RATIONAL AND AMIABLE CREATURES (CONCLUDED)

Jane Austen's heroines possess singlemindedness. This imparts to them a peculiar intensity and uniqueness. Their language is intelligible, their motives clear. They try to grapple with the present. The past is important for them inasmuch it has a bearing on the present. Elizabeth believes in this philosophy and asks Mr. Darcy to follow it:

"You must learn some of my philosophy. Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure."

(PP, pp. 368-369)

Catherine Morland insists on knowing from Henry Tilney exact details about the Captain Tilney-Isabella affair:

"But what can your brother mean? If he knows her engagement, what can he mean by his behaviour?"
"You are a very close questioner?"
"Am I?—I only ask what I want to be told."

(NA, p. 161)

Later, when she suspects that General Tilney must have been enormously cruel to his late wife, she is anxious to examine
Mrs. Tilney's apartment. To do so becomes almost an obsession with her. She is determined to see her plan through to satisfy her curiosity: "The next day afforded no opportunity for the proposed examination of the mysterious apartments." She is, however, carried by an ardent wish. And "the succeeding morning promised something better" (NA, p. 190). Ultimately, she gets her suspicion removed, her agitations pacified. Emma Woodhouse's conviction—that when a woman doubts whether she should accept a man or not, she should invariably refuse—is indicative of her insistence on clarity of motive or conduct. She advises Harriet Smith:

"I lay it down as a general rule, Harriet, that if a woman doubts whether she should accept a man or not, she certainly ought to refuse him."

(E, p. 52)

While conveying the refusal, her language should be clear:

"There is no danger of your not being intelligible, which is the first thing. Your meaning must be unequivocal—no doubts or demurs . . . ."

(E, p. 51)

So there is no vagueness about them.

Like their creator, the heroines always maintain decorum and decency in behaviour. Elizabeth Bennet time and again blushes for Lydia and Mrs. Bennet's impropriety of behaviour. She "particularly" dislikes Lydia's way of getting husbands
Elinor does not approve of liberties taken by Marianne Willoughby in their love-affair. The neglect of feminine decency and delicacy is inexcusable:

"Elinor could not be surprised at their engagement. She only wished that it were less openly shown; and once or twice did venture to suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne."  

(PP, p. 53)

Marianne later admits that she ought not to have acted in such a manner: "I have erred against every commonplace notion of decorum" (SS, p. 48).

These formalities are not mere outward show. They mean good behaviour in polite society. Jane Austen's heroines are sincere and honest; their intentions are pious and selfless, since they possess integrity and honesty of purpose and moral 'principling'. Elizabeth Bennet confesses to Mr. Darcy by the end of the novel: "My manners must have been in fault, but not intentionally, I assure you" (PP, p. 369). It is only in extenuating circumstances like those of Jane Fairfax that "thinking only of herself" is excused. Emma Woodhouse tells Mrs. Weston that a lot may also be said in favour of Jane's secret engagement:

"And how much may be said in her situation for even that error!"  
"Much, indeed!" cried Emma feelingly. "If a woman can ever be excused for thinking only of herself, it is in a situation like Jane Fairfax's. Of such, one may almost say that 'the world is not theirs, nor the world's law.'"  

(E, p. 400)
She quotes Romeo's words to denote Jane Fairfax's utter helplessness. Emma herself errs, yet for no selfish interest or base motives. Before thinking of themselves, the heroines think of others' interests. Anne Elliot had rejected Captain Wentworth's proposal in the past not "for a merely selfish caution"; but she thought that she was "consulting his good, even more than her own" (P, pp. 27-28).

When Elizabeth Bennet has to pretend what she does not feel to be, it is an uphill task for her. The time is when, unaware of the latest development in the Darcy-Elizabeth affair, Mr. Bennet laughs at the affair, and tells Elizabeth that the information of their intention to marry is "so delightfully absurd":

"Elizabeth had never been more at a loss to make her feelings appear what they were not. It was necessary to laugh, when she would rather have cried."

(PP, p. 364)

The heroines are fallible, certainly not "pictures of perfection". However, they learn from their experience.

