Jane Austen's Novels
The Fabric of Dialogue
I

1 Jane Austen's Style
The Climate of the Dialogues

It is not unfair to say that most of Jane Austen's critics are obsessed by a sense of her limitations. The germ of the bias is easy to find in her notorious references to "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a brush" and to "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village the very thing to work on." 1 Charlotte Brontë supplied a catch phrase to go with "Ivory"—"There is a Chinese fidelity in the painting"—while denouncing the novels as restricted in theme. To her they revealed only the most "distant recognition" of the "feelings" and no awareness of the "passions": "what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life and the sentient target of death—this Miss Austen ignores." 2 It remained for Jane Austen's nephew to provide biographical support for the view by recording, "Of events her life was singularly barren." 3 These proved to be major strands of Jane Austen criticism, still plainly visible in a twentieth-century disapproval by H. W. Garrod: "Undoubtedly she is entitled to that praise which belongs to a writer who limits her theme and her style to the exact measure of her interests, knowledge and powers." 4 Technique, theme, and life have been confidently equated.

This kind of verdict has been passed so often on Jane Austen's work that sympathetic critics accept it almost without question. And even Mary Lascelles, in one of the most rewarding studies of Jane Austen, tends to settle for an uneasy truce. On the one hand she extenuates the limitations on the ground that they are intentional: "Jane Austen's resolve to 'go on in her own way' means deliberate choice both of subject and of mood.
she will take as subject for her art a certain region in the social world because it is 'the delight of her life'—not, as her critics have loosely inferred, the safest thing for her to write about.' But on the other hand she argues the limitations out of existence by a determined—and somewhat enigmatic—application of "scale": "By presenting her people in perspective, as none but a writer with an exact sense of scale can do, Jane Austen indicates recession, and so gives the impression of a limitless human world beyond her visible scene." At best these claims seem to equivocate between the critic's sense of density in the novels and the usual opinion that they are highly restricted in manner and theme.

Reginald Farrer has taken a surer critical stance in emphatically differentiating between the surface of the works and their import. "Talk of her 'limitations' is vain," he insists, because "it must never be thought that limitation of scene implies limitation of human emotion": "Jane Austen's heroes and heroines and subject-matter are, in fact, universal human nature, and coterminous with it, though manifested only in one class"

His distinction is crucial in that it hints at the basic fallacy of the limitationists, their confusion of a novel's tone with its issues. For I suspect we have been hoaxed by the well-bred air of Jane Austen's characters, by the eminently social tone of their conversations, by the very stability of their moral universe. Because we can glide so easily over the surfaces of this fictional world, we have been tempted to ignore its substance. Thus the burden of the following chapters: that analysis of Jane Austen's dialogue reveals a richer substance in the novels, and a far greater range of expressiveness on the part of the characters, than has generally been allowed.

Probably we have been encouraged to undervalue her matter because it has so readily been classified as dealing in manners. How this could buttress the limitationist tradition may be suggested by Ernest Baker's remark about Jane Austen creating "a novel of manners in a narrower and truer sense" than Maria Edgeworth or Fanny Burney in that "She takes the morals for granted." Such a comment leaves us, in effect, with manners
operating in a kind of void. Marvin Mudrick, representing a more recent strain of Jane Austen criticism, moves to the opposite extreme. Concerned for the individualistic rather than the conventional, he relentlessly inverts Jane Austen's irony to argue that she was in bitter revolt against her society and really parodies its values. We are now asked, it would seem, to discard the evidence of the manners and find the real significance of the novels in a psychological drive attributed to their author.

But both the revolutionists and the limitationists—though doubtless I have just formulated their positions too absolutely—appear to me to take, at bottom, too strait a view of manners. For manners are the very habits of man's being, social man or private man, and rooted in human experience. If as public gestures they are therefore formal to a degree and codify the values of society, we must never forget that they are at the same time inevitably charged with the values of the individual, because by means of them he expresses his private experience. Thus manners are neither readily subverted—men of straw for some deeper instinct—nor do they inhabit a vacuum. As Lionel Trilling has most handsomely assured us, we must take them seriously: "What I understand by manners, then, is a culture's hum and buzz of implication. I mean the whole evanescent context in which its explicit statements are made. It is that part of a culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value."

"The great novelists," he adds, "knew that manners indicate the largest intentions of men's souls as well as the smallest and they are perpetually concerned to catch the meaning of every dim implicit hint." Manners, then, if we read them as indexes to major cultural and personal values, may define a comprehensive and substantial reality. In Jane Austen's novels, we ignore gestures so significant at our peril.

Yet even supposing that manners are not a necessarily limited subject, we still need to face the charge that polite conversation must automatically be limited in its scope, intensity, and significance. This is the main problem dealt with through the chapters that follow. In them I shall be arguing that Jane Austen's dialogue actually reveals her characters in depth and shows them
engaged in the most fundamental activities of personality: in bringing to bear the entire self, for instance, to sway someone else; or in evolving judgments about the behavior of others and of the self; or in winning through to insight into human beings and affairs, as well as lapsing into blindness, either process deeply conditioned by the nature of the character in question. Indeed the issues in these conversations are vital, although the tone of the speakers remains almost always decorously social. To discover these issues, we shall have to examine the very fabric of the dialogues—the implications woven into the language of the speakers themselves. And the first step in cultivating our awareness to these implications is to explore the linguistic context of the dialogues, Jane Austen's style; for in effect her style acts as the expressive norm in terms of which the verbal gestures of her characters become significant.

Any writer's style, evidently, is determined in some measure by the culture from which he derives, by the kinds of words and linguistic structures that the culture makes especially available to him. And no one would question that Jane Austen, although her novels were published in the early nineteenth century, has her major affinities with the culture of the eighteenth century and with the stylistic modes that it fostered. As Mary Lascelles has observed, "To us Jane Austen appears like one who inherits a prosperous and well-ordered estate—the heritage of a prose style in which neither generalization nor abstraction need signify vagueness, because there was close enough agreement as to the scope and significance of such terms. Character and motive, for example, might be presented in them—a practice best illustrated, and very likely familiar to Jane Austen herself, in the Lives of the Poets." Indeed many traits that I shall be finding in Jane Austen's style—such as her dependence on conceptual terms, her
ways with a particularized diction, her generalizations, her limited use of figurative speech—have their analogues in verbal practices common during the eighteenth century. Of course, any stylistic habit characteristic of a period carries the imprint of that age's attitudes. A typically eighteenth-century locution like "finny tribe"—to treat it oversimply in bringing out only these dimensions of its meaning—implies the outlines of a world view: the phrase minimizes the particularizing detail; it emphasizes universal aspects in referring to fish; it thus highlights the aspects accessible to man's reason; and, in the phrase's proportioning of general and particular, it observes a standard of decorum. It is attitudes like these, though Jane Austen happens not to use the sort of phrase cited, that come into play in her style when she does ground it in eighteenth-century practices.

