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Plot Devices in Jane Austen's Novels:

Sense and Sensibility

Pride and Prejudice

and

Persuasion

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JANE ELIZABETH BROOKER

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ABSTRACT

This thesis evaluates various plot devices occurring in three novels by Jane Austen. The novels studied are Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice (1813), and Persuasion (1818). I have chosen novels from different periods of Jane Austen's career as a novelist. One of the novels, Pride and Prejudice is regarded as having a virtually flawless plot, while both Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion are considered to have major plot flaws.

To evaluate Jane Austen's use of plot devices, I have isolated the main devices in each novel. Each chapter of the thesis is devoted to one type of plot device. The plot devices analysed come under the headings of Journeys and Character Positioning, Revelations, Elopements, Illnesses, Alternative Suitors, Minor Characters, and Conclusion. At the end of each chapter I have summarised the main points and compared the devices discussed in the chapter. The conclusion is divided into three parts, dealing separately with the three novels.

In my analysis of plot devices I have looked particularly for consistency of characterisation, and for plausible events. As I expected, Pride and Prejudice has a very carefully constructed plot. Chance and coincidence play their parts, and Jane Austen does not try to disguise this. In Pride and Prejudice Jane Austen displays her ability to vary the devices used to bring Darcy and Elizabeth together, using holidays, illnesses and social gatherings. Furthermore, Elizabeth and Darcy are not always surrounded by the same characters. As the settings and characters change, so too do the reactions of Elizabeth and Darcy towards each other. Each incident is well realised and consistent with the characters' personalities.

Sense and Sensibility has one major plot flaw. The subplot concerning Marianne, Willoughby and Colonel Brandon is far

from perfect, and despite some mitigating circumstances (such as the obvious care expended on the description of Marianne's illness) it remains unsatisfactory. However, the novel does not deserve to be disregarded, as some of the plot devices are very well written (and on a par with similar ones found in the other novels studied).

Persuasion is also a flawed novel. The revelation made by Mrs Smith has received harsh criticism, yet it plays a very minor role in the plot of the novel, and is unfairly regarded as a clumsy piece of deus ex machina. The least satisfactory part of the plot concerns the elopement of Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay at the end of the novel, and it seems that Jane Austen has sacrificed characterisation to achieve a moral patterning of marriages. There are, however, some very fine plot devices in Persuasion, particularly the renting of Kellynch and the letter from Wentworth to Anne.

In conclusion, it seems that Jane Austen is generally very careful to create events which are plausible (even if fortuitous). On the occasions where some character consistency has been sacrificed, Jane Austen has done so for the sake of the moral pattern. This is not always acceptable, particularly in Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion. However, it does not often occur, and the plots of all three novels are remarkably well constructed.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis evaluates devices of plot occurring in three novels by Jane Austen - Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice and Persuasion.

I have chosen one novel (Pride and Prejudice) which is regarded as having an almost flawless plot. The two other novels are widely held to have major flaws in their plots, thus providing an interesting contrast with Pride and Prejudice. Furthermore, the novels studied come from three different periods of Jane Austen's career as a novelist. Sense and Sensibility, published in 1811, is an early novel. Although Pride and Prejudice is published only two years later in 1813, it is a more mature work. Persuasion, published posthumously in 1818, is Jane Austen's last completed novel.

My first task was to locate the various plot devices, determining how they occurred and recurred through the novels studied. I then evaluated Jane Austen's use of those plot devices drawing comparisons between the three novels, and seeing how well the devices were employed. As it is difficult to establish the exact dates of writing, I have not tried to measure Jane Austen's development as a writer by taking Sense and Sensibility as a starting point, and Persuasion as her ultimate achievement. Such an examination is not in the scope of this thesis.

In my analysis of Jane Austen's plot devices I have looked for consistent characterisation and plausible occurrences. In each chapter, similar plot devices have been examined and, after analysing each one separately, I have compared devices of the same type to ascertain which are the most successful and why.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction and acknowledgements	iv
Chapter One - Journeys and Character Positioning ...	1
Chapter Two - Revelations	18
Chapter Three - Elopements	45
Chapter Four - Illnesses	60
Chapter Five - Alternative Suitors	76
Chapter Six - Minor Characters	83
Chapter Seven - Conclusion	93
Footnotes	105
Bibliography	108

CHAPTER ONE: JOURNEYS AND CHARACTER POSITIONING

1. The renting of Kellynch-hall to Admiral Croft -
Persuasion

The renting of Kellynch-hall to Admiral Croft is the first in a chain of events leading finally to the reunion of Anne Elliot and Captain Frederick Wentworth. It is necessary for Jane Austen to bring Wentworth back into Anne's proximity, and this is accomplished through the Crofts and their tenancy of Kellynch, the ancestral home of Anne Elliot's family.

Persuasion opens with a description of Sir Walter Elliot and the family situation. Jane Austen states that "vanity was the beginning and end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation (P,p.36). Towards the end of the chapter we learn that Sir Walter is "growing distressed for money . . . the Kellynch property was good, but not equal to Sir Walter's apprehension of the state required in its possessor . . . It had not been possible for him to spend less; he had done nothing but what Sir Walter Elliot was imperiously called on to do" (P,p.40). Both Sir Walter and his eldest daughter (mistress of the household since her mother's death some thirteen years earlier) are highly conscious of the dignity and style to be maintained by a baronet of Sir Walter's rank. When plans for stringent retrenchment are proposed by Lady Russell (acting on Anne's sensible advice) they are strongly scorned. As the baronet says "To live no longer with the decencies even of a private gentleman! No, he would sooner quit Kellynch-hall at once, than remain in it on such disgraceful terms" (P,p.44). From this declaration it is but a short step to the removal of the Elliot family from Kellynch. Sir Walter and Elizabeth are to establish a house in Bath, where Anne will join them in a few month's time, when she accompanies Lady Russell on her annual sojourn there. Meanwhile, Anne (who loathes Bath)

is to remain in the Kellynch neighbourhood, staying with both Lady Russell and with her sister Mary at Uppercross (a short distance away).

Given the description of Sir Walter's character in the opening chapters of Persuasion, it comes as no surprise to learn that he should have grossly overspent. It is also in keeping with his self-esteem that he should refuse to adopt the sensible retrenchment proposed by Anne. The only logical step is for the Elliot family to vacate Kellynch, and that is determined upon in Chapter 2. As W A Craik states in her discussion of Persuasion "Sir Walter's first and chief function is to be the cause of leaving, but he seems to act in his own character, rather than have to be given that character in order to comply with the story"¹ Jane Austen has accounted well for the Elliot's departure from Kellynch-hall. By having them remove to Bath, she is also preparing for the final chapters of the novel. Bath is a popular tourist resort, which explains why so many characters in the novel meet up there.

Anne's exclusion from the plans made by Sir Walter and Elizabeth is important to the plot of Persuasion in that Anne is able to remain in the district, and meet up again with Wentworth. The removal to Bath of Sir Walter and Elizabeth has further significance. With Anne's disapproving family absent, there could be no objection to a renewal of the relationship between Anne and Wentworth. At Uppercross the only real barrier between the couple is Wentworth himself, as he later admits (P,p.244). Once Wentworth has realised the folly of his pride and anger, he is worthy of Anne, and the major obstacle between them has been removed. However, if Anne's family had been present in the early chapters of Persuasion, Anne's contact with Wentworth would have been further reduced. Jane Austen needed to have Sir Walter and his eldest daughter in one place and Anne in another. She uses the characters of both Elizabeth and Sir Walter (who evince no desire to have Anne's

company in Bath) to achieve this, and to emphasise that the chief obstacle separating the couple is Wentworth himself.

Kellynch is rented to Admiral Croft and his wife Sophy, the latter being a sister of Anne's former love Frederick Wentworth. That the Crofts should occupy Kellynch-hall is of prime importance to the plot of Persuasion as it allows Jane Austen to bring Wentworth and Anne into communication again. How plausible is it that Admiral Croft should be the tenant of Kellynch? The idea of a naval man renting the estate is first mooted by Sir Walter's agent Mr Shepherd who remarks to Sir Walter "that the present juncture is much in our favour. This peace will be turning all our rich Navy Officers ashore. They will all be wanting a home . . . If a rich Admiral were to come our way" (P,p.47). The fact that Mr Shepherd should mention a "rich admiral" is not simply coincidental, for we learn later that "he had received a hint of the admiral from a London correspondent" (P,p.50).

Admiral Croft has a reason for wanting to rent a home in the county of Somerset, as Jane Austen tells us that he was (conveniently) born there. The Admiral is described by Mr Shepherd (who meets him at a court session in the nearby town) as "being of a gentleman's family" (P,p.51). Jane Austen informs us that he "has acquired a very handsome fortune" (P,p.50), no doubt acquired as the spoils of war. Mr Shepherd's reference to the "peace" explains why the Crofts are looking for a suitable home, and it also explains why a young man like Wentworth is able to spend so much time with them.

It does not seem improbable that a naval commander should rent Kellynch. W A Craik (in her book Jane Austen in her time) states that "prize money obtained by capturing enemy vessels . . . may be considerable".² This would explain the wealth of both Admiral Croft and his brother-in-law Captain Wentworth. Mrs Craik also says that "the navy enjoyed a high reputation".³ Jane Austen's use of the navy in

Persuasion is important thematically. David Monaghan states that "By the time she wrote Persuasion, Jane Austen seems to have lost faith in the gentry . . . the future seems to lie in the hands of the navy".⁴ While it is difficult to speculate too deeply about any new social vision of Jane Austen's, the navy is certainly portrayed favourably in Persuasion. All the naval characters are "gentlemen" and good-hearted (the Admiral being a better landlord than Sir Walter, p.141). The fact that the navy allowed men to rise "by personal effort" also reveals the intrinsic worth of men such as Wentworth (despite the not inconsiderable luck he has experienced in the course of his career). The Crofts perform another useful role in Persuasion in that they represent what Anne and Wentworth could have been had they married eight years earlier (providing a contrast to Mrs Smith and her ill-fated early marriage). Mrs Croft also reassures us that "women may be as comfortable on board (ship), as in the best house in England" (P,p.93), confirming that Anne's future life with Wentworth will be comfortable and happy.

Andrew H Wright cites the renting of Kellynch to Admiral Croft (the husband of Wentworth's sister) as the first of "a set of very fortunate (and fortuitous) circumstances".⁵ The fact that the Crofts and Wentworth are related is an aspect of the plot which must be accepted. However, Jane Austen has prepared very carefully for the device of placing Anne and Wentworth in the same vicinity. The need to rent Kellynch can be fully explained by the character of Sir Walter Elliot and, to a lesser extent, by that of his eldest daughter Elizabeth. That Sir Walter's tenant should be a gentleman from the Royal Navy is not too surprising, given that the navy was proving a respectable profession (for its officers, at any rate) allowing great potential for individual advancement. Jane Austen explains the renting of Kellynch-hall more than adequately. She also prepares for Persuasion's examination of attitudes towards love and marriage, and for the novel's focus on the navy. It is

"fortuitous" that Kellynch should have to be let, and to Admiral Croft, but perfectly acceptable all the same, and neatly contrived.

2. Guests at Barton Park - Lucy and Anne Steel in Sense and Sensibility

Much of the action in Sense and Sensibility (as regards the Elinor/Edward Ferrars plot) stems from the arrival of the Steele sisters at Barton Park. In Chapter 21, after the departure of the Palmers, Sir John Middleton and his mother-in-law Mrs Jennings meet the two women and promptly invite them to stay. The greatest coincidence in the whole episode is that Sir John and Mrs Jennings should meet up with the Steeles in Exeter. On receipt of the invitation from Sir John, Jane Austen says that "their engagements at Exeter instantly gave way before such an invitation" (SS, p.141). It becomes clear later on in the novel that the sisters are glad to stay with any of their acquaintances who should desire their company. Anne Steele tells Elinor that if "Mrs Jennings should want company, I am sure we should be very glad to come and stay with her for as long as she likes. I suppose Lady Middleton won't ask us any more this bout" (SS, p.275). The Steeles also receive an invitation to stay with the John Dashwoods in London which is, predictably, eagerly accepted (Chapter 36).

The Miss Steeles (as Jane Austen refers to them) are invited to Barton Park on the strength of their being related to Mrs Jennings (and therefore, to Lady Middleton). The girls are described by Sir John as being his wife's cousins (p. 142), although the relationship is not (and does not need to be) made more specific. That the Steeles are related to the vulgar Mrs Jennings is not at all inconceivable. Mrs Jennings is described as a "good-humoured, merry, fat, elderly woman, who talked a great deal, seemed very happy, and rather vulgar" (SS, p.66). Anne Steele quickly reveals her own vulgarity in her first conversation with the Dashwood sisters and, although Lucy possesses more beauty and shrewdness than her sister, "Elinor was not blinded . . . to her real want of elegance and artlessness" (SS, p.146).

Sir John's hasty and warm invitation to the Steeles can be easily explained. From our initial meeting with him in Chapter 6, it is clear that Sir John Middleton is an hospitable man. In the following chapter Jane Austen says that "continual engagements at home and abroad, however, supplied all the deficiencies of nature and education; (and) supported the good spirits of Sir John" (SS,p.65). Sir John loves company and is delighted to meet relatives whom he can invite to Barton Park, especially as the Palmers have returned home after a very short stay with the Middletons.

It is essential to the plot of Sense and Sensibility that Anne and Lucy should stay at Barton Park. This situation is carefully contrived by Jane Austen and, apart from the coincidence of the meeting between Sir John, Mrs Jennings and the Steeles, it can be explained by the character traits of Sir John and the Steele sisters.

3. The meeting of Elizabeth and Darcy at Hunsford - Pride and Prejudice

Chapter 27 of Pride and Prejudice takes Elizabeth Bennet on the first leg of her journey to Hunsford, where she is to stay with her friend Charlotte, now the wife of Elizabeth's foolish cousin Mr Collins. The visit is crucial to the plot, principally because Darcy arrives in the neighbourhood while Elizabeth is still there. The Parsonage is the scene of Darcy's first proposal, ungracious and ill-fated. From Darcy, Elizabeth learns the truth about his actions, about Wickham and, most importantly, about herself. Clearly, the meeting of the hero and heroine at this stage has important plot ramifications.

As I have already mentioned, Elizabeth's main reason for journeying to Hunsford is to see Charlotte Lucas. Elizabeth and Charlotte were neighbours and close friends before Charlotte's marriage to Mr Collins, and although Elizabeth is dismayed at Charlotte's extremely practical attitude towards marriage and feels that their relationship cannot retain its closeness, she is still happy enough to see her old friend. The visit is anticipated in Chapter 26 when Charlotte pays her final visit to the Bennets, on the day prior to her marriage. Charlotte tells Elizabeth that her father and sister are to visit Hunsford in March and she invites Elizabeth to come with them. "Elizabeth could not refuse, though she foresaw little pleasure in the visit" (PP,p.183). However, when March finally arrives, Elizabeth finds that she is rather more keen to accompany the Lucases. With Jane away from home she had little to induce her to remain at Longbourn. The trip to Hunsford was also to be made via London, giving Elizabeth the chance to see her sister and aunt and uncle. Jane Austen has accounted for Elizabeth's visit to the Hunsford parish most plausibly.

Elizabeth is at Hunsford two weeks before Darcy arrives to stay with his aunt at Rosings. Although Jane Austen states

that "Elizabeth had heard soon after her arrival, that Mr Darcy was expected there in the course of a few weeks" (PP, p.203), this is the first time that the fact is made known to the reader. It is quite plausible that Darcy should pay his respects to his aunt, and more than likely that Darcy should be encouraged by his aunt, Lady Catherine, to stay at Rosings. Wickham informs Elizabeth in Chapter 16 that Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Darcy's mother Lady Anne were sisters and he adds that "it is believed that she (Miss de Bourgh) and her cousin will unite the two estates" (PP,p. 126). Before Darcy's arrival (in Chapter 30) Elizabeth notes that Lady Catherine "talked of his coming with the greatest satisfaction, (and) spoke of him in terms of the highest admiration" (PP,p.204). Jane Austen has provided us with explanations for both visits, and the former especially has been well prepared for. Darcy's visit to Rosings is as plausible as Elizabeth's to Hunsford, but it is interesting to note that although Jane Austen accounts adequately for it, she does not find it necessary to furnish in advance several reasons for Darcy's visit. Had the reader been informed of Darcy's stay before Elizabeth had arrived at Hunsford, much of the interest and surprise of the plot would have been removed.

4. The surprise meeting of Elizabeth and Darcy at Pemberley
 - Pride and Prejudice

When Elizabeth Bennet stays overnight in London on the way to Hunsford, her aunt Mrs Gardiner invites Elizabeth to accompany them on a summer holiday "perhaps to the Lakes" (PP,p.190). Elizabeth is most enthusiastic in her acceptance. With hindsight, we know that Jane Austen's intention was to have the Gardiners and their niece meet Darcy at Pemberley, as eventually happens in Chapter 43. However, instead of having a visit to Derbyshire (and Pemberley) as the object of the Gardiners' tour, Jane Austen acts in a more subtle, less direct way. Elizabeth (and the reader) know nothing of a change in plans until shortly before the tour is due to commence. In Chapter 42 Elizabeth receives a letter from Mrs Gardiner "which at once delayed its (the tour's) commencement and curtailed its extent (PP,p.264). The reason given for the alteration in plans is Mr Gardiner's being "prevented by business" (PP,p.264) from being away for more than a month. Mr Gardiner's business affairs have been mentioned earlier in Pride and Prejudice. In Chapter 7, Mrs Bennet is described as having (among other things) "a brother settled in London in a respectable line of trade" (PP,p.75). The Gardiners first appear in Chapter 25 when they arrive to spend Christmas with the Bennets. Jane Austen writes that "the Netherfield ladies would have had difficulty in believing that a man who lived by trade, and within view of his own warehouses, could have been so well bred and agreeable" (PP,p.177). It is revealed in the same chapter that the Gardiners live in unfashionable Gracechurch Street, but again the exact nature of Mr Gardiner's business remains undisclosed. That Mr Gardiner is conscientious in his business affairs is evidenced by a remark of Lydia's, as she is telling a reluctant Elizabeth about her wedding - "just as the carriage came to the door, my uncle was called away upon business to that horrid man Mr Stone. And then, you know, when once they get together, there is no end of it" (PP,p.332). It seems sensible therefore, to accept Mr Gardiner's business

as a valid reason for the change in plans regarding the proposed visit to the Lake Country.

In the time that now remains to them, the Gardiners decide "to go no farther northward than Derbyshire" (PP,p.264), one of the reasons being that Mrs Gardiner has a strong attachment to that county. Mrs Gardiner's former residency in Derbyshire has also been made known to us before the fact assumes any degree of importance to the plot, such is the care with which Jane Austen customarily writes. When the Gardiners are staying at Longbourn in Chapter 25, they are introduced to Wickham who pleases Mrs Gardiner by giving her "fresher intelligence of her former friends than she had been in the way of procuring" (PP,p.180). It is stated on the same page that Mrs Gardiner had lived for some while in the part of Derbyshire where Wickham had also resided (near Pemberley, Darcy's home).

