The Mimetic-Thematic Relationship and the Thematizing of Narrative
1 Character, Progression, and Thematism: The Cases of 1984 and Pride and Prejudice

I

The interpretive maneuver most widely practiced by contemporary critics can be summarized in a two-word slogan: "Always thematize!" To follow the slogan as we begin to look at the relations among the components of character would of course be to give pride of place to the thematic function: the importance of thematizing derives from the assumption that a narrative achieves its significance from the ideational generalizations it leads one to. The same assumption leads one to conclude that the component of character contributing to those generalizations is the most important. More succinctly, if a fictional narrative can claim to work upon the world, then it must base that claim upon its ideational significance, much of which will be carried by the characters.

Yet amid the widespread practice of thematic criticism, there continue to be occasional cogent protests against it, most often on the grounds that it is frequently reductive, that typically it moves one away from the richness of response authors and texts invite their audiences to have. The most forceful protesters have been neo-Aristoteleans, and their alternative practice leads them to give pride of place to the mimetic function of character. For them, narratives are typically representations of actions involving human agents for the purpose of moving their audiences in a particular way. Such emotional responses can also depend crucially on the ideational content of the work, but in the neo-Aristoteleans' view the ideational content is less often made central than the thematists would have one believe: a character is a represented person and the emotions we feel about that character are the emotions we feel about people in life. Although people may have representative significance, they typically cannot be adequately summed up by their representativeness. And the same goes for literary characters.

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This disagreement provides a useful starting point for investigating the relation between the mimetic and thematic components of character because it indicates how the relation is connected both to ways of reading and to claims for the importance of literary narrative. Furthermore, although adjudication itself matters less here than investigating the relation between the mimetic and thematic components of character, the attempt to adjudicate will require me to make some careful discriminations about the connections among those components of character and the general progression of a narrative. I shall eventually argue that in order to account for the complex relations of the mimetic and the thematic components of character the alternatives presented by the thematists and the anti-thematists need to be transcended. This argument, however, cannot proceed simply by saying that each side has a piece of the truth and that we need to synthesize those pieces. Instead, it will cause me to reexamine the nature of character and to complicate what I have said in the introduction about the relation between character and progression. I shall begin with an analysis of a work that both the thematists and the Aristoteleans would regard as dominated by theme: Orwell's 1984. After proposing an explanation of the relation between Winston Smith's functions and the progression of the narrative, I will take up the issues of the dispute as they apply to Elizabeth Bennet's character in Pride and Prejudice, a novel about which the thematists and anti-thematists would disagree.

II

What Murray Sperber said in 1980 about the criticism of 1984 remains true today: despite all the attention Orwell's novel has received, its detailed structure has yet to be sufficiently analyzed.3 For this reason, my account of the progression will be fairly detailed. One of the striking features of that progression is that after Orwell introduces the first major instability in Chapter 1—Winston's thoughtcrime, his beginning his diary—he does not significantly complicate that instability until the eighth and last chapter of Book One, when Winston returns to Mr. Charrington's shop, the place where he bought the diary. This feature is made all the more striking because, with the exception of the segments given over to the book of the brotherhood, the remainder of the narrative rather tightly follows the line begun with that crime and continued with Winston's developing relationships with Julia and O'Brien. Analyzing how the narrative progresses in Book One will also illuminate the relationship between Winston's mimetic and thematic functions.
Apart from the introduction of the first instability, the narrative in the first book progresses largely by the introduction and partial resolution of a significant tension. "It was a bright, cold day in April and the clocks were striking thirteen." This first sentence creates a gap between the narrative audience that already knows the year of the action and is already familiar with clocks striking thirteen and the authorial audience for whom these facts are either unknown or unfamiliar. Mark Crispin Miller's discussion of this first sentence points to the significance of April in the British literary tradition from Chaucer to Eliot, a significance which further emphasizes the peculiarity of the weather for the season. Since the authorial audience would be presumed to know that tradition while the narrative audience, located in time after the Party's alteration of the past, would not, the mention of April further emphasizes the gap between the two audiences. This gap also signals a tension of unequal knowledge between author and authorial audience: he and his narrator surrogate know all about this world but plunge into the narrative without orienting us. The tension is heightened as the first few paragraphs work in this gap between narrative and authorial audiences and make references to a poster of someone called Big Brother; a preparation for something called Hate Week; a telescreen; INGSOC; Thought Police; the Ninth Three-Year Plan; and the Ministry of Truth. Our reading is driven in part by a desire to reduce this tension.

Of course the experience of beginning a narrative and being asked to read as if we shared knowledge that we do not actually possess is a common one. Such an experience does, I think, always produce a mild tension, but that tension is often quickly resolved. My claim about *1984* is that the initial defamiliarizations emphasize the tension (the difference between it and other narratives that carry the illusion of occurring in our world is a matter of degree) and that this tension is not—indeed cannot be—quickly resolved. This cognitive tension is both like and unlike the ethical tension that we saw in "Haircut." It functions to propel us forward in the narrative, but because of other signals we are given about Winston as a mimetic character, it orients us toward the acquisition of information that will influence our judgments, expectations, desires, and attitudes about the characters and the instabilities they face. In general, cognitive tension functions in this way in narratives with a strong mimetic component. In narratives like the classic detective story, where the mimetic component is restricted, cognitive tension can be the primary source of the progression. (Of course in such narratives, the cognitive tension does not manifest itself in a gap between authorial and narrative audiences but between both of them and the author.) Ethical tension is
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typically a sign that the narrative has a strong mimetic component; it
is itself one mechanism through which authors induce readers to
form judgments, set up expectations, develop desires, adopt atti­
tudes, and so on.

After introducing the major instability of Winston’s thoughtcrime
(an incident to which I shall return), Orwell’s narrative progresses by
reducing the tension: rather than immediately showing how the first
thoughtcrime leads Winston into a related series of actions, Orwell
shows us Winston going about his business in his world, occasionally
punctuating the accompanying disclosures about that world by re­
turning to scenes of Winston writing in his diary. By the end of Book
One, Orwell has reduced much—though not all—of the tension
and simultaneously complicated our understanding of the major in­
stability. In addition, through his references to Julia and O’Brien he
has laid the groundwork for further development of the instability.

One of the major ways in which the progression by tension com­
plicates the initial instability is to affect our expectations about Win­
ston’s success in eluding the Thought Police. By the end of Book One,
we certainly still hope that he will, but we have strong reason to think
that he will not. In addition, through maintaining the technique of
the opening paragraphs and through representing Winston in numer­
ous contexts, Orwell has also revealed most of Winston’s major attri­
butes. The narrative then returns to the progression by instability.

More specifically, before Book One is over, Orwell shows us Win­
ston with his neighbors, Mrs. Parsons and her rabid children; Win­
ston submitting to the morning exercises (Physical Jerks) beamed over
the telescreen; Winston working at the Ministry of Truth, where his
job is to alter records, especially those contained in newspapers; Win­
ston undergoing the trials of eating lunch in the Ministry’s cafeteria;
Winston reflecting on the Party’s control of the past through its han­
dling of the counterrevolutionaries Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford;
Winston roaming about the proles’ quarter of the city until he once
again finds himself in Charrington’s shop. Through these various
scenes Winston frequently reflects on the social and political or­
ganization of his world as it impinges on—or indeed, determines
and controls—the particular activity he is engaged in; occasionally,
Orwell gives us Winston’s thoughts about incidents in his own past
life such as his vague memory of his mother sacrificing herself for
him, and his unhappy marriage to Katherine, who despised sex but
thought of procreation as their duty to the Party.

The world revealed through these scenes and incidents is a curious
mixture of efficiency and inefficiency, a world with sophisticated tech­
nology and a poor standard of living. Telescreens can both trans-
mit and receive, and individuals can be watched vigilantly by the
Thought Police, but elevators frequently don't work and food is
barely palatable. Winston can rewrite newspaper articles and the his-
torical record can be swiftly altered, but the streets don't get cleaned,
and decent medical care for such things as Winston's varicose ulcer
seems to be nonexistent. Above all, Oceania in 1984 is a world domi-
nated by the Party and the social structure it has imposed on the
province. The basic principle of this structure, we soon learn, is state
total control over the individual. The relatively poor standard of living sig-
nifies both one way of exerting control—it keeps the Party members
extremely dependent—and one way the system is execrable.

