodest.

In an article in Living Age in 1871 (vol.110) the reviewer compares Jane Austen's heroines to other current ones, and finds Austen heroines to have more humor, self-respect, hardness of heart, and realistic views of love

(648). The Austen heroine sees love as an interest, whereas the romantic heroines saw love as a consuming passion. The heroine in an Austen novel displayed self-command to a higher degree than other current heroines. In other points this review resembles many previous ones, in esteeming the author's skill at characterization (643), and in the art of constructing the story (646). The writer comments on the age depicted in her novels, noticing its qualities of reticence and self-control (643); to this writer's contemporaries her characters displayed "strained emotion" (648) and "courtly reserve" (648), and their dress was old-fashioned and their expressions seemed quaint (643).

This writer is aware of romanticism, and by examining Austen's heroines in contrast to others he begins to articulate some of the elements we associate with romantic literature. He says that the danger for writers of his age is not of feeling too little, but of expressing more than they feel (648). A return to the reticence and self-control of Austen's time appears in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and can be seen in a parallel return of readership to Austen's works.

The tone of this article (Living Age, 1871) is sentimental when speaking about Jane Austen, reflecting the prevalent attitude of veneration of the author. The critic says, "One can picture the children who are playing at the door of the old parsonage, and calling for Aunt Jane" (650).

Today, information from her letters and the correspondence of her relatives reveals that she was not so preferred by her nieces and nephews as it has once appeared (Halperin). A "sunny temper" (651) and other similar qualities were imagined to characterize the author. An idealization of her personality was begun by her family, and by critics as well, and persists to the present.

An article in Nation (1871) discusses Jane Austen's literary fate. Written in 1871, it shows a distance from the author's time, and looks back on her early reception as a curious course of events. It shows a new perception of other authors of her time as inferior. The author marvels that her works brought Austen no general notoriety or famous friends ("Early Writings" 165), as were the rewards for "far inferior and now almost forgotten authoresses" (165), such as Fanny Burney, Hannah More, the Porters, and Maria Edgeworth. He mentions Scott's notice of Austen in the Quarterly and speculates that she was unaware of the identity of the author who praised her so highly. The reviewer regrets that few others of high status in the literary world recognized her genius, pointing to the Prince Regent as the only other contemporary reader who brought attention to her work, by requesting that Emma be dedicated to him (165). Then the reviewer lists several men who have since helped to confirm Austen's fame by their notice and praise of her work: Sir Walter Scott, Archbishop Whatley,

Sir James Mackintosh, Southey, Coleridge, Guizot, Macaulay, Whewell, Sydney Smith, Chief Justice Marshall, and Judge Story (165).

At this point in the article, the writer regrets the bumbling reception her works of genius received on the whole in the early nineteenth century. He gives examples of the eminent literati who praised her. He also claims that Austen had a popular following, but does not elaborate any further on that subject. He writes that

her reputation has been growing and spreading, and she has long been recognized by the highest authorities, as well as by widespread popular admiration, as one of the immortals. If she had not at any one time as wide a circle of readers as some of her sensational sisters, we will venture to say that none of them had so many, on the whole, or of so high a quality. (165)

From research on the reputation of her more sensational sisters, it appears that they did have as many admirers as she, even after the peak of their popularity. This fact is evident from looking comparatively at the number of editions and issues printed by their publishers and number of critical notices printed in magazines about the authors and their works.

As for "widespread popular admiration" (165) it seems

that her work did experience a limited popularity on the European continent and in America, but not as much as this statement would suggest. Whether or not the reviewer asserted the claim based on an appearance of the reality, or out of desire to lend credence to his high estimation of Austen is not clear.

Most of the article is a review of her then recently released fragments which included "Lady Susan," "The Watsons," and the original denouement of Persuasion, an alternate ending which Jane Austen chose not to include in the final version of the book. Of "Lady Susan" the reviewer remarks that the characters and the details of the story are very unpleasant, and to him "The Watsons" contains only glimpses of her talent. The earliest planned denouement of Persuasion he finds to be too brief, and he points out that the ending chosen for Persuasion reveals the hand of the artist with no traces of her illness. The reviewer thanks the family for giving Austen's readers more knowledge of her. His statement suggests the growing hunger of her readers for knowledge about Jane Austen as a person: "Whatever gives us a more intimate knowledge of such an enchantress in her private life, and the method and beginnings of her art, is a favor for which we are grateful, and for which we desire again to acknowledge our obligations to the author and editor of this most interesting book." He is encouraging, especially encouraging the family to divulge

more of Austen to the public. The family response to such encouragement never matched reader curiosity, however (165).