Once in Derbyshire the Gardiners eventually travel to Lambton, the small town where Mrs Gardiner once lived and "where she had lately learned that some acquaintances still remained" (PP,p.265). We are then told that although Pemberley is not on the road which they will be taking, it is not "more than a mile or two" (PP,p.265) away from the road. It seems that Pemberley is one of the principal estates in the area, and both Mrs Gardiner and her husband are keen to visit it. Elizabeth's reluctance to go there is made obvious by Jane Austen. She describes Elizabeth as being "distressed. She felt she had no business at Pemberley and was obliged to assume a disinclination for seeing it. She must own that she was tired of great houses; after going over so many" (PP,p.266). One of the main reasons for Elizabeth's reluctance to go there is given a couple of paragraphs later - "the possibility of meeting Mr Darcy, while viewing the place, instantly occurred. It would be dreadful!" (PP,p.266). The excuse offered by Elizabeth is interesting in that it provides us with a good explanation for the Gardiners' wish to see Pemberley. Clearly they have

visited many stately homes while touring, and Pemberley is reputed to be a fine estate (PP,p.84, p.125, p.180). Once Elizabeth ascertains that the Darcy family are not in residence at Pemberley, she is greatly relieved and her natural curiosity to see the estate reasserts itself. However, I feel that if Derbyshire (and Pemberley) had been the destination of the tour from the start, Elizabeth would have been reluctant to accompany the Gardiners, hence the invention of a change in plans.

Yet another change of plans occurs in Pride and Prejudice, when Darcy returns to Pemberley earlier than anticipated. Elizabeth had already ascertained that the family were absent from Pemberley, before consenting to accompany her aunt and uncle on a visit there. Once at Pemberley, she wishes to ask Darcy's housekeeper whether he is indeed absent "but had not the courage for it" (PP,p.268). The question is eventually asked by Mr Gardiner and the three visitors hear that Darcy and his friends are expected the very next day. "How rejoiced was Elizabeth that their own journey had not . . . been delayed a day" (PP,p.268). Secure in the knowledge that she will not meet Darcy while inspecting his house, Elizabeth seems to enjoy looking through the rooms, listening eagerly to the praise Mrs Reynolds bestows on her master. Elizabeth has had leisure to reflect on the situation between herself and Darcy (and to feel "a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance" - PP,p.272), and therefore the sudden meeting between the two comes as a great shock to her.

The meeting at Pemberley is of vital importance to the plot. Darcy has an opportunity to display his courteous manners and good will, both towards Elizabeth and to her relations (despite their close connections with trade). Elizabeth is continually having to modify her harsh judgment of Darcy, and at Pemberley she sees him (and hears of him) in yet another light. Clearly the plot has been organised here so

that the hero and heroine encounter each other. Has the situation been engineered smoothly and plausibly by Jane Austen? Darcy's premature return to Pemberley is explained by that gentleman himself on p.276 (Chapter 43), in answer to a remark from Elizabeth. He told Elizabeth that "business with his steward had occasioned his coming forward a few hours before the rest of the party with whom he had been travelling". It is quite conceivable that Darcy should have business with his steward, and that he should travel on ahead of his friends so that it might be completed. His housekeeper, Mrs Reynolds, represents him as taking a thorough interest in his estate, and she describes him as "the best landlord, and the best master . . . there is not one of his tenants or servants but what will give him a good name" (PP,p.270-271). Miss Bingley also testifies to Darcy's conscientiousness in matters regarding Pemberley when she refers to the library at Pemberley and his part in adding substantially to the collection (PP,p.83). Darcy's coming forward a day early can be easily explained. It is very likely that he would not want business affairs to remove him from the company of his sister and his guests, as Mrs Reynolds shows him to be a devoted brother (PP,p.271).

As I have already noted, the rerouting and rescheduling of the proposed Lake Districts tour and the early return of Darcy to his estate are of crucial importance to the plot of the novel. Joel Weinsheimer, in an article on Pride and Prejudice, states that these events are "fortuitous" although he concedes that Jane Austen "assigns each (incident) a cause".⁶ I believe that the causes assigned by the author are both plausible and carefully prepared for. The reasons for the change in holiday plans are prepared for before they are needed (as in the references to Mr Gardiner's business, and to Mrs Gardiner having formerly resided in Derbyshire). Darcy's premature return to Pemberley can be explained by his own nature (his conscientious sense of duty towards the Pemberley estate). The reader is aware of the fortuitousness of Darcy and Elizabeth meeting at Pemberley

and of the sequence of events making it likely that they should meet. The final effect of the incident is such that the mechanics of the plot are virtually forgotten as the reader becomes more absorbed in Elizabeth's and Darcy's subsequent behaviour. However, if the plot devices employed by Jane Austen in this section of Pride and Prejudice are analysed closely, it is clear that the author has carefully created events which are within the bounds of probability, without being explained in too much depth. Although we can assign reasons for the chance occurrences in this part of Pride and Prejudice, at no stage does Jane Austen try to mask the fortuitous nature of these happenings. Chance has dictated that Elizabeth and Darcy should meet at Pemberley, but they are in control of their behaviour and can determine their reactions towards each other. That they should act civilly (considering the bitterness of their last encounter) marks another turning point in Pride and Prejudice. As so often happens in Jane Austen's novels, the plot is inextricably linked with other facets of the novel.

It is necessary for Jane Austen to position the characters in her novels so that they can interact with each other. In both Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice she employs chance meetings between various characters, which ultimately advance the plots of those novels. The renting of Kellynch to Admiral Croft is an example of character positioning in Persuasion when Jane Austen has to bring Wentworth back into Anne's life. In this case, the chance meeting is between Sir Walter Elliot's agent and Admiral Croft (although the Admiral's desire to rent a home is known to Mr Shepherd), leading fortuitously to the renting of Kellynch to relatives of Captain Wentworth.

Each of the four plot devices analysed in this chapter involves a journey. The Elliot household moves to Bath, leaving Anne behind. In Sense and Sensibility the Steele sisters do a good deal of travelling to visit acquaintances. Elizabeth Bennet, in Pride and Prejudice, travels away from home twice in the course of the novel, and unexpectedly meets Darcy on both occasions. These meetings give the couple an opportunity to react to each other without the encumbrance of Elizabeth's family. There are reasons for Elizabeth's journeys and they are prepared for before the two trips take place.

Each device used in this chapter can be partially explained by the personalities of the characters involved. In each instance Jane Austen has contrived an event which is within the bounds of probability, and which can be ascribed to the natures of those characters included. Mrs Craik's comment about Sir Walter Elliot (quoted in Section One) can also be applied to several other characters in Jane Austen's novels.

Two of the devices do not simply advance the plots of the novels in which they occur. Jane Austen has Kellynch-hall rented to Admiral Croft, who is both Wentworth's relative and a naval commander. There is, in Persuasion, a focus on the navy and all the members of that profession to whom we

are introduced are likeable and worthy gentlemen, who can be compared very favourably with the two Elliot males. As I have noted in Section One, the Crofts are used as an example of a happy early marriage, providing a standard against which Mrs Smith and Anne can be balanced. The themes of pride and prejudice are examined by Elizabeth when she meets Darcy at Hunsford. The episode leads to the revelation about Wickham, important to the plot and to the thematic concerns of Pride and Prejudice. It is at the Collinses' that Elizabeth gains self-knowledge.

Although each device can be explained and accounted for, Jane Austen does not completely disguise the coincidence inherent in each. In Persuasion the greatest coincidence is that Sir Walter's tenant should be the brother-in-law of Anne Elliot's former love. However, the need to rent Kellynch and the fact that the lessee is a naval man can both be fully explained. In Sense and Sensibility it is a coincidence that Sir John and Mrs Jennings should meet two of the latter's relations in Exeter, but quite acceptable. The two unexpected (and eventful) meetings between Darcy and Elizabeth in Pride and Prejudice are most fortuitous. However, there are always good reasons explaining why the two characters should be in the same place at the same time.

Jane Austen is obliged to employ various devices in her novels which enable characters to be positioned satisfactorily. She may also wish to achieve a variety of character groupings in the one novel. In Pride and Prejudice, for instance, the characters appearing with Elizabeth and Darcy change in each major scene, as in Ch.8-11, Ch.32-34, and Ch.43-45). The positioning can generally be attributed to the fact that the characters involved are on holiday (as happens in Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice). The Elliots' removal from Kellynch-hall is one of economic practicality, and is more effective than just having the family go on holiday, as it explains why the estate is not left vacant. Although chance and coincidence play their

part in each event, none of the devices used by Jane Austen is overly contrived or unconvincing, nor does she rely on using the same device in every novel.

CHAPTER TWO: REVELATIONS

1. Lucy Steele's revelation of her secret engagement to Edward Ferrars - Sense and Sensibility

The first major revelation which occurs in Sense and Sensibility is a private one - between Lucy Steele and Elinor Dashwood. Before the revelation of Lucy's secret engagement to Edward Ferrars can be made, several preconditions must exist. As I have explained in Chapter One, Section Two, Jane Austen has, through a set of plausible circumstances, established the Steele sisters as guests of the Middletons at Barton Park. She now has to engineer a situation whereby Lucy can confide her secret to Elinor.

Sir John Middleton and his mother-in-law Mrs Jennings can see that Marianne Dashwood and Willoughby are clearly attracted to each other, and this, no doubt, leads them to wonder if Elinor also has a "particular favourite" (SS,p.90). Sir John enjoys good natured raillery (SS,p.91) and Mrs Jennings is shown to be very fond of gossip and speculation (SS,p.69, p.95-95) and of getting "a good husband for every pretty girl" (SS,p.69). Margaret, the youngest of the sisters, responds to Mrs Jennings' probings by revealing that Elinor does indeed have a "favourite", and that his name begins with the letter F. About two weeks after the dinner party, Edward Ferrars arrives at Barton to stay with the Dashwoods. The very next day Sir John and Mrs Jennings visit Barton Cottage, coming to "take a survey" of the new arrival (SS,p.123). "With the assistance of his mother-in-law, Sir John was not long in discovering that the name of Ferrars began with an F. and this prepared a future mine of raillery against the devoted Elinor, which nothing but the newness of their acquaintance with Edward could have prevented from being immediately sprung" (SS,p.123-124). Once Edward leaves Barton, Sir John takes delight in teasing Elinor and the letter F. is the subject of so many jokes

from that quarter "that its character as the wittiest letter in the alphabet had been long established with Elinor" (SS, p.147).

The Steeles arrive at Barton in Chapter 21 and are quickly "acquainted with whatever he (Sir John) knew or supposed of his cousin's situations in the most delicate particulars" (SS, p.147). Sir John cannot resist revealing that the name of Elinor's young man is Ferrars, and the reaction from Anne Steele is surprising and immediate, as she informs the assembled company that she knows Edward Ferrars "very well" (SS, p.148). Her statement is swiftly modified by Lucy, but Elinor suspects that the Steeles do indeed know Edward rather well. Her suspicion is finally confirmed in Chapter 22, when Lucy manages to speak alone with Elinor, taking pleasure in confiding that she "may be very intimately connected" with the Ferrars family as she and Edward "have been engaged these four years" (SS, p.150-151).

The revelation has been gradually planned for by Jane Austen and stems from Sir John's and Mrs Jennings' love of raillery. For Lucy's confession to have its intended effect, Elinor must receive proof that Lucy is telling the truth. Jane Austen has given hints of a secret engagement in the preceding chapters, and once Lucy's secret is made known, Elinor (and the reader) have little difficulty in substantiating the veracity of Lucy's assertions. In evidence, Lucy enquires whether Elinor has heard Edward mention a Mr Pratt, Edward's tutor and Lucy's uncle. Elinor's answer is in the affirmative. Lucy also produces a miniature portrait of Edward which Elinor is obliged to admit is like him. Lucy also has on her person a letter written in Edward's hand. The other two proofs Lucy offers can be substantiated by the reader, as well as by Elinor. Lucy asks "did you not think him (Edward) dreadful low-spirited when he was at Barton? He was so miserable when he left us at Longstaple to go to you" (SS, p.154-155). Lucy adds that Edward had stayed a fortnight with them before travelling

on to Barton, and this accords with what Edward says upon his arrival at the Dashwoods' cottage (SS,p.113). Elinor remembers that Edward was in low spirits and that he mentioned virtually nothing about the friends with whom he had been staying. Elinor and Marianne have both found Edward rather reserved in the past, and the secret engagement explains his previously unaccountable behaviour. Finally, Lucy mentions a ring which Edward wears, containing an inset of plaited hair. The ring is first brought to our attention in Chapter 18, by Marianne. Edward is clearly embarrassed by her thoughtless questioning and says that the hair belongs to his sister Fanny. Neither Marianne or Elinor believe that the hair is Fanny's, and both feel that it must be Elinor's, "the only difference in their conclusions was, that what Marianne considered as a free gift from her sister, Elinor was conscious must have been procured by some theft or contrivance unknown to herself" (SS,p.123). For Elinor and the reader the truth of the engagement between Lucy Steele and Edward Ferrars cannot be denied.

Events which have happened before Lucy has the opportunity to acquaint Elinor with the truth are plausibly contrived and worked into the characters of Sir John, Mrs Jennings and even Edward himself. The proof required to confirm the revelation is supplied from two sources - things which Jane Austen has already mentioned prior to Chapter 21, and things which Lucy states and Elinor confirms. In supplying proof by two different means, Jane Austen avoids the charge of being overly scrupulous in providing evidence for the engagement (as only two of the five things have received prior mention). She also ensures that the engagement and its veracity are not simply 'proven' on the spur of the moment. Clues have been furnished by the author, and once Lucy's secret is made known, they assume full relevance and importance.

Why does Jane Austen go to all this trouble to have Lucy reveal the information? I believe that Elinor's being crossed

in love provides a comparison with Marianne's situation. Both sisters are unhappy, but they behave in quite different ways. Elinor suffers as badly as Marianne, but she is obliged to control her affliction. "Elinor . . . reflected that . . . its (some old Constantia wine of Mrs Jennings) healing powers on a disappointed heart might as reasonably be tried on herself as on her sister" (SS,p.208). Jane Austen seems to be indicating that Elinor's behaviour in this situation is admirable, especially when contrasted with Marianne's excessive sensibility and self-indulgent grief. Clearly, Elinor exemplifies "sense", but she is also deeply upset by the revelation that Edward is already engaged. Despite her unhappiness, she still acts with propriety and good sense, in contrast to Marianne, who has much to learn before the end of the novel.

2. The public revelation of Lucy's and Edward's engagement
- Sense and Sensibility

The public revelation of the engagement discussed in the previous section of this chapter comes in Chapter 37 of Sense and Sensibility. We learn of the news third hand - from Mrs Jennings who has heard it from Donavan, a London doctor who attends the households of both the John Dashwoods and the Palmers. It is Lucy's elder sister Anne who has broken the secret, a fact ironic in itself, as Lucy was in fear lest Anne should reveal too much during their stay at Barton Park (SS,p.154).

The public revelation of the betrothal is very important to the plot of Sense and Sensibility, and produces diverse effects. The first is to confirm us in our judgments of several minor characters - notably, the John Dashwoods, Mrs Ferrars and Mrs Jennings. John Dashwood, his wife and mother-in-law all betray their meanness and narrow-minded snobbery. Mrs Jennings proves that her heart is in the right place by supporting Edward against the condemnation of John Dashwood. She also displays a willingness to help the young couple (SS,p.261, p.269), unlike Edward's relatives, who are determined to disinherit him. Secondly, the revelation produces an interesting reaction from Marianne, when she learns that her hope of a loving relationship between Elinor and Edward has now been blighted. After Marianne's grief has run its course, she asks Elinor how the facts were made known to her. Upon learning that Lucy's confession to Elinor occurred some four months earlier, Marianne is astounded, and then guilty. Once again, Jane Austen is comparing the behaviour of the two sisters. Elinor's sense of duty to her family and friends, and even to Lucy, is seen as admirable, and Marianne acknowledges her own wrong behaviour. It seems that Elinor's suffering has not yet ended, for her self-command must undergo one further test. Colonel Brandon wishes to help Edward by presenting him with the Delaford living, and he does so through

Elinor, unaware of the pain his generosity is occasioning her.

Clearly, the revelation has many effects on the plot of Sense and Sensibility. It is now necessary, however, to look closely at the mechanics of this device. The secret is made public by Anne Steele, while she and Lucy are guests of Edward's sister and her husband. Anne sees how well regarded Lucy is by the Dashwoods, and believes that there will be no objection from that quarter when Lucy and Edward finally announce their engagement. Naturally, Fanny is highly displeased (as is her mother), the Steeles are banished forthwith, and Edward is disinherited by his mother for persisting in his sense of duty to Lucy. It is very likely that Anne would let the secret slip and, as I have already noted, Lucy was in constant dread of her sister doing so at Barton Park. The first description of Anne Steele shows that Lucy's fear was not unfounded. "They found in the appearance of the eldest, who was nearly thirty, with a plain and not a sensible face, nothing to admire" (SS,p.142). Jane Austen also states that "the vulgar freedom and folly of the eldest left her no recommendation" (SS,p.146). Anne's indiscretion is evident from her earliest conversations with the Dashwoods; and Lucy, "who generally made an amendment to all her sister's assertions" (SS,p.148), is constantly on her guard. From the beginning, Anne Steele is depicted as a silly, vulgar woman whose conversation reveals little discretion or intelligence. She is also devoid of the shrewdness possessed by Lucy. That she should be the one to reveal the secret engagement is highly plausible, and the reader could be forgiven for expecting the revelation to occur several chapters earlier. Jane Austen has written this section of Sense and Sensibility very economically, in that she has Anne reveal the secret to Fanny, who promptly becomes hysterical. Fanny's reaction necessitates the summoning of Mr Donavan who is quite happy to carry the startling news elsewhere. It seems likely that if the revelation had been made to another character, the

effects would have been far less immediate and interest in the plot might have flagged somewhat. Fanny is also 'punished' for her snobbish schemes to have Edward marry the daughter of a wealthy Lord. The advancing of the plot always remains within the bounds of character consistency, and Anne Steele's role in the revelation is entirely credible.

3. Willoughby's Past - Sense and Sensibility

In Sense and Sensibility Jane Austen uses the device of a black past to discredit Willoughby and to make him totally ineligible to marry Marianne Dashwood. Mary Lascelles states that "the convention demanded that he (Willoughby) should lose her by a single violent act - and the moral pattern of the novel, that it should be as ugly an act as Jane Austen would consent to speak of - and so Colonel Brandon's Eliza is introduced into the story".⁷ The convention referred to is described by Miss Lascelles as being "a climax to the action; that is of tension first increased, then snapped, by some act more violent than any that has preceded it . . . Richardson has made it seem that . . . the violence of actual and attempted seduction might be the most apt and convenient for the novelist's purpose".⁸ It seems, therefore, that Jane Austen felt the need for a climax in the Marianne/Willoughby plot, and the one she uses is the one favoured by her predecessor (and apparently by other contemporary novelists). I propose to see how and why Jane Austen has used this conventional device, and to examine its use in other situations, notably, with regard to Wickham in Pride and Prejudice. A variation on the same device is also found in Persuasion, where events from the past are used to discredit the character of William Walter Elliot.

To a modern reader, it appears that Willoughby is already ineligible to marry Marianne, because of his cruel treatment of her and, more obviously, through his marriage to the heiress Miss Grey. However, we must accept the fact that Jane Austen felt it necessary to follow the convention detailed by Mary Lascelles. By marrying, Willoughby makes it impossible for a liaison between himself and Marianne to occur within the near future. However, Marianne is still free to love Willoughby and to spurn any other aspirants to her hand. This would explain why Jane Austen draws on an event from Willoughby's past to render him morally (as well as physically) ineligible. Willoughby has treated Marianne

harshly. However, despite his unpleasant behaviour, Marianne still wishes to think well of Willoughby, as she tells her sister. "Elinor, I have been cruelly used; but not by Willoughby" (SS,p.200). She would rather believe that his behaviour has been induced "by all the world, rather than by his own heart" (SS,p.201).