The telescreens, the enforced Physical Jerks, the ubiquity of Big
Brother, the ritual of the Three Minutes Hate, the existence of the
Spies and the Thought Police, the creation of Newspeak, the abolition
of written laws without the abolition of punishments: all these Party
innovations testify to its elaborate—and largely successful—efforts to
control the lives of its members. Mrs. Parsons's fanatically loyal chil-
dren terrorize her. Winston's thought that his friend Syme, a dedi-
cated worker on the new edition of the Newspeak dictionary, will be
vaporized simply because he understands the intended effects of the
impoverished language points to the truth that, ironically, Syme
has himself articulated: “Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.” Winston's
memories of his mother and his wife indicate how the Party has de-
stroyed the most intimate relationships: Winston thinks that the kind
of sacrifice his mother made “had been tragic and sorrowful in a way
that was no longer possible. Tragedy, he perceived, belonged to the
ancient time, to a time when there were still privacy, love, and friend-
sip, and when the members of a family stood by one another with-
out needing to know the reason. . . . Today there were fear, hatred,
and pain, but no dignity of emotion, no deep or complex sorrows”
(p. 22). He was not able to develop any deep emotions in his own
marriage because Katherine had been so unconsciously orthodox that
she could not experience such emotions. Finally, Winston's excursion
among the proles illustrates how the Party keeps them occupied with
work on the one hand and bread and circuses on the other.

The extent—and success—of the Party's control is sketched more
fully in the information about Winston's job, in his remembrance of
what happened to Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford, and in his at-
ttempt to find somebody who can remember the time before the Party
was in power. As we see Winston at work, we see how the Party
controls history. Winston's remembrance of the three counterrevolu-
tionaries dramatizes the consequences of that effort: to control history
is to control reality. Although Winston's photograph of the three
counterrevolutionaries is concrete evidence that the official version of their history is false, he could not do anything public with that evidence. Furthermore, thinking back to his brief possession of the photograph, Winston muses that the “photograph might not even be evidence.” Finally, the impossibility of recapturing history is dramatized in Winston’s futile attempt to get the old prole to answer his questions about the past.

By the end of Book One, our knowledge of Winston’s world is not complete, but the tension between Orwell and the authorial audience is greatly diminished: we know the kind of world we are reading about, and this knowledge has significant consequences for our understanding of the initial major instability and of Winston’s character. We come to understand that to begin the diary is to rebel against the Party, not merely because the diary contains exclamations like “DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER!” but also because the act of writing is an act of individual consciousness and autonomy. Simply by sitting down to write, indeed, by contemplating that act, Winston is guilty of thoughtcrime; he is asserting his selfhood against the Party, which wants to deny that selfhood. The central issues of the whole narrative are gradually defined in the course of Book One: can Winston elude the Thought Police and go on writing the diary, and more important, can he have any sustained existence as an individual in this totalitarian society? As the form of the second question indicates, the progression of Book One leads us to read Winston thematically: he comes to represent the individual citizen, and what he does and what happens to him matters to us because of what these things imply about the possibility of individual freedom in totalitarian society. This movement of Book One gives thematic prominence to certain of Winston’s attributes, even as Orwell’s handling of the point of view emphasizes his mimetic function.

By the end of Book One, the most salient attributes of Winston’s character to emerge are his name, his age, his habit of thinking by subconscious association, his intelligence, his concern with the past, his love of beauty, his hatred of the Party, and his optimism; furthermore, though Winston is distinguished from his associates by his intelligence and his resistance to the Party, he is not given any great powers of action—he is a man more ordinary than extraordinary. The first chapter of the novel, indeed its first three paragraphs, establish Winston’s name and age—and as noted above in a somewhat different way, they immediately signal to the authorial audience that his world, despite its similarities to our own, is a synthetic construct. Our awareness of the fictionality of the world naturally brings the synthetic component of Winston’s character into the foreground of the
narrative. This foregrounding combines with other aspects of Orwell's presentation to emphasize some of Winston's thematic dimensions. When we learn in the sixth paragraph that he lives in London, and when the later progression encourages us to regard him thematically, his name and age take on further associations. Combining the extremely common British surname with the first name of England's greatest hero of the 1940s identifies him as what a typical male British citizen of 1984 would be—if there were still a Britain. Since he is thirty-nine, he was born in 1945, and, we can infer, was named for Churchill. The last name, though, emphasizes his ordinariness: this is not Winston Churchill, but Winston Smith. I shall return to the significance of this point after discussing the way Orwell handles the conclusion of the narrative.

Later in the narrative, after Orwell reveals how the Party is destroying the past, and especially after Winston becomes involved with Julia, his age takes on a thematic significance that further defines his representative status. His conversations with Julia indicate that the next generation simply cannot envision life without the Party. Having grown up with the Party as a fact of life, Julia takes it so much for granted that it constrains her ideas of rebellion; until she meets Winston, her goal in life is to manipulate the Party's system rather than overthrow it. She, for instance, pretends to be a rabid member of the Junior Anti-Sex League so that she can have a cover for her various sexual liaisons. Winston, in contrast, with his dim memories of life before the Party, can envision life without it. His response is to do whatever he can—keep his diary, get involved with Julia, attempt to join the Brotherhood—to resist the Party's repression of individuals. His optimism allows him to hope that such resistance may eventually lead to the Party's overthrow, even as his intelligence reminds him that such an outcome is unlikely. This disparity between Winston and Julia clearly marks him off as a member of the last group of citizens to remember life without the Party, the last group that could use that connection to the past as a motive for rebellion. "Who controls the past controls the future." As the narrative progresses, Winston's name and age combine to make him a figure of "the last man in Europe," a phrase that Orwell considered using as the book's title. Consequently, the stakes of the instabilities are raised: Winston's story is not just an exemplary case of what happens when the individual rebels against the totalitarian state but also an account of how the Party responds to one of its last apparently serious threats.

Despite the elements of the opening chapter that foreground its synthetic status, and despite the movement of Book One that places Winston's actions into a broad thematic context, Orwell's initial treat-
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ment of Winston himself is directed toward emphasizing his mimetic function. Orwell's own statement about the book aptly describes the effect of the opening pages: "it is in a sense a fantasy but in the form of a naturalistic novel." 7 Orwell relies greatly upon the manipulation of point of view to establish Winston's mimetic function. Winston is consistently the focalizer in the narration; we see things as Winston sees them, though frequently the voice used to express Winston's vision is the narrator's. 8 "Outside, even through the shut window pane, the world looked cold. Down in the street, little eddies of wind were whirling dust and torn papers into spirals" (pp. 3-4). It is Winston who is up at his window looking "down" at the "little eddies of wind," but it is the narrator who describes the wind in those terms. In addition to emphasizing the mimetic function of Winston's character, this technique has other important effects in the progression, but these can be better understood after we look at the progression in Book Two.

At the end of Book One when Winston returns to Mr. Charrington's shop, Orwell begins to shift the main principle of movement from the resolution of tension to the complication of instabilities. Winston builds on his initial "crime" of buying the diary by buying the hundred-year-old glass paperweight, and he begins to think about returning again and again to the shop, even about renting the upstairs room. Book Two opens with Julia's approach to him, and soon they are in love with each other and united against the Party. In addition, O'Brien makes his approach to Winston, and the lovers soon join the Brotherhood. Meanwhile Winston rents Charrington's upstairs room, and he and Julia begin meeting there. With each step, the magnitude of their rebellion and the exercise of their individual freedom (one equals the other) increase, and so of course does the danger that they will be captured. "We are the dead," they remind themselves without fully believing what they are saying. Having established the overarching thematic background in Book One, Orwell here designs the trajectory of the main action around our mimetic interest in Winston and his struggle. And as Orwell confines us to Winston's vision through the point of view, he has us participate in the trajectory of Winston's own emotions in the main action: Like Winston, we not only take pleasure in his relationship with Julia and in his finding an apparently kindred spirit in O'Brien, but we also come to desire deeply the total overthrow of the Party.

At the same time, from the information in Book One about the power of the Party, we develop a strong sense that this positive outcome is not possible. When Winston and Julia are arrested by the Thought Police, we share his feeling that such an event was inevi-
table, but our knowledge offers no solace for the disappointment we feel. Moreover, even the appropriate surprise of discovering Mr. Charrington to be a member of the Thought Police does not fully prepare us for the new developments of the progression in Book Three, developments that are dependent in large part on Orwell's management of the point of view and that in turn contribute to the emphasis on Winston's mimetic function. Book Three resolves the instabilities by tracing the conversion of Winston's rebellion into his total defeat. Although such a resolution has been implicit in the narrative from early on, Orwell is able to maximize its power by suddenly showing us that the tension between his knowledge of the world and ours has not been resolved as fully as we thought. In consistently restricting us to Winston's vision, Orwell does not give his own authority to Winston's conclusions about the world; we need to recognize that those conclusions are always subject to later revision. In fact, it is because he handles the technique this way that Orwell can legitimately "surprise" us with the truth about Charrington and O'Brien. At the same time, Orwell counts on our erroneously accepting some of Winston's conclusions. For example, in Chapter Two Orwell depicts Winston thinking about the ubiquity of Big Brother: "Even from the coin the eyes pursued you. On coins, on stamps, on the covers of books, on banners, on posters, and on the wrapping of a cigarette packet—everywhere. Always the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or in bed—no escape. Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull" (p. 19–20). Although we are still clearly being given only Winston's vision here, we are inclined to share it and Orwell does nothing to alter that inclination. The inviolability of one's mind is one of the supposed truths of our world, Winston's thoughtcrime has not yet brought down any punishment on him, and the rhetoric of the passage makes the final sentence a mere concession. We are being told by both Winston and Orwell about the limited freedom the individual has; we accept what we are told, including what the passage regards as the single small exception. Although the rest of Book One tells us a great deal about Winston's world and about the power of the Party, it is not until the very end of the narrative that we learn that even those few cubic centimeters are not one's own. Indeed, the Party's power extends far enough to control not only what one does, not only what one thinks, but also what one feels.