The reference to Austen as an "enchantress" shows the idealized way in which some of her readers imagined her. With the early biographical notice and J.E. Austen-Leigh's Memoir being the only information her readers had to digest about her life, it is natural that this image of Austen appeared in public thought. It seems to be what the family wanted. But is it realistic to expect anyone's life to live up to such standards of perfection? The portrayal of Jane Austen as a demigoddess has had the effect of raising curiosity among those who expect even geniuses to be human.

CHAPTER VI

1882-1900: POLAR VIEWS OF AUSTEN EMERGE

AT THE PEAK OF HER POPULARITY

Opposing views of Jane Austen emerge in criticism from 1882 to 1900. Her admirers idolize her, an attitude fostered by her family, and her detractors condemn her art as limited by a narrow intellect and a lack of imagination; they are baffled by the sudden interest in Austen's books and believe readers overestimate her. To them, the absence of an exciting plot in her novels is a sign of dullness of mind; the most they have to say for her is that she is clever. To them, her limitations prevent her from achieving the status of a great writer, rather than achieve her artistic purpose, and thus win for her a permanent regard as a great novelist.

The criticism dating around the year 1882 is a response to the new edition of her works published by Bentley, one which included the letters which Lord Brabourne had edited. Then, in 1898 Lord Northbrook proposed a dedication to Austen of a memorial window in Winchester Cathedral, resulting in the publishing of more articles on Austen. In 1900 the appearance of the Macmillan edition and the Roberts

Brothers edition of her works spurred another wave of critical response.

In an article from an 1882 issue of The Literary World Jane Austen was seen as a limited novelist, without imagination or poetry ("Jane Austen and Her Novels" 131). The reviewer defines her mind as shrewd and clever (131), mistakenly assuming that the self-imposed limitations she placed on her art were evidence that her view of life was narrow. He categorized her with a "large class of fiction writers" (131) which he called clever, and which he associated with Maria Edgeworth. This class could only be the many women novelists of the period, whose subject usually included the life and romantic fate of a heroine. The writer's classification of Austen wrongly judges her art, and her value as a writer. It ignores her perfect focus on human nature, and its value. Finding her plots often dull, and missing characters of depravity or heroic stature (130), this reviewer mistakenly assumed that an absence of breadth makes the presence of fine detail not worth praising.

In another article on Austen in Living Age in 1882, A. Armitt compares Charlotte Bronte to Jane Austen, portraying Charlotte Bronte as a woman lonely and unhappy, without pleasant surroundings or company, amidst family tragedy. On the other hand, he says of Jane Austen, "We see her always a sweet, serene figure--kindly, cheerful, unimpatient,

unambitious, willing to put aside among the middle-aged while she was yet young, yet bright enough in spirit to have remained youthful when she had become actually old." To him, Austen was so complete a person that she did not require her environment to suit her perfectly in order to be happy. Her genius was like her character, self-sufficing (369).

"Jane Austen lived serene without longings, and died content without regrets" (370), says Armitt, expressing an opinion questioned by several modern critics. Charlotte Bronte's life history was not as cloudy as Jane's, and this reviewer's main point is to regret that Charlotte Bronte, an inferior writer in his view, was to receive so much attention, and that Jane Austen was to be neglected for several years.

In his comments, Armitt acknowledges a class of readers who cannot appreciate Austen, and he characterizes them thus: "a large class of readers to whom nature does not speak plainly enough, for whom real life is not intense enough" (371). He disparages this class by saying that it lacks discrimination in art (372). He criticizes the vogue of romantic sentimental literature and its admirers, the writers who play upon the feelings of the reader in a painful way, adding up miserable events until the reader could hardly bear to believe them (372).

In conclusion, he identified the dependence on plot and

"incidence" (372), of the sensational novels, and admired Austen's refreshing lack of such technique. He praised her novels' adventurously different approach, which he credited for their outlasting the more popular sensational novels (372).

Another comment on Jane Austen's novels from the year 1882 appears in Living Age (vol. 153). This article notes her gift of comic genius, and defends her right as an author to exclude tragedy from her novels (48). The reviewer clearly perceives her tone as not serious; he is more apt to appreciate the playful side of Austen's creation with words. He claims that Austen lacked deep feelings, and that if she had felt more deeply she would have written differently (48). The writer dubbed her humor superficial, skimming "the surface of life" (48), but he appreciates her skill as a writer; however, he ranks her below Walter Scott and Fielding, saying their range is wider and "touch" more "powerful" (46).