In Chapter 31 Colonel Brandon visits Mrs Jennings' house, hoping to find Elinor alone. "My object - my wish - my sole wish in desiring it - I hope, I believe it is - is to be a means of giving comfort; - no, I must not say comfort - not present comfort - but conviction, lasting conviction to your sister's mind" (SS,p.214). As Elinor quickly divines, the Colonel has information about Willoughby's past "that will open his character further" (SS,p.215). After a long, hesitant speech the Colonel finally arrives at the climax of his narrative and reveals that Willoughby has seduced his young ward Eliza, leaving her pregnant and alone, without writing or returning to help her. The Colonel describes Willoughby's character as being "expensive, dissipated, and worse than that" (SS,p.218). His earlier mercenary tendencies might have been forgiven if had proved suitably penitent, but an act of such moral depravity as seduction and desertion cannot be pardoned. Jane Austen has ensured that Willoughby can no longer be associated with Marianne, and this fact is acknowledged by Marianne in Chapter 32, once Elinor has acquainted her sister with the Colonel's information, although "she felt the loss of Willoughby's character yet more heavily than she had felt the loss of his heart" (SS,p.221).

At this stage, it seems that Willoughby's consistency and realism as a character have been sacrificed to the requirements of the plot. It was necessary for Marianne to realise that Willoughby is morally unsuitable, and this she has done. Willoughby's moral ineligibility also renders Marianne's eventual marriage to Colonel Brandon a little more likely (although there are problems with this aspect of the plot which will be discussed in a later chapter). Willoughby is

an appealing character in the early stages of Sense and Sensibility, and he and Marianne seem an ideally suited couple. We can understand why he marries the wealthy Miss Grey, for his love of an expensive lifestyle has never been hidden by Jane Austen (SS, p.88, p.117). Willoughby's seduction and desertion of Eliza Williams are hard to accept, but must be taken as a device of plot precluding realism of characterisation or proper preparation of the reader. However, the rather clumsy mechanism of a black past is further complicated in Sense and Sensibility by Willoughby's reappearance in Chapter 44, when he believes Marianne to be dying. In this chapter he confesses to Elinor the follies of his former ways, and it is evident that he felt deeply for Marianne, and indeed, that he still does care. Willoughby comes across as a rather vain, idle and extravagant young man, but as one who is sincere in his love for Marianne Dashwood. This is very similar to the impression we have of him in the initial chapters of Sense and Sensibility.

Mary Lascelles says of Jane Austen that "in Sense and Sensibility she accepts this convention almost uncritically - as though she were not yet conscious of her instinctive dissatisfaction with it".⁹ I feel that the re-introduction of Willoughby is Jane Austen's way of showing that she did realise the mechanical nature of the plot, with its resultant sacrifice of realistic character depiction. However, it seems to me that Jane Austen would have been better to leave Willoughby out of the novel once his infamous past is revealed. He is meant to be a thorough villain (as shown in SS, Chapter 31), but then returns to the scene as a young man who has made several errors in his life, and who deeply regrets the folly of his ways. It is a relief for the reader to regard Willoughby again in this more favourable light, but this causes further problems in the plot of Sense and Sensibility. Willoughby's reappearance throws him back into the forefront of the novel, and in comparison, Colonel Brandon is dull and colourless. Willoughby, once blackened, should have stayed that way. His character has

already been sacrificed to make possible Marianne's marriage to the worthy Colonel. Willoughby's confession in Chapter 44 merely reinforces the idea that he and Marianne are soulmates and that they ought to be united at the end of the novel, regardless of the obvious merits of Colonel Brandon.

There is one other possible explanation for Willoughby's re-appearance in the novel. As well as adding depth and verisimilitude to the character of John Willoughby, Jane Austen has also used Chapter 44 as part of Marianne's development and maturity. We learn from Elinor that Marianne has long forgiven Willoughby (SS,p.134), as a Christian would do. In Chapter 44 Willoughby has the opportunity to explain his previous actions, making him seem a foolish, regretful young man rather than the black villain he seemed after Colonel Brandon's revelation in Chapter 31. Once Elinor has told Marianne of her final conversation with Willoughby (SS,p.338), Marianne is able to form a more complete picture of Willoughby and her forgiveness is now based on a true knowledge of his character. Marianne has to learn to temper her sensibility with reason, and her new knowledge of (and reaction to) Willoughby is a step in her progression toward that goal. Just as Marianne is able to see Willoughby as he really is, so is she able to acknowledge the merits of Colonel Brandon by the end of Sense and Sensibility, despite his age and ailing health! Willoughby's reappearance in Chapter 44 can therefore be viewed as an essential part of Marianne's growth as a character. However, although Marianne has learnt much about herself and other people by the end of the novel, her sensibility has actually diminished very little (see Chapter Four), and her marriage to Colonel Brandon remains unsatisfactory.

Every aspect of the plot surrounding Willoughby is unsatisfactory when subjected to close analysis. The device employed (of an immoral past) may be an accepted and necessary convention of the time, but it is contrived and flat, and pays little heed to realistic characterisation. I believe

that Jane Austen attempted to atone for this latter fault by bringing Willoughby back into Sense and Sensibility, but his re-entry into the novel causes further plot complications which cannot be removed or overcome.

4. Darcy's revelation about Wickham - Pride and Prejudice

Darcy's revelation about Wickham's real nature occurs in Chapter 35 of Pride and Prejudice. The information is contained in a letter, given by Darcy to Elizabeth Bennet. Elizabeth's perusal of the letter has far-reaching consequences, affecting both the themes and the plot of the novel.

In Chapter 34 of Pride and Prejudice, Darcy makes his first proposal to Elizabeth and is angrily refused. Elizabeth challenges Darcy to account for his previous behaviour towards her sister, and towards George Wickham. The charges laid against Darcy spur him to write the letter, in an attempt to clear his name. Darcy states in the opening paragraph of the letter that "my character required it to be written and read" (PP,p.227). He makes it clear that he is writing for the purpose of answering "two offences . . . you last night laid to my charge" (PP,p.227). Darcy briefly explains his conduct relating to Jane and Bingley, and then moves on to discuss Wickham. Up to this point we have only heard Wickham's account of his treatment by Darcy (confided to Elizabeth in Chapter 16). Elizabeth had observed the strained relationship between the two men (PP,p.116), and was instantly sympathetic towards Wickham. Wickham further engaged her sympathy with his confession of the relationship between Darcy and himself. Whereas Wickham's confidence to Elizabeth was made verbally, Darcy states his side of the story in a long and detailed letter. Having the information conveyed by letter proves very useful for Jane Austen. Is it plausible that Darcy should have written such a letter?

After the tempestuous scene of the previous evening, it is hardly surprising that Darcy should wish to avoid another confrontation with Elizabeth. The relationship between them is awkward, and Darcy would have been able to express himself far more clearly and fully in a letter. The reasons given by Darcy for writing the letter (quoted in the above paragraph) accord with our knowledge of him. We have seen

that Darcy is proud and dignified, and his nature is not one which will allow Elizabeth's false impressions to go uncorrected. The type of letter which he writes can also be ascribed to his personality. The letter is long and precise, and Darcy explains himself very thoroughly. His writing prowess has already been alluded to in Chapter 10, where Miss Bingley's incessant compliments do at least reveal that Darcy tends to write long letters (PP,p.93).

The fact that the information is revealed in a letter is important. In the chapter following the letter, Elizabeth examines her own actions and thoughts and "she grew absolutely ashamed of herself" (PP,p.236). She later states that "till this moment, I never knew myself" (PP,p.237). This is the crucial point in Elizabeth's character development. She does not come to the vital self-recognition instantly. She reads the letter several times and moves from reactions of shock and disbelief to a gradual acceptance of the information contained in the letter. The value of revealing the truth about Wickham in a letter becomes obvious. Elizabeth has the opportunity to assimilate the information gradually, and she is not required to change her attitude immediately. If the revelation had been made verbally, it is very likely that Elizabeth would not have believed Darcy, and her reaction against him would have been swift and complete. The letter is convenient, but it also fits in well with the situation, and with the character of the writer. It also provides an interesting contrast with Wickham's method of revealing the 'same' information. Wickham's easy address and pleasant features go a long way towards convincing Elizabeth of his sincerity.

Many people have noted the similarities between Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility and Wickham in Pride and Prejudice. W A Craik notes that the two novels have "strong connections" and that "Willoughby and Wickham are similar".¹⁰ Mary Lascelles says that the catastrophes of these two novels "are particularly close to one another", while finding that

"there is a very great technical advance: Wickham's share in the story is much better contrived than Willoughby's: his character is opened to us gradually and deftly, in preparation for the part he is to play, and this part is evenly interwoven with the rest".¹¹

Wickham performs several functions in Pride and Prejudice and is very useful to the plot. The first use is in his relationship with the heroine Elizabeth Bennet. Wickham (like Willoughby) is charming and popular, and a very pleasant companion. Elizabeth is far from liking Darcy or believing well of him, and Wickham's account of Darcy's unkind behaviour accords with Elizabeth's own impressions. She therefore has no hesitation in accepting Wickham's testimony. Wickham declares to her that "it is not for me to be driven away by Mr Darcy. If he wishes to avoid seeing me, he must go" (PP,p.122). It is interesting, nevertheless, to note that Wickham is absent from the ball given by Bingley, where he would certainly have encountered Darcy. Jane Austen has already prepared for the possibility of Wickham not telling the truth, although this goes unnoticed by Elizabeth for the meanwhile. (Wickham's rationalisation of his absence is revealed in Chapter 21, and Elizabeth, unhesitatingly, "highly approved his forbearance", PP,p.156). Darcy's letter presents his side of the story, and Elizabeth and the reader are eventually brought to accept Darcy's statements as the truth. Elizabeth is made to realise how hasty and incorrect her judgments of both Wickham and Darcy have been. The episode with Wickham indirectly teaches Elizabeth much about herself, and is therefore useful to more than just the plot of Pride and Prejudice. Elizabeth realises that she has been guilty of acting with prejudice and with unwarranted pride in her powers of discernment. Before Elizabeth and Darcy are a truly suited couple, both characters have to gain self-knowledge, and grow from that knowledge. For Elizabeth, this realisation comes through her perusal and acceptance of Darcy's assertions. Darcy's letter and its revelation about Wickham's nature perform an

important function thematically in Pride and Prejudice.

The information revealed by Darcy about Wickham makes Wickham's second function in Pride and Prejudice more plausible. We learn that he attempted to seduce and elope with Darcy's wealthy, young sister Georgiana. Just as Wickham's first elopement allowed Elizabeth to learn the truth about her prejudice, the second one also places Darcy in a good light. It is through Wickham that Darcy is able to help the unfortunate Bennet family, thereby revealing how deeply he cares about Elizabeth.

Jane Austen makes use of moral depravity in Wickham's past to discredit him, just as she did with Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility. However, the revelation about Wickham comes as less of a surprise because the whole subplot is better contrived than its equivalent in Sense and Sensibility. Wickham's seduction of Georgiana Darcy is motivated by money (PP, p.231). We are given other instances of Wickham's mercenary tendencies. Although Wickham is interested in Elizabeth he is clearly aware that she will have only a small marriage settlement, and he does not allow the relationship to develop beyond friendship (PP, Chapter 27). In the same chapter we learn that Wickham is "now rendering himself agreeable" to a young lady who has just inherited ten thousand pounds (PP, p.186), in whom he was uninterested before the acquisition of her fortune. Wickham's elopement with Miss Darcy was nearly successful, and prepares for future events in the novel because he actually carries out a second seduction and elopement (although his subject was most willing). Wickham's moral depravity seems to have been worked into his character quite carefully, and the effects of the revelation about him are also worked carefully into the novel, both thematically and physically. The revelation is not used to discredit Wickham as a suitor for Elizabeth, and it actually helps explain other occurrences in the plot prior to Darcy's letter (such as the two men's dislike of each other, and Wickham's absence from the

Netherfield ball). Mary Lascelles' comments are justified. There does seem to be "a . . . technical advance" in Pride and Prejudice when Wickham is compared with his counterpart from Sense and Sensibility, John Willoughby.¹²

5. Mrs Smith's revelation about Mr Elliot - Persuasion

Much of the criticism levelled against Persuasion occurs because of dissatisfaction with Mrs Smith and her revelation. Andor Gomme, in an article titled "On Not Being Persuaded" feels that "there are . . . clear signs of haste . . . in the mechanics of the plot, most obviously, no doubt, in the invention of Mrs Smith".¹³ Robert Liddell states that "unsatisfactory as the character of Mrs Smith is, it is yet more acceptable than her story . . . the documentary evidence against Mr Elliot . . . does nothing, apart from establishing the vindictiveness of Mrs Smith".¹⁴ The general consensus seems to be that the Mrs Smith episode is flat, mechanical and contrived.

I believe that many critics overestimate the importance of Mrs Smith's revelation to the plot, and many of them do not look closely enough at the alternative reasons for Mrs Smith's inclusion in the novel. Mrs Smith's condemnation of Mr Elliot does not influence Anne's decision not to marry her cousin. Anne learns the truth from Mrs Smith in Chapter 21, but she has already rejected the possibility of marrying her father's heir, and becoming the future Lady Elliot. She does consider the benefits of marriage to her cousin, but quickly dismisses the idea: "The charm of Kellynch and of 'Lady Elliot' all faded away. She never could accept him. And it was not only that her feelings were still adverse to any man save one; her judgment, on a serious consideration of the possibilities of such a case, was against Mr Elliot" (P, p.172 - Chapter 17). Mrs Smith's revelation comes some four chapters after this, and only after she ascertains that there is no possibility of Anne marrying William Walter Elliot. Neither Mrs Smith nor Anne makes public their knowledge of Mr Elliot's true nature. He is not subject to public condemnation through the actions of the two women. The only way that Mrs Smith's revelation materially affects the plot is in its preparation for the relationship between Mr Elliot and the scheming Mrs Clay, which Jane Austen briefly refers

to at the end of Persuasion, and which I will discuss more fully later. Now that our knowledge of William Elliot's character is more complete, it comes as less of a surprise that he should form an alliance with Mrs Clay.

Mrs Smith's revelation serves two other major purposes. The first is to confirm Anne's judgment of her cousin. In Chapter 17 Anne's opinion is given against her cousin. "Mr Elliot was rational, discreet, polished, - but he was not open . . . She (Anne) felt that she could much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never slipped" (P,p.173). The revelation then, vindicates Anne's decision not to marry her cousin, or even view him with a great deal of respect. Anne's superior judgment over Lady Russell is also confirmed, as her ladyship finds no fault with Mr Elliot, and cherishes the thought of marriage between Anne and her cousin.

In my opinion, the main function of Mrs Smith and her revelation is thematic. This conclusion is also reached by K K Collins, who sees Mrs Smith as being linked to the morality of Persuasion.¹⁵ Mrs Smith married at an early age and although her husband was tolerably wealthy, the couple lived beyond their means. She experienced much 'bad luck' in that "she had been fond of her husband, - she has buried him. She had been used to affluence, - it was gone" (P,p.166). Both her health and her circumstances are severely straitened. Jane Austen seems to have included Mrs Smith as an illustration of the position Anne Elliot could have been in had she married, at a young age, a man in a hazardous occupation, with decent prospects and much optimism, but very little money (although it must be noted that Captain Wentworth and Mr Smith are very different in character and principles). Mrs Smith was unfortunate, and Jane Austen is making the point that the same sort of thing could so easily have happened to Anne. As it turns out, Wentworth had excellent luck in his profession. However, by using Mrs Smith to show

what could have plausibly occurred, Jane Austen is supporting Anne's persuasion out of an early marriage by Lady Russell. Although Anne later admits that she would not give the same advice that she took, she still believes that she acted correctly. By looking at the example provided by Mrs Smith, the reader cannot affirm that Anne's yielding to persuasion was weak and wrong. One of the principal themes of Persuasion is prudence, and Mrs Smith is a variation on this theme.

The reasons Mrs Smith gives for initially withholding the information from Anne have also been criticised. She says "I considered your marrying him as certain, . . . and I could no more speak the truth of him, than if he had been your husband. My heart bled for you, as I talked of happiness. And yet, he is sensible, he is agreeable, and with such a woman as you, it was not absolutely hopeless" (P,p.216). Mrs Smith should perhaps have let her love of Anne override good manners in this case, but her reasons are valid and acceptable. This problem of candour or discretion also surfaces in the other two novels being studied. Colonel Brandon does not come forward with his information about Willoughby until he is absolutely certain that Marianne and Willoughby are not to be married. His excuse is similar in nature to Mrs Smith's - "to suffer you all to be so deceived . . . but what could I do? I had no hope of interfering with success; and sometimes I thought your sister's influence might yet reclaim him" (SS,p.219). Clearly, it was not acceptable to place candour ahead of propriety in such a situation, and we must simply accept the circumstances surrounding the revelations in Persuasion and Sense and Sensibility. Jane Austen's insistence on discretion is also reinforced in Pride and Prejudice when both Darcy and Elizabeth remain silent about Wickham's depravity (although there are other reasons for their silence, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The revelation by Mrs Smith cannot be considered as a major

piece of plot machinery, because its effects on the plot of Persuasion are minor. In this case, the device of a revelation shedding light on a character's morals is used principally for thematic reasons. The whole Mrs Smith episode is not perfect, but neither is it as flawed as might appear on first glance, and as several critics would have us believe.

6. Wentworth's revelation to Anne of his love - Persuasion

Wentworth's letter to Anne occurs in Chapter 23 of Persuasion, and is one of the chapters inserted by Jane Austen after she had completed the original draft of the novel. The letter reveals that Wentworth is still deeply in love with Anne, but that he is unsure of her feelings. The letter confirms Anne's hope that Wentworth is still in love with her, and it is the means by which the two are reunited. The reader already knows Anne's feelings, and Wentworth's letter shows that the love is mutual. Once he has declared his love, Anne can declare hers. It is the letter, therefore, which brings about the resolution of the plot of Persuasion.

The events leading up to the revelation of Wentworth's love are carefully contrived. As the chapter opens, Mrs Musgrove and Mrs Croft are discussing engagements. Anne can overhear their conversation and it seems that Wentworth, too, hears a good deal of the discussion (P,p.235). Captain Harville, like Anne, is unoccupied, and it is only natural that they should converse. Harville, obviously still shocked and hurt by Benwick's sudden engagement to Louisa Musgrove, knows that in Anne he will find a sympathetic and intelligent listener (ironically bringing to mind a similar conversation between Anne and Benwick at Lyme, in Chapter 11). Although Jane Austen tells us that Captain Harville did not overhear the conversation between the two older ladies (P,p.235), his conversation with Anne is along similar lines. The two captains are executing a commission for Benwick, and this gives Harville the opportunity to express his dismay at Benwick's inconsistency. The very nature of the commission being undertaken by the two captains reinforces Benwick's fickleness. Anne and Harville then enter into a discussion on constancy in love - one of the major themes of Persuasion. Through this conversation Anne is able to state her belief that women have the "privilege . . . of loving longest, when existence or hope is gone" (P,p.238). Wentworth is seated at a writing table near the two and, just as he was able to

overhear the conversation between his sister and Mrs Musgrove, so is he able to distinguish the subject of Anne's and Harville's discourse. Harville explains that Wentworth is writing a note to Benwick (relating to the commission that they are carrying out for him) and this gives Wentworth the chance to scribble the note to Anne. It must be borne in mind that the letter scene was not part of the original novel, and that it was inserted (along with Chapter 22) later. Clearly, Jane Austen felt that the discussion on inconstancy (with its thematic importance) and the letter were a better way of uniting Anne and Wentworth. She carefully prepares for each stage in the action, and as a result, the scene at the Inn is realistically presented.