I shall return to discuss the resolution in some detail but even here we can recognize some important effects of the delayed resolution of the tension. In relieving so much of the tension in Book One, Orwell
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gives us the illusion that we know the worst. When we learn that even our extensive knowledge of the Party's mechanisms of control has underestimated its power, our revulsion from such a totalitarian state becomes even greater—and so too does the effectiveness of the narrative as a warning. In this way the tension is crucial to the mimetic (and emotional) effect of the ending, which in turn Orwell uses to reinforce the thematic point about the threat of totalitarianism.

In general, Orwell's handling of Winston's character follows the pattern outlined here: he emphasizes Winston's mimetic function, increases our involvement with his progression toward his fate as itself an emotionally affecting experience, and then ultimately subordinates that function and our involvement to his communication of a larger thematic point. The relation between the mimetic and the thematic is fairly clear for such attributes as Winston's concern with the past and his love of beauty; perhaps the least obvious and most dramatic illustration of the general pattern occurs in what Orwell does with Winston's attribute of associative thinking, which is itself a significant part of his psychological portrait. Here Orwell immediately establishes this attribute as a significant mimetic trait, but he does not develop its full thematic significance until the final pages of the narrative.

Winston's attribute of associative thinking is established simultaneously with the introduction of the first major instability. Winston's first diary entry describes his trip to the "flicks" the previous night. During the war films, which were depicting various people being shot or hit with bombs or otherwise violently obliterated to the great approval of most spectators, one proletarian started shouting her objections to the film. Winston breaks off his account after saying that the police turned her out; then we are told, "He did not know what had made him pour out this stream of rubbish. But the curious thing was that while he was doing so a totally different memory had clarified itself in his mind" (p. 8). That memory turns out to be a look from O'Brien during that morning's Two Minutes Hate, a look that Winston interprets as a signal that O'Brien is on his side. Winston never figures out the connection between the two events, but Orwell expects his audience to recognize that the scene at the flicks clarifies the scene during the Two Minutes Hate because in each an individual acts in opposition to the hysterical mob surrounding him or her. Orwell never does anything else with Winston's instinctive connection between the two events; and consequently, the association becomes significant largely for the way it adds a psychological complexity to Winston's character. Furthermore, at this stage of the narrative, this important attribute does not have any thematic function.
As the narrative develops, Orwell places this attribute in a rather complex relationship with Winston's optimism. When Winston begins his diary, he tells himself that he is thereby making himself one of the dead; but as I noted above, this admission does not become a conviction until he is actually captured. Instead, he goes on with his acts of rebellion, becoming more and more hopeful about the possibility of eventual success with each passing day. Yet Orwell shows us, through Winston's habits of associative thought, that in another part of himself Winston senses that his optimism is based upon a denial of certain perceptions. In Chapter 7 of Book One, for example, Winston gazes at a portrait of Big Brother which forms the frontispiece of a children's history textbook: "The hypnotic eyes gazed into his own. It was as though some huge force were pressing down upon you—something that penetrated inside your skull, battering against your brain, frightening you out of your beliefs, persuading you, almost, to deny the evidence of your senses" (p. 55). Then he consciously resists these conclusions as his optimism gains the upper hand: "But no! His courage seemed suddenly to stiffen of its own accord." And then: "The face of O'Brien, not called up by any obvious association had floated into his mind" (p. 55). Although the vision of O'Brien comes hard upon the heels of his renewed courage, the narrator's comment about the absence of any obvious association directs the audience to supply that association: Winston subconsciously links O'Brien and Big Brother.

In case we have lingering doubts, Orwell shows us at the end of the next chapter that the association can also move in the other direction: Trying to think of O'Brien, whom he now regards as the eventual audience for his diary, Winston focuses on the memory of O'Brien's saying in a dream, "We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness." The nagging presence of the telescreen interferes with his thoughts, and then "The face of Big Brother swam into his mind, displacing that of O'Brien" (p. 70). This reinforced association of the two occurs in the last paragraph of Book One, and thus provides an ominous backdrop to the apparently positive developments of Book Two. Again, though, the general point is that Orwell is using the attributes to increase the psychological realism of his treatment of Winston and thereby to increase the extent of our emotional involvement in his unfolding story.

Before I turn to how Orwell makes the attribute of associative thinking function thematically, I need to expand on my earlier assertion that this attribute is part of Orwell's attempt to create a realistic individual psychology for Winston—even as Orwell leaves it to us to piece together the workings of that psychology. Recall Winston's ini-
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itial thought after breaking off his first diary entry: “He did not know what had made him pour out this stream of rubbish” (p.8). Later in the narrative Orwell supplies us with the answer: in recounting the scenes where the mother in the movie vainly tries to protect her child who burrows into her and where the proletarian mother in turn tries to protect her children from having to watch such a movie, Winston is recalling his own mother’s attempts to protect his sister—and more generally himself as well. The first time he sleeps after beginning the diary, he dreams of watching his mother and sister sink in the bottom of a ship while he is able to stay up and out in the light; later, when Julia brings chocolate to their first tryst, it stirs up “some memory which he could not pin down, but which was powerful and troubling” (p.81). Still later, during one of his visits to the room above Charrington’s shop with Julia, he dreams of his mother again and this dream allows him to pin down the earlier memory: it is a memory of the last time he saw his mother, and how on that occasion his own ravenous hunger drove him to take for himself his sister’s lesser share of chocolate. What is most vivid in the memory is how Winston’s mother embraced and tried to protect his sister, and how even after he snatched her chocolate, his mother went on trying to protect and comfort her. Winston draws a very significant moral at that point: “he did not suppose, from what he could remember of [his mother], that she had been an unusual woman, still less an intelligent one; and yet she had possessed a kind of nobility, a kind of purity, simply because the standards that she obeyed were private ones. Her feelings were her own, and could not be altered from outside. . . . If you love someone, you loved him, and when you had nothing else to give, you still gave him love. . . . The terrible thing that the Party had done was to persuade you that mere impulses, mere feeling were of no account, while at the same time robbing you of all power over the material world” (pp. 109–10).

Yet the significance of Winston’s dreams and memory for the narrative are not exhausted in this moral, because they reach beyond these insights to affect our understanding of what happens in Book Three.11 The whole sequence—journal entry, dream, dim memory, second dream, clear memory—works like the associative thought processes to emphasize Winston’s realistic psychology. The particular nature of the dreams and memories adds a significant dimension to our understanding of how and why Winston’s betrayal of Julia breaks him. When, faced with imminent attack from the ravenous rats, Winston shouts “Do it to Julia!” he violates something at the core of his values because it is at the core of his own existence: the feeling that he is alive because the woman who brought him into the world and
loved him had sacrificed herself for him. Both the power and the repulsiveness of the Party are emphasized by our understanding that Winston had no choice but to act as he did.

The ending of the narrative then takes these attributes of Winston’s character that have been working to emphasize his mimetic function and converts them into thematic functions. In the last chapter, Winston has become a figure reminiscent of Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford. In Chapter 7 of Book One, Orwell describes Winston’s recollection of the day he saw the three of them in the Chestnut Tree Café.

It was the lonely hour of fifteen. . . . The place was almost empty. A tinny music was trickling from the telescreen. The three men sat in their corner almost motionless, never speaking. Uncommanded, the waiter brought fresh glasses of gin. There was a chessboard on the table beside them, with the pieces set out, but no game started. And then, for perhaps half a minute in all, something happened to the telescreens. The tune that they were playing changed, and the tone of the music changed too. There came into it—but it was something hard to describe. It was a peculiar, cracked, braying, jeering note; in his mind Winston called it a yellow note. And then a voice from the telescreen was singing:

“Under the spreading chestnut tree
I sold you and you sold me
There lie they, and here lie we
Under the spreading chestnut tree."