As soon as we start talking about attitudes of any sort in relation to a style, whether a period or a personal style, we are likely to say that the style "expresses" them. Yet the word is misleading if it suggests that the attitudes are lying somewhere out behind the style, merely a part of its background. Rather, they are embedded in the style, which keeps bringing them immediately to bear, constantly projects these attitudes toward the reader (thus my frequent mention of the "audience" in describing Jane Austen's style). For language, and hence style, is inevitably transitive in that its essential function is to communicate. It communicates by shaping raw experience into a version sharable with others. An element of form inheres in all the items that go to make up language, in words themselves, syntactic patterns, rhetorical structures, and the like; that is to say, each of these is to some degree a convention, has some area of generally agreed upon significance, or communication could not take place. The inescapable formal dimension in language may discourage us from seeking out the man behind the style, insomuch as the intervention of form would forbid us to match the contours of the reported experience with the initiating one. But this indigenous formality encourages us to conceive of a writer's style as a vehicle of persuasion: for it is the very essence of form to presume an audience, and, when a form is realized, it codifies an appeal to an
audience. By this view of style, a thought shaped in language has already entered the realm of action; a sentence is a deed. And by this view, the style of an author is to be described in terms of the typical appeals that it makes, those signs that often suggest the writer's interpretation of the audience. Such are the theoretical assumptions that underlie the following analysis of Jane Austen's style, and I think that they allow us to define securely the particular world that she creates in her novels.

One mark of that world is its minimum of physical action. In place of physical event, the style records a series of intellectual, emotional, and moral states, implying that these—whether motives or consequences—make up the real importance of an action. The human mind and heart, in fact, are the major fields of activity in these novels. So verbs, traditionally active words, carry little weight. The passive voice, which insists on the static, is frequent, as is its equivalent, the impersonal construction. One example will be enough here, but I should preface it with two general remarks about the illustrations throughout this chapter. First, I have tried to choose—for obvious reasons—representative passages from as wide a range of Jane Austen's writing as possible. Second, the italics in these selections are mine unless otherwise noted, a way of setting off the stylistic trait in question, like the verbs in the present example:

Elinor had given her real opinion to her sister. She could not consider her partiality for Edward in so prosperous a state as Marianne had believed it. There was, at times, a want of spirits about him which, if it did not denote indifference, spoke a something almost as unpromising. A doubt of her regard, supposing him to feel it, need not give him more than inquietude. It would not be likely to produce that dejection of mind which frequently attended him. A more reasonable cause might be found in the dependent situation which forbade the indulgence of his affection. She knew that his mother neither behaved to him so as to make his home comfortable at present, nor to give him any assurance that he might form a home for himself, without strictly attending to her views for his aggrandizement. With such a knowledge as this, it was impossible for Elinor to feel easy on the subject. (Sense and Sensibility, p. 22)
These verbs do not portray vigorous physical action. Rather, they distinguish between basic categories of response: considering, believing, supposing, feeling, knowing. They further indicate presence or absence: giving, producing, attending, finding, forming—and being or not being. Yet what is, here, is “a want of spirits” or some other condition, and what is not is a capacity “to feel easy.” The two strongest verbs, “spoke” and “forbad,” activate concepts, not people: it is the “want of spirits” that “spoke” and “the dependent situation” that “forbad.”

Indeed in Jane Austen’s style such concepts are the real actors. She often handles these groups of nouns as if they need only step on the stage in order to convince the audience, but we must never doubt their power on that account. For conceptual terms of this sort gain a kind of life of their own in that they seem to universalize whatever aspects of experience they name, treating them less as parts of a single configuration—the way the individual would encounter them in reality—than as absolutes. Since the words thus appear markedly abstract, they have a special air of being fixed by reason alone and therefore of being eminently shareable with others. Further, because these terms seem freed from the fluctuations of a merely personal opinion, they automatically command assent from an audience. One cue to their status for Jane Austen is that, in accordance with an eighteenth-century practice, she frequently capitalized such words in her manuscripts. But any page of the novels will witness the supreme role that these terms play: enunciating the general principles that underlie the individual variety, they embody enduring values.

The following passage shows how typically Jane Austen accumulates nouns referring to concepts, even when she describes the judgment of the light-hearted Henry Crawford:

Fanny’s beauty of face and figure, Fanny’s graces of manner and goodness of heart were the exhaustless theme. The gentleness, modesty, and sweetness of her character were warmly expatiated on, that sweetness which makes so essential a part of every
woman's worth in the judgment of man, that though he sometimes loves where it is not, he can never believe it absent. Her temper he had good reason to depend on and to praise. He had often seen it tried. Was there one of the family, excepting Edmund, who had not in some way or other continually exercised her patience and forbearance? Her affections were evidently strong. To see her with her brother! What could more delightfully prove that the warmth of her heart was equal to its gentleness?—What could be more encouraging to a man who had her love in view? Then, her understanding was beyond every suspicion, quick and clear; and her manners were the mirror of her own modest and elegant mind.

Nor was this all. Henry Crawford had too much sense not to feel the worth of good principles in a wife, though he was too little accustomed to serious reflection to know them by their proper name; but when he talked of her having such a steadiness and regularity of conduct, such a high notion of honour, and such an observance of decorum as might warrant any man in the fullest dependence on her faith and integrity, he expressed what was inspired by the knowledge of her being well principled and religious. (Mansfield Park, p. 294)

The sentences present not so much a specific personality as a configuration of concepts, because Fanny's qualities are, in a sense, abstracted from her as absolutes of human nature. We start with physical characteristics, which the broad terms "beauty of face and figure" hardly touch on; move immediately to the most general categories of personality with "manner," "heart," and "character"; go on to perhaps slightly more limited departments in "temper" and "affections"; but soon return to the larger tracts of "understanding" and "manners." Here the dynamics of behavior are less important than the conditions they illustrate: the particular events implied by "He had often seen it tried" and "To see her with her brother" merely prove that Fanny has a "temper" one can "depend on" and "affections" which are "strong."