The letter itself is also 'realistic'. It is written by a man who is tormented by the hope that Anne may still love him, and who has to know immediately. The sentences are reasonably short, and the statements are spontaneous and passionate (such as "I can listen no longer in silence", and "You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope" P,p.240). The letter gives Anne (and the reader) a very clear picture of how Wentworth is feeling. It is quite plausible that he should write such a letter. We know that he is an impetuous, warm man (P,p.107) and Anne prizes his frankness and warmth of feeling (P,p.173). Wentworth's jealousy of Mr Elliot has also been exhibited (P,p.199). It seems natural that a letter from him, written in all the heat and urgency necessitated by the situation, should take the form of the one found in Chapter 23 of Persuasion.

In this case, the revelation leads almost immediately to the resolution of the plot - the reuniting of Anne and Wentworth. By this stage, both characters have had leisure to reflect on their past actions, and the letter is Wentworth's statement of his feelings. Once it has been given to Anne, the couple can be secure in their love, and the novel can end satisfactorily. I believe that it was a wise move on the part of Jane Austen to have Wentworth reveal his love in a

letter to Anne, as it provides a moving, and fitting, climax to Persuasion. The whole scene at the Inn accords perfectly with the characters of Anne and Wentworth.

As can be seen, the revelations discussed in Sections Three, Four and Five have much in common. In each case, a character who first appears to be rather charming and popular is discredited by means of an event from the past. The three discredited characters are very similar, with Jane Austen describing them as "agreeable" young men. Although there has been much criticism of Mrs Smith's revelation in Persuasion I believe that the revelation in Sense and Sensibility is the worst contrived of the three. Willoughby's character is blackened by Colonel Brandon's revelation and he becomes a thorough villain rather than a charming, though extravagant, young man (which is how he was initially portrayed). The blackening of Willoughby's character is vitally important to the plot, as it eliminates the possibility of his marrying Marianne, leaving Colonel Brandon to become her husband.

As Mary Lascelles concludes, the role of Wickham in Pride and Prejudice is "better contrived than Willoughby's".¹⁶ The effects of Darcy's revelation about Wickham are not so closely connected to the plot. Wickham and Elizabeth are not likely to marry, and so Wickham, unlike Willoughby, is not discredited for that reason. Nor in Persuasion does Mrs Smith's revelation affect Anne's decision not to marry her cousin. The revelations in Pride and Prejudice and Persuasion are of more importance thematically. Knowledge of Wickham produces in Elizabeth vital self-knowledge (and a reformed opinion of Darcy). Mrs Smith and her story illustrate the theme of prudence in Persuasion, and she can be seen as a counterpart to Anne. Her revelation confirms Anne's excellent character judgment. The revelations in Pride and Prejudice and Persuasion do have some bearing on the plot, but the effects do not seem so markedly vital as is the case of Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility. Thus, the revelations in the latter two novels are not merely mechanical devices introduced for the sole purpose of advancing the plot.

All six revelations which I have examined can be compared

from the angle of character consistency. If we look closely at the characters of the people who make the revelations, we can determine whether they are acting in character. It is Lucy who tells Elinor about her engagement to Edward, and she is the only character with a sound reason for doing so. She perceives that Elinor is a rival and makes the revelation in the hope of disquieting Elinor and removing her as a threat. Lucy Steele's shrewdness and spite are referred to many times in Sense and Sensibility (SS,p.149, p.164, p.247), making the revelation perfectly harmonious with her personality. I have already discussed the character of Anne Steele who brings the secret engagement of Lucy and Edward to public notice (see Section Two of this chapter). Anne is the only person who could make the revelation at this juncture and it is perfectly in character that she should do so. Darcy, in his letter to Elizabeth revealing the truth about Wickham, says that "my character required it to be written and read" (PP,p.227). Again, he is the only one able to reveal the information (as Wickham has chosen to alter the facts), but his reason for doing so is highly acceptable, given his pride. Wentworth's letter declaring his love for Anne is equally in character for that gentleman. The remaining revelations - those of Colonel Brandon and Mrs Smith - cannot be said to have been made because their characters "required it". The revelations were made reluctantly, although the explanations given are valid. Colonel Brandon and Mrs Smith seem to have been chosen because it is plausible that they could have private information about the past lives of Willoughby and William Elliot, respectively. The Colonel's rather "dull" manner can also be partially attributed to the knowledge he has of his ward, and later, of Willoughby's involvement in the affair.

Two of the revelations are made by letter. The device of a letter for revealing important information seems to have worked very well. Although both letters differ markedly in content and style, they are both of vital importance to the plot, and they are integrated into the thematic concerns of

the two novels. Furthermore, the style of each letter reflects the character of the writer.

Jane Austen has used revelations in her novels for different purposes, and it seems fair to conclude that the most successful ones are where the information does not have an immediate or direct influence on the plot. Those revelations which are also contrived within the limits of character consistency seem less awkward, obtrusive and mechanical than their counterparts. The revelations which fulfil both these requirements are Lucy's and Anne's in Sense and Sensibility (both of comparatively minor importance) and the two letters - Darcy's in Pride and Prejudice and Wentworth's in Persuasion. They seem able to refute the charges of mechanical contrivance and conventionality levelled at the exposés of Colonel Brandon and Mrs Smith.

CHAPTER THREE: ELOPEMENTS

1. Lucy Steele and Robert Ferrars - Sense and Sensibility

It appears that in Sense and Sensibility Edward Ferrars will indeed marry Lucy Steele, leaving Elinor to nurse her broken heart. The prospect of an early marriage is assisted by Colonel Brandon's gift to Edward of the Delaford living, which Edward gratefully accepts in Chapter 40. Despite the apparent inevitability of the marriage between Edward and Lucy, it is revealed in Chapter 48 that Lucy is married to Edward's younger brother Robert Ferrars. Elinor is absolutely astounded and delighted by the news, and the reaction in most readers would probably be very similar. Lucy's expected marriage to Robert leaves Edward free to marry Elinor, whom he has loved sincerely. Has Jane Austen contrived things convincingly to bring about such an unexpected happening?

Jane Austen notes that the marriage is a great surprise, through Elinor's reaction to it. "To her own heart it was a delightful affair, to her imagination it was even a ridiculous one, but to her reason, her judgment, it was completely a puzzle" (SS,p.354). However, between them, Elinor and Edward are able to account quite logically for the marriage. This seems to indicate that Jane Austen wants the reader to follow through the same process, arriving at an acceptance of the 'fortunate' event, and possessing an understanding of the factors leading up to its occurrence. Elinor tells Edward of Robert's intended "mediation in his brother's affairs" (SS,p.354), obviously by applying to Lucy and requesting her not to go through with the marriage to Edward. "That was exactly like Robert, was his (Edward's) immediate observation" SS,p.354.

Robert Ferrars' character plays an important role in this section of Sense and Sensibility, and this involvement has been skilfully prepared for well in advance. From our first

introduction to Robert Ferrars he is depicted as a vain, foolish young man. He makes his first appearance in the novel in Chapter 33 and Elinor notices "the puppyism of his manner" (SS,p.228) and his departure "with an happy air of real conceit and affected indifference" (SS,p.229). The young man is not named at this stage, but Elinor soon encounters him again, this time at a soirée. John Dashwood and the stranger move to where Elinor is standing "and Mr Dashwood introduced him to her as Mr Robert Ferrars" (SS,p.253). Elinor is engaged in conversation with her newest acquaintance and finds "that he was exactly the coxcomb she had heard him described to be by Lucy" (SS,p.254). Robert Ferrars' stupidity and high self-esteem are both revealed in his one-sided conversation with Elinor. The two meet again in Chapter 41 and it is here that Robert announces his hope of being able to dissuade Lucy and Edward from marrying (SS, p.297). With hindsight, it appears that Robert must have visited Lucy with this aim in mind. Lucy Steele is a shrewd, cunning woman, and it is hardly likely that she would have relished the thought of living on the income of a struggling clergyman. Robert has now succeeded to the position of eldest son, financially, through the whim of his mother, and would therefore be a far more desirable husband than Edward (in Lucy's opinion). Mrs Ferrars' decision to disinherit Edward (an act quite in keeping with her usual behaviour) helps explain Lucy's transferral of 'affection' from one brother to the other. Had Edward not been disinherited in favour of Robert, Lucy, generally a discerning judge of character (the adjective "shrewd" being applied to her on many occasions), would have recognised Robert as being a fool, primarily interested in himself. As Edward correctly supposes, "the vanity of the one had been so worked on by the flattery of the other, as to lead by degrees to all the rest" (SS,p.354). This is indeed what did occur. We are given one more explanation for Robert's proposal to Lucy (stated by the author) - "he was proud of his conquest, proud of tricking Edward, and very proud of marrying privately without his mother's consent" (SS,p.365). The picture of

Robert Ferrars is complete.

Robert Ferrars does not seem worried about being disinherited by his mother for marrying Lucy, although that was the fate suffered by Edward for intending to marry the same woman. However, he no doubt feels secure in the knowledge that he is his mother's favourite son. Jane Austen makes it clear that Mrs Ferrars has always valued Robert far more than Edward (SS, p.295), p.355), which is why she took the liberal step of bestowing his inheritance unconditionally. Elinor reveals that Mrs Ferrars has actually settled a sum on her younger son, making him independent (SS, p.295, p.355). From what we know about her character, it seems quite plausible that she should do so.

The unexpectedness of the marriage between Lucy Steele and Robert Ferrars cannot be denied, but it can be explained logically if one cares to go back through Sense and Sensibility, looking for the hints that Jane Austen habitually includes. Robert's characterisation is extremely well done and the whole affair can be explained satisfactorily through his and Lucy's personalities (as Elinor and Edward so in Chapter 49). The marriage is very useful to the plot, and most 'fortuitous'. Jane Austen has, however, contrived it well, without over-accounting for its occurrence. Included in the episode is the masterful character sketch of Robert Ferrars, a fitting twist to the plot. There are also signs that Jane Austen has expended much careful planning on this area of the plot of Sense and Sensibility.

2. Wickham and Lydia - Pride and Prejudice

This elopement actually has its foundation in the revelation made by Darcy in Chapter 35. In his letter to Elizabeth he states that Wickham has a "want of principles" and that "his life was a life of idleness and dissipation" (PP,p.230). Having exposed Wickham's true nature to Elizabeth, Darcy then proceeds to describe a specific offence perpetrated by Wickham, which can leave Elizabeth in doubt no longer about Wickham's real character. Darcy relates that Wickham made himself agreeable to his sister Georgiana Darcy, and was on the point of eloping with that wealthy young lady when Darcy was informed of the affair. Darcy states that "Mr Wickham's chief object was unquestionably my sister's fortune, which is thirty thousand pounds" (PP,p.231). I have given evidence in Chapter Two, Section Four of Wickham's mercenary propensities, and it does not seem improbable that he would be moved to exert himself in the hope of securing such a fortune. The attempted elopement is foiled, but Darcy does not make public Wickham's despicable behaviour, explaining that "regard for my sister's credit and feelings prevented any public exposure" (PP,p.231). Darcy chooses to remain silent about Wickham's actions. Similarly, once Elizabeth accepts the veracity of the information conveyed in the letter, she too maintains a discreet silence about the whole affair. She tells Jane that she believes a public denouncement of Wickham "ought not to be attempted" (PP,p.253) as the information was meant to be regarded as private.

Joel Weinsheimer cites "Elizabeth's failure to expose Wickham to Lydia or her parents" as one of the series of plot incidents in Pride and Prejudice which is highly 'fortuitous'.¹⁷ It could be suggested that Elizabeth's communication of the information received about Wickham could have prevented the elopement of Wickham and Lydia from occurring. Naturally, Jane Austen needed this event to occur, as it is vital to the dénouement of the plot, so Elizabeth's silence is presumably essential. However, I propose to show that there

is every likelihood of the elopement between Lydia and Wickham happening, regardless of Elizabeth's candour or discretion. Elizabeth is able to justify remaining silent, and therefore blames herself unfairly in Chapter 46 when she states her belief that "I might have prevented it!" (PP,p.294). As I have noted in the previous paragraph, Elizabeth does not wish to publicise Darcy's private communication, for fear of distressing his family. Furthermore, she does not believe that the information against Wickham would be accepted, as the young man in question is a general favourite in Meryton, and Darcy is not at all liked. Elizabeth and Jane, on their return from their respective visits to Hunsford and London, learn that Wickham's regiment is to leave Meryton in a fortnight. Elizabeth concludes that because of Wickham's imminent departure his past life can be of little further significance. Even had she revealed her knowledge to Lydia and her parents, it is still highly probable that Elizabeth would have been unable to prevent Lydia journeying to Brighton. Mrs Bennet is very keen for the whole family to stay there, and is delighted that her youngest (and favourite) child should have the opportunity to accompany Mrs Forster and the regiment. Elizabeth notices that although her father is not in favour of the trip to Brighton, "his answers were at the same time so vague and equivocal" (PP,p.250). It is also unlikely that Elizabeth's attempts to convince her parents and Lydia of Wickham's real nature would have succeeded, as the anti-Darcy feeling prevalent in Meryton runs particularly high in the Bennet household. In any case, Lydia Bennet is very capable of getting her own way and she is constantly portrayed as a strong-willed, selfish girl (PP,p.75-76, p.113, p.241). Even Mr Bennet is unable to gain much control over his youngest daughter (should he exert himself to do so). The Lydia/Wickham sub-plot does not appear to hinge on Elizabeth's failure to reveal Wickham's true character at this juncture. The elopement could easily have occurred despite a revelation from Elizabeth, because of the personalities of Lydia and Wickham and, to a lesser extent, Mr and Mrs Bennet. (However, I believe that had Mr Bennet been

acquainted with Wickham's depravity, he would have refused to allow Lydia to go to Brighton).

Having established that the elopement is not an unconvincingly realised occurrence, it is now necessary to study its effects on the plot of Pride and Prejudice. Elizabeth learns of the elopement in Chapter 46, and Darcy is the first person to whom the news is related, Elizabeth being too distressed to conceal the unwelcome information. Jane Austen contrives to have Darcy receive the news first so that he is able to act quickly in assisting Elizabeth and her family. Elizabeth receives news of the elopement from her sister's letters, just before Darcy is due to visit her. Darcy's presence at the Inn that morning is prepared for in Chapter 44, when he and his sister invite the Gardiners and Elizabeth to have dinner at Pemberley "the day after the next" (PP,p.283). It is the day of the dinner engagement that Elizabeth receives the unfortunate report of Lydia's elopement. Darcy's presence at that crucial time has been prepared for in advance, and is not merely a fortuitous occurrence hastily utilised by the author.

When the Bennet family finally learns that the eloping couple have been located and that they are to be married in London, it is assumed by everyone that Mr Gardiner is responsible for ensuring that the marriage is indeed to take place. It is Lydia (now married, and recounting the details of her marriage to an unwilling listener in Elizabeth) who reveals in Chapter 51 that Darcy was present at the wedding ceremony. Elizabeth's curiosity is now aroused and she writes to Mrs Gardiner to seek the truth. The reply is received in Chapter 52 and Mrs Gardiner clearly believes that Darcy has acted out of love for Elizabeth. Elizabeth's "heart did whisper, that he might have done it for her" (PP,p.338), although she soon attributes Darcy's behaviour to other causes, principally his guilt at not having publicised Wickham's true nature after his attempted seduction of Georgiana. That is the excuse that Darcy gives to explain his involvement in the whole

affair (as Mrs Gardiner tells us on p.334). As Philip Drew states, "the incident of Georgiana Darcy, then, casually introduced though it is, serves to make the whole of Darcy's conduct in the novel more credible, and thus more sympathetic. It demonstrates once again how Jane Austen's unfailing concern for detail reinforces the structure of her novels".¹⁸ Marvin Mudrick takes the opposite view and accuses Jane Austen of "pushing a standard black-and-white seduction scene, with all the appurtenances . . . and with no trace of doubt, shading or irony". He wonders why Jane Austen "retained this threadbare revelation when, as early as Pride and Prejudice, she could demonstrate the most subtle and resourceful skill in representing every other particular of the action".¹⁹ I feel that Mr Mudrick is being unnecessarily harsh on Jane Austen. He does not seem to notice the difference between Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice in the application of the convention. Furthermore, I do not consider that the use of this convention in Wickham's case is unharmonious with the rest of Pride and Prejudice. Jane Austen has given us subtle hints preparing for some catastrophe relating to Wickham, and she also makes good use of the convention after Darcy's revelation has taken place. As both Mrs Gardiner and Elizabeth suspect that Darcy could have a second motive for his active participation, it seems reasonable to assume that this is what Jane Austen wishes the reader to conclude.

Wickham, by eloping, unwittingly gives Darcy a second chance to display his good nature and moral worth. Darcy's feeling of guilt when he considers that he could have prevented the elopement (by denouncing Wickham) is understandable, and it is therefore plausible that he should attempt to rectify matters. He is the only one of the characters involved who could provide the substantial financial inducement necessary for Wickham to consent to marry Lydia. It is important that the two should marry (from the point of view of the plot, rather than morality) because Darcy will have to overcome his strong distaste of Elizabeth's connections if he wishes to marry her. Darcy's financial assistance is vital then,

but he is also given two excellent reasons whereby we can account for his involvement.

Thus far, it appears that the elopement and associated matters have been very carefully prepared and interwoven. The final point which needs to be examined is the plausibility of the elopment itself. We have seen that Wickham is a dissipated young man, who is clearly very fond of money. In this instance it is most unlikely that Wickham would elope with Lydia in the hope of gaining a substantial sum of money. Why then, does he elope? It seems that Wickham and Lydia are physically attracted to each other, and Lydia would not have been an unwilling companion when Wickham was obliged to leave Brighton in rather a hurry. Colonel Forster reveals that Wickham has incurred large debts in Brighton, and he does the same in Meryton. His extravagance accords with Darcy's description of him as idle and dissipated (PP,p.230). It seems that Wickham takes Lydia with him as a companion and that he intends to leave her once his passion has worn off. Marriage to her is not one of his plans. He does marry her, however, because of the settlement provided by Darcy. The elopement is (for several reasons) quite in character for Wickham and Lydia.

Jane Austen has employed the device of an elopement very successfully in Pride and Prejudice. So many of the events in this area of the plot are tightly interwoven. Darcy's letter in Chapter 35 sets the scene which comes to fruition in Chapters 46-52. There are a variety of reasons explaining why the elopment occurred. Jane Austen has given prominence to Elizabeth's failure to expose Wickham, yet this is almost a red herring. It seems that Jane Austen pursues the point because of the importance Elizabeth's non-intervention assumes later in the novel. Elizabeth blames herself for the elopement, believing that she was wrong in not denouncing Wickham. Although Darcy says very little when Elizabeth reveals the news to him, her guilt seems to affect him. Just as Elizabeth remained silent about Wickham's true

nature, so too did Darcy maintain a discreet silence about Wickham's behaviour. Darcy later justifies his assistance to the Bennet family by citing his failure to publicise Wickham's degeneracy as one of the principal causes of the second elopement. However, despite the guilt felt by both Darcy and Elizabeth, there is every likelihood that the elopement between George Wickham and Lydia Bennet would have occurred regardless of their action or interaction, simply because of the personalities of those characters most closely involved (Wickham, Lydia, and Mr and Mrs Bennet).