The three men never stirred. But when Winston glanced again at Rutherford’s ruinous face, he saw that his eyes were full of tears. And for the first time he noticed, with a kind of inward shudder, and yet not knowing at what he shuddered, that both Aaronson and Rutherford had broken noses. (Pp. 52–53)

In the last chapter, Winston sits in the same café, and again it is almost empty at “the lonely hour of fifteen.” From time to time, an “unbidden” waiter comes and fills Winston’s glass with gin, which has become “the element he swam in,” while he fitfully plays a solitary game of chess and listens to the telescreen. He recalls his last, cold, painful visit with Julia, a visit in which they confessed that they had betrayed each other. And then:

Something changed in the music that trickled from the telescreen. A cracked and jeering note, a yellow note, came into it. And then—perhaps it was not happening, perhaps it was only a memory taking on the semblance of sound—a voice was singing:
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"Under the spreading chestnut tree
I sold you and you sold me—"
The tears welled up in his eyes.

(P. 195)

The expected inferences are clear: the song is the Party's way of mocking Winston for betraying Julia, just as it had been mocking Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford for their own versions of mutual betrayal. More generally, what has happened to Winston in the Ministry of Love is just a variation on what always happens to thought-criminals. Winston has come to represent the inevitable failure of the individual to resist the totalitarian state. Nevertheless, at this point the instabilities created by Winston's rebellion and the Party's response to it are not entirely resolved: the tears are a sign that he is still attached to his former attitudes, that he regrets his betrayal of Julia. If he were to die now, he would die hating Big Brother—and thus, by his own earlier definition, achieve some measure of victory. Orwell works toward the resolution of the instability by following the progress of Winston's thoughts.

First, he gives us one more instance of Winston's associative thought process. Winston's thoughts of the alleged war in Africa—

"He had the map of Africa behind his eyelids. The movement of the armies was a diagram: a black arrow tearing vertically southward, and a white arrow tearing horizontally eastward, across the tail of the first" (pp. 195–96)—trigger a subconscious association with a childhood memory. He thinks of an afternoon spent playing with his mother a game called Snakes and Ladders, a game in which the tiddlywinks move vertically and horizontally. "Soon he was wildly excited and shouting with laughter as the tiddlywinks climbed hopefully up the ladders and then came slithering down again. . . . His tiny sister, too young to understand what the game was about, had sat propped up against a bolster, laughing because the others were laughing. For a whole afternoon they had all been happy together, as in his earlier childhood." Then Winston's training at the Ministry of Love takes over: "He pushed the picture out of his mind. It was a false memory" (p. 196).

This reaction to the memory is sharply different from Winston's reactions to his previous memories. As we have seen, those lead him to reflect on the Party's elimination of the human bonds that develop in a social order that allows privacy, friendship, and love. His pushing the memory away signifies a very crucial step in his defeat: under the pressure of his training, he is betraying not only his own prior belief in the integrity of the past but also the bonds that were part of
his early private life and part of his identity. His rejection of the memory is also crucial because it represents his own conscious attempt to control his subconscious. In presenting the memory, Orwell is reminding us that Winston's mind has worked in ways that were beyond his control. In presenting Winston's first memory of a happy time during this afternoon of his own dull unhappiness, Orwell is showing us again the power of Winston's subconscious. But when Winston reacts by denying the validity of the memory, his defeat is all but complete.

The final steps come with the telescreen's announcement of Oceania's victory in Africa. In representing Winston's response here, Orwell indicates that Winston's memory is not so easily pushed away; instead, it is perversely transformed and applied to Winston's present situation. Wildly excited in memory, he becomes wildly excited in the present: "in his mind he was running, swiftly running, he was with the crowds outside cheering himself deaf" (p. 197). Happy and content in memory, no longer at odds with his mother and sister, he becomes happy and content in the present, no longer at odds with the Party.  

Ah, it was more than a Eurasian army that had perished! Much had changed in him since that first day in the Ministry of Love, but the final indispensable, healing change had never happened until this moment . . . sitting in a blissful dream, he was back in the Ministry of Love, with everything forgiven, his soul white as snow. He was in the public dock, confessing everything, implicating everybody. He was walking down the white-tiled corridor, with the feeling of walking in sunlight, and an armed guard at his back. The long-hoped-for bullet was entering his brain. (P. 197)

He is ready for the last step of his transformation, the final perverse twist the Party's training produces on his specific memory and his general consciousness.

He gazed up at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark mustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! . . . But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother. (P. 197)

This passage appropriately closes and completes the narrative because it not only signals the end of Winston's rebellion but also indicates the extent of the Party's ability to control the individual. It is able to manipulate not just behavior, not just thoughts, but also emo-
tions. It is even able to control the workings of the subconscious mind. In achieving this completion, the narrative transforms the thematic dimension accompanying Winston's trait of associative thinking into a major thematic function. That trait now exists not only to give Winston mimetic plausibility but also to demonstrate the extent of the totalitarian state's power. If it can effect such a transformation in a mind like Winston's that frequently operated in a way that was beyond his own conscious control, its power is enormous indeed. The narrative's warning about totalitarianism becomes even more urgent.

Orwell's handling of vision and voice in the final pages sheds further light on the relation between the mimetic and the thematic functions of Winston's character there. Previously, as the narrative has presented the world of 1984 through Winston's vision, the authorial audience has been asked to share virtually all of Winston's evaluative comments. Here for the first time, our evaluations are diametrically opposed to his. Indeed, since we have been traveling with Winston so closely throughout the narrative, if Orwell had not been so insistent on the state's control over the individual, we ourselves might have felt betrayed by Winston in this passage. Even within the final passage Orwell takes steps to block that response. In the sentence represented by the ellipsis above, the narrator leaves Winston's vision and describes him from the outside: "Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose" (p. 197). The outside view provides a comment on his internal elation; we see him not as triumphant but as pathetic. The emotions generated by our vision work to support our own opposition to the totalitarian system that reduced Winston to this state. Again, in short, Orwell develops the mimetic response and then subordinates it to his thematic purpose.

This reading of the ending and the way it affects both the previous mimetic characterization of Winston and the indictment of totalitarianism suggest a further conclusion about Orwell's use of mimetic and thematic elements of Winston's character. At first glance, it may seem surprising that Orwell does not make Winston a man with greater powers of action. If he is to be a figure of the last man in Europe who succumbs to the power of the state, and if his losing struggle is to be as tragic as possible, then, we might argue, Orwell ought to have made him more formidable. Although I believe that such a strategy might have also been effective, I think that Orwell was constructing the narrative along different lines—and toward a different kind of effectiveness. For Orwell the greater power of the totalitarian state is finally a foregone conclusion. He builds some suspense about whether Winston can succeed in his rebellion by restricting us to Winston's point of view for most of the narrative and by not fully
resolving the tension about the nature of the totalitarian state until Book Three, but the greater emphasis in the narrative is on what the state does to the individual, common man. In this respect, Winston's mental life is of more significance than his powers of action. By showing us what the state does to an individual with such a mental life, an individual who finally is not a serious threat to the Party, Orwell places the burden of his indictment precisely on the dangers that the totalitarian state poses for Everyman.

In conclusion, the narrative progression of 1984 eventually gives the greatest weight to the thematic functions of Winston Smith's character, but the effects of those functions also depend crucially on Orwell's ability to make Winston function as an effective mimetic character. At the same time, the progression develops different thematic functions from different attributes: his age and his ordinariness make him a certain kind of representative figure; his love for the past is used to develop the thematic point about the connection between the Party's control of the individual and the Party's control of history; his associative thinking is used to develop the thematic point about the Party's control over the thoughts and feelings of the individual. Moreover, all these separate functions work together as part of the narrative's exploration of the threat of totalitarianism. In this respect, we might say that the separate functions eventually run together in a Grand Central Function as Winston becomes the embodiment of individual actions and desires that the totalitarian state seeks to crush. The narrative of 1984, in other words, presents one form that the mimetic-thematic relationship can take. More generally, it presents one remarkable example of how one component of character can be subordinated to another without that subordination restricting the component, for Orwell can only communicate the full thematic significance of Winston's character through his extended development of his mimetic component.

III

The most immediately relevant part of these conclusions for the discussion of Pride and Prejudice is that the thematists would claim that they apply, mutatis mutandis, to Elizabeth Bennet. For them, Elizabeth is a character whose individuality is joined to a representative function, and their analyses seek to explain the precise nature and significance of that function. In order to understand why the neo-Aristoteleans object to that practice, let us look at some thematic readings of the novel and the case against such readings.