It is not only these major conditions that stabilize Fanny's character for us by absorbing it into a realm of established values. By the typical genitive construction—as in "graces of manner"—Jane Austen separates the attributes of concepts from the con-
cepts themselves, and these very attributes beget a new set of conditions. Evidently "manners" can be graceful or not, a heart good or bad, "character" gentle, modest, and sweet or their opposites, "conduct" regular or irregular, "decorum" observed or neglected. The construction creates a world of immovable areas, each one capable of being subdivided into two—but rarely more —static regions. In "warmth of heart," the formulation detaches the emotional attribute from "heart" not merely in grammar but in idea, so that the heart’s "warmth" can be equated with, measured against, its "gentleness." Likewise, "sweetness" is a unit of settled value in the sum of "woman’s worth." It is hardly surprising that "love" should be "in view" in this world, not because "love" is simply an intellectual possibility—that is not true—but because it is another area to be analytically explored according to the postulates of character.

Yet if all these conceptual terms are especially stable in their detachment from too personal an emotion, the terrain they mark out is not therefore petrified. Clearly the "judgment of man" honors his emotional demand for "sweetness" in the "character" of the beloved. In the same way, a man of "sense" must instinctively "feel the worth of good principles." And apparently "knowledge" inspires one morally—even Henry Crawford for the moment. Of course, he meets Fanny in person, so he can respond fully to her qualities even though unable to call them "by their proper name." We meet her in the pages of a book, so Jane Austen must name Fanny’s qualities for us. But we have already seen how the naming itself, if done with conceptual words, dramatizes value for the audience.

This stylistic habit is basic in Jane Austen’s work, whatever the local job of the prose. For instance, conceptual terms pervade the introduction of each character, where they assess him against a scale of absolutes. And they turn up just as regularly in the most emotional scenes. But instead of following up these uses, we had better glance at another, noticing how Jane Austen employs a conceptual vocabulary to satirize—though she never turns against such words in themselves. Sometimes she creates parody by the wild disproportion between these naturally
weighty terms and the commonplace situation they describe, in this case the departure of an indifferent man from the room: "it is absolutely impossible that he should ever have left you but with Confusion, Despair, and Precipitation" (Volume the Second, p. 94). More often she writes ironically, using the conceptual words to render a smooth surface and a corrupt sense at the same time: "Flexibility of Mind, a Disposition easily biassed by others, is an attribute which I am not very desirous of obtaining; nor has Frederica any claim to the indulgence of her whims, at the expense of her Mother's inclination" (Lady Susan, p. 294). All seems well until Lady Susan mentions her "inclination"; but this word, apparently so in tune with the rest, implies that her motives are no more dignified than the "whims" she objects to in her daughter—and so undermines the whole passage. This is no laughing matter, we might note in passing, for Lady Susan succeeds by manipulating society's terms. Yet Jane Austen also aims at effects nearer the comic, as in revising the pompous Mr. Parker's original statement, "My Plantations astonish everybody by their Growth," into "The Growth of my Plantations is a general astonishment" (Sanditon, p. 46). Transforming the particular verb into the generic noun emphasizes his pretentiousness.

Indeed anyone studying the few revisions she has left us—for instance in R. W. Chapman's separate editions of The Watsons, a rather early fragment, and of Sanditon, her unfinished final work—will discover how frequently Jane Austen leans toward conceptual language. There is little or no satire in the following samples, simply the effects we saw before in the passage from Mansfield Park. She refixes action as an idea when she changes "am rather afraid of" to "have my fears in that quarter" (The Watsons, p. 16), "we have been doing" to "has been our Occupation" (Sanditon, p. 105), and "were beginning to astonish" to "were a moment's astonishment" (Sanditon, p. 114). Her revision of "particularly urged for" to "warmly offered his assistance" (Sanditon, p. 125) detaches the emotion from the action. Finally, she substitutes more pointedly conceptual terms, their vitality implicit in the capital letters, for rather flat assertions in re-
placing "was . of rather formal aspect" with "had a reserved air, & a great deal of formal Civility" (The Watsons, p. 21), or "truly gratified look" with "a look, most expressive of unexpected pleasure, & lively Gratitude" (The Watsons, p. 42), or "for want of something better to do" with "for want of Employment" (Sanditon, p. 70). No doubt many of these are colorless enough, but the recurrence of similar revisions betrays how fully Jane Austen relies on a conceptual vocabulary, one in which the abstractions become agents.

Another stylistic device with the same sort of reverberations is her use of general statements. No novelist can make these, unless in dialogue or perhaps in transcribing a character's private thoughts, without intruding—subtly or explicitly—into the fiction. In Jane Austen's novels the main purpose of such intrusions is clear: to remind the reader of common knowledge that he already shares or may share. For a generalization is a formula, presumably dependable because it applies to more than one case. More than that, its reliability is confirmed by the impersonal phrasing, which seems to promise us that the statement does not issue from any purely private judgment. Thus, a generalization, like its close relative the maxim, apparently brings to bear universal wisdom, so fundamental that we can all assume ourselves ready to call on it at any moment. And the form itself becomes a kind of guarantee because it automatically resurrects the sense of a trustworthy public community of views—even if the generalization really expresses a private opinion. So to generalize is to dramatize the unity of author and audience. Like the conceptual terms, this stylistic trait formulates a set of standards in such a way that they seem taken for granted, and thus it invites us to share them.

Jane Austen often generalizes in a light tone, simply prompting us to remember the basic facts of experience: "where youth and diffidence are united, it requires uncommon steadiness of reason to resist the attraction of being called the most charming girl in the world" (Northanger Abbey, p. 50). Or she asks us to smile at a familiar human failing: "How quick come the
reasons for approving what we like!” (Persuasion, p. 15). And, since the true values of human nature are constant, always secure, she may invert them for irony: “The business of self-command she settled very easily;—with strong affections it was impossible, with calm ones it could have no merit” (Sense and Sensibility, p. 104); “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (Pride and Prejudice, p. 3).