3. Mrs Clay and Mr Elliot - Persuasion

That part of Persuasion dealing with Mr Elliot seems to have met with a barrage of criticism. Mrs Smith's revelation about Mr Elliot has probably received most critical disapprobation, but Mr Elliot's flight with Mrs Clay at the end of the novel has also earned Jane Austen much censure. Marvin Mudrick says that "in the end, nothing remains of Mr Elliot except Anne's suspicions, Mrs Smith's disclosure, and the author's curt summary".²⁰ He also finds Mrs Clay's alliance with William Elliot poorly explained.²¹ W A Craik says of Mrs Clay that she is "used to dispose conveniently of Mr Willian Elliot".²² Mary Lascelles asks "what are we to make . . . of that crude farce - the mutual seduction of Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay - thrust into this delicate comedy?"²³ In a subsequent chapter of her book on Jane Austen, Miss Lascelles states that "Mrs Clay has to perform a tedious little act of duplicity before Anne's eyes; and then she and her accomplice are left at a loose end until the author tidies them up".²⁴ Along the same lines, W A Craik says that "the conclusions of Persuasion shows the same passion as in Mansfield Park for tying up loose ends, and for very strict morality."²⁵

Anne notes at the end of Chapter 17 that "Mr Elliot was too generally agreeable . . . He had spoken to her with some degree of openness of Mrs Clay; had appeared completely to see what Mrs Clay was about, and to hold her in contempt; and yet Mrs Clay found him as agreeable as anybody" (P,p.173). A hint of a relationship between Mrs Clay and Mr Elliot is also suggested in Chapter 19, when Mrs Clay appears eager to walk home with Mr Elliot, despite a light shower of rain (P,p.184). It is possibly Mr Elliot's greater prudence which makes him decide that Anne's boots were the thickest and that she ought to walk. These two incidents are very minor and can hardly be considered as careful preparation for the events to come.

The first conclusive hint we have of Mr Elliot's involvement with Mrs Clay comes in Chapter 22, when Mary Musgrove spies the pair talking in the street, and her sighting is confirmed by Anne. At the end of the chapter Anne taxes Mrs Clay with the matter, and the latter's reply is rather unconvincing. Anne believes that she sees a trace of "guilt in Mrs Clay's face as she listened. It was transient, cleared away in an instant . . . She exclaimed, however, with a very tolerable imitation of nature" (P,p.232). Mrs Clay's recovery from the jolt Anne's information must have occasioned still seems unsatisfactory and rather too staged, even for that arch schemer. The only other joint mention of Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay comes at the end of the novel, when Jane Austen is summarising forthcoming events affecting the characters in Persuasion. We are told that "Anne's engagement . . . deranged his (Mr Elliot's) best plan of domestic happiness, his best hope of keeping Sir Walter single . . . But, though discomfited and disappointed, he could still do something for his own interest and his own enjoyment" (P,p.252). It is then revealed that Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay have moved to London together. This device does "tidy up" the loose ends of Persuasion. Is it contrived realistically with attention to consistent characterisation, or are the finer details (present, I believe, in the elopment of Lydia and Wickham in Pride and Prejudice) omitted?

Mr Elliot is introduced to us in the first chapter, foreshadowing the importance he will assume further on in the novel. His estrangement from Sir Walter's branch of the family is described, along with the statement that "he (William Elliot) had purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth" (P,p.39). Mr Elliot's efforts to be reunited with Sir Walter are viewed suspiciously by Anne, who can only suppose that he must have formed an attachment to Elizabeth several years earlier (P,p.154). However, she acknowledges that he has very pleasant manners. In Chapter 21 Mrs Smith relates the circumstances of Mr Elliot's marriage and his desire for "wealth and independence"

(P,p.207). She also believes Mr Elliot to be genuinely attached to Anne, and to be aware of the value of family connections and consequence, having now as much money as he requires. Mrs Smith also points out Mr Elliot's great desire to become Sir William, and suggests that the possibility of Mrs Clay and Sir Walter marrying has been one of the reasons for Mr Elliot's journey to Bath. From Jane Austen's summary of her characters' fates in Chapter 24 of Persuasion, it seems that Mr Elliot has eloped with Mrs Clay "to save himself from being cut out by one artful woman, at least" (P,p.252). Unless Mr Elliot is reverting to 'type' (by connecting himself with the lowly Mrs Clay) his action is hard to explain. There is still every possibility that Sir Walter may be flattered into marriage by another schemer, as he is not likely to have learnt a lesson from his foolish association with Mrs Clay. As W A Craik suggests, "Mr Elliot could have married Elizabeth Elliot",²⁶ who would surely have accepted him (P,p.219). This would still have given him "his best hope of keeping Sir Walter single by the watchfulness which a son-in-law's rights would have given" (P,p.252). Mr Elliot's desperation does not seem to accord with his previous behaviour, or to be in character. The reasons Jane Austen gives us to explain the alliance between Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay do not seem consistent with the character of the former. He has striven to be reunited with the Elliots and their dignity and consequence, and throws it away rather suddenly to remove the danger of Sir Walter marrying one scheming lady. He has now made it very difficult for himself should he want to prevent Sir Walter from marrying anyone else in the future. As Marilyn Butler so aptly says "the manoeuvre by which Mr Elliot is disposed of, his affaire with Mrs Clay, seems decidedly under-motivated and inconsistent with the worldly wisdom which has hitherto been his leading characteristic".²⁷

Mrs Clay's reasons for eloping with Mr Elliot are less unsatisfactory, but still not very convincing. We are told that "Mrs Clay's affections had overpowered her interest,

and she had sacrificed for the young man's sake, the possibility of scheming longer for Sir Walter" (P,p.252). Apart from their token meeting unexpectedly witnessed by Anne (in Chapter 22), there is little suggestion that a relationship exists between Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay. Yet Mrs Clay's "affections" must indeed have been very overpowering for her to discard the possibility of marrying Sir Walter. Upon arriving in Bath, Anne notices that her father seems to be overcoming his former objections to Mrs Clay (P,p.158-159). The likelihood of Sir Walter proposing to Mrs Clay seems very real, but we are told that she sacrifices that object because of her love for the younger Elliot. If Jane Austen had given sufficient hints of Mrs Clay's attraction to Mr Elliot, we might have been more convinced by the only explanation we are given. However, the character of Mrs Clay is not sufficiently developed to render this explanation acceptable.

It seems that Jane Austen has indeed "tidied up" the loose plot ends just a little too perfunctorily. The two villains of the piece are neatly paired off, as are the hero and heroine (and several minor characters). Possibly Jane Austen's main objective in detailing the relationship between Mrs Clay and Mr Elliot was to complete the pattern of a moral hierarchy of marriages in Persuasion. Clearly the marriage of Anne and Wentworth can be set at the top of the scale of marriages. Their love is sincere and they are suited morally and intellectually. At the opposite end of the scale is the affair between Mrs Clay and Mr Elliot, as yet unsolemnised. The elopement betrays a lack of principle and moral discernment in both characters. However, it seems that Jane Austen has sacrificed plausibility to achieve the pattern of marriages so evident in Persuasion. The unsatisfactory nature of the device remains, regardless of its thematic function.

In Persuasion Jane Austen has not used the device of an elopement with the care that is evident even in the early Sense and Sensibility. The device has been used to round

off the plot (rather than advance it) and it has not been incorporated very thoroughly into the novel.

Ironically, it is the two elopements most necessary to the plot which are the most successful. The elopement of Lucy Steele and Robert Ferrars in Sense and Sensibility is vitally important, as it is only through their marriage that the novel can end satisfactorily (with the union of Elinor and Edward). Although the elopement of Robert and Lucy is a surprise, it is prepared for on several occasions and is also explicable if one looks at the character traits of the two protagonists. The same vindication can be made of the elopement in Pride and Prejudice. Wickham has attempted to elope previously, and he is a pleasure-loving, dissipated young man. It is equally simple to account for Lydia's involvement in the affair. As I have noted earlier (in the second section of this chapter) the elopement in Pride and Prejudice is connected to many of the novel's events. The close interweaving of several facets of the plot in Pride and Prejudice makes it difficult for charges of mechanical contrivance to be successfully laid against Jane Austen.

The elopements in Persuasion and Sense and Sensibility have several similarities. Both occur near the end of the novel, and are between two of the 'bad' (in Robert Ferrars' case, perhaps merely foolish) characters. Although both events are unexpected, only the elopement in Sense and Sensibility can be accounted for reasonably. In Sense and Sensibility Jane Austen has contrived the elopement so that it falls within the bounds of consistent characterisation. It is possible that Jane Austen might have tightened up the conclusion of Persuasion, and particularly the disclosure of the alliance between Mrs Clay and Mr Elliot, if she had had leisure to fully revise the novel. (The composition of Persuasion took a comparatively short time when compared with the other later novels.)²⁸ She would possibly have prepared more thoroughly for the elopement, by giving the discerning reader solid hints as to its occurrence. It must be noted, however, that Jane Austen did revise the penultimate chapter of the novel, so perhaps she did not see the necessity to carry the revision a little further and include in its scope the elopement of Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay.

CHAPTER FOUR: ILLNESSES

1. Marianne Dashwood's Illness - Sense and Sensibility

Marianne Dashwood's illness in Sense and Sensibility has a pronounced effect on the plot of the novel, for it is primarily through this device that Jane Austen accounts for the marriage of Colonel Brandon and Marianne Dashwood at the conclusion of the novel. At the beginning of the book Marianne is portrayed as a young woman of great sensibility, although she is also an intelligent girl. It appears initially that she will eventually marry Willoughby, who shares very similar tastes and thoughts. However, this possibility is reduced by Willoughby's defection. Marianne's heart still belongs to Willoughby, even though he has used her harshly, and his immoral past is also known to her. However, after her serious, self-inflicted illness Marianne is said to have changed considerably, and she eventually marries aging, stolid, but worthy Colonel Brandon. We are meant to regard Marianne's illness as the cause of the change in her, which leads to her marriage at the end of the final chapter of Sense and Sensibility. Is the change in Marianne fully accounted for? Also, can we accept the consequences of the illness?

Marianne's sensibility is evident from the first description of her, which Jane Austen includes in Chapter 1. "She was sensible and clever; but eager in every thing; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was every thing but prudent" (SS,p.42). In Chapter 8 Marianne, reacting to Mrs Jennings' belief that Colonel Brandon has fallen in love with her, states that a person of the Colonel's age (he is about thirty-five) could not possibly feel the sensations of love. Marianne also views second attachments with abhorrence. As Elinor says to Colonel Brandon, "her (Marianne's) opinions are all romantic" (SS,p.86). Yet, ironically, at the end of Sense and Sensi-

bility Marianne marries Colonel Brandon, who is by now nearing forty and, furthermore, it is a second attachment for both of them. Jane Austen assures us that "Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby" (SS,p.367).

Once Colonel Brandon's revelation of Willoughby's degenerate past has been communicated to Marianne, along with the Colonel's own misfortunes in love, Marianne's attitude towards the man she had viewed as aged and dull softens slightly. She no longer avoids him and speaks to him "with a kind of compassionate respect" (SS,p.221). The Colonel's "exertion had produced an increase of goodwill towards himself (from Marianne), and gave Elinor hopes of its being further augmented hereafter" (SS,p.225). However, despite these kinder feelings towards the Colonel, Marianne's heart is still, in essence, Willoughby's. It is clear that some major change will have to occur before Marianne will consent to marry the Colonel, even though Willoughby has been removed from the scene because of the revelation about his past.

After her pain at losing Willoughby, Marianne is excessively distressed and frequently keeps to her room. Mrs Jennings suggests that her two guests should accompany her to Cleveland for a brief sojourn with the Palmers, and Marianne remembers that Willoughby's estate Combe Magna is but a comparatively short distance away. Once there, Marianne seeks solitude and walks around the grounds "where the trees were oldest, and the grass was longest and wettest" (SS,p.302). This behaviour is foreshadowed by the misadventure which brings Marianne into contact with Willoughby in Chapter 9 of Sense and Sensibility. The first incident (although lightly handled) suggests romantic self-indulgence and excess, and this is certainly reinforced by Marianne's conduct at Cleveland. Unsurprisingly, Marianne soon catches a violent cold, which in turn leads to a fever. The next few chapters deal with her illness and its consequences. The fever be-

comes very serious and the doctor in attendance on Marianne can do little to relieve her symptoms. The possibility of Marianne's dying from the fever is raised and Elinor is moved to send for their mother. As Tony Tanner notes in his introduction to the Penguin edition of Sense and Sensibility, Marianne's illness is described in some detail (p.12-13). Jane Austen describes accurately the progression of the illness from a cold to a "disorder" with a "putrid tendency" (SS,p.303), to the dangerous fever which Mrs Jennings (not unwarrantedly) believes might eventuate in Marianne's "rapid decay . . . (and) early death" (SS,p.308). The author has worked meticulously on the circumstances leading to the fever. Mr Tanner remarks that "Marianne's illness is clearly psychosomatic" (p.13); that seems an overstatement, but certainly the illness is self-inflicted, and this is one of the conclusions which Marianne reaches upon recovery. Marianne's slow convalescence affords her leisure to reflect on the events of the past few months. With new awareness she tells Elinor that "my illness, I well knew, had been entirely brought on by myself . . . had I died, - it would have been self-destruction" (SS,p.337).

Once the Dashwoods are back at Barton Cottage, Marianne resolves to devote her time to serious study and self-improvement. The plan of work Marianne sets herself is an arduous one and Elinor notes with a smile that her sister, although intending to embark on the programme of serious study, is still doing things with "the same eager fancy" (SS,p.355), as of yore. Marianne's sensibility has not vanished with her illness, although the girl has changed in other ways. Marianne understands how badly she has behaved in the past, and she resolves to be a better person. However, she is no less 'sensible' than she was in the early stages of the novel. Her energy and eagerness is merely being channelled into other pursuits.

The next few chapters of the novel deal with the resolution of the Elinor/Edward subplot and Marianne comes into pro-

minence again only in the final chapter of Sense and Sensibility. We are then told of Marianne's marriage to Colonel Brandon. The "confederacy" against Marianne is strong, and Elinor, Edward and Mrs Dashwood all wish to see her become the wife of Colonel Brandon. "They each felt his sorrows, and their own obligations, and Marianne, by general consent, was to be the reward of all" (SS,p.366). Jane Austen does not state that Marianne Dashwood was in love with Colonel Brandon when she agreed to marry him, but she does assure us that Marianne eventually became as devoted to her husband as she had been to Willoughby. Jane Austen may have been making a thematic point of the fact that Marianne learns to love Colonel Brandon after their engagement and possibly marriage. She marries Colonel Brandon not primarily for personal gratification but out of compliance for the wishes of her family. Thus from disregard of others she has progressed to a sense of duty which includes even marriage. The marriage of Marianne to Colonel Brandon has a thematic function in Sense and Sensibility, but Jane Austen has not worked out that theme with sufficient regard for the character she has created. Ironically, Marianne has married the man "whom, two years before, she had considered too old to be married, - and who still sought the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat!" (SS,p.367). Jane Austen's gentle irony at Marianne's expense does not remove the objections to the marriage. It remains unsatisfactory and contrived for several reasons.

Marianne's illness has been thoroughly described, and its progression from cold to violent fever is logical and believable. Marianne's convalescence gives her the opportunity to reflect upon her past actions. Through her serious illness she achieves vital self-knowledge. It seems that we are expecting to believe that Marianne has changed rather drastically as the result of her fever. However, as I stated earlier, Marianne has lost very little of her former sensibility. It is still very difficult to imagine Marianne marrying "with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and

and lively friendship" (SS,p.366) as we are told is the case.

The other reason for finding the marriage unsatisfactory lies in the personalities of Colonel Brandon and Willoughby. The latter's 'loss' as a character (through the revelation about his immoral past) is unfortunate, as he and Marianne do appear to be ideally suited. To complicate matters further, Willoughby reappears in Chapter 44, once again engaging the reader's sympathy and interest, despite his shocking past. Mrs Dashwood's assertion that "Marianne would yet never have been so happy with him (Willoughby) as she will be with Colonel Brandon" (SS,p.331) cannot be accepted by Elinor or the reader. There is not any reason to suppose that Marianne and Willoughby would not have been very happy, especially when Willoughby's sincere love for Marianne is made evident in his interview with Elinor in Chapter 44. By comparison with Willoughby, Colonel Brandon is infinitely more virtuous and worthy, but he is also rather dull and colourless. At no stage do we see the Colonel personally declaring his love to Marianne, nor do we witness his proposal of marriage. Jane Austen does not even give us any dialogue between the couple. Marvin Mudrick is very critical of the ending of Sense and Sensibility, finding the faults cited very serious indeed. He states angrily that "Marianne, the life and center of the novel, has been betrayed; and not by Willoughby".²⁹ While I cannot go as far as Mr Mudrick, I do feel that the marriage of Marianne Dashwood and Colonel Brandon continues to be unconvincing, despite the Colonel's obvious merits. Jane Austen clearly wanted to pair off the two remaining 'worthy' characters, but the difference between them seems almost too great to be overcome. Furthermore, the author's resurrection of Willoughby renders Marianne's marriage to the Colonel less satisfactory. The reader's uneasiness at the conclusion of the novel remains undispeled.

2. Louisa Musgrove's fall at Lyme - Persuasion

Louisa's fall and subsequent period of convalescence have a profound effect on the plot of Persuasion. Before the journey to Lyme it appears as if Louisa Musgrove will become the wife of Captain Wentworth. Initially, it is hard to decide which of the Musgrove sisters Captain Wentworth intends to marry. However, Henrietta is reconciled with her cousin Charles Hayter and, as Anne regretfully realises, "every thing now marked out Louisa for Captain Wentworth, nothing could be plainer" (P,p.112-113). In the same chapter, Admiral and Mrs Croft discuss Wentworth and his marital prospects and the Admiral believes that his brother-in-law "certainly means to have one or other of those two girls" (P,p.113). However, by the end of the novel, Louisa is engaged to Wentworth's friend Captain Benwick, and Anne and Wentworth are reunited. This somewhat surprising change of affairs must be principally attributed to the fall Louisa incurs at Lyme, as it is the only major crisis occurring in the novel which would be likely to produce an effect different to the one Jane Austen anticipates in Chapter 10.

Louisa's fall occurs in Chapter 11, when a party of the young people makes a short trip to Lyme Regis. The group (its size augmented by the Harvilles and Benwick) walk along the Cobb, where the wind makes it desirable for them to move down to the lower level. Jane Austen states that "all were contented to pass quietly and carefully down the steep flight, excepting Louisa; she must be jumped down them by Captain Wentworth. In all their walks he had had to jump her from the stiles; the sensation was delightful to her" (P,p.129). Louisa, having been assisted down the steps by Captain Wentworth, desires to repeat that enjoyable experience and does so precipitously, falling before Wentworth can catch her. Louisa "was taken up lifeless" (Pp,129), although it is soon ascertained that she will recover. The accident means that Louisa must now remain with the Harvilles and Benwick in Lyme, where she is later joined by her anxious

parents. We are reassured in Chapter 14 that Louisa is now "recovering apace" (P,p.149) and hear no more of her until Anne receives a letter from Mary in Chapter 18. Mary tells Anne that Louisa has returned to Uppercross and then reveals that Captain Benwick and Louisa Musgrove are in love and wish to marry. With Louisa surprisingly engaged to Benwick, Wentworth is now a free man, and able to renew his attention to Anne (as he eventually does).