In The Improvement of the Estate Alistair Duckworth sets forth a well-
executed example of thematic reading. He argues that through her representation of Elizabeth Bennet's education Jane Austen communicates her vision of a "properly constituted society." According to Duckworth, Austen insists that such a society "emerges only from the interaction of cultural discipline and individual commitment, and only when inherited forms receive the support of individual energy do they carry value. Conversely, however, ... individual energy must be generated within social contexts, for, lacking social direction and control, it turns too easily to withdrawal from society, or to irresponsibility and anarchy" (p. 132). Duckworth maintains that this dialectic between cultural discipline and individual energy is played out through Austen's representation of Darcy and Elizabeth respectively. "Only when Elizabeth recognizes that individualism must find its social limits, and Darcy concedes that tradition without individual energy is empty form, can the novel reach its eminently satisfactory conclusion" (p. 118). Duckworth's reading focuses on how Elizabeth's recognition comes about, on how Darcy both possesses and learns to modify a "proper pride," and on how the same dialectic between individual energy and social control is at work in other elements of the novel, especially in the motif of laughter. For Duckworth, in short, though Austen is writing a comedy, what is important in the comedy is not the characters as people but the characters as ideas. Furthermore, his particular thematic view of *Pride and Prejudice* exemplifies a general thematic view of comedy, one that sees the genre as largely an affirmation of societal values as it depicts individuals becoming integrated into a social community.

Susan Morgan's reading of Elizabeth's character provides a useful second look at thematism because Morgan explicitly sets her reading in opposition to Duckworth's. "To understand *Pride and Prejudice* in terms of some ideal blend of the individual and the social is to speak of finalities about a writer who herself chooses to speak of the possible, the continuous, the incomplete." More specifically, "If Mr. Darcy is to represent society and Elizabeth a rebellious individualism, how can we account for the fact that the first breach of society's rules is made by Mr. Darcy, when he insults Elizabeth within her hearing at the Meryton ball?" (p. 80). For Morgan the central issue of the novel is the relation between freedom and intelligence, or more particularly, involvement and perception, and this issue receives its fullest expression through Austen's presentation of Elizabeth's character. Like her father, Elizabeth initially believes that "understanding, intelligence, and perception depend on being independent of their objects" (p. 83), and she wants above all to be an intelligent observer. Yet the action of the novel shows Elizabeth learning that she is never
fully detached from but "always involved" with the objects of her perception (p. 84). Even after the essential lesson is learned through Darcy's letter, Elizabeth makes mistakes of perception and judgment—as in her decision not to expose Wickham—but "the difference is that Elizabeth no longer sees her world as a place of easily discovered folly from which in self-defense as much as in amusement she must stand apart if she is to see the truth. She has come to value the connections and particularities which inform truth and to understand the lesson of Hunsford that a lively intelligence is personal and engaged" (p. 104). With this new attitude, Elizabeth comes to discover her own affection for Darcy, an affection which leads to her expression of gratitude for what he did on Lydia's—and her family's—behalf and from there to Darcy's second proposal. Morgan finds this story of a heroine giving up her freedom from being involved to be "most appropriately a love story" (p. 83), but, like Duckworth, Morgan clearly locates its value and the importance of its characters in the ideas they represent.

Presented with this disagreement between Duckworth and Morgan, Richard Levin would respond by saying "a pox on both your houses." Levin's attack on thematism occurs in New Readings vs. Old Plays, a book whose project is to examine "in some sort of rigorous way, the basic assumptions, techniques, and consequences" (p. ix) of three interpretive approaches to Renaissance drama—the ironic, the historical, and the thematic. Since he follows his plan of isolating assumptions, techniques, and consequences, his case against thematic readings of Renaissance drama also applies to such readings as Morgan's and Duckworth's. Because Levin's argument amplifies and updates such early attacks on thematism as Keast's and Crane's, it offers me the opportunity to examine some problems with both thematism and anti-thematism as they influence our understanding of a character such as Elizabeth Bennet.

Levin's case against thematism derives much of its force from his implicit application of the neo-Aristotelean distinction between mimetic and didactic works to thematic criticism. The distinction divides all works into one of two general classes: those organized mimetically, that is, to represent characters in action for the sake of the emotions generated by that representation, and those organized thematically, that is, to represent characters in action for the sake of some ideational purpose such as convincing the audience of the truth of some proposition or ridiculing objects external to the representation. In one respect, Levin's argument is that the thematists typically treat mimetic works as if they were didactic, though, as will be evident, he would find some of the methods of thematism inappropriate for many didactic works as well.
The major flaw Levin finds in the thematic approach is contained in what he identifies as its major assumption: literary works representing characters and actions are not really about those characters and actions but rather about some abstract idea such as jealousy, irresolution, ambition, honor, appearance and reality, the individual and society, perception and involvement, and so on. The basic technique of thematic reading, employed by both Duckworth and Morgan, and called the thematic leap by Levin, follows naturally from this assumption: "it consists of seizing upon some particular components of the drama and making them the representatives or exemplars of the general class, which then become the subject of the play and the critic's analysis" (p. 23). Duckworth and Morgan make the leap not from any single component alone but from character and incident considered together; in this respect, their critical reasoning is both more complex and more typical than Levin's description would suggest. But his essential point remains unaffected by this modification.

Levin argues that the procedure is flawed because it is arbitrary: the work itself does not provide a sufficient basis for the thematist to choose one general idea rather than numerous others, and thus the critic may leap from the particulars to a multitude of possible thematic platforms. The first problem that this arbitrary leap creates for the thematist is one of showing why his or her thematic interpretation should be preferred over others. Levin contends that a thematist has only two ways to solve the problem and both are unsatisfactory. A thematist can claim greater centrality for his reading by claiming either that the chosen theme corresponds to more parts or aspects of the work than previous thematic interpretations—this is Morgan's strategy with Duckworth's reading—or that it encompasses the previous candidates for thematic center. The problem with the second strategy is that either the relation between abstractions cannot be so easily ordered (does the thematic pair freedom and intelligence encompass perception and involvement or vice versa or neither?) or the move up the ladder of abstraction has nowhere to stop. The problem with the first strategy is that it may well show some flaws in a rival reading without validating the proposed one. When Morgan "corrects" Duckworth's reading, she gives the appearance of providing greater support for her own; but that support is finally insufficient because the central theme Morgan claims to find—the relation between perception and involvement—also exists at too great a distance from the particulars. Levin concludes this part of his case against thematism by asserting that when we examine the various themes purported to be central to any one work, "we will have to conclude that any or all or none of them could be considered central, which is
Levin extends his objections to thematism by criticizing the typical way thematists build their positive case for their reading, i.e., their thematic analyses of structure. These analyses, Levin explains, come in “two basic varieties, which might be called the homogeneous and the dialectical” (p. 42). In the homogeneous account, which might be described as “the same damn thing over and over again,” all the elements of a work—imagery, characters, incidents, plot, etc.—directly embody or mirror or encapsulate the central theme. In dialectical accounts such as Duckworth's and Morgan's, the various parts of the work are regarded as heterogeneous and in interaction with each other, an interaction that, in the thematist's view, is designed to exemplify the central idea. The dialectical account of structure itself takes two basic shapes, one schematic, the other sequential. In the schematic reading, exemplified by Duckworth, the basic opposition of two ideas is reflected at various levels and in various elements of the text—thus, for Duckworth, the motif of laughter participates in the dialectic between individual and society—and this opposition is consistently resolved in the same way. In the sequential reading, exemplified by Morgan, the thematist assumes that the thematic structure has a “distinct temporal movement which corresponds to the play's line of action” (p. 49). The typical pattern here is for the critic to identify a basic conflict between two ideas and then to argue that the action of the work dramatizes and finally resolves the conflict.

Levin identifies two main problems with the homogenizers: (1) in most cases these critics have to ride roughshod over differentiations which exist in the “literal structure” of the literary works; (2) the unity found by these critics is of the most general—and easy—sort: “it is like the unity of a heap of pennies, which may be called 'one' only in the sense that every object in the heap partakes of penniness; and it is a nominal unity because the number or arrangement of the pennies can be changed without affecting the oneness of the heap or its penniness” (p. 46).

The chief difficulty Levin finds with the dialectical accounts of structure is that they inevitably introduce distortion of the textual facts. His point in effect is that these readings take the “high priori” road, manipulating those facts to fit the conceptions rather than letting the conceptions emerge, if possible, from the facts. The distortion is all but inevitable because the thematic assumption renders the literal facts relatively inconsequential. For the thematist “the particular facts of the play take on significance only as they 'symbolize' or 'embody' the one governing Idea floating above them that gives the play
its meaning” (p. 52). Morgan herself shows that Duckworth's thema­
tic conception distorts details of Darcy's characterization. Levin, in
turn, would point out that Morgan's thematic categories lead her to
some distortions, or at least inconsistencies, the most obvious of
which involve Elizabeth's attitudes toward Wickham. Morgan de­
clares that “because Austen depicts both Elizabeth's credence and her
feelings in the familiar and suspect language of sentimental fiction we
must conclude that Elizabeth no more seriously believes Wickham's
tale than she believes she is in love with him” (p. 91). Later, however,
Morgan argues that “the worst moment of Elizabeth's objectivity is
her letter to Mrs. Gardiner telling of Wickham's defection to Miss
King. Her sisters, she says, are more hurt than she for they 'are young
in the ways of the world, and not yet open to the mortifying convic­
tion that handsome young men must have something to live on, as
well as the plain.' It is a terrible sentence, terrible in its distance from
her feelings, its self-satisfied realism, its 'way of the world'” (p. 98).
Morgan herself, Levin would maintain, is manipulating Elizabeth's
feelings to keep them traveling smoothly along her high priori the­
matic road.