He welcomes her avoidance of the passion for nature, which he associated with souls out of harmony with the life around them (43). In discussing this harmony with life he compares Wordsworth to Byron, saying that because Wordsworth is in harmony with the life around him, his poems will outlast Byron's Don Juan. (Jane Austen is like Wordsworth in her relationship to her world.) Byron's reality in Don Juan is itself "unreal" (46), and is therefore a less true

portrait of life. It seems that romantic spirits, or those out of harmony, are as necessary to existence as those who exhibit the harmonious aspect of nature.

This review clarifies Austen's relationship to that of other great writers. Despite the reviewer's high estimation of Scott, his perception of Austen is clear, in reference to judging her as not primarily serious in purpose.

Also noteworthy is the lessening power of the Memoir, and the comments of Austen's relatives. Neither seems to color the tone of the reviews in the 1880s as much as they did those of the previous decade; however, they probably influenced the comment this reviewer made, saying Austen did not feel deeply. Henry Austen's biographical notice of the author prompted this view by his statements that she had never suffered great disappointment, and that her disposition was always sweet (Halperin 4).

Other than this point, no others seem to come from the opinions of relatives. In the first paragraph, the absence of the romanticized image of Jane Austen created by the Memoir can be seen in the statement, "She made few friends beyond the circle of her own family, and it is not known that she was ever seriously in love" (43).

"She is a small, thin classic," according to M. A. W. of Macmillan Magazine (1882). He valued her as a stylist who resembled the French in her "drier and more bracing elements," but he missed emotion, passion, glow, and the

power of expansion, which he defined as a necessary element of very great writing. He saw Austen as half-way to that greatness, since she possessed the other half of what he defined as essential to great artistry, the power of concentration. What made a great writer, to him, is one who knew how to expand and concentrate, and how to include both virtues of novel writing in correct proportion (91).

At this date M. A. W. was aware of sentiment and moralizing as a negative aspect "in letters" (89). He characterized most writers as tending mainly to powers of concentration, or compression of their work (89), in order to avoid either sentiment or moralizing. But he was not satisfied with their approach. He named Chaucer as a writer who could use both expansion and concentration rightly, and Gower as an example of one who did not (89).

He called Austen a stranger to the world of ideas (87), and assumed because great questions of life do not penetrate her letters or her books, that she was unaware of them (87). It seems more likely that she was aware of them, but found them less compelling than human character, and as a stylist did not see them fitting in to her subject matter comfortably.

He found little use for her newly published letters, as their subject was often mundane, and he did not see Lord Brabourne's edition of them as in any way enlightening (84). He commended the virtue of not publishing too freely, and he

valued the "old distinction between public and private life, which still held firmly in the days when Jane Austen and Miss Ferrier refused to give their names to any production of their pens--the old personal reserve" (84). It seems likely that there were other reasons for women to maintain personal reserve, chiefly to maintain a unified female identity that public knowledge of their authorship threatened.

With an opposing attitude to the novelist, the reviewer in an 1883 issue of Living Age (vol. 156) tried to defend her against those who thought her limited by shallow feelings. The writer was particularly concerned about one critic's assertion that if Austen had felt more deeply she would have written differently ("Miss Austen" 696). The Living Age reviewer blamed her family for the current vogue of labeling her with shallowness, or lack of humanity, since they did not try to erase the vague impression of Austen's life that the Memoir left (691). The impression left by the Memoir had obviously satisfied few of her readers as to the nature of her real self. This reviewer says, "the blank of her life in some sort impairs the interest of her books, and so far is, and has been, an injury to her fame" (692). He says that since she had genius, the world demands to know her life. Jane Austen's family did not acknowledge any obligation to posterity, and instead respected what they felt her own wishes would have been, and what were certainly

their wishes. They could not have known that these actions would cause unflattering conjecture about the author, but such is the case (692).