The sudden and unexpected engagement of Benwick and Louisa is vitally important to the plot of Persuasion. How does Jane Austen account for its occurrence? Anne's reaction to the news is one of astonished delight (P,p.176). Once she is on her own she attempts to understand the event. "Where could have been the attraction? . . . It had been in situation. They had been thrown together several weeks, . . . they must have been depending almost entirely on each other, and Louisa just recovering from illness, had been in an interesting state, and Captain Benwick was not inconsolable" (P,p.177-178). The reader is meant to accept Anne's explanation for the engagement, and it is not too difficult to believe. The betrothal can be explained by looking at the characters of the two principals. Anne describes Benwick as having "an affectionate nature. He must love somebody" (P,p.178). Anne suspected as much in her conversation with Benwick at Lyme, and does not waste much sympathy on him in the privacy of her own thoughts, although she is happy enough to talk with him. Anne also describes Louisa as being "in an interesting state" (P,p.177), and it is very likely that Benwick's quietness and love of poetry proved very agreeable to Louisa while recovering from her nasty fall. Charles tells Anne that Louisa is "much recovered; but she is altered: there is no running or jumping about, no laughing or dancing" (P,p.223). Benwick's qualities would be appreciated by Louisa, especially as he was her constant companion at Lyme. She also displays strong naval fervour.

The consequences of the accident and convalescence are not

inexplicable. Is the accident itself well contrived? It is Louisa's self-will which is responsible for the accident. She is depicted as being rather lively and headstrong, and Wentworth admires and, indeed, reinforces these qualities in her (P,p.107, p.110), believing her to have a strong, warm personality (as opposed to Anne's supposed weakness). The circumstances leading to the fall are in character for Louisa, as Jane Austen emphasises on p.116. Her delight in Wentworth's favour is evident (P,p.120, p.129). However, although Louisa's part in the event is well realised, the whole incident is handled in rather a perfunctory manner, which has bothered some critics. Mary Lascelles attempts to account for this by conjecturing that "Louisa Musgrove was originally meant to suffer injury in some sort of carriage accident . . . but that . . . Jane Austen was turned from her purpose by remembrance of two such accidents, . . . and contrived instead that fall from the Cobb which wears, to me, the air of an improvisation".³⁰ Jane Austen does not draw out the incident, and near tragedy soon becomes almost comic, even if rather inappropriate comedy. Clearly Louisa cannot be in grave danger if Jane Austen's reaction is so brisk and light, as it is when she describes public reaction to the accident and the report that there were "two dead young ladies" on the Cobb (P,p.131). The fact that the accident is far from being fatal could explain Jane Austen's decision not to dwell on it. Her main interest is in the effects of the accident (on Louisa and Wentworth) and she can be forgiven for skipping over the physical details of the fall. The most puzzling aspect of the incident is the ineptitude of Benwick and Wentworth, both naval commanders who have presumably dealt with worse accidents in their careers at sea. Anne is shown in a very good light, as she is the only member of the party to act with any semblance of good sense. Both Charles and Wentworth turn instinctively to Anne for guidance, and she responds capably. It is necessary that Wentworth should be made to acknowledge Anne's worth and superiority (particularly over the wilful Louisa) and Anne's "strength and zeal" (P,p.130)

come as no surprise. However, there is still room for Benwick and Wentworth to act rationally and capably, which neither does very successfully. The personal guilt Captain Wentworth experiences on Louisa's falling just before he could catch her helps to explain his inability to cope. Although we do not have any direct examples of Benwick's strength and capability, Admiral Croft affirms that Captain Benwick is "an excellent, good-hearted fellow . . . a very active, zealous officer too" (P,p.182), so it would be natural to expect him to behave with more efficient good sense than he displays. The slightly inconsistent conduct of Benwick and Wentworth is a rather minor point, and Wentworth's reaction can be easily explained. Nevertheless, the incident is not as tidy and plausible as we have come to expect.

Louisa's fall at Lyme Regis plays a major role in the plot of Persuasion. Its consequences for Wentworth will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. The fall leads eventually to the engagement of Benwick and Louisa, which Captain Harville finds distressing. His sister ("a very superior creature" - P,p.192) was formerly engaged to Benwick, and died only a few months before the accident at Lyme occurred. Harville is still grieving over Benwick's inconstancy when he is visiting Bath, and it is Benwick's sudden engagement to Louisa which provokes the all-important discussion on constancy in love in Chapter 23.

Andrew Wright cites "the fall of Miss Musgrove at Lyme" as one of a set of "fortuitous circumstances" in Persuasion leading to the reunion of Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth.³¹ The fortuitous nature of the fall cannot be denied. However, the consequences of the accident can be explained by the character of Benwick and by the effects of the fall on Louisa. The fall itself can also be attributed to Louisa's ruling characteristic - her headstrong impetuosity. The actual description of the scene on the Cobb is not perfectly written, but as the event did not prove tragic,

Jane Austen had no need to indulge in dramatic prose. Mary Lascelles' theory (quoted in an earlier paragraph) may also help explain the perfunctory nature of the writing. Finally, while I am loath to place much emphasis on the fact that Persuasion was never fully revised by its author, it is possible that Jane Austen might have altered this section of Persuasion (or at least tightened its structure and tone) had she revised the novel. I do not believe that she would have needed to change the type of accident as the fall accords perfectly with the description we have already been given of Louisa Musgrove. However, Jane Austen might have been moved to describe the scene on the Cobb in a slightly different manner. Despite the minor flaws, the accident and its consequences are not at all improbable and once again, Jane Austen has taken care to relate events to the personalities of the characters involved.

3. Jane Bennet's illness - Pride and Prejudice

While Jane Bennet's illness is not as serious as the other two studied in this chapter, it does necessitate a stay at Netherfield, where she is eventually joined by Elizabeth. This illness does not actually advance the plot of Pride and Prejudice in a major way, but it does give us further insight into the characters of Darcy and Elizabeth. The stay at Netherfield is also used by Jane Austen to provide information which assumes greater significance later on.

The circumstances leading up to Jane's illness and enforced stay with the Bingleys are quite realistic. The invitation from Caroline Bingley is received in Chapter 7 and has been proffered because the Netherfield gentlemen are dining out that evening. Mrs Bennet, although disappointed that Bingley will not be present, decides that her eldest daughter must travel by horse as it is likely to rain heavily, making Jane unable to return to Longbourn that same night. Mrs Bennet's plans come to fruition as the rain falls shortly after Jane's departure. That Jane catches cold is not surprising, because her note to Elizabeth (received the following morning) reveals that she was drenched in the downpour, and is now unwell. The whole incident is perfectly plausible, given the character of Mrs Bennet. She is a foolish woman who desires little more than to see her daughters married to wealthy gentlemen (PP, p.51, p.53, p.178). However, even without Mrs Bennet's schemes, it is very likely that Jane would still have been obliged to journey by horse, as Mr Bennet eventually admits that the carriage horses are unavailable (PP, p.77). The likelihood of heavy rain is established before Jane sets out.

Elizabeth's visit to Netherfield as soon as she receives Jane's note is quite in character. The two eldest Bennet children have a close, caring relationship and Elizabeth is clearly concerned to learn of her sister's ailment (PP, p.78). She is most determined to see her sister, despite

the unavailability of the carriage. Jane Austen tells us that "she was no horsewoman" (PP,p.78), and so Elizabeth walks the three miles to Netherfield, through the mud. Elizabeth is not someone totally governed by social conventions. Her concern for her sister's welfare overrides any objections she might have had to walking such a distance in unpleasant conditions.

While at Netherfield, Elizabeth spends some time in the company of Darcy and the other residents. In the scenes at Netherfield, information is revealed about the characters of both Elizabeth and Darcy, and this is the main function of Jane Bennet's illness (see also the conclusion to Chapter One). Darcy's admiration of Elizabeth is becoming more obvious (PP,p.82, p.91, p.102). Although Elizabeth claims to dislike Darcy, she is still able to be amused by his conversation, and the group have several spirited discussions. Elizabeth is not in awe of Darcy, and her natural personality comes through in her conversations. She is also unrattled by the spite and jealousy of Caroline Bingley and shows herself to be quite capable of remaining calm and amiable. The Netherfield interlude gives Darcy, especially, the opportunity to become better acquainted with Elizabeth. It is clear that the more he sees and hears of her, the more attracted he is, and we are told that he "had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her" (P,p.96).

As a result of Jane Bennet's illness the focus of the novel shifts to Netherfield for those chapters. Jane Austen is able to prepare for future events in the novel by incorporating various pieces of information into the speeches of her characters. It is Miss Bingley who proves most useful in this respect. She is clearly desirous of securing Darcy as a husband and is continually attempting to engage that gentleman in conversation. She also praises him several times, and her commendation gives us further insight into his character. Firstly, Miss Bingley reveals that Darcy is greatly interested in maintaining the condition of his estate,

and making improvements where possible. The example cited is Darcy's diligent enlargement of the Pemberley library (PP,p.83). Mrs Reynolds later tells the Gardiners and Elizabeth that Darcy is a conscientious master, and the praise bestowed by Caroline Bingley suggests to the reader that the statement is true. Miss Bingley also praises Darcy's ability at letter writing and the latter admits that his letters "are generally long" (PP,p.93). Both these facts are used by Jane Austen in later chapters of Pride and Prejudice, and have been casually (and cleverly) introduced long before they are needed.

Jane Bennet's illness is not too serious, nor does it bring about any change in her. The principal function of the episode lies in its characterisation of the hero and heroine. The illness, unlike the other two studied, does not contribute greatly to the plot of the novel. Its purpose is to bring about another encounter between Elizabeth and Darcy, and is one of many such incidents occurring in Pride and Prejudice where one or both of them modify their opinions of the other.

There is one very obvious similarity between the illness of Marianne Dashwood in Sense and Sensibility and the fall of Louisa Musgrove in Persuasion. In both cases, the illnesses lead to a change in the two sufferers, and to a hitherto unexpected development in the plot. In Marianne's case, the change occasioned by her serious fever and contemplative recuperation is intended to explain her marriage to Colonel Brandon, with which event Sense and Sensibility concludes. Louisa's accident produces a diminution in her previously very lively spirits and explains why she finds bookish, affectionate Benwick attractive. However, the most important consequence of Louisa's illness is that it frees Wentworth from any obligation (possibly culminating in marriage) towards her. Furthermore, both illnesses arise through self-indulgence of a more or less foolish kind, meaning that both contribute to the moral scheme of the novel as well as the plot. Both occurrences bring about vital changes in the expected course of events, but the specific details of each illness differ more than would appear to be the case on first glance.

The two illnesses (with their enforced periods of lengthy convalescence) cause two characters to achieve a degree of self-knowledge, vital in both cases. As would be expected, Marianne's self-induced illness, which almost results in her death, makes her realise just how self-indulgent her actions have been, especially when compared with the fortitude and 'right' behaviour of her sister Elinor, suffering from a similar disappointment in love. Louisa's fall also brings about a higher degree of self-recognition, not in that young lady, but in Captain Wentworth. Before Anne and Wentworth can be properly reunited, both must gain self-knowledge, and Wentworth's is achieved through the accident at Lyme Regis. Louisa's role in Persuasion is a comparatively minor one, in the sense that she is not one of the main characters in that novel. She does perform two important functions in the book. The first is in attracting Wentworth (who acts out of pride, rather than for any better

reason), and the second is in marrying Benwick, rather than the man whom all her acquaintances expect her to marry. The reason that Jane Austen does not use the fall at Lyme to bring about self-knowledge in the victim is that Louisa Musgrove is not the main focus at this stage. Louisa has her uses, but it is Wentworth in whom Jane Austen is primarily interested. As the hero, he must prove worthy of regaining Anne. Recognition of Anne's superiority (and his own foolish pride) comes at Lyme, and he grows in stature through Louisa's fall and his consequent self-awareness. Jane Austen has used a similar device in Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion, but some of the effects that the devices produce are dissimilar.

Jane Austen has not used illness as the cause of change in both cases. Instead, she has chosen to use the device of an accident in Persuasion, which seems a wise decision. Jane Austen demonstrates in Sense and Sensibility an ability to depict Marianne's illness, its causes and consequences very realistically. The causes of Marianne's illness are consistent with her personality. Louisa Musgrove's mishap is equally consistent with her nature.

In summary, Marianne Dashwood's illness and her subsequent desire for self-improvement are well planned and convincingly described by Jane Austen. However, Marianne's desire to reform does not bring about as marked a degree of change in her personality as the plot demands. The illness is very thoroughly detailed, but it does not account sufficiently for the marriage at the end of Sense and Sensibility. In contrast, I find the accident of Louisa, and its consequences, quite plausible. The fall of Louisa Musgrove in Persuasion is not as well described, nor does it receive the depth of preparation as its counterpart in Sense and Sensibility. However, the effects of Louisa's fall on the plot of Persuasion are believable. The self-realisation which the event occasions in Wentworth and the freedom he regains are both accounted for satisfactorily. Both of these devices of

plot have good and bad points, but in the final analysis, the one in Persuasion is superior because the effects on the plot are acceptable.

The illness of Jane Bennet in Pride and Prejudice bears little affinity to those of Marianne Dashwood and Louisa Musgrove. Its consequences are far less serious, and its impact on the plot of Pride and Prejudice is marginal. The success of the device of an illness in Pride and Prejudice should therefore perhaps be attributed to the fact that it is not required to have a significant effect on the plot. In this chapter, it is clear that the illness having the least effect on the plot of the novel, is also the most plausible and successful.

CHAPTER FIVE: ALTERNATIVE SUITORS1. Edward and Robert (for Lucy) - Sense and Sensibility

Edward Ferrars has been engaged secretly to Lucy Steele for some four years (as Lucy tells Elinor in Chapter 22 of the novel). Elinor (and her family) believe that Edward is attracted to her - "she felt that Edward stood very high in her opinion. She believed the regard to be mutual; but she required greater certainty of it" (SS,p.54). Edward's behaviour is frequently reserved (SS,p.56, p.120) and his spirits are often rather low. His previously inexplicable behaviour is partially accounted for by Lucy's revelation in Chapter 22. Although Elinor is obliged to accept Lucy's statements as the truth, she still believes (as does Marianne, when the full facts are known by her) that Edward's "affection was all her own . . . Her mother, sisters, Fanny, all had been conscious of his regard for her at Norland; it was not an illusion of her own vanity. He certainly loved her" (SS,p.157). Despite Edward's affection for Elinor, when his engagement to Lucy is publicised in Chapter 37, Edward resolves to honour his promise to Lucy, and he intends to marry her as soon as their finances make it practicable. With the presentation to Edward of the Delaford living, it appears that the marriage of Lucy and Edward will take place almost immediately. However, it is disclosed in Chapter 48 that Lucy, contrary to expectation, has married Edward's younger brother Robert.

I have discussed this occurrence and Jane Austen's explanation for it in Chapter Three, Section One. Suffice to say that the marriage of Lucy and Robert, although a surprise, can be accounted for by the personalities of both Lucy and Robert. Jane Austen employs the device of an alternative suitor for Lucy, so that the plot of Sense and Sensibility can be suitably resolved. Elinor is clearly established as the heroine of Sense and Sensibility (along with her sister

Marianne) and Edward is the only man in the novel with whom she falls in love. There is a possibility (suggested originally by John Dashwood) that Elinor could marry Colonel Brandon, but this prospect never eventuates because of the Colonel's love for Marianne (and Elinor's love for Edward). Jane Austen gives us several indications of Edward's attachment to Elinor, and it seems right that they should be united at the end of the novel, despite Marvin Mudrick's protest that Edward is "damp company"³² and the fact that Jane Austen never allows him to give evidence of the qualities he is reputed to have. Through the plausible device of an elopement, Jane Austen makes it possible for the marriage of Elinor and Edward to eventuate. The pattern of the novel requires their marriage to take place, and it is singularly appropriate that the artful Lucy should be paired off with foolish, conceited Robert Ferrars. Lucy, although shrewd and rather beautiful, is no fit match for Edward. Lucy and Robert have the money they both desire at the end of the novel, and so are not 'punished' completely. Edward and Elinor are far from being wealthy, but they are able to live comfortably and the reader feels assured of their happiness in the future.

Edward's initial engagement is necessary for several reasons, despite the fact that Jane Austen does not want Lucy and Edward to marry. Edward's and Lucy's engagement is revealed to Elinor four months before it is publicly disclosed. Elinor is placed in a situation very similar to Marianne, but her behaviour contrasts markedly with that of her younger sister. By placing the two Dashwood sisters in virtually parallel situations, Jane Austen can examine 'right' and 'wrong' behaviour. Elinor behaves with sense and decorum, although clearly suffering through the loss of Edward. Marianne (not without sense herself) displays excessive sensibility and her grief, while no greater than Elinor's, is allowed a free rein. The engagement of Edward and Lucy is also worked in with the motif of second attachments, so prevalent in Sense and Sensibility as Susan Morgan

notes and explains in her article on the novel.³³ Edward (along with Colonel Brandon and Marianne) shows that it is possible to love more than once, and his happy second attachment contrasts with his unfortunate first engagement. Finally, Edward is prepared to behave honourably towards Lucy, as a gentleman ought. At no stage are we led to believe that the engagement between Lucy and Edward will lapse through any act of Edward's. He realises that Elinor is far superior to Lucy but he is prepared to act with honour, fulfilling his duty to Lucy. Edward's behaviour in this situation can be compared with Willoughby's. Although Willoughby is not formally engaged to Marianne Dashwood, that young lady (and her family) believed herself "to be as solemnly engaged to him, as if the strictest legal covenant had bound us to each other" (SS,p.200). There is every chance that Willoughby and Marianne, although not wealthy, would have been happy had they married. However, Willoughby ignores any moral obligation towards Marianne when he decides to marry for money. Edward displays the behaviour required of a true gentleman when he is prepared to marry Lucy, with little chance of wealth or great happiness.

It is thematically necessary in Sense and Sensibility for Edward Ferrars to be engaged to Lucy Steele. It is not fitting that their marriage should eventuate, however, and Jane Austen is obliged to employ the device of an alternative suitor who removes Lucy as a rival, leaving Edward free to marry Elinor. The sudden alliance between Lucy and Robert Ferrars can be explained more than adequately, and Jane Austen has prepared for its occurrence, by including subtle hints in the chapters prior to the elopment.

2. Wentworth and Benwick (for Louisa) - Persuasion

In Persuasion Chapter 10, we are given every indication that Captain Wentworth will marry Louisa Musgrove. After Louisa's fall at Lyme, Wentworth is remorseful, feeling that he was greatly responsible for the accident. The incident also produces another effect on him, with potentially more serious consequences. As Wentworth confesses to Anne (in Chapter 23), he discovered "that I was considered by Harville an engaged man! . . ." (P,p.244). He adds that "he found too late, in short, that he had entangled himself; and that precisely as he became fully satisfied of his not caring for Louisa at all, he must regard himself as bound to her" (P,p.245). Wentworth is prepared to behave honourably towards Louisa, to the extent of marrying her upon her recovery from the fall. He states that "I was hers in honour if she wished it" (P,p.245) and he is prepared to marry her if she so desires. However, that sacrifice is not required of him. Jane Austen again employs the device of an alternative suitor, and it is Captain Benwick who marries Louisa, not Wentworth as first seemed likely. The engagement between Benwick and Louisa has been discussed fully in Chapter Four and I concluded that the engagement can be satisfactorily accounted for, as Anne does in Chapter 18 of Persuasion.