In concluding his attack, Levin observes that the chief disadvan­tage of thematism is the very process of abstraction upon which it is
based. The process is so disadvantageous because it requires the critic
to operate at a considerable distance from the imaginative experience
offered by the work and consequently to have little to say about that
experience. Thus, instead of enabling us to enrich and refine our un­
derstanding of our experience, thematism removes us from that ex­
perience and often distorts it.

Levin's argument, even as presented in this truncated version, is
damaging to the thematists: thematic leaping is methodologically un­
sound because it encounters so little resistance from textual gravity;
because it is not adequately grounded in texts, it cannot make good
its claims to offer insight into their structure. However, as Levin's
own comments on the rivalry between thematic readings instruct us,
the fact that thematic reading is unsound does not necessarily mean
that his alternative—eliminating almost all talk of themes—will itself
be satisfactory. Furthermore, in considering the limits of his alterna­tive,
we need to ask whether he has overdone his attack.

Concerned as he is with criticizing other modes of analysis, Levin
gives only a brief sketch of his positive neo-Aristotelean program. He
does, however, offer a fuller sketch of his ideas about character as he
considers a possible problem in his argument. In insisting so strongly
that characters as possible people are part of the literal particulars of
a work, Levin is vulnerable to the charge that he ignores the role of
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general ideas in our experience of character. Aware of the risk, Levin openly maintains that characters can have or participate in what he refers to as a universal dimension. (I might note in passing that the reference is misleading since the universal, upon closer scrutiny, is usually a culture-bound phenomenon and sometimes a class-bound one.) "Although I have been arguing that the kind of play we are dealing with presents the particular actions of particular characters, those actions and characters must incorporate some more general component or we could not understand them, much less be moved by them. We could never 'recognize' Lear, for instance, if we could not relate his personal traits and thoughts and feelings to general ideas or categories, derived from our past experience (both real and vicarious), which we bring to the play—ideas of kingship, fatherhood, age, rage, love, and many other abstractions including even appearance and reality" (pp. 75–76). The trouble with the thematists, for Levin, is that they "reduce or assimilate the particulars to these general ideas." Or "in other words, they solve the problem of the relationship of the particular to the general in literature by sacrificing the former to the latter. But our actual response to these plays appears to be just the opposite—we use the general ideas to understand the particular actions and characters, which are the primary focus of our attention. For we do not see Lear as the representative of the ideas we bring to bear upon him; although we recognize him by means of these ideas, we at the same time recognize that he is not completely contained under them, that he is something unique in our experience" (p. 75). For Levin the universality of characters refers "not to the inclusiveness of the idea or class they represent but to the breadth of their appeal. . . . And this is not a function of the typicality of the characters, but of their richness, complexity, roundedness, completeness, depth, uniqueness—all the terms we employ to distinguish a successfully individualized character from a class stereotype" (p. 76).

This sketch has a certain appeal, but finally it also fails to do justice to the question of universality, and in that failure shows the constricting effect of the mimetic-didactic distinction. Levin's argument seems to exclude possibilities without even considering them, perhaps because the distinction does not allow them to be seen, or perhaps because to take these possibilities seriously would jeopardize the validity of the distinction. General ideas, Levin says, can be used to recognize a mimetic character like Lear, but then their work is finished. Indeed, if one believes in the mimetic-didactic distinction, their work must be finished; if their work continued, the general ideas would then be a significant part of the plot, and the movement of the work would have to be conceived as not just a movement of action
but also a movement of thought. If, however, we look at the problem of universality without any prior commitment to the mimetic-didactic distinction, we can remain open to the possibility that our experience of Lear may depend on Shakespeare's representation of his rich individuality, on our bringing ideas of kingship, fatherhood, age, rage, love, and so on to the play and also on the way the play makes active use of these ideas in its representation of the protagonist and then emphasizes them or downplays them in the progressive unfolding of his struggle. That Lear is a character who is more than the embodiment of general ideas does not necessarily mean that he is not also such an embodiment. In short, Levin's belief in the mimetic-didactic distinction leads him to present an either/or choice when a both/and solution is more likely to be adequate.

Perhaps even more troubling is that Levin's commitment to the distinction hinders him from making useful discriminations even among so-called mimetic works. It is possible that in some works the appeal of character may be based on the process of invoking and transcending general ideas that he describes, whereas in others it may be based on the process of invoking and staying with general ideas that I have described. Although Levin's case against thematism still remains persuasive, we need to recognize that if the thematists solve the problem of the relation between the general and the particular by sacrificing the particular to the general, Levin solves it by sacrificing the general to the particular. Indeed, the both/and approach to the problem of the general and particular as it applies to character seems more in keeping with the principles enunciated by the founding father of Levin's critical school when he claimed that poetry was more philosophic than history because it would recount not what Alcibiades did and suffered but what such and such a man would do and suffer according to the laws of probability and necessity.

As we turn to consider what the both/and approach to character means for our understanding of Elizabeth Bennet's character, we ought to be wary of simply concluding that we need a reading of Pride and Prejudice that consists of equal parts thematism and mimesis. My turn away from that recipe and into the novel will follow the progression, giving a special emphasis this time to the movement generated by the opening chapter.

IV

That chapter introduces two different kinds of instabilities, one local, the other global. A local instability—in this case, Mr. Bennet's apparent refusal to go call on Mr. Bingley—generates the narrative progres-
tion for a scene or two and is then quickly resolved, while a global instability—in this case, Bingley's moving into the neighborhood—is one that gets complicated by later action. Each instability in this chapter has a significant effect on the authorial audience's expectations about the ensuing narrative, but those effects can only be appreciated by looking both at their relation to each other and at the influence exerted by Austen's handling of the devices of disclosure—the narrator's commentary and the dialogue between the Bennets.

The global instability is introduced in the third sentence of the chapter which is also the first line of dialogue, "My dear Mr. Bennet, . . . have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?" The famous first sentence—"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife"—and its less famous but equally important follow-up—"However little known the views or feeling of such a man on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so firmly fixed in the minds of the surrounding families that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters"—provide us with a general pattern of social attitudes and behavior, a particular instance of which we now infer that Mrs. Bennet will supply. The local instability, introduced with Mr. Bennet's uncooperative reaction to his wife's news, is foregrounded in the chapter, but even as Austen takes us through the various thrusts and parries of the Bennets' conversation, she directs our attention beyond their drawing room toward the possibilities and questions raised by Bingley's arrival: What are his views upon settling at Netherfield? Does Elizabeth, whom Mr. Bennet singles out as his favorite, share either her mother's or her father's views toward the marriage market? How interested are the Bennet daughters in getting married? Just what difference will Bingley's presence make for the family and the neighborhood in general? And so on.

This development of the global instability within the complication of the local one is a sign of Austen's characteristic narrative economy, but we need to ask what she gains by being economical in this way. The local instability is after all resolved swiftly and easily in the beginning of the next chapter when the narrator tells us that Mr. Bennet was among the first to call on Bingley and had always intended to visit him. First, the humor with which the dialogue is conducted—and which is topped off by the resolution of the local instability—helps establish our expectations about the progression of the whole narrative. We are reading comedy with an edge here. The ironic first sentence is bright and sparkling but not entirely light. And this description applies as well to Mr. Bennet's voice in the dialogue, which
in part merges with the narrator's voice. While the edge is main-
tained, Mrs. Bennet's reactions to some of Mr. Bennet's speeches in-
dicate that although he is not making her happy, his opposition is not
seriously threatening her welfare: When he jests that Mr. Bingley
might like her better than her daughters, she replies, "My dear, you
flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pre-
tend to be anything extraordinary now" (p. 2). And the resolution of
the dialogue gives Mr. Bennet, with whom we have sided, the last
word. Although we could not yet predict with full confidence that the
global instability will always be treated within the boundaries of this
particular comic context, the first chapter does make a substantial
contribution to the stability of that context.