The heroines, being consciously virtuous, acquire great self-confidence and faith. They are not easily disheartened. It is only in extraordinary situations that even a naive girl, Catherine Morland, actuated by haunting illusions, feels terrified in Northanger Parsonage. She has faced boldly what a human-being can face:
"The dimness of the light her candle emitted made her turn to it with alarm; but there was no danger of its sudden extinction, it had yet some hours to burn and that she might not have any greater difficulty in distinguishing the writing than what its ancient date might occasion, she hastily snuffed it. Alas! it was snuffed and extinguished in one. A lamp could not have expired with more awful effect. Catherine, for a few moments, was motionless with horror. It was done completely; not a remnant of light in the wick could give hope to the rekindling breath. Darkness impenetrable and immovable filled the room. A violent gust of wind, rising with sudden fury, added fresh horror to the moment. Catherine trembled from head to foot. In the pause which succeeded, a sound like receding footsteps and the closing of a distant door struck on her affrighted ear. Human nature could support no more. A cold sweat stood on her forehead, the manuscript fell from her hand, and groping her way to the bed, she jumped hastily in, and sought some suspension of agony by creeping far underneath the clothes. To close her eyes in sleep that night she felt must be entirely out of the question. With a curiosity so justly awakened, and feeling in every way so agitated, repose must be absolutely impossible. The storm, too, abroad so dreadful!"

(NA, pp. 170-171)

The heroines also do not excuse lack of virtue or integrity in others. Marianne is shocked at her lover Willoughby's paying attention to another woman. She is heart-broken on seeing his evident indifference towards her, and prays to her sister:

"Go to him—, and force him to come to me. Tell him I must see him again—must speak to him instantly,—I cannot rest, I shall not have a moment's peace till this is explained."

(SS, p. 177)

To Catherine Morland, Isabella's flirtation with Captain
Tilney is incomprehensible, as Isabella is to marry James Morland. She says to Henry Tilney: "What does your brother mean?" She maintains: "A woman in love with one man cannot flirt with another" (NA, p. 151). For self-interest Miss Isabella Thorpe jilts James Morland and marries rich Captain Tilney. Catherine Morland despises her immoesty and insincerity. She observes to Henry Tilney:

"Isabella -- No wonder I have not heard from her. Isabella has deserted my brother, and is to marry yours! Could you have believed there had been such inconstancy, and fickleness, and everything that is bad in the world?"

(NA, p. 204)

Elinor instantly blames Willoughby while the latter, in explaining his past ill-conduct, extols Marianne and speaks ill of his wife:

"You are very wrong, Mr. Willoughby," while her voice, in spite of herself, betrayed her compassionate emotion; "you ought not to speak in this way, either of Mrs. Willoughby or my sister."

(SS, p. 329)

To Fanny Price Henry Crawford's flirtation with the Bertram girls is wholly indefensible. She cannot excuse Henry's flirting with the Bertram cousins. When angry over his vulgar acting, she repeats to herself with "silent indignation":

"Never happier ... never happier than when behaving so dishonourably and unfeelingly! Oh, what a corrupted mind!"

(MP, p. 225)
Moral weakness is the origin of all Willoughby's sufferings, and it is unpardonable. Elinor declares:

"One observation may, I think, be fairly drawn from the whole of the story—that all Willoughby's difficulties have arisen from the first offence against virtue, in his behaviour to Eliza Williams. That crime has been the origin of every lesser one, and of all his present discontents."

(PP, p. 204)

While reading Mr. Darcy's long letter, Elizabeth Bennet is particularly shocked over Mr. Wickham's villainous designs towards Miss Darcy:

"But when this subject is succeeded by his account of Mr. Wickham, when she read, with somewhat clearer attention, a relation of events which, if true, must overthrow every cherished opinion of his worth ... her feelings were yet more acutely painful and more difficult of definition."

(PP, p. 305)

Elizabeth later on tells her sister, Jane Bennet, that Lydia and Wickham's elopement can never be forgiven or forgotten:

"Their conduct has been such," replied Elizabeth, "as neither you nor I, nor anybody can forget. It is useless to talk of it."

The heroines do not brook any insult to their parents or members of their father's family, as it is a reflection on their own nature. Elizabeth Bennet's prejudice against Mr. Darcy increases in the early part of the story, as he seems to dislike some members of the Bennet family. It is further increased when she learns that he boasts of having saved his friend, Charles Bingley, from having matrimonial connections
with the family. She claims equality with Mr. Darcy. Lady Catherine refers to her low connections:

"True. You are a gentleman's daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition."

"Whatever my connections may be," said Elizabeth, "if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to you."

(PP, p. 356)

However, when she again mentions her connections disparagingly, Elizabeth's patience is exhausted and she is seriously annoyed:

"I am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest sister's infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young man's marrying her was a patched up business at the expense of your father and uncle. And is such a girl to be my nephew's sister?--Heaven and Earth!--of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?"

"You can now have nothing further to say," she resentfully answered, "You have insulted me, in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house."