But generalizations also serve—and this is crucial—for the most serious assessment of character. Representing the standards of society, either by irony or directly, they establish the terms in which we are to evaluate the behavior of the individual. In the following passage Jane Austen sounds like Swift for a moment as she reverses the values to make the bitterest of judgments:

The whole of Lucy’s behaviour in the affair, and the prosperity which crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of time and conscience. (Sense and Sensibility, p. 376)

She may invigorate the generalizations with an intense rhetoric to castigate the moral abnormality of the marriage between Mr. Rushworth and Maria Bertram:

She had despised him, and loved another—and he had been very much aware that it was so. The indignities of stupidity, and the disappointments of selfish passion, can excite little pity. His punishment followed his conduct, as did a deeper punishment, the deeper guilt of his wife. (Mansfield Park, p. 464)

Or Jane Austen, describing Emma’s response to Mr. Knightley’s proposal, will epitomize the issues of an entire novel in a sympathetic decree:

Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the
conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very mate-
rial. (Emma, p. 431)

The rhetoric in all these passages is hardly chance: it suggests a
firm conviction that society's judgments, the substance of the
generalizations, are reliable.

Finally, and this is no less a matter of conviction, Jane Aus-
ten generalizes in the interests of propriety: to disengage us from
particulars that are too highly emotional. Sometimes this pro-
priety may seem mainly a technical contrivance, as in the com-
ment on Harriet Smith's alarm at the gypsies: "A young lady
who faints, must be recovered; questions must be answered, and
surprises be explained. Such events are very interesting, but the
suspense of them cannot last long. A few minutes made Emma
acquainted with the whole" (Emma, p. 333). Here we must es-
cape being seriously involved so that Emma can plot an attach-
ment between Harriet and her savior, Frank Churchill, with-
out appearing hatefully insensible. But there is more than mere
contrivance to the propriety that Jane Austen usually seeks
through generalizing. Perhaps the previous example gives us a
clue when it implies that the most violent emotional effects are
necessarily short-lived. For decorum is the realm of lasting
values, where the too highly particular must be somewhat gen-
eralized so that it may reveal its relation with the universal. This
assumption explains, I suspect, Jane Austen's notorious care to
keep us at a distance from her hero and heroine when they
finally declare their love. To take one scene, Elinor Dashwood

was oppressed, she was overcome by her own felicity;—and hap-
pily disposed as is the human mind to be easily familiarized with
any change for the better, it required several hours to give sedate-
ness to her spirits, or any degree of tranquillity to her heart.
(Sense and Sensibility, p. 363)

As for Edward Ferrars,

it was impossible that less than a week should be given up to the
enjoyment of Elinor's company, or suffice to say half that was to
be said of the past, the present, and the future:—for though a few hours spent in the hard labour of incessant talking will dispatch more subjects than can really be in common between any two rational creatures, yet with lovers it is different. . . . no subject is finished, no communication is even made, till it has been made at least twenty times over. (*Sense and Sensibility*, pp. 363-64)

It may be true that Jane Austen can afford this distance by the novel's conclusion, when the characters have already made their emotional adjustments. Still, the generalizations deliberately create a tone of reserve, for reserve is the condition of decision and endurance—a proof of decorum.

This same cluster of preferences leads Jane Austen to avoid highly particular words on the whole. In a world stabilized by public agreement on certain concepts, we would hardly expect a vocabulary of evocative particulars to flourish. For the colors of sense and feeling, though of course providing local shading, can be by definition only briefly effective. Moreover, a diction too richly suggestive may pose a threat to the author's control of his audience by exciting various reactions, some of them unpredictable.

When particular words do occur in Jane Austen's writing, they usually point out deviations from the norms of good breeding. The tendency appears in the *Letters*: “she was highly rouged, & looked rather quietly and contentedly *silly* than anything else.—Mrs. Badcock thought herself obliged to run round the room after her *drunken* Husband” (I, 128). In the *Juvenilia* this diction sounds the tone of parody rather than of personal distaste, as in the following blatant reversal of the features conventionally attributed to young ladies in sentimental fiction: “Lovely & too charming Fair one, notwithstanding your forbidding Squint, your greazy tresses & your swelling Back
I cannot refrain from expressing my raptures, at the engaging Qualities of your Mind, which so amply atone for the Horror, with which your first appearance must ever inspire the unwary visitor” (*Volume the First*, p. 6).

After the *Juvenilia* particular terms are likely to be less ex-
treme; yet they still emphasize what is alien to good form. On rare occasions in revising, Jane Austen adopts a more colloquial phrasing simply to ease expression. Thus “being always able by their vicinity, to” becomes “being always at hand to” (Sanditon, p. 36), or—an unusual reversing of the tendency we noted earlier—“a great increase of the Happiness” becomes “better & better” (Sanditon, p. 116). But more often she substitutes a particular phrasing to sharpen irony by delicate exaggeration. To insist on Margaret Watson's affected drawl, she changes “the words seemed likely never to end” to “she could hardly speak a word in a minute” (The Watsons, p. 87); in the same way, she points up Tom Musgrave's pretensions to fashion by writing “Dishabille” for “a state” (The Watsons, p. 107). This mode of intentional heightening is one staple of ridicule in the novels. So gossipy Mrs. Jenkins comes “hallooing to the window” (Sense and Sensibility, p. 106), and Elizabeth's curiosity is “dreadfully racked” about Darcy (Pride and Prejudice, p. 321). Or Jane Austen plays off particular terms against the generic to dramatize irregular behavior ironically: “Catherine . listened to the tempest with sensations of awe; and, when she heard it rage round a corner and close with sudden fury a distant door, felt for the first time that she was really in an Abbey.—Yes, these were characteristic sounds” (Northanger Abbey, p. 166). The fun arises here from Catherine's sense that the singular is “characteristic.”

But such diction need not be used ironically. It may simply intensify the departure from a rational standard. Jane Austen underlines the stupidity of Diana Parker and her friends by revising “mistakes” to “blunders” (Sanditon, p. 150). And she allows the insipid Lady Middleton to be pleased only by “four noisy children” who “pulled her about” and “tore her clothes” (Sense and Sensibility, p. 34). More strikingly, particular words make up a kind of backdrop to set off more permanent values when she celebrates the final understanding of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth:

as they slowly paced the gradual ascent, heedless of every group around them, seeing neither sauntering politicians, bus-
In this passage Jane Austen seems deliberately to contrast the transientsly suggestive particulars with the fixed entities—"retrospections," "acknowledgments," and "explanations"—that confirm the endurance of the lovers' relationship and appeal reliably to an audience.