Perhaps more important, by foregrounding the local instability,
Austen is able to raise at the outset of the narrative important idea-
tional concerns that we then pay attention to as the narrative de-
velops. In fact, part of the edge in the comedy results from the
introduction of these issues: the importance for a young woman in
this society to be well-married, the openly acquisitive attitude toward
single men displayed by a member of an established family. Austen
also uses the way that the Bennets play out the positions taken in the
opening ironic statement to affect our immediate judgments and our
understanding of much that happens later. Mrs. Bennet of course re-
peats much of the language of the narrator's introduction—"a single
man of large fortune;" "I am thinking of his marrying one of [our
girls]"—and so comes to represent one of those who do not get the
irony of the opening because she lives by the creed Austen is ironi-
cally undercutting. By having Mr. Bennet take the narrator's view of
the marriage market, Austen can then use his brief phrase about Eliz-
abeth to arouse our expectations about her eventual importance in
the global instability introduced in the chapter: when the surrogate
for the narrative voice affectionately singles her out as more sensible
than the others, we take greater notice of her. 18 By the same logic of
voices, Mrs. Bennet's denial of Elizabeth's superiority functions to
confirm it. 19 Finally, by presenting the global instability by means of
the dialogue between this ill-matched couple, Austen makes a fur-
ther reflection on the values of Mrs. Bennet: The values and concerns
of the majority in the marriage market begin at the bank and stop at
the altar. Although we may get a marriage plot here, the narrative has
no illusions about the inevitability of marital bliss. Thus, the first
chapter begins a progression that is generated by the seemingly au-
tonomous acts of individual characters but that immediately impli-
cates those acts in an exploration of thematic issues. The precise
relation of the mimetic and the thematic is of course not yet clear, but
the chapter gives a strong signal that both will be significant parts of the progression.

The economical and subtle craft of the first chapter remains in evidence throughout the rest of the narrative, but by the standards of modern narratives its general movement is fairly straightforward—and readily seen. Some basic instabilities of character and situation are introduced in the opening chapters; these instabilities are further complicated as the narrative progresses until a turning point is reached, and then the instabilities are resolved with the establishment of a new stable situation. But note that even this general description of the progression indicates an important difference from the movement of *1984*. Where the initial movement of Orwell’s narrative is provided by the arousal and resolution of tensions, a movement that places the later action clearly within a broader thematic context, the movement here is generated through instability and consequently follows the mimetic and thematic interests without clearly subordinating one to the other.

More concretely, Elizabeth’s fortunes begin to fall almost as soon as she meets Darcy and has her pride injured by him (Vol. I, chapt. 3); they continue to fall as she continues her misjudgments of his character and endorses Wickham’s view of him; and finally, they hit bottom in the first proposal scene (the exact halfway point of the narrative) in which she proudly refuses Darcy, accusing him of ruining Wickham’s life and Jane’s happiness. Elizabeth’s fortunes begin to change after the proposal, when Darcy is able to alter her opinion of him through his letter explaining his conduct and, as we learn later, is also able to alter his arrogance; the reversal continues as her feelings for Darcy are further altered, first, by her visit to Pemberley, which brings renewed contact with Darcy and the discovery of his changed manner, and second, by her discovery of his role in Lydia’s marriage to Wickham; then, Elizabeth reaches a state of final happiness—as defined by the novel—in her marriage to Darcy.

Within this general pattern, Austen accomplishes three tasks that significantly affect the way we respond to the developing narrative: (1) she subordinates the initial global instability—Bingley’s moving into Netherfield and becoming attracted to Jane Bennet—to a later one—Darcy accompanying Bingley and injuring Elizabeth’s pride; consequently, the complication and resolution of that first instability contribute to the complication and resolution of the more central one involving Elizabeth and Darcy; (2) she reassures us that Elizabeth’s fortunes will never be irrecoverably damaged; (3) she exploits the ensuing gap between our perception of Elizabeth and her situation and her own perception of herself and situation. These last two steps al-
low Austen to represent Elizabeth reflecting on the serious negative consequences of her rash judgments while never threatening our own sense that the consequences will not be disastrous.

As my longer look at the first chapter indicates, the omissions in this description are enormous, but my purpose here is simply to offer a sketch of the progression that will provide a useful background for a closer look at the relation between the mimetic and thematic components of Elizabeth's character. As we look at her character, we shall be required to consider the progression more closely.

Elizabeth's character is composed of these main attributes: she is the twenty-year-old daughter of a gentleman and of a woman whose father was in trade, a twenty-year-old who possesses (1) a greater degree of independence from the norms governing the marriage market, including a greater independence from the influence of rank and social prestige, than anyone else in her social sphere; (2) "more quickness of observation" than all her sisters and "less pliancy of temper" than Jane (p. 9); (3) "a lively, playful disposition which delights in anything ridiculous" (p. 7); (4) a strong pride in her own abilities; and (5) a capacity to be honest with herself about her own faults. To this list of frequently noted attributes, I would add two less often commented upon: a capacity for feeling emotions of all kinds that exceeds what any other character has; and a tendency to give immediate voice to her emotions. We see these linked attributes throughout the narrative. They appear, for example, in the ardor with which she meets Wickham's account of Darcy's injuries to him, and in the agitation she feels after reading Darcy's letter, but they are probably most evident on three occasions: (1) in her response to Charlotte's news that she is to marry Mr. Collins: "Engaged to Mr. Collins! my dear Charlotte—impossible!" (p. 87); (2) during the first proposal in her angry response to Darcy's haughtiness; and (3) in her surprising outpouring of her grief to Darcy after she learns of Lydia's flight with Wickham.

These attributes also exist as mimetic traits that coalesce to make Elizabeth not just a plausible person but also one of the most lovable characters in English fiction: the independence and the pride give free rein to the quickness of observation and the playful disposition, even as her honesty and her capacity for feeling show us that she is more than just light and bright and sparkling. When one adds to this combination of traits the fact that she acts effectively in a world where most of the real power is wielded by men, one has a good understanding of her appeal. Yet this is not the whole story of her character. For just as the foregrounded mimetic interests of the novel's first chapter are located within some larger thematic concerns so also do most of Elizabeth's mimetic traits simultaneously perform thematic
functions. And these thematic functions do much to determine the complex effect produced by the progression of the whole novel.

Elizabeth's independence from the norms of the marriage market is most clearly seen for the first time in her refusal of Mr. Collins's proposal, despite the importunities of her mother and the possible solution it offers to the problem of the Bennet estate being entailed to him. Because Collins himself is such an odd mixture of pride, obsequiousness, and bad judgment, the thematic significance of Elizabeth's independence does not begin to appear until Charlotte accepts his proposal. Once Charlotte's acceptance shows us what even a highly sensible, perceptive, and intelligent woman would do when facing the prospect of spinsterhood in this provincial society, and once that acceptance makes Elizabeth feel that their friendship has been permanently altered, Elizabeth's stand for independence becomes not just a natural choice for any woman but a choice for a certain kind of woman. Elizabeth's independence, clearly endorsed by Austen even as she treats Charlotte with sympathy and understanding, comes to represent one kind of admirable stance toward the marriage market—one that rejects the views of a Mrs. Bennet and a Charlotte, and instead insists on dealing in the market on one's own terms rather than on those of the men or of the society in general.

Where Winston Smith's thematic function evolved from his status as a representative person of a certain age, value-system, and ability, Elizabeth here becomes a possible person who embodies a abstract idea.

The thematic function of Elizabeth's independence is then a very important part of the first proposal scene. With Charlotte's action as a backdrop to this scene, which occurs in her house, and with Darcy's expectation that she could not possibly refuse him, we come to appreciate how rare and admirable an act it is for a woman of Elizabeth's age and social position to reject an offer of marriage from a gentleman of Darcy's income and social consequence. To be sure, Elizabeth is not thinking of these things at the moment of her refusal—she is too angry with Darcy's manner of expressing himself, too prejudiced against him even to consider his offer tempting. But "she is not insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection" (p. 131), and we remain aware of this thematic background. Indeed, I think that the presence of this thematic function here helps explain why Elizabeth, in spite of her seriously prejudiced view of Darcy, nevertheless remains essentially admirable in the scene. She is wrong in her judgments of him, wrong because her wounded pride has made her eager to believe Wickham's slander and ready to give Darcy all the blame for Jane's disappointed hopes about Bingley; yet, even apart from Darcy's un-
attractive haughtiness, Elizabeth's distinctive strength overshadows these misjudgments.

Since the principle underlying Austen's use of Charlotte will be one that we will return to in the discussion of Wemmick in Chapter 4 and of Fred Vincy and Mary Garth in the conclusion, it is worth a further look. Except in the mechanical sense of allowing Austen to bring Elizabeth and Darcy within the same social circle after Bingley's departure from Longbourn, Charlotte's decision to marry Collins does not directly affect the complication of the instabilities between Elizabeth and Darcy. Its more significant contribution to the progression is to alter the authorial audience's understanding of those instabilities, an alteration that emphasizes the thematic component of Elizabeth's mimetically motivated action. In short, Charlotte's decision is a crucial part of the progression, even though it does not directly affect the outcome of the main action. Austen's use of Charlotte here thus illustrates what we might call the Principle of Indirect Affective Relevance.