(PP, p. 357)

Anne Elliot does not blame Lady Russell for her advice about her marriage with Captain Wentworth, as the former has regarded Lady Russell as a mother. "To me, she was in the place of a parent" (P, p. 246). Her hatred of Mr. Elliot is partly due to the fact that some years back he had refused to marry in her family for no convincing reasons. He was not on good terms with her family.
Jane Austen does not describe physical beauty in detail. She leaves that to the reader's imagination. Except Emma Woodhouse, no heroine is remarkably beautiful. Fanny Price is not "absolutely pretty", as infatuated Henry Crawford calls her (MP, p. 229). His sister, Mary Crawford, rightly hastens to correct him and declare that Fanny, according to her, is "pretty—not strikingly pretty", but "pretty enough". "The wonderful degree of improvement" is the creation of Henry's own mind. Also looking at the action "through Fanny's eyes one shares the consciousness of a plain woman". Catherine Morland has had no physical attraction. She gathers some beauty and bloom later, as she grows up. Yet she never grows up to be a remarkable beauty. Elinor Dashwood and Marianne Dashwood are introduced with reference to their prudence and sensibility. Elizabeth is reported to be "hardly beautiful". It is not a downright lie when Mr. Darcy calls her "tolerable" only. Elizabeth uses the term "elegant female" in a derogatory sense, when she rejects Mr. Collins' proposal: "Do not consider me as an elegant female intending to plague you . . ." When the novel opens, Anne Elliot has lost her bloom, although a few years back, she "had been a very pretty girl".

Nor do the heroines care much for physical beauty. When Mary Crawford praises Edmund Ferrars for his physical
appearance alone, Fanny Price is shocked over such an attachment:

"The woman who could speak of him, and speak only of his appearance! --what an unworthy attachment!"

(MP, p. 416)

Elinor is considerably handsome. Her physical appearances are described to some extent:

"Miss Dashwood had a delicate complexion, regular features, and a remarkably pretty figure."

Marianne is still more beautiful:

"Marianne was still handsomer. Her form, though not so correct as her sister's, in having the advantage of height, was more striking; and her face was so lovely that when in the common cant of praise she was called a beautiful girl, truth was less violently outraged than usually happens."

(SS, p. 46)

However, they do not attach much significance to their pretty physical features. Only shallow characters, like Elizabeth Elliot, Sir Walter and John Dashwood, care for physical beauty. John Dashwood remarks about Marianne's loss of bloom on account of the Willoughby-affair:

"You would not think it perhaps, but Marianne was remarkably handsome a few months ago, quite as handsome as Elinor,—Now you see it is all gone."

(SS, p. 237)
Robert Ferrers, another dandy, also emphasizes prettiness most. He describes Lucy Steele (after a study of ten minutes) to Elinor as "The merest awkward country girl, without style or elegance, and almost without beauty" (SS, p. 299). Mr. Collins stresses Elizabeth Bennet's being "fair" time and again. Mr. Bennet repents having married a wife for her "beauty and youth" only. Mrs. Bennet is exposed when she praises Mr. Darcy for his physical beauty:

"I am so pleased—so happy; such a charming man—so handsome! so tall!" (PP, p. 378)

When Lydia Bennet refers to the ugliness of the waiter, she shows her feeble mind:

"But he is an ugly fellow! I am glad he is gone. I never saw such a long chin in my life." (PP, p. 220)

The description where Sir Walter is much influenced by Captain Wentworth's "superiority of appearance" is at once ironic. (P, p. 248)

In reality, Jane Austen holds that handsome is that handsome does. She says in a letter:

"Mr. Diggled has used us basely. Handsome is as handsome does; he is, therefore, a very ill-looking man." -1

Jane Austen's heroines love conversation. They like walks and visits as these provide them with ample occasions for fruitful conversation, besides bodily exercise. Except Fanny Price, all heroines are fond of long walks. Some women have a tendency to feel tired; however, the heroines are alert and energetic. Emma Woodhouse says: "I walk fast" (E, p. 363). Even when at Kent, Elizabeth Bennet continues her usual walks. She and Anne Elliot are tireless walkers. Even the Crofts are great walkers. Lady Catherine de Bourgh asks Elizabeth Bennet to have with her a turn in the garden—the motive is to discuss with her Mr. Darcy's proposal to her. In fact, walks are quite free and frequent and these are loved as long as these are within the bounds of female propriety.

The pitch of the speaker's voice indicates her intentions. Those who speak aloud do so either to display something or to give vent to the shallowness of their mind. Isabella Thorpe does this when she expresses her views about men in general. Lydia's loud speech is an expression of her being both vulgar and irresponsible. However, to be wholly silent means that something good or bad is to be hidden. It postulates diffidence or evil design. It is to be noticed that female bores, like Miss Bingley, Mrs. Elton and Mrs. Norris, frequently "lower their voice" while engaged in conversation. The heroines speak neither aloud
nor too low. Their pitch is as much as is required to make their views audible. They speak out whatever they think right. While in conversation, her women give definite and clear clues to their nature. Howard Babb, for example, points out that Anne Elliot's characteristic habits of speech also indicate the blending of "sense" and "sensibility". These generalisations express reason saturated with Anne's personal feeling thus becoming a verbal echo, as it were, of that union of innate sense with emotional sensitivity which I have called her intuition. -1

Jane Austen's heroines mostly dislike playing cards. They prefer conversation. Marianne at one place is bold enough to declare to Lady Middleton that cards do not interest her much: "Your Ladyship will have the goodness to excuse me—you know I detest cards (SS, p. 144).