Wentworth's obligation to Louisa Musgrove plays an important role in Persuasion. He is angry with Anne Elliot, believing her to have given in weakly to Lady Russell's persuasion when deciding not to marry him nearly eight years earlier. He has now amassed a considerable fortune and has risen in his chosen profession - the navy. He declares to his sister Mrs Croft that "I am . . . quite ready to make a . . . match" (P,p.86), and it seems that one of the Musgrove sisters will indeed be his choice. Jane Austen tells us that the only young woman Wentworth will not consider marrying is Anne Elliot, who he feels "had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shown a feebleness of character in doing so" (P,p.86). Louisa's

accident at Lyme makes Captain Wentworth realise how mistaken he has been. He realises that Louisa's supposed strength of mind is really strong will and a desire to have her own way. The accident also brings to light Anne's excellent sense and her superiority to Louisa is acknowledged by Wentworth. Before Wentworth and Anne can be reunited at the end of Persuasion Wentworth has to experience a new self-awareness, and undergo a period of waiting. He is brought to acknowledge that he has unfairly misjudged Anne, and he realises that his pride has almost involved him in an unfortunate marriage.

Wentworth deserves to marry Anne, although he must be made aware of his faults and her merits before he can do so. It is far more fitting that Louisa Musgrove should marry Captain Benwick for, just as Benwick is inferior to Wentworth, so is Louisa Anne's inferior. The engagement of Benwick and Louisa is initially surprising, but it can be convincingly accounted for as we saw. The device of an alternative suitor in Persuasion is necessary, and appropriate.

In both Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion Jane Austen needs to extricate Edward Ferrars and Captain Wentworth from undesirable situations so that both men may be free to marry their true loves. However, both gentlemen have to behave honourably towards the two ladies with whom they have become previously entangled. At no stage in Sense and Sensibility do we doubt that Edward will marry Lucy, rather than act dishonourably in the interests of his own happiness. "Mrs Jennings was very warm in her praise of Edward's conduct, but only Elinor and Marianne understood its true merit. They only knew how little he had had to tempt him to be disobedient, and how small was the consolation, beyond the consciousness of doing right, that could remain to him in the loss of his friends and fortune" (SS,p.270). Although we hear of no positive intention of Wentworth's to remain honourable towards Louisa until long after the necessity for such behaviour, it is impossible to believe that he will desert Louisa. Interestingly, we are given no hint as to his diminishing regard for Louisa after the accident, and it seems that he is still attracted to her.

The heroes of both Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion display a sense of honour and duty, and both learn from their entanglements. The two gentlemen are rewarded by the end of each novel. Jane Austen brings this about by contriving a fortuitous incident in each case. Although the marriages of Lucy and Robert, and Louisa and Benwick come as a surprise, Jane Austen has prepared for both. Lucy, Robert and James Benwick all act characteristically, and Louisa's change of heart can be convincingly explained by her serious fall and enforced convalescence.

In both novels, the honourable behaviour of the hero can be contrasted with that of another character; this is particularly evident in Sense and Sensibility. Edward's sense of honour places him in a very favourable light when compared with Willoughby. Captain Wentworth's readiness to marry Louisa if she so desires shows that he too has a

sense of honour. His actions can be compared with those of his 'rival', Mr Elliot. The letter Mrs Smith shows Anne in Chapter 21 proves Mr Elliot to have been far from a gentleman in the past. His elopement with Mrs Clay at the end of Persuasion reveals "how double a game he had been playing" (P,p.252), and confirms that he is not a true gentleman.

There is another dissimilarity in the two situations aside from the difference in the devices used to extricate the two men from their respective predicaments. Edward does not try to encourage a separation between himself and Lucy. Wentworth, on the other hand, takes the positive step of removing himself from the vicinity of Lyme and Louisa. He tells Anne later that "he would gladly weaken, by any fair means, whatever feelings or speculations concerning him might exist" (P,p.245), although he is prepared to return to the district as Louisa's fiancé. The fact that Wentworth is not near Louisa while she is recovering, helps explain her subsequent attachment to Benwick, who is a constant companion.

CHAPTER SIX: MINOR CHARACTERS

1. Lady Catherine de Bourgh - Pride and Prejudice

Many commentators on Pride and Prejudice have remarked upon the usefulness to the plot of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Jane Austen would seem to have anticipated this when Elizabeth says of Lady Catherine that she "has been of infinite use, which ought to make her happy, for she loves to be of use" (PP,p.389). Lady Catherine, it cannot be denied, is useful to the plot of Pride and Prejudice, and she is also interesting as a character (and as a reflection on her nephew, who bears some resemblance to her).

Lady Catherine is primarily useful to the novel as Darcy's aunt and as Mr Collins' patroness. Wickham discloses to Elizabeth in Chapter 16 that Lady Catherine (whose condescension and "beneficence" are so extolled by Mr Collins) is "aunt to the present Mr Darcy" (PP,p.126). Wickham describes her ladyship as having manners that are "dictatorial and insolent" and he also remarks upon her "pride" (PP,p.127). He points out that Lady Catherine's daughter "Miss de Bourgh, will have a very large fortune, and it is believed that she and her cousin (Darcy) will unite the two estates" (PP,p.126). Wickham's information about Lady Catherine, although not the main focus of his conversation with Elizabeth, proves very useful. It also helps guide Elizabeth and the reader by establishing his credibility. The reader is now aware of the relationship between Mr Darcy and Mr Collins' benefactor, and the possibility of Darcy marrying Miss de Bourgh has also been raised. This latter fact presumably explains Lady Catherine's delight in having Darcy come to stay at Rosings in Chapter 30 of Pride and Prejudice. Darcy's projected visit is casually mentioned by Jane Austen on p.203, when we are informed that "Elizabeth has heard soon after her arrival, that Mr Darcy was expected there in the course of a few weeks". Elizabeth

notes that Lady Catherine "talked of his coming with the greatest satisfaction, (and) spoke of him in terms of the highest admiration" (PP,p.204). Elizabeth believes that Lady Catherine fully intends Darcy to marry her daughter, so it is likely that she would encourage her nephew to visit Rosings. It is essential that Darcy and Elizabeth should both stay in the Hunsford neighbourhood at the same time, and Darcy's visit can be explained by his relationship to Lady Catherine.

It is coincidental that Lady Catherine de Bourgh should be both Mr Collins' revered patroness and Darcy's aunt, and necessary for the plot. However, the fact that Mr Collins is so deferential towards her ladyship reveals much about his nature (and hers), and provides scope for Jane Austen's ability as a comic writer. Secondly, Lady Catherine and her nephew are not dissimilar in many respects. Lady Catherine can be viewed as a caricature of Darcy (just as Fanny Dashwood in Sense and Sensibility can be described as a "strong caricature" of her husband - p.41). Lady Catherine de Bourgh is a proud woman whose "air was not conciliating, nor was her manner . . . such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank . . . whatever she said, was spoken in so authoritative a tone, as marked her self-importance" (PP,p.197). Darcy also places a great value on rank and dignity, and is very quickly "discovered to be proud, to be above his company" (PP,p.58) by the people of Meryton. Furthermore, Lady Catherine is described as having "some resemblance to Mr Darcy" in her "countenance and deportment" (PP,p.197). It is not hard to accept that Lady Catherine is the aunt of Fitzwilliam Darcy.

Lady Catherine's second function in the plot of Pride and Prejudice occurs in Chapter 56 when she visits Longbourn, having heard that Elizabeth is expected to marry her nephew Mr Darcy. The full effects of Lady Catherine's visit become clear in Chapter 58 when Darcy repeats his proposal of marriage to Elizabeth, to have his offer accepted.

"Elizabeth soon learnt that they were indebted for their present good understanding to the efforts of his aunt, who did call on him in her return through London, and there relate her journey to Longbourn, its motive, and the substance of her conversation with Elizabeth" (PP,p.375). Once Darcy is acquainted with the particulars of Elizabeth's refusal to submit to Lady Catherine's command, he hastens to Longbourn for the purpose of once again asking Elizabeth to marry him, believing that he may be successful this time. Mark Schorer aptly says that "Lady Catherine, through the very extremity of her kind of snobbery, is in fact the agent in the plot that at last completely releases Darcy from his".³⁴ Lady Catherine would have been most indignant to know that she had helped unite her nephew and Elizabeth, and this is the final irony of Lady Catherine's involvement in the plot. Marvin Mudrick remarks upon Lady Catherine's usefulness to the story, and notes that although her ladyship expects to have "her judgments explicitly followed . . . in the story at least, she never does what she thinks she is doing, or wishes to do".³⁵

In connection with Lady Catherine's important visit to the Bennet household, Mary Lascelles observes the role that Mr Collins plays in sending her ladyship to question Elizabeth. Her ladyship says that she saw the Collinses "the night before last" in answer to an enquiry of Mrs Bennet's (PP,p. 362). She later angrily tells Elizabeth that "a report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago" (PP,p.363). Miss Lascelles says that "we are left to infer a connexion between these two references . . . Such are the care and ingenuity of her early invention".³⁶ "As he likes to be useful to Lady Catherine, so is he (Mr Collins) useful to the plot".³⁷ In her turn, Lady Catherine de Bourgh also proves very useful to the plot of Pride and Prejudice.

In Pride and Prejudice Jane Austen makes use of Lady Catherine de Bourgh in a variety of ways. She has connections with Mr Collins and, more importantly, with Darcy. She is

also used as an acceptable reason for Darcy's visit to Rosings, coinciding fortuitously with Elizabeth's stay at Hunsford. Jane Austen employs her as an agent of the plot on one further occasion, leading this time to the resolution of the plot. Lady Catherine also fits in with one of the main themes of the novel - that of pride. As a caricature of Darcy, she is the sort of person that Darcy could become, if his pride had not been surmounted. Lady Catherine's behaviour in Pride and Prejudice is convincing as well as being convenient. Jane Austen established at an early stage in the novel how Lady Catherine likes to organise the lives of those around her (PP, p.108, p.111, p.147). Her pride is also mentioned on several occasions, rendering her actions in the novel totally plausible.

2. Mrs Reynolds - Pride and Prejudice

Mrs Reynolds is Darcy's housekeeper at Pemberley, and it is to be expected that she would have an intimate and true knowledge of her master's character. When the Gardiners and Elizabeth visit Pemberley in Chapter 43 of Pride and Prejudice it is Mrs Reynolds who shows them around the house, talking about the Darcy family as the visitors move from room to room. Elizabeth initially describes Mrs Reynolds as "a respectable-looking, elderly woman, much less fine and more civil, than she had any notion of finding her" (PP,p. 267). Mrs Reynolds is happy to answer Mr Gardiner's questions about the family "either from pride or attachment" (PP,p.269). Mrs Reynolds praises Darcy highly, mentioning his kindness, generosity and concern for others. Her listeners are astounded, even Elizabeth, who already knows that Darcy's character is not as bad as it has been painted. Mr Gardiner attributes Mrs Reynolds' praise to a "kind of family prejudice" (PP,p.270) and Elizabeth feels that the housekeeper's commendation of her master "was going pretty far" (PP,p.270).

Mrs Reynolds' veracity is proven to the Gardiners a short while later, when Darcy displays the good nature attributed to him by Mrs Reynolds. The Gardiners are also eventually brought to realize that the housekeeper's description of Wickham as having "turned out very wild" (PP,p.268) is quite accurate, and not just another example of Mrs Reynolds' prejudice on behalf of the Darcy family. For Elizabeth and the reader, the housekeeper's reliability as a witness of Darcy's character is established a little sooner. Elizabeth already knows the extent of Wickham's degeneracy, and Mrs Reynolds' description accords with her own certain knowledge. Mrs Reynolds does actually mention Darcy's supposed pride, and accounts for people's opinion of him by stating that "to my fancy, it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men" (PP,p.271).

Mrs Reynolds seems to have been included in the novel to provide further evidence of Darcy's being an excellent man in all respects. Her testimony as to Darcy's good nature is soon given credibility by Darcy's behaviour towards Elizabeth and her aunt and uncle, at the end of Chapter 43. Ironically, the Gardiners and Elizabeth initially believe that Mrs Reynolds' praise of her master is evidence of her loyalty to the family, rather than an accurate summary of Darcy's character. They believe her to be exhibiting pride and prejudice (in favour of Darcy), rather than adhering strictly to the facts. However, when the three visitors personally experience Darcy's good will, they decide that "the authority of a servant who had known him since he was four years old, and whose own manners indicated respectability, was not the hastily rejected" (PP,p.284). The Gardiners' own prejudice against Darcy is exposed and they are obliged to rethink their opinion of him.

Mary Lascelles says that "Mrs Reynolds is a useful piece of machinery - but I do not think that the more exacting Jane Austen of the later novels would have been content with her".³⁸ In defence of Mrs Reynolds and her role in Pride and Prejudice it should be borne in mind that Mrs Reynolds' testimony of Darcy's fine character is not strictly necessary. By the end of the novel, no one could doubt that Darcy is a good man, and the Gardiners begin to revise their opinion of him as early as Chapter 44. However, the Gardiners and Elizabeth do not change their attitudes towards Darcy primarily because of Mrs Reynolds' praise. Her inclusion in the novel anticipates Darcy's good behaviour, and also provides yet another examination of the key themes of pride and prejudice. Despite first indications, it is not the housekeeper who is guilty of those vices. Mrs Reynolds' praise of Darcy is another step along Elizabeth's path towards a full understanding and acceptance of that gentleman.

3. Mrs Jennings - Sense and Sensibility

Mrs Jennings is one of Jane Austen's minor characters who serves a variety of functions, many connected to the plot of the novel. Her first use arises out of her relationship with the Steeles, whom she and Sir John Middleton chance to meet one morning in Exeter. Jane Austen needs to have the Steeles resident at Barton Park, and Mrs Jennings is the prime means for achieving this situation (as discussed in Chapter One, Section Two).

Mrs Jennings' second function in the plot of Sense and Sensibility comes in Chapter 25, with her invitation to Elinor and Marianne to accompany her to London. As the mother of Lady Middleton, she spends a good deal of time in the vicinity of Barton Park, and gets to know the Dashwoods quite well. She is, among other things, a "good-humoured, merry . . . woman" (SS,p.66) and is clearly very fond of company (SS,p.141, p.171). Although the invitation is said to surprise the Dashwoods (SS,p.170) it is quite in character for Mrs Jennings. It is important for the plot of the novel that Elinor and Marianne should spend some time in London, and Marianne is very keen to go, hoping to meet up again soon with Willoughby. It is in London that the seeds of Marianne's self-indulgent affliction are sown. That same city does little to further Elinor's happiness, especially when both Lucy and Edward are staying there. London is also the scene of the publicising of Lucy's and Edward's secret engagement, and their marriage seems imminent. As can be seen, several major incidents take place in London. London is a convenient place to set these events, as it is plausible that all the characters involved would be staying there at the same time. (In this way it serves a similar function to Bath in Persuasion.) Jane Austen has to contrive a way of getting the elder Miss Dashwoods to London, and Mrs Jennings is an appropriate hostess.

It is through Mrs Jennings that Elinor and Marianne make a

short stay at Cleveland, the home of the Palmers. Mrs Jennings is due to travel there, and the Dashwoods are persuaded to accompany her (SS, Chapter 39). It is at Cleveland that Marianne is again able to indulge in solitary rambles around the more remote parts of the estate (after the restrictions of London), and her subsequent illness is surprising (see Chapter Four). Cleveland is also the scene of Willoughby's reappearance in Sense and Sensibility, caused by Marianne's serious illness.

Aside from the role Mrs Jennings plays in the plot of Sense and Sensibility, she is also included for thematic reasons. Although she is a rather vulgar woman, she is good-natured and well-meaning. As such, she can be described as a pivot between the 'good' and 'bad' characters in the novel. Initially, Marianne is very intolerant of Mrs Jennings (SS, p.98, p.212) and her excessive sensibility does not allow her to acknowledge the merits of Mrs Jennings. (Marianne treats Colonel Brandon in a similar way.) Marianne's illness and consequent self-awareness allow her to realise the error of her ways, and she finally treats Mrs Jennings with the respect and friendship she deserves. Marianne's growth and maturity as a character can be partially measured by her reaction to Mrs Jennings.

Mrs Jennings is an interesting character, and well depicted. Like many of Jane Austen's other minor characters she is extremely useful to her creator. However, once again, Jane Austen has managed to combine utility with plausibility, and Mrs Jennings' actions seem to issue from her character, rather than the other way around.

Jane Austen makes wide use of the minor characters in Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice and Persuasion, and their importance to the plots of the three novels cannot be denied. Frequently Jane Austen uses minor characters to bring about an unexpected development in the plot, leading ultimately to the satisfactory resolution of that plot. Lucy Steele and Robert Ferrars prove very useful for their creator in Sense and Sensibility, as do Wickham and Lady Catherine, for example, in Pride and Prejudice. Two minor characters in Persuasion Louisa Musgrove and James Benwick, are used to free Wentworth, enabling him to marry Anne, and thereby ending the novel positively and properly.

Two of the minor characters studied play very necessary roles in the plots of the novels in which they are characters. By way of contrast, Mrs Reynolds does not have any real effect on the plot of Pride and Prejudice, despite appearances. Her testimony of Darcy's nature adds weight to his characterisation, but it is not strictly necessary. Both Lady Catherine de Bourgh in Pride and Prejudice and Mrs Jennings in Sense and Sensibility are necessary to the plots of those two novels. Of the three characters, Lady Catherine is the one most useful to Jane Austen. Interestingly, I also find that her characterisation is extremely well done, and the part she plays is even less 'contrived' than are the roles of Mrs Reynolds and Mrs Jennings. With Lady Catherine, Jane Austen has gained the maximum possible use from a minor character. Lady Catherine is a caricature of Darcy, and an embodiment of the two main themes of the novel. Ironically, she is responsible for Darcy's second proposal to Elizabeth, that being the one thing she desperately tried to stop. The irony and subtlety manifest in this section of the plot of Pride and Prejudice make it successful, and Lady Catherine's great usefulness to her creator would be almost overlooked had Jane Austen not cleverly drawn attention to it in the penultimate chapter of the novel (see Section One of this chapter).

Jane Austen's minor characters generally play quite major roles in the plots of her novels, but they do not appear to have been included for that reason alone.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Sense and Sensibility

This novel is probably Jane Austen's most underrated work, especially when compared with the brilliance of Pride and Prejudice and the critical acclaim won by Emma. The fact that this novel has two heroines helps explain why critical opinion of Sense and Sensibility has not always been favourable. Several critics (Marvin Mudrick being among the most vehement) have declared that the novel is badly flawed, principally because of Marianne's marriage to Colonel Brandon, with which event the novel concludes. Dissatisfaction with the role of Willoughby is also common, and not unwarranted. However, despite the serious flaws in the Marianne/Brandon/Willoughby subplot, Sense and Sensibility does not deserve to be thoroughly slated by critics. This novel contains some fine pieces of writing and moreover, many of the plot devices employed by Jane Austen in this novel are better contrived than similar devices occurring in the other two novels studied (Pride and Prejudice and Persuasion).