The narrative brings the thematic function of Elizabeth's independence to the foreground when Lady Catherine comes to Longbourn to order Elizabeth to give up any idea of marrying Darcy. Elizabeth's ability to stand up to Lady Catherine—indeed, to get the better of her—is impressive without being surprising, and at first the scene appears to be merely giving us the pleasure of watching Elizabeth overmatch Lady Catherine while reinforcing the point about her admirable independence. But with Austen's characteristic blend of narrative economy and appropriateness, the scene becomes a step toward the engagement of Darcy and Elizabeth after Lady Catherine informs Darcy of the "perverseness and assurance" (p. 253) with which Elizabeth responded to her attempted persuasion. Because Elizabeth's trait of independence thus becomes one means by which she achieves her happiness, the thematic function resulting from this trait is further developed. Austen asks us not only to admire this kind of woman but also to believe that such a woman may in fact achieve a fate commensurate with what she deserves.

The first conclusion we may draw, then, is that Austen's representation of Elizabeth as a consistently mimetic character is fused with her use of that character in exploring and exemplifying thematic issues. We not only bring general ideas to this work and its characters, but, contrary to what Levin claims, the work itself takes up some of those ideas and develops them in its progressive unfolding of the characters in action. The second conclusion we may draw is that this recognition provides a superior account of the problem of the "universal" than either Levin's or the thematists'. The representative
component of literature is a result neither of the direct correlation between particulars and general ideas nor of rich individuality alone but rather of characters whose mimetic and thematic dimensions both get converted into functions. Elizabeth, then, can be both a representative of the idea of individual independence and a possible person, without either function restricting the other.

This conclusion may draw further validity from a third one which can be quickly seen by a brief consideration of the thematic functions resulting from almost any one of Elizabeth's other attributes. Take, for example, her pride in her own abilities. Even novice thematists will be able to tell us that Elizabeth serves to exemplify both the strengths and weaknesses of pride. On the one hand, the pride enables her to maintain her independence, but, on the other, it is the source of most of her misjudgments in the narrative: she is willing to believe Wickham because Darcy has injured her pride; then once set on the track of believing in his villainy she has too much pride in her own judgment to question her belief until she is given the severe jolt of Darcy's letter. This rather obvious thematic function together with the presence of the function of Elizabeth's independence and the functions of her other attributes shows that Elizabeth's mimetic and thematic functions have a complex relationship—or at least one noticeably different from that between Winston Smith's mimetic and thematic functions. In Elizabeth's case, the thematic functions do not combine into a single function or even into a hierarchy of functions supporting one central point, but instead are rather disparate.

The concept of a central theme for this novel is a misleading one not because all the themes one may claim to find in it are the result of arbitrary leaping from particulars to generalities but because the progression of the novel generates a multiplicity of diverse themes, which move in and out of the foreground of the narrative at different points in the progression. As for so-called universality, the "richness" of a character that Levin appeals to as a sign that such universality is a function of mimetic individuality can now be reconceived as equally the product of multiple thematic functions.

This conclusion indicates that the mimetic-didactic distinction is far too rigid to account for the complexity of effects generated by a narrative such as Pride and Prejudice. Indeed, given that Pride and Prejudice is a virtual paradigm case of what the neo-Aristoteleans call an "action" as distinct from an "apologue" (the terms are from Sheldon Sacks) such as 1984, my analysis suggests that the concept of the action needs to be revised. For Sacks, the thematic material of an action was important for the way it affected our involvement in the mimetic illusion offered by the narrative, but it was only the apologue
that made thematic assertions for their own sake. My argument is that the thematic material of a so-called action like *Pride and Prejudice* can be made important for its own sake, whenever the progression converts the thematic dimensions of the characters into thematic functions—in other words, in most narratives. As the brief comparison of Elizabeth's functions with Winston's suggests, this revision does not completely collapse the distinction between action and apologue because it is only in the apologue that the thematic assertions will coalesce into a central one or at least into a clear hierarchy. The revision, however, does make the gulf between the two forms much narrower than Sacks originally described it.\(^1\)

More concretely, the multiple thematic functions of Elizabeth are so much a part of the progression that to see them as working only to influence what the neo-Aristoteleans call our "expectations and desires" about Elizabeth and Darcy is to offer an inadequate account of the progression of the novel. That progression is not just one of action but also one of thought. To be sure, the progression of thought does increase the power of the emotions we feel about Elizabeth and Darcy, but the thematic functions of Elizabeth's character play such a large role in our understanding of the significance of her union with Darcy that they merge with our interest in the characters as people. Consequently, the union of Darcy and Elizabeth is a union of people and an affirmation of ideas and issues that each, especially Elizabeth, has come to represent.

To do further justice to the complexity of the progression and of Austen's treatment of Elizabeth, I want to explore one more element of the relation between the mimetic and thematic components of her character. Consider Elizabeth's linked attributes of feeling deeply and reacting quickly, especially as they reveal themselves in the scenes where they are most dramatically exhibited, her outburst to Charlotte, her angry response to Darcy's first proposal, and her almost instinctive revelation to him of the news of Lydia's disgrace. Although the first scene has a limited function in the narrative, serving primarily to reinforce the difference between Elizabeth's and Charlotte's attitudes toward the marriage market, the other two have very large functions, bringing about significant changes in Darcy's character and Lydia's situation. However, I believe that the ways in which these two scenes function in the progression do not result in a conversion of this dimension of Elizabeth's character into a thematic function.

This claim may be somewhat surprising since in both cases Elizabeth's spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings eventually aids in bringing about her final happiness. Darcy not only hears her accusations about her pride but comes to acknowledge their justice;
he not only seeks to give her immediate relief in her sorrow over Lydia but he acts to make the best of the bad situation, which in turn earns her gratitude, deepens her affection, and ultimately leads to the second, successful proposal. But unlike the case of Elizabeth's independence and her scene with Lady Catherine, the narrative does not do anything to give the credit, as it were, to Elizabeth's deep feelings and frank expressions; it works instead to make us see that it is Darcy who is responsible for his self-improvement and for the salvaging of Lydia's respectability. In other words, Elizabeth's reactions in these scenes provide the occasions for significant changes or the revelation of such changes in Darcy's character. One way to understand the lack of any significant thematic function of these deep feelings is to reflect that had Darcy been different, had he been what Elizabeth thought he was, her outbursts would have simply driven him and Elizabeth further and further apart.

This discussion also illustrates further the differences between a dimension and a function. Certainly part of Elizabeth's attraction for Darcy (and for us) is this twin capacity for feeling deeply and speaking quickly, and to that extent her attribute can be seen as participating in the thematic sphere—behind such attraction must be some authorial recommendation. But just as Browning gives the Duke of Ferrara attributes that cause us to take a negative attitude toward him without making it a purpose of the poem to alter our feelings about people with those attributes, so too Austen gives Elizabeth these positive attributes without developing them into thematic points about feeling and reacting. In both cases, the authors seem to take our response for granted. If this analysis is accurate, then, in the terms I have been using, Austen gives Elizabeth an attribute that gets converted by the progression into a significant element of her mimetic function but that does not get converted into a thematic function. Consequently, a significant part of our experience of Elizabeth's character remains chiefly in the mimetic sphere—a realization that gives special force to the statement that just as she is more than a possible person she is also more than a vehicle for carrying ideas. Furthermore, this point also reinforces my initial claim that an adequate account of character in this novel cannot be derived from a recipe calling for equal parts thematism and neo-Aristoteleanism.

To what extent do this account of the novel's progression and the counterargument to Levin's anti-thematism weaken the case against Duckworth and Morgan? In one sense, not at all. Their thematic analyses still appear to be reductive and selective and to invite distortion of textual particulars. But the charge that their procedure is completely arbitrary needs to be withdrawn. What each critic has done, in effect,
is to take one or two attributes of Elizabeth's character—for Duckworth, her relative independence from the influence of social prestige and her inferior social status; for Morgan, her lively, playful disposition and her quickness of observation—to suggest ways that these attributes combine with other elements of the work to get converted into thematic functions, and to argue that the novel is structured around them. It is the last step in their procedure that involves the thematic leap and that causes all the problems: the novel cannot be adequately described as structured by Austen's exploration of these ideas. Since, however, the first steps have a "literal" connection to Austen's representation of Elizabeth, we can, I think, understand much of the appeal and continued vogue of thematic criticism for Pride and Prejudice—and, by extension, for numerous other narratives.

One of the points that the argument so far has kept returning to is the crucial role of narrative progression in the developing relationship of a character's mimetic and thematic functions. In order to extend our consideration of the variations on that relationship, I will turn in the next chapter to a narrative whose progression is very different from Orwell's and Austen's: "The Beast in the Jungle." As I consider James's novella, I shall also take up some further problems associated with reading and interpreting the thematic function of character, problems that will require further reflection on different ways of marching under the critical banner, "Always thematize!"