This movement from particular to generic is characteristic of the prose. Indeed most of the particular words are in effect absorbed into the generic terms that dominate the style. To take a single instance, a typical phrase describes Marianne Dashwood as "in violent affliction" (Sense and Sensibility, p. 75). The evocativeness of "violent" is blurred because the adjective merges with a state, "affliction"; further, Marianne is already "in," as the phrasing insists, the condition. At an exceptional moment, such as Anne Elliot's departure from Uppercross, Jane Austen may intensify the atmosphere with particulars:

An hour's complete leisure for such reflections as these, on a dark November day, a small thick rain almost blotting out the very few objects ever to be discerned from the windows, was enough to make the sound of Lady Russell's carriage exceedingly welcome; and yet she could not quit the mansion-house, or look an adieu at the cottage, with its black, dripping, and comfortless veranda, or even notice through the misty glasses the last humble tenements of the village, without a saddened heart.—Scenes had passed in Uppercross, which made it precious. It stood the record of many sensations of pain, once severe, but now softened; and of some instances of relenting feeling, some breathings of friendship and reconciliation, which could never be looked for again, and which could never cease to be dear. (Persuasion, p. 123)

But even in this example the concrete landscape is replaced by a "record," something settled in the human mind, and Jane Austen translates the specific emotion, as we have come to expect, into a conceptual vocabulary, here only mildly animated by the sub-
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It is not that she denies feeling; rather, she creates the terms in which it can be most meaningful for her characters and for her audience. In this world, evidently, feeling achieves significance when it escapes its natural domain of self-interest and attaches itself to a publicly recognized hierarchy of values like forgiveness, "friendship," and "reconciliation." The analogy to the danger of highly particular words is plain; because they propose only individual excitement, they may subvert decorum by preventing the reader from committing himself soberly to the publicly formulated values—or, worse, they may utterly divert the reader from those values by betraying him to a private emotion.

The same judgment of her audience determines the ways in which Jane Austen employs figurative language. The distrust of metaphor that arose around the middle of the seventeenth century—when the groundwork was laid for the dominant stylistic habits of the eighteenth century—has become a critical commonplace. Perhaps Dryden put the case most succinctly in the Preface to his "Religio Laici": "A man is to be cheated into passion, but to be reasoned into truth." His remark implies the two standard complaints against figurative language. First, literally it lies because it likens or equates two things which are really not alike. Second, since its main purpose is to intensify, it invites an emotional response that may short-circuit our sensible alignment with reality. This distrust limited the possibilities of figurative expression rather sharply, as Jane Austen's prose makes clear.

It seems that the best insurance in using metaphor seriously is to choose figures so familiar that their meanings have been circumscribed and their emotions carefully subdued. Indeed, Jane Austen's usual metaphors are such old friends that we hardly notice them. Hearts are "at war" (Northanger Abbey, p. 99), "wounded" (Mansfield Park, p. 175), and "sinking" (Persuasion, p. 137). One's emotions often make one "blind" (Pride and Prejudice, p. 208). Hopes have been "harboured" (Mansfield Park, p. 175) or "hours flew" (Northanger Abbey,
p. 120). One is “bound” to do something (Sense and Sensibility, p. 99), sees things “in the same light” (Mansfield Park, p. 36), feels “the full weight” of others’ claims (Emma, p. 435), or is in a “glow” of spirits (Persuasion, p. 181). Expressions of this sort, appearing over and over again, are legitimate coin, worn smooth by long usage. Sometimes in her revisions we can see Jane Austen removing what might be thought counterfeit because of its glitter. Thus she changes “the disease of activity” to “a spirit of restless activity” (Sanditon, p. 130), and she dulls “we must not rip up the faults of the Dead” to “we must not find fault with the Dead” (Sanditon, p. 97).

But if figurative language, like particular diction, can be seriously employed only within strict limits, it may go beyond these to deflate or inflate for local satire, where there is no question of the figure deeply engaging the emotions of the audience. Some of the earlier examples are rather extravagant. The domestic Charlotte Lutterell pillories herself in calling her sister’s face “White as a Whipt syllabub” (Volume the Second, p. 113). And Catherine Morland’s romantic conception of herself is consciously exaggerated when Jane Austen dismisses her “heroine to the sleepless couch, which is the true heroine’s portion; to a pillow strewed with thorns and wet with tears” (Northanger Abbey, p. 90). Later instances are likely to be farther from parody and nearer irony. In the sentence that follows, the figures are somewhat toned down by “seemed” and “almost,” though they still accentuate Meryton’s foolishness in judging Wickham: “All Meryton seemed striving to blacken the man, who, but three months before, had been almost an angel of light” (Pride and Prejudice, p. 294).

The extending of a figure, which obviously calls attention to it, also serves satiric purposes, and the added weight may be mercilessly used. At moments we can catch Jane Austen in the act of increasing the pressure. To preserve the military metaphor that belabors Margaret Watson’s unpleasantness, the author substitutes “attacks” for “altercations” in “The Peace of the party for the remainder of that day was continually invaded by her fretful displeasure, & querulous attacks” (The Watsons,
pp. 115–16). In the novels as well, extended metaphors are a means to condemn. The longest of them—picked up again some forty pages after the sample given below—dramatizes Sir Thomas Bertram’s attitude toward Fanny Price, whom he wants to become “sick” of her own home: “It was a medicinal project upon his niece’s understanding, which he must consider as at present diseased. A residence in the abode of wealth and plenty had a little disordered her powers of comparing and judging, and he trusted that she would be the wiser and happier woman, all her life, for the experiment he had devised” (Mansfield Park, p. 369). The doctor, a judicious but sympathetic healer and professional precisionist, represents perfectly Sir Thomas’ image of himself. Yet for us, who know how constantly and drastically he misjudges, every extension of the metaphor carries a new barb.

Whether sustained or not, then, the sharper figures of satire do not tempt us to surrender ourselves to them. It is as if Jane Austen feels that she can trust her audience in situations of this sort not to be fatuously blinded or intimately entangled. When she does design her figures to intensify emotionally, they are usually brief. On Marianne Dashwood’s meeting with Willoughby, “the confusion which crimsoned over her face had robbed her of the power of regarding him” (Sense and Sensibility, p. 43); Catherine Morland’s “judgment was further bought off” (Northanger Abbey, p. 50); Fanny Price retreats from the “toils of civility” (Mansfield Park, p. 273); or—more startling because it occurs at a climax in the novel—“It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself” (Emma, p. 408). But even at these fairly intense moments, and others like them, the figures are so compressed, and so often conventional, that they hold the reader back from a deeply emotional involvement with the characters. And Jane Austen’s normal use of figure is even safer, as in this description of Mary Crawford’s discontent: “The assurance of Edmund’s being so soon to take orders, coming upon her like a blow that had been suspended, and still hoped uncertain and at a distance, was felt with resentment and mortifi-
cation" (Mansfield Park, p. 227). The "blow" itself refers to a condition; its force is dispersed by the account of its suspension, which is so indecisively figurative; and its impact is finally wasted when our attention is immediately shifted to the new conditions that the "blow" produces. We are back in the sphere of secure concepts, where judgments can be made because values are independent of the individual.