To prove Jane Austen lovable, the writer gives the best examples of her kindness and her capacity for feeling that he can find. First, he tells us that her brothers were kind and affectionate, as if this reflected on her, and how she esteemed her countrymen and its heroes, as evidenced by her positive portrayal of navy officers in her novels. Then he mentions her love of a doctor she met when she was a young woman, and of his death, and how her grief must have resulted in the ten year pause in her writing, but this causality cannot be proven. That she did not write for some time he sees as evidence of deep feeling. But the truth is we cannot be sure of the causes of her silence from 1798 to 1808--disappointments certainly were the cause, but of what kind no one is sure. Some say love, some say literary discouragement--the truth probably lies in between. There simply is no clear evidence of her deep attachments, although her sister said that the doctor and Jane had been romantically involved (694).

The writer continues to say that Jane Austen loved children (698), a statement repeated in criticism of her many times, and not apparently a true one (Halperin 128). But in saying she did feel deeply, the reviewer was correct. Anne Elliot, in Persuasion, shows the author's capacity for

deep feeling, in the lines Anne speaks to Captain Harville, in which the appearance of her deep feelings are surely obvious:

I hope I do justice to all that is felt by you, and by those who resemble you. God forbid that I should undervalue the warm and faithful feelings of any of my fellow-creatures. I should deserve utter contempt if I dared to suppose that true attachment and constancy were known only by woman. No, I believe you capable of every thing great and good in your married lives. I believe you equal to every important exertion, and to every domestic forbearance, so long as--if I may be allowed the expression, so long as you have an object. I mean, while the woman you love lives, and lives for you. All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone. ("Miss Austen" 696)

Because Anne Elliot could say this the reviewer believes Jane Austen must have felt the feelings expressed in them, and this seems believable. In closing he regrets that

Austen and her heroines have been seen as prudish and hard, and blames the family for allowing this harsh outline of the author to come about (697).

T. E. Kebbel's article, in an 1885 issue of Living Age (vol. 164), is one of the most valuable on Jane Austen. In it he claims that she was no moralist (683). This is true, and brings out a point often missed by those who see the moral messages as her primary aim. The morality in her works is a result of her artistic purpose, which was, as he said, to take society as she found it (683).

Kebbel sees her limitations on her subject as an expression of her aim; the choice to depict only the middle and upper classes of English society was an artistic one. This view places Kebbel in that group of reviewers who admire Austen for limiting her scope and being able to do what she did with such a limited fraction of society. He points out that better material for fiction writing could be found among the very poor or the very rich, and that comfort--the kind found in the lives of her characters--does not lend itself to the imagination. For her creation with such raw material Kebbel thinks homage is owed her (684).

He acknowledges writers who had called her wit "insipid" (680), and redefined her wit as "rather delicate than rich" (680). He reminds the reader of her genius, and expresses an awareness of what had been her literary fate in the nineteenth century:

it was not till the flood of enthusiasm excited by the great feudal and medieval renaissance had begun to settle down that Jane Austen's characters reappeared, so to speak, above the waters, and assumed their natural place in the literary world. (682)

Kebbel understood her art and valued it appropriately. He also understood how people outside of England would react to her novels, and expressed it when he said, "Scott wrote for the world, while Miss Austen could hardly be appreciated by anyone not thoroughly English" (685). America had little interest in the society Austen depicted, at least not in the beginning or middle of the nineteenth century. Her society was rigid, and stood for much which American forefathers had criticized, and sought to escape by moving to America. Not until the end of the century did the age accept a return in ideology to classical restraint, and some of the values which an Austen novel taught.

Lippincott's Magazine published an article on Jane Austen, by Agnes Repplier in 1891. In it she portrays Austen as a charming old maid who did not experience any great pain in her life, or loss of love (393). Repplier discounts the story of Tom Lefroy as one of Austen's romances, and believes the novelist's only romance was with a doctor who was killed shortly after the two met (392).

According to Cassandra Austen, the doctor was Jane's only romance (393).

The article in Living Age in 1892 viewed Austen's novels as moral, instructing unobtrusively, as fiction should ("Jane Austen" 674). The "cheerful discharge of duty" (680) is what this writer thought Austen taught, and for that reason he found no fault with her for leaving out direct religious utterance (680). While absence of piety in her works had caused some readers to question her devotion to God, the reviewer discounted such doubts. Austen's novels seemed to him wholesome and refreshing, totally unlike the sensational novels that he called "lurid tales," that often depicted "squalor" (674), a subject he was tired of reading about.

He compared Austen to Mitford and Edgeworth, as Repplier had done in "Three Famous Old Maids," in 1891. But he found more fault with Edgeworth and Mitford than did Repplier. He saw Edgeworth as too didactic, and Mitford as too sentimental (674). Austen was the median--exhibiting appropriate morality and pure feeling. Her comic genius was not for humor, as he said Scott's was (675). He believed Scott felt a kinship even with the fools in the world, but Jane Austen did not (675). Her genius was for satire.