The novel's faults are obvious and I will deal with them first. Marvin Mudrick states that "Marianne, the life and center of the novel, has been betrayed; and not by Willoughby".³⁹ Mr Mudrick is referring to Marianne Dashwood's marriage to Colonel Brandon. He (along with many other people) clearly feels that Marianne and Willoughby should have been united at the end of the novel, and he does not find Marianne's marriage to the Colonel at all convincing. In the chapter of this thesis devoted to an analysis of Marianne's illness and its far-reaching consequences, I came to a similar conclusion. Jane Austen's goal is clearly to have Marianne marry Colonel Brandon, a situation not without its own gentle irony when we remember Marianne's condemnation of the Colonel and his precautionary measures

in the interests of his deteriorating health! Marianne takes the romantic (and restricted) view that second attachments are impossible whereas Jane Austen shows in Sense and Sensibility that they frequently lead to great happiness, (as in the cases of Edward Ferrars and Mrs Henry Dashwood, as well as Marianne and Colonel Brandon).⁴⁰ To bring about the unexpected match between the Colonel and Marianne, Jane Austen uses the device of a serious illness, bringing considerable changes in the personality of the character afflicted (or so we are led to believe). The onset of the illness is perfectly plausible, as Jane Austen describes Marianne's excessive grief, her desire for solitude in her ramblings around the wildest parts of the grounds at Cleveland, and her careless disregard for her own health. The progression of the illness is also carefully detailed and Jane Austen devotes a chapter to a description of Marianne's worsening symptoms. The serious nature of the illness cannot be denied and it is to be expected that the experience would have a profound influence on Marianne, especially in the immediate future. Marianne's convalescence is necessarily a lengthy one, and through it she arrives at vital self-knowledge. The self-inflicted nature of her illness is also acknowledged, along with her selfish disregard for the feelings of others (particularly Elinor). Marianne's desire to mend her ways is a sincere one and quite understandable. However, Elinor and the reader note that Marianne's sensibility has not diminished. Her "eager(ness) in every thing" (SS,p.42) is merely being channelled into more worthwhile pursuits. The change in Marianne Dashwood is not as marked as we are first led to believe, which is why her marriage to Colonel Brandon, founded on "no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship" (SS,p.366), remains unsatisfactory. The illness and its immediate consequences are totally plausible, but Marianne's sensibility is not suitably dampened so as to render her marriage to the Colonel acceptable. Although the pressure on Marianne to marry the Colonel is probably not unfelt (SS,p.366), it is difficult to believe that a person

of Marianne's sensibility would submit for that reason alone (nor is it likely that she would marry simply for the "desire of an establishment" like Charlotte Lucas - PP, p.163). At no stage do we see the Colonel making a personal declaration of his love to Marianne and there is no dialogue between them which would assist the reader in comprehending Marianne's acceptance of Colonel Brandon as her husband.

The device of an illness leading to a change in our expectations is also utilised in Persuasion. The consequences of Louisa's fall can be more easily understood and accepted (and Anne's rationalisation in Chapter 18 is quite logical). However, the description of Louisa's accident is not as well done as the description of the illness in Sense and Sensibility. Jane Austen worked hard to make Marianne's illness totally convincing, but the care she expended is not totally sustained until the very end of the novel, and the consequences are therefore unacceptable.

The other major fault in Sense and Sensibility (connected with devices of plot) stems from Jane Austen's use of an event from the past to blacken Willoughby's character. Unfortunately, so that Willoughby is made totally ineligible to marry Marianne (and so that she can no longer desire such a match) Jane Austen is obliged to sacrifice any character consistency Willoughby may have had. Andrew Wright states that "Willoughby . . . is too rudely yanked about by his author for the purpose of the plot, to be a credible human being"⁴¹ and I am sure that most readers must concur. The sacrifice of Willoughby's character to the requirements of the plot is regrettable, but necessary, if Marianne is to fulfil the design of her creator and eventually marry Colonel Brandon. The device of a revelation from the past is not very convincing and Jane Austen seems to wish to atone for this by bringing Willoughby back into the novel in Chapter 44. Willoughby's reappearance in the novel makes him more credible as a character, but he in turn makes Marianne's marriage to the Colonel even less satisfactory. Willoughby

engages the sympathy of Elinor and the reader, and Elinor's momentary wish that Willoughby was a widower (SS,p.327) is shared by the reader. Willoughby's love for Marianne seems no less ardent and sincere than Colonel Brandon's, and he and Marianne are more ideally suited. The conventional device⁴² of a dissolute past remains mechanical and unsatisfactory in Sense and Sensibility (and far more poorly contrived than its counterpart in Pride and Prejudice, where Wickham's degeneracy is incorporated more realistically into his character).

The devices which Jane Austen employs in the other subplot of Sense and Sensibility (that involving Elinor and Edward) are generally well contrived. The means of getting the Steeles to Barton Park is quite plausible and can be explained by the hospitality of Sir John Middleton (eagerly seconded by his mother-in-law), and by the characters of the Misses Steele. The circumstances leading up to Lucy's revelation (in Chapter 22) are built up gradually, having their foundation as far back as Chapter 13. The public revelation of Lucy's secret is quite in character for Anne Steele.

The last important plot contrivance in this subplot is the elopement of Lucy Steele and Robert Ferrars. To her credit, Jane Austen does not try to disguise the surprise the elopement must occasion, and she allows Elinor and Edward between them to piece together a logical explanation for its occurrence. Once again, Jane Austen has prepared for the event, principally through her characterisation of Lucy and Robert. The latter also hints to Elinor that he believes himself capable of dissuading his brother and Lucy from marriage, although Elinor and the reader attribute his assertions to his usual unfounded pride in his own abilities. However, this unlikely situation does occur, and Jane Austen has skilfully prepared for it. The marriage of Lucy and Robert (like that of Benwick and Louisa in Persuasion) is a surprise, but it is believable. The device of an elopement in

Sense and Sensibility is better contrived than the one in Persuasion between Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay. In the early novel Jane Austen makes the elopement consistent with the personalities of Lucy and Robert, whereas the one in Persuasion has not been carefully integrated into the characters of the participants.

There are flaws in the plot of Sense and Sensibility and no amount of contrivance can remove them. Yet Sense and Sensibility is an interesting and moving novel, and in it we see many plot devices which Jane Austen employs in other of her novels. Those devices are not always better contrived, when they recur in the later novels and at least one important episode (Marianne's fever and subsequent self-realisation) is better executed.

Pride and Prejudice

When compared with Sense and Sensibility this novel seems greatly superior. The ending of the novel is the only conclusion which would be appropriate, and the marriage of Darcy and Elizabeth is totally acceptable. The villain of the piece, Wickham, receives similar treatment to Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility, but the role of the former is better contrived and more thoroughly integrated into the events which occur in Pride and Prejudice.

Pride and Prejudice is a novel which seems to rely a good deal on chance and coincidence, although many fortuitous occurrences can be fully explained. Jane Austen has to engineer 'chance' meetings between Darcy and Elizabeth, because their relationship is such that the latter would no doubt avoid any personal contact with the former. To contrive the two meetings between her hero and heroine Jane Austen makes good use of her minor characters, beginning with Elizabeth's sister Jane. Lady Catherine de Bourgh's dual role as Darcy's aunt and Mr Collins' patroness is vital. The fact that Mr Collins is related to Elizabeth's family is important for the plot only because it leads that gentleman to solicit the hand of Charlotte Lucas, the Bennets' neighbour, once he has been summarily rejected by Elizabeth. It is as Mrs Collins' guest that Elizabeth goes to stay at Hunsford. The second (and happier) meeting between Darcy and Elizabeth occurs at Pemberley, and this time it is Elizabeth's aunt and uncle Gardiner who are primarily responsible. The tour to be made by the Gardiners and Elizabeth is planned long in advance of its taking place, and has to be curtailed suddenly. The reasons given for the rescheduling and rerouting of the vacation are all plausible, and Jane Austen chooses facts which can be verified by the reader (by referring back to earlier chapters of the novel).

Wickham's part in Pride and Prejudice has nevertheless been

criticised by various readers. The similarity between Wickham and Willoughby from Sense and Sensibility is obvious, and it is equally clear that "there is a very great technical advance" in Pride and Prejudice as Mary Lascelles states.⁴³ Even if it is taken solely on its own merits, Wickham's involvement in the plot of Pride and Prejudice is generally satisfactory, despite Marvin Mudrick's comments to the contrary.⁴⁴ We are alerted to the fact that Wickham does not always tell the truth long before that fact assumes any great significance. Wickham's mercenary tendencies are also displayed (in Chapter 26) before Darcy's full revelation about his character in Chapter 35. Wickham's attempted elopement with Georgiana Darcy seems quite in character for him (especially when given the extent of Georgiana's fortune). It must also be noted that the elopement does not eventuate, nor is there the "ruined female" of Sense and Sensibility. Wickham actually seduces another young woman in the course of the novel, and marries her only because of a substantial financial inducement to do so. His past and present actions are always in character.

Darcy's letter to Elizabeth proves very useful to the plot. The device of a letter as a means for making a revelation is a clever one. Elizabeth's reaction to the information changes slowly as she rereads the contents of the letter, gradually assimilating the information contained therein. The letter allows Darcy to expound the facts about Wickham's profligacy very thoroughly. Darcy's reason for writing to Elizabeth he explains himself, in the opening paragraph of the letter, and it proves satisfactory. His desire not to have another direct confrontation with Elizabeth is also understandable. Darcy is a proud man and feels the need to clear himself of the strong charges laid against him. The tone and style of the letter are also consistent with the character of the writer. One of the most important functions of the letter is to effect a change in Elizabeth, who acknowledges her wrong behaviour. Darcy's letter in Pride and Prejudice is a successful plot device in that it conveys

vital information without sacrificing character consistency. Its success as a device in Pride and Prejudice could explain why Jane Austen used a letter in Persuasion from the hero to the heroine, leading directly to the resolution of the plot. Both letters are well contrived and multi-functional.

Elizabeth's failure to reveal the truth about Wickham to Lydia and her parents has been cited as a major contributing factor to Lydia's elopement with Wickham.⁴⁵ The elopement is vital to the plot of Pride and Prejudice, as it enables Darcy to reveal the extent of his love for Elizabeth. Elizabeth has several valid reasons for not exposing Wickham (analysed in Chapter Four, Section Two), but I believe that there is every possibility of the elopement occurring even if Elizabeth does reveal the truth about Wickham. The elopement is in character for both Lydia and Wickham, and has been neatly contrived by Jane Austen. None of the involved act erratically or unconvincingly.

Pride and Prejudice does not seem to have been as ambitious an undertaking as either Sense and Sensibility or Persuasion. Sense and Sensibility is complicated by its dual plot, one part of which is badly flawed. Persuasion, also flawed in some respects, seems to involve a slight change in focus, and many of the occurrences in the novel are included principally for thematic reasons, rather than being strictly necessary for the plot. Pride and Prejudice is "light and bright and sparkling" as Jane Austen told her sister Cassandra,⁴⁶ yet its plot is remarkably well contrived. Although many examples of fortuitous circumstances can be found in Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen has explained them most plausibly, and has generally exhibited great subtlety and ingenuity. The novel is perhaps less complicated in its scope than either Sense and Sensibility or Persuasion, but it is not less interesting, and the plot of Pride and Prejudice is much harder to fault.

Persuasion

The plot of Persuasion (like that of Sense and Sensibility) has often been considered mechanical, flat and ill-contrived. Many critics have also noticed the "fortuitous" nature of several plot incidents leading to the reunion of Anne and Wentworth, and not all have been approving. The two flaws most singled out for comment are Mrs Smith's revelation about William Elliot, and the elopement between Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay at the end of the novel.

The importance of Mrs Smith's revelation to the plot of Persuasion has been grossly overrated. She does not function as a deus ex machina, saving Anne from making an unfortunate marriage. Four chapters before Mrs Smith's disclosure is made, Anne has already resisted a slight temptation to marry her cousin and occupy the place formerly held by her beloved mother, as the future Lady Elliot. Apart from the fact that she remains devoted to Wentworth, Anne's "judgment, on a serious consideration of the possibilities of such a case, was against Mr Elliot" (P,p.172). Mrs Smith's revelation confirms Anne's discernment (as opposed to Lady Russell's total acceptance of the man) and, as the information Anne receives is not communicated to anyone else, there is no public condemnation of Mr Elliot, nor is he ostracised from Bath society. The only effect that the revelation does have on the plot is to make the surprising alliance described at the end of Persuasion marginally more credible.

I believe that Mrs Smith has been included in the novel to provide a point of comparison with Anne. Mrs Smith made an early marriage and then experienced much ill-luck (losing her husband, her health, and most of their wealth). Anne also had the opportunity to make an early marriage, to a man with less accumulated wealth than Mr Smith (although Wentworth had potential and considerable faith in his own abilities). As it turned out, the early marriage of Anne and Wentworth would have been happy and materially comfortable (and probably

not unlike the marriage of the Crofts). Nevertheless, Mrs Smith serves as a warning of what could have been the fate of Anne Elliot. Jane Austen is clearly agreeing with her heroine when Anne states her belief that she was right in yielding "to persuasion exerted on the side of safety" (P, p.246). Luck also plays an important part in this novel, and Wentworth must realise just how fortunate he was in his career, and how perilous his as yet unrealised abilities would have been as a basis for marriage.

The alliance between Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay cannot be defended as a device of plot, although it is possible to see why Jane Austen included it at the end of Persuasion. It does round off the novel, but rather too neatly. The elopement (unlike those occurring in Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice) is not consistent with the previous actions of either of the participants. Jane Austen appears to have forsaken character verisimilitude in her desire to tie up the loose ends of the plot, as neither Mrs Clay or Mr Elliot act in their own best interests (which they have done until the final chapter). The device of an elopement in Persuasion remains unsatisfactory, despite the completion of a moral hierarchy of marriages in the novel.

The necessity of renting Kellynch is a particularly fine piece of plot contrivance, as it stems totally from the ruling characteristics of Sir Walter Elliot - "vanity of person and of situation" (P, p.36). His refusal to submit to severe retrenchment is in character, and the departure from Kellynch of the Elliot family is the only acceptable plot development. Associated with Sir Walter's removal to Bath is the renting of Kellynch to Admiral Croft. Jane Austen accounts plausibly for the tenant of the estate being a naval man. We also learn that the Admiral was born in Somerset, explaining why he wanted to rent a house in that county. Admiral Croft and his brother-in-law Captain Wentworth are just two of the naval characters in Persuasion and they are used to embody the general theme that people

should be judged on their intrinsic worth, rather than by rank and appearance.

The most unexpected development in the plot of Persuasion (once Kellynch has been rented to Admiral Croft) is the engagement of Benwick and Louisa, and she does this by means of Louisa's accident at Lyme Regis. Wentworth also has to acknowledge his wrong behaviour in gaining Louisa's affections. He must grow morally before he and Anne can be reunited, and this is one of the effects of the fall at Lyme. The incident arises from Louisa's strong will. The consequences of the incident are unexpected, but they are able to be explained, through the altered personality of Louisa Musgrove and the situation in which she is placed. Although the tone of Jane Austen's description of the fall is somewhat perfunctory, the effect of the fall on Louisa (her marriage to Benwick) is more carefully brought out than the consequences of Marianne Dashwood's illness in Sense and Sensibility. The use of illness to account for an unexpected (and very necessary) plot development is ultimately more satisfactory in Persuasion than in Sense and Sensibility because Louisa Musgrove is shown to have altered a great deal.

The finest plot device in Persuasion is the one leading to the resolution of the plot. The scene at the White Hart Inn in Bath is superbly engineered, from the conversation between Mrs Musgrove and Mrs Croft to the discussion on constancy in love between Anne Elliot and Captain Harville, just overheard by Wentworth. It is natural that Captain Harville should still be grieving over Benwick's inconstancy, as the two captains are executing a commission for Benwick while in Bath. Through the discussion (embracing once of the themes of Persuasion) Anne is able to state her belief that women remain constant longest, even when hope has vanished. Jane Austen allows Anne to state indirectly her love for Wentworth without breaching social decorum. Wentworth then takes the initiative, writing an impassioned plea to Anne while pretending to be finishing his letter to

Benwick. The letter itself bears the traits of Wentworth's personality - warmth and spontaneity, just as Darcy's letter in Pride and Prejudice evolved from his character. Jane Austen's decision to rewrite the climactic chapter of Persuasion was a sound one. Wentworth's letter is an excellent piece of plot manipulation, leading almost immediately to the reunion of Anne and Wentworth. It is more moving than Darcy's letter in Pride and Prejudice, possibly because it does not have the same bulk of information to convey. The background for the device has been carefully arranged and the result is one of the finest scenes to be found in a novel by Jane Austen.

Because numerous critics have found Persuasion badly flawed, several have suggested that Jane Austen would have undertaken significant revision had she lived, before having the novel published. However, the only part of the novel needing major revision is a comparatively minor incident - the elopement of Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay. Mrs Smith's involvement in the novel is primarily thematic, and I do not find her revelation about Mr Elliot badly contrived because it does not have a profound effect on the plot of Persuasion. Not all aspects of the plot of Persuasion are as well contrived as we would hope, especially when compared with Pride and Prejudice (and even Sense and Sensibility, on occasions). However, the flaws are not as important as they first appear to be, and they do not overly detract from the novel as a whole. Pride and Prejudice is the most even in quality of the three novels studied (examined from the angle of plot contrivance), but there are in Persuasion two of Jane Austen's finest plot devices, the renting of Kellynch-hall (the first in a chain of events leading to the reunion of Anne and Wentworth) and Wentworth's letter to Anne in Chapter 23 (the final link in that chain).

FOOTNOTES

1. Craik, W A - Jane Austen: The Six Novels, p.173.
2. Craik, W A - Jane Austen in her Time, p.79.
3. Ibid, p.78.
4. Monaghan, David - Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision, p.143.
5. Wright, Andrew - Jane Austen's Novels, p.23.
6. Weinsheimer, Joel - "Chance and the Hierarchy of Marriages in Pride and Prejudice", p.406.
7. Lascelles, Mary - Jane Austen and her Art, p.73.
8. Ibid, p.72-73.
9. Ibid, p.73.
10. Craik, W A - Jane Austen: The Six Novels, p.32.
11. Lascelles, Mary - p.74.
12. Ibid, p.74.
13. Gomme, Andor - "On Not Being Persuaded", p.174.
14. Liddell, Robert - The Novels of Jane Austen, p.121.
15. See Collins, K K - "Mrs Smith and the Morality of Persuasion".
16. Lascelles, Mary - p.74.
17. Weinsheimer, Joel - p.406.
18. Drew, Philip - "A Significant Incident in Pride and Prejudice", p.358.

19. Mudrick, Marvin - Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery, p.111.
20. Ibid, p.222.
21. Ibid, p.221.
22. Craik, W A - Jane Austen: The Six Novels, p.174.
23. Lascelles, Mary - p.81.
24. Ibid, p.206.
25. Craik, W A - Jane Austen: The Six Novels, p.183.
26. Ibid, p.183.
27. Butler, Marilyn - Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, p.280.
28. Mudrick, Marvin - p.217.
29. Ibid, p.93.
30. Lascelles, Mary - p.128-129.
31. Wright, Andrew - p.23.
32. Mudrick, Marvin - p.86.
33. Morgan, Susan - "Polite Lies: The Veiled Heroine of Sense and Sensibility", p.199.
34. Schorer, Mark - "Pride Unprejudiced", p.85.
35. Mudrick, Marvin - p.103.
36. Lascelles, Mary - p.150.
37. Mudrick, Marvin - p.102.
38. Lascelles, Mary - p.163.
39. Mudrick, Marvin - p.93.

40. See Morgan, Susan - p.199.
41. Wright, Andrew - p.92.
42. See Lascelles, Mary - p.73.
43. Ibid, p.74.
44. See Mudrick, Marvin - p.110-111.
45. Weinsheimer, Joel - p.406.
46. Quoted by Cecil, Lord David in A Portrait of Jane Austen, p.160.

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