The last stylistic trait to be discussed is Jane Austen's rhetoric. The word is a risky one for my purposes because of itself it connotes almost automatically a kind of conscious splendor, and because the term, when mentioned in relation to the later eighteenth century, is all too likely to call up memories of such elaborately articulated structures as Burke's extended periods, Gibbon's massive irony, the emphatic idiom of Dr. Johnson—or even the pomposity of Fanny Burney. But the two rhetorical structures that I want to single out in Jane Austen's prose are much less ostentatious and their effect relatively subdued. Yet I think that the basic tendencies which we have already noticed in her language—toward stability and restraint—are still visible. For a pattern of verbal groupings, however unobtrusive it may be, is by definition an organizing force, and thus dramatizes a basic order. Moreover, a formal arrangement, by selecting certain items for emphasis, marks a heightened tone—but not too heightened, for the very existence of the pattern implies emotional control. In Jane Austen's novels, one recurrent pattern is an essentially two-part structure: it may juxtapose its terms—sometimes for intellectual and moral distinctions, sometimes in the interest of irony—or it may double them for emphasis. The other pattern that she frequently calls on sets its terms in a straighter line, accumulating them for expressive power. In the case of either structure, the formality is indeed a gesture to move the audience, for to shape verbal patterns is both to ask for and to define a response. At the same time, though, the structures impersonalize emotion, temper it, by formulating it in such a way that it can be shared.

Perhaps I can make my sense of this emotive quality clearer
if we look at comparable sections from two of Jane Austen's letters to her brother Frank, each announcing her father's death (Letters, I, 144-46). The first excerpt runs:

At nine this morning he [the family doctor] came again—and by his desire a Physician was called in;—Dr. Gibbs—But it was then absolutely a lost case—. Dr. Gibbs said that nothing but a Miracle could save him, and about twenty minutes after Ten he drew his last gasp.—Heavy as is the blow, we can already feel that a thousand comforts remain to us to soften it. Next to that of the consciousness of his worth & constant preparation for another World, is the remembrance of his having suffered, comparatively speaking, nothing. Being quite insensible of his own state, he was spared all the pain of separation, & he went off almost in his Sleep.

The letter recreates a flow of fact and sensation. The doctors arrive and judge; the death occurs; its effect on others is mentioned; but then the reader is returned to the authentic death. Everything happens in almost unmodulated sentences which contain a series of rather colloquial expressions—"a lost case," "nothing but a Miracle"—that culminates in the sharp "he went off almost in his Sleep." This is the intensity of actuality.

But Jane Austen sent the first letter to the wrong place, so the next day she wrote another. The difference between the two is not just a matter of distance from the event, though that has something to do with it. Rather, where the first presented a situation in all its immediacy, the second represents it rhetorically. This excerpt from the later version aims at creating a scene that will stimulate a perfectly conventional—though deeply felt—response:

A Physician was called in yesterday morning, but he was at that time past all possibility of cure—& Dr. Gibbs and Mr. Bowen had scarcely left his room before he sunk into a Sleep from which he never woke.—Everything I trust & beleive was done for him that was possible!—It has been very sudden!—within twenty four hours of his death he was walking with only the help of a stick, was even reading!—We had however some hours
of preparation, & when we understood his recovery to be hopeless, most fervently did we pray for the speedy release which ensued. To have seen him languishing long, struggling for Hours, would have been dreadful! & thank God! we were all spared from it. Except the restlessness & confusion of high Fever, he did not suffer—& he was mercifully spared from knowing that he was about to quit the Objects so beloved, so fondly cherished as his wife & Children ever were.—His tenderness as a Father, who can do justice to?—My Mother is tolerably well; she bears up with great fortitude, but I fear her health must suffer under such a shock.

Here most of the sentences are carefully fashioned to arouse tension by their highly dramatic contrasts: the arrival of the new doctor vs. the impossibility of “cure”; the departure of help vs. the coming of death; the activities of life, such as “walking” and “reading,” vs. the “sudden” onset of death (new material in this second letter, additionally exciting because it insists on the father’s liveliness just before death); the hopelessness of “recovery” vs. the fervency of prayer; the suffering endured vs. the knowledge “mercifully spared.” Even the exclamation marks formulate a plea for feeling, as does the narration of what “would have been dreadful” though it did not occur. But in all this shaping of the event, its actuality is idealized. The particular phrasings of the first letter become formulas in the second: “a Sleep from which he never woke,” “the speedy release which ensued,” and “the Objects so beloved, so fondly cherished as his wife & Children ever were.” Indeed this later version gives us not so much the particular event in the Austen household as the proper death of a pious man in a pious family. Symbolic of this propriety are the exclamation “Everything I trust & beleive was done for him that was possible!” and the final rhetorical question, “His tenderness as a Father, who can do justice to?”

We can summarize in this way: the first excerpt is instinctively dramatic because it seems to record the event as personally perceived, while the second formulates both the event and the feeling appropriate to it. Thus the more formally heightened account strikes one as less intense than the first. But to regard this
modulation of intensity as an abandonment of feeling on Jane Austen's part would be to misconceive one of her basic verbal methods. For it is only the formalizing of an emotion—the detaching it to some extent from the interested parties and the containing of it within a structure—that can give it an independent existence.

If we turn to Jane Austen's fiction, we find, quite predictably, patterns much more deliberate and detailed. It would be impossible to give examples here of all the local purposes that these patterns serve, so I shall bypass such matters as the many finely shaped parodic fragments in the *juvenilia* and the mild rhetoric so often used later on simply to order a variety of materials without coloring them strongly. But I must illustrate the two basic structures that I referred to earlier, the one moving from side to side, the other going straight on. Either of them, to repeat, can be suited to any number of effects. My choice of an ironic passage to show the two-part movement and of an emotional passage to show the second pattern is purely arbitrary.