The "foundress of psychological analysis" is what one other critic had called her near the turn of the century (676), but the writer of this article qualified her claim.

He said it was the Americans who were the primary exponents of psychological analysis, and that it was accomplished in fiction, usually through discourse on the characters, rather than through dramatic presentations of them, as Jane Austen created. Despite the difference in technique, the title still seems appropriate.

The title of the review appearing in an issue of *Dial* (1892) revealed the writer's opinion of Jane Austen. "A Fortunate Old Author" is what he called her, as if the belated fame her novels won for her were due to luck, rather than the enduring power of her art. The reviewer did not understand her growing critical acclaim, since her novels were "devoid of vivid action and even vivid emotion" (342). He noted her omission of "humble life" and scenery as striking (344).

On the positive side, he credited Austen with her humor, which he called "spontaneous" and "placid" (343); however, this definition does not seem to capture her satirical frame of mind. He thought her range was narrow, though her vision was not (343). Strikingly, he noticed how little her family truly appreciated her work, hardly daring to rank her with Edgeworth (342). And this same observation is made in the same year by Agnes Repplier, in the Critic, when she commented on Austen's family lacking recognition of the artist among them. Repplier wrote: "She did not even--be it recorded with respect--exact the smallest tribute of

praise or deference from her family" (514). This singular aspect of Austen's family interaction accounts, in part, for her reticence as a writer, as her only frame of reference was her family.

Oscar Fay Adams, in New England Magazine (1893), finds Jane Austen's subjects limited primarily by how little the author herself traveled (595). In his article, entitled, "In the Footsteps of Jane Austen," he takes a sentimental trip to the places Austen and her characters had visited, and includes photographs for the readers' reference.

In 1893, another tribute to Austen and the life she depicted appeared in Eclectic Magazine. Alfred Cochrane was the author of a poem, written in quatrains, and dedicated to Jane Austen. The poem's view of her time was fond and nostalgic, seeing people of her age as simpler, and the scenery as beautiful and calm. Cochrane expressed exasperation with the "perils" found in "modern tales" and with social reform and moral "schemes." The classicism of Austen appealed to the reader tired of romantic and moralistic literature (653).

In a comparison of Jane Austen and Susan Edmonstone Ferrier, published in an 1893 issue of Atlantic Monthly, the reviewer believes Miss Ferrier deserved more fame. He compares her fame to Jane Austen's and wonders why Ferrier had been neglected.

Susan Edmonstone Ferrier wrote caricature portraits of

people she knew and placed them in her novels. The reviewer admires her humorous distortions; it was probably her reliance on these that made her stories popular during her lifetime, but not much after. In comparing authors he implies that Austen's books are dull because they are realistic, and because she does not use real people whom she knows, in her novels. He categorizes several relatively contemporary novelists: placing Dickens, Smollet, and Ferrier in a group that misrepresents life humorously, a group he called "abnormal" ("Miss Austen and Miss Ferrier" 846). Thackeray, Fielding, and Austen represent life humorously, and he calls them "normal" (846).

Austen's popularity appeared as a known fact at this time, as he says, "England and America are vying with each other in new editions, that embrace tentative and fragmentary pieces as well as the six novels known to fame" (836). He is one of the critics who is baffled at the rising fame of the "normal" writer, whom he sees as uninteresting.

Replier's earlier article, in Living Age in 1898, shows that Replier did not value Austen as highly as she valued Scott. She defines Austen as a "miniaturist" (215), and with that definition comes the negative label of narrowness. Replier also thinks Austen borders on being a caricaturist, a label that does not fit. Another estimation Replier makes of Austen is that her gift as a writer is for

humor (216), whereas it seems that Austen's true talent is for satire, not for the embracing warmth of humor. While little of what Repplier said reveals a view of Austen that fits the author, her opinions were probably shared by many of Austen's readers.

CHAPTER VII

JANE AUSTEN'S OBSCURITY

One reviewer of Jane Austen's novels accounts for her courting obscurity by pointing to her position within the family ("Miss Austen and Miss Mitford" 558-69). The distance which Halperin implies that she felt from her mother possibly resulted from envy of the attention her siblings received, especially her brothers. The reviewer from Living Age says that

Jane Austen grew up to womanhood in a gentle obscurity, one of many--her individual existence lost in the more noisy claims of the brothers, whose way in the world has to be the subject of so much thought. (558)

Whereas this reviewer suggests that Jane was happy in her family life, or at least reconciled to her position there, Halperin suggests that her obscurity was not gentle. He accounts for the family's over-rosy depiction of the author at the time of her death, and their sluggishness in divulging details of Jane Austen's life, as motivated by a wish to keep the negative aspects of her personality a secret (54). She did not exhibit the love for humanity that

she professed; Halperin points to instances where she declined to help her relatives in crises, particularly her brother and his children at the time of his wife's death (166-167). Cassandra, her sister, was more available than Jane on more than one occasion of need. Halperin also calls attention to Jane's dislike of the noisiness of children, a circumstance she had to tolerate when visiting some of her relatives (227). The family's benign characterization of Jane Austen and their secrecy at her death was motivated by their desire for privacy, and also contributed to her lack of popularity.

After her death, her brother Henry wrote a biographical notice which appeared with the publication of Northanger Abbey and Persuasion in 1818. This notice was reprinted by American magazines more than once. Reviewers at that time occasionally commented on how little was known about the author, and the Austen family did not give the public much to digest. Cassandra, Jane Austen's sister, destroyed more letters than she preserved (Halperin 190). There are no letters from May 1801 to September 1804, possibly a time of much distress for Jane and her sister (132), and the letters which Cassandra did preserve were not published till 1932. Also, no biography of Jane Austen appeared until her nephew, James Austen-Leigh, published his Memoir of Jane Austen in 1870. His work includes a few letters, but no collected edition of her letters appeared until 1884, when Edward

Knatchbull Hugesson edited one. The letters came into his possession at the death of his mother, Fanny Knight, who was Jane Austen's favorite niece (58). The fullest edition of letters was edited by R. W. Chapman in 1932. These include Jane Austen's letters to her sister Cassandra and others.

In 1870, a reviewer in America remarks that the Austen family declined to publish her earliest works from her preparatory period, and he says that it would not be fair to the author, that it might damage her reputation (Harper's 41: 230). For whatever reasons, the family did not encourage public interest in Jane Austen, until over fifty years after her death.

Before 1870, the only words from the family on Jane Austen were laudatory, which led her biographer, John Halperin, to become curious, given how little actual information they provided concerning her. Their reticence certainly added to the obscurity surrounding her person and her novels in early nineteenth-century America, but there were other larger reasons for the American's cool reception of Austen.

From 1800 to 1900 Jane Austen's novels grew in popularity and in critical acclaim, but for the first fifty years of the century they were hardly recognized, the reason being the popularity of romantic literature, and that of sentimental, and moralistic fiction. The bias of Americans against English society was another influencing factor in

Austen's unpopularity, from 1800 to 1850.

From mid-century to the publication of James Edward Austen-Leigh's Memoir in 1870, criticism shows a growing esteem for the power of characterization and structuring of plot that Austen's novels exhibit, as against the romantic values earlier critics judge her fiction by. The focusing of theory of criticism for fiction is responsible for the reestimation of Austen's novels. After the publication of the Memoir (1870), until the publication of the Bentley edition of Austen's works (1882), critics reassess Austen's position among novelists, and their heightened appreciation of her art reflects the forming of critical theory of fiction--which places more value on the author's exclusion of the extraneous.

From 1882, when Austen's popularity caused Bentley and the Roberts Brothers to publish editions which included fragments, until 1900, criticism showed that Austen was at the peak of her popularity in the century. She was also becoming a controversial figure. Some saw her as moral, some did not. Some thought her hard and shallow, some believed she was loving and kind. With regard to the novels, there were those who thought her plots were dull and that she lacked imagination.

These critics thought she was hardly as great a writer as Scott. Others saw her art as impeccable in having achieved the means to the desired end, and her dramatic

portrayal of human character as the work of a comic genius. The limitation of her subject was, for them, a secondary consideration, and seen as an artistic choice, which did not lessen her worth as a great writer. For these critics Austen's rising fame was seen as an inevitable revaluation long overdue.

American society appreciated romantic, sentimental, and moralistic literature, in the early 1800s. Not until the latter half of the century did the public return to the restrained temperament reminiscent of Austen's age. As these elements influenced her fame so did her decision to conceal her authorship. Her desire to lead such a quiet and private life contributed to the lack of recognition of her accomplishment in the half-century following her death.

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