In the description of Sir John and Lady Middleton that follows, the rhetoric develops its pressure by distinguishing between two equally ridiculous extremes and balancing them against each other. Perhaps the main contours of the passage will stand out if it is typographically rearranged and only its major antithetic elements italicized, though this does no justice to the minor patterns of antithesis and parallelism that echo the main design:

The *house* was large and handsome; and the Middletons lived in a *style* of equal hospitality and elegance.

The *former* was for Sir John's gratification, the *latter* for that of his lady.

They were scarcely ever without *some friends* staying with them in the house, and they kept *more company of every kind* than any other family in the neighbourhood.
It was necessary to the happiness of both; for however dissimilar in temper and outward behaviour, they strongly resembled each other in that total want of talent and taste which confined their employments, unconnected with such as society produced, within a very narrow compass.

Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother.

He hunted and shot, and she humoured her children;

and these were their only resources.

Lady Middleton had the advantage of being able to spoil her children all the year round, while Sir John's independent employments were in existence only half the time.

Continual engagements at home and abroad, however, supplied all the deficiencies of nature and education;

supported the good spirits of Sir John, and gave exercise to the good-breeding of his wife.

(Sense and Sensibility, p. 32)

The rhetoric both organizes and energizes an adverse judgment of the Middletons. The structural oppositions define extremes which the pattern periodically unites for more explicit attacks. The closing sentence recapitulates the structure and the sense, distinguishing Sir John from his wife but confirming the foolishness of both.

Jane Austen's rhetoric moves in a straighter line when she represents Catherine Morland's anguish at being dismissed from Northanger Abbey, especially in those emotional series, indi-
cated by italics, that characterize the middle section of the pas-

Catherine's swelling heart needed relief. In Eleanor's presence friendship and pride had equally restrained her tears, but no sooner was she gone than they burst forth in torrents. Turned from the house, and in such a way! —Without any reason that could justify, any apology that could atone for the *abruptness*, the *rudeness*, nay, the *insolence* of it. Henry at a distance—not able even to bid him farewell. *Every* hope, *every* expectation from him suspended, at least, and *who* could say how long?—*Who* could say when they might meet again?—And all this by such a man as General Tilney, *so* polite, *so* well-bred, and here­to­fore *so* particularly fond of her! It was as incomprehensible as it was *mortifying* and grievous. From what it could arise, and where it would end, were considerations of equal perplexity and alarm. (*Northanger Abbey*, p. 226)

The climactic series are not the only traditional device used here for dramatizing excitement. The incomplete sentences, variation in sentence length, exclamation marks, and rhetorical questions all accumulate to express powerful feeling in the body of the selection. But this passage has a quite different facet that also deserves attention: the doubled units with which Jane Austen opens and closes it. The first pairs—"friendship" and "pride," "any reason " and "any apology ",—mark as it were the initial restraint that is released in the series of the middle section. And the final pairs dam up the flow of emotion in the reservoirs of reason and condition so carefully articulated by "incomprehensible" vs. "mortifying and grievous," "From what " vs. "where ," and "perplexity" vs. "alarm." By the end of the passage, emotion has been safely consolidated in "considerations," and the rhetoric has controlled even while it has heightened.

This containing of emotion, as I earlier suggested, is the re­current effect of Jane Austen's rhetoric. Whatever the pattern she chooses and whatever its inherent power, she employs it to define, and thus evoke, a decorous public response.
All Jane Austen’s linguistic habits, I have been maintaining, dramatize attitudes that are presumed to have automatic public appeal. Her style, that is, constructs a version of reality. And it is her own stylistic practices that establish the possibilities of meaning for the verbal gestures of her characters, their gestures revealing, in turn, how these persons resist or adjust to the reality projected by Jane Austen’s style. The clues to their behavior lie in the deeds of their language, even when the verbal surface is unruffled, or hardly ruffled. In thus suggesting that we come at the characters through their styles, let me add, I am not implying that these persons can be considered as absolutely real (although for the sake of simple expression, I shall often refer to them as if they were living). Plainly the characters in a novel retain only a virtual life. Yet as parts of the writer’s total dramatic enterprise, as embodiments of what he wants to communicate, these figures must show their innermost qualities to us. In the case of a character, then, we are peculiarly justified in interpreting the style as the man.

Throughout Jane Austen’s novels, indeed, it is especially necessary for us to examine how the characters speak, because what we learn about them otherwise is commonly filtered through the mind of a heroine who has biases of her own. If we would see them truly, we must look at the dialogue, for that is where the characters define themselves. They may do so by various verbal traits, which acquire their significance, as I have already said, through the values implicit in Jane Austen’s own style. Perhaps the usual diction of a character gives him away. Does he simply recite concrete facts? or does he intensify what he refers to with particular terms that dramatize his own excitement? or does he use conceptual terms—and reliably or unreliably? Maybe the key to a character lies in his figurative language. Does he tend to avoid it, conceivably distrusting its fictitiousness and intensity? or
does his too violent commitment to figures prove that he is emotionally obsessed? or does his control of metaphor suggest that he is emotionally disengaged? Often a character’s speech rhythms are indicative. Does he chatter breathlessly? or is he easily agitated? When does he use rhetoric, and what kind of rhetoric is it? Even more significant are the character’s habits in generalizing. Does he generalize inductively or deductively, and in either case properly or improperly? What kind of norms do his generalizations betray, the wisdom of common experience or the merely personal disguised as the universal? These are some of the major means by which dialogue may represent behavior itself. Then there is a further technique that appears periodically in Jane Austen’s novels: she will set up a trivial enough social situation, yet allow her characters to talk of it in such a way that it becomes a kind of metaphor dramatizing much vaster areas of human experience, though the literalness of the situation preserves decorum. By analyzing practices like these in the following chapters, I shall try to suggest that the novels present characters more intensively human and explore a greater range of experience than the limitationists, put off by the decorous tone, have admitted.

All this is not to say that Jane Austen consciously plotted out her characters’ verbal habits and then meticulously patterned them in dialogue, nor that her characters can be reduced to a few traits verbally expressed—impressions which I fear the following analyses may give. But it is to say that in her own style Jane Austen’s habits are so significant and so precisely sustained as to create a context in which minute stylistic variations on the part of her characters are charged with import. Because such slight variations are expressive, she can maintain a tone of propriety; indeed decorum is the condition of communication in this society, what makes society possible and meaningful. Yet the conversations will show us that language dramatizes the terms on which the individual participates in society—and that those terms may be anything but decorous. Profoundly human motives, in short, are revealed in the dialogue, which makes up the very real action in these novels that notoriously lack incident.


8. Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery (Princeton, N. J., 1952), passim. (Cited hereafter as Jane Austen.) See also D. W. Harding, "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," Scrutiny, VIII (1940), 346–62. Mudrick's view, I should add immediately, seems to me to falsify the plot of every novel, which shows its major characters discovering freedom, not in the anarchy of self-will, but in willingly adjusting to and living through the conventions of their society.


12. Oblique evidence for the vitality of conceptual terms during the eighteenth century itself is perhaps provided by the age's notorious readiness to personify them, to endow them verbally with life. Earl R. Wasserman has explored this habit fully—in "The Inherent Values of Eighteenth-Century Personification," PMLA. LXV (1950), 435–63—and he is underlining the particularization implicit in the mode when he says: "Indeed, the eighteenth century recognized the personified abstraction, not as a device for abstracting and universalizing, but as a means of clothing the universal in imagery effective to the senses, of transferring the abstraction from the intellect to the imagination."
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The sentence also makes clear, of course, that the things animated by personification were universals, abstractions; and it is the latent life of such terms when they appear in Jane Austen's style—as distinct from their actual personification—that I want to emphasize.

13. William K. Wimsatt has said of Dr. Johnson's style that "if he is interested in generality, in the classes to which things belong, the aspects which unify groups of objects, he becomes at moments even more interested in these aspects as things in themselves, as metaphysical realities. Allowing the physical objects to be pressed out of sight, he erects the metaphysicalities or abstractions into the substantives of his discourse" (The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson [New Haven, 1941], pp. 55-56). The universe of Johnson's "discourse" which these sentences define seems to me analogous to the universe which I am claiming that Jane Austen's style creates, one structured by fixed qualities. In the local matter of the genitive construction, Wimsatt finds Johnson favoring a type of "appositional genitive in which one noun is abstract, or both"; and the critic traces the duplications of sense in a phrase like "excitements of fear, and allurements of desire": "The notion 'fear' (itself perhaps abstract) has the quality of exciting pulled out of it and formed into a second abstraction; so 'allurements' is pulled out of 'desire'; and the pairs of abstractions float in unstable expansion, each ready to collapse into one" (p. 57). My guess would be that this sort of appositional genitive does not turn up frequently in Jane Austen's writing. At any rate, the genitives I cite in my text—such as "graces of manner"—function rather to subdivide Jane Austen's universe in the way that I go on to describe.

14. R. W. Chapman prepared separate editions of all Jane Austen's minor works except Volume the Second, including within them canceled phrasings and sentences. Many of these original versions he omitted, however, in his collected edition of the Minor Works. Thus whenever, in this and in the next chapter, I cite a revision, the page references will be to his separate edition of The Watsons (Oxford, 1927) or of the Fragment of a Novel (Oxford, 1925), commonly called Sanditon.

15. The same sort of claim about the attitude of the eighteenth century itself toward the particular has been voiced by Bertrand H. Bronson in his eloquent essay "Personification Reconsidered," ELH: A Journal of English Literary History, XIV (1947), 163-77. Speaking of the age's poets, Bronson observes: "They were neither humanly incurious of, nor emotionally insensitive to, particulars, as almost any page of Boswell will prove; but personal statements gained force, conviction, vaster horizons, when lifted to the plateau of the general consensus" (p. 165).


17. The prose of Fanny Burney is worth a glance here because of the various links between her work and Jane Austen's. She was one of Jane Austen's immediate predecessors, of course, as a woman novelist writing stories about courtship which concern themselves to some extent with manners; and her novels were evidently read and reread by Jane Austen. In the matter of style, Fanny Burney is generally conceded to derive
from Dr. Johnson. And there is a Johnsonian ring to many passages of even her first book, before her manner further stiffened. In the following excerpt, I think we can hear the tones of her master most clearly in the nearly equal articulation of both members in a parallel or antithetic structure, this even weighting of the parts making the structure especially emphatic, while the recurrent equalizing leaves us with the impression of a highly patterned prose: "In all ranks and all stations of life, how strangely do characters and manners differ! Lord Orville, with a politeness which knows no intermission, and makes no distinction, is as unassuming and modest, as if he had never mixed with the great, and was totally ignorant of every qualification he possesses; this other Lord, though lavish of compliments and fine speeches, seems to me an entire stranger to real good-breeding; whoever strikes his fancy, engrosses his whole attention. He is forward and bold, has an air of haughtiness towards men, and a look of libertinism towards women, and his conscious quality seems to have given him a freedom in his way of speaking to either sex, that is very little short of rudeness" (Evelina [Everyman's Library ed.; New York, 1951], p. 106).

Certainly the basic organization here is firm enough: the contrast between Lord Orville and "this other Lord," between the real "politeness" expressed through an "unassuming" manner in the one, and the essential "rudeness" exhibited in the presuming manner of the other. But some of the minor structures are less convincing. The careful parallelism in "all ranks and all stations" would appear to imply that the second member should somehow significantly advance the meaning of the first; yet in this context "stations" actually tells us no more than "ranks," and indeed the repeated "all" comes to seem excessive when both the examples we arrive at are lords. One wonders, too, how much "modest" adds to "unassuming," or "bold" to "forward"—or even whether "makes no distinction" in fact conveys much more than "knows no intermission," since a continuing "politeness" can hardly be thought to lapse in any way. The effect of these less than satisfying minor structures is to make the prose feel inflated, as if Fanny Burney were writing with her ear on the pattern of sound rather than with her mind strictly on the sense. While Dr. Johnson's prose is likely to be at least as carefully shaped, his structures commonly rest on much surer logical foundations. And the effect of verbal flabbiness is as alien to Jane Austen's style as to Dr. Johnson's, though of course her prose is not so consistently patterned, her constructions not so equally weighted in their parts, as his or Fanny Burney's. What Jane Austen herself may owe to the style of Dr. Johnson—the prose moralist she liked best, according to her brother—is hard to tie down. The particular indebtedness mentioned by Mary Lascelles is to Johnson's "coining" of "pregnant abstractions," a practice echoed in such a phrase as the "desultory good-will" ascribed to Miss Bates (Jane Austen, p. 109). But, as Mary Lascelles also suggests, the similarities between Jane Austen's style and Dr. Johnson's are very general; so much so, I think, that we are justified in viewing Johnson rather as a part of the eighteenth century's legacy to Jane Austen than as a more specific stylistic model.