Elinor also leaves cards to take up some work to help Lucy Steele:

"Perhaps," continued Elinor, "if I should happen to cut out, I may be of some use to Miss Lucy Steele, in rolling her papers for her; and there is so much still to be done to the basket, that it must be impossible I think for her labour singly, to finish it this evening. I should like the work exceedingly, if she would allow me a share in it."

"Indeed I shall be very much obliged to you for your help," cried Lucy . . . ." (SS, p. 145)

Candour in them is a virtue, but propriety demands of

them not to be very outspoken. Tom Bertram holds that "Girls should be quiet and modest" (MP, p. 49). Elizabeth Bennet has to beg pardon when she frankly hints to her father about the possible dangers involved in sending Lydia Bennet to Brighton:

"Excuse me, --for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment."

(PP, p. 231)

However, complete reserve or reticence is not commended in young women. The heroines are neither silent beings nor talking beings. Their liking is for moderation in this connection. Jane Austen was a great talker in the company of her acquaintances. While coming to Martha Lloyd in 1800, she cannot think of taking books with her; she is all for an engrossing and interesting conversation with her. She has many things to hear and say. She frankly remarks:

"You distress me cruelly by your request for Books; I cannot think of any to bring with me. . . . I come to you to be talked to, not to read or hear reading. I can do that at home."-1

She read at home quite studiously; one is to mark the speed with which her niece's books are read by her.

2. Ibid., L. Nos. 98, 100.
Even letter-writing for her becomes a mode of conversation. She writes about the true art of letter-writing to Cassandra Austen in 1801:

"I have now attained the true art of letter-writing, which we are always told, is to express on paper exactly what one would say to the same person by word of mouth; I have been talking to you almost as fast as I could the whole of this letter." -1

She likes Mary Deedes who is a conversable woman and does not deal much in superlatives:

"Mary Deedes I think must be liked there, she is so perfectly unaffected and sweet tempered, and tho' as ready to be pleased as Fanny Cage, deals less in superlatives and rapture." -2

Jane Austen likes Miss Lee, since the latter is affable and good at conversation: "Miss Lee I found very conversable." 3 Her heroines are equally impressive in conversation. They converse with reasonable ease and confidence. The Plan of a Novel according to Hints from various quarters was to open with father and daughter(heroine)" conversing in long speeches, elegant language . . . ." -4

1. Ibid., L.N. 29, p. 45.
2. SL, L.N. 74.1, p. 126.
3. Ibid., L.N. 91, p. 148
Jane Austen has great skill in creating interesting conversation. Her mode of study being dramatic, greater concentration is on conversation and mental alertness of the heroines. They get a singular animation when they speak. They are at their best while conversing.

Conversation is their forte. Fanny Price's "voice was sweet, and when she spoke her countenance was pretty" (MP, p. 12). Elizabeth Bennet acquired a unique fascination while engaged in conversation. Naturally, Mr. Darcy is soon attracted by "the pair of fine eyes". Mrs. Allen confuses important matters with trivial ones. But Catherine Morland is invariably simple and forthright. Anne Elliot is rational and firm in her arguments, whereas Captain Harville fluctuates here and there (P, pp. 234-236). Indeed: "The fashion in which Jane Austen imagines her characters, makes their physical appearance in large measure irrelevant." It is mainly because of her great emphasis on conversation in character-study that Jane Austen can do without physical descriptions. W.A. Craik observes: "Jane Austen has no need to describe physical features . . . (as she has) her power of creating conversation."

Jane Austen's heroines are sufficiently serious about important things. Ellenor is called "Miss Prudence" by her mother for her superior wisdom. She often advises Marianne to be composed and considerate. Catherine Morland takes all that is told to her seriously. Their fondness for reflection and solitude also makes the heroines much thoughtful. Moreover, they have a moral basis. Fanny Price objects to Henry Crawford's past conduct on the basis of his moral laxity. She seems to echo, though in a firmer tone, the views of Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney that one cannot, and should not, flirt with one and love another the person. Catherine and Henry discuss Isabella-James-Frederick affair:

"She is very much attached to my brother--
You know she must be attached to him."
"I understand; she is in love with James,
and flirts with Frederick."
"Oh no, not flirts. A woman in love with one
man cannot flirt with another."
"It is probable that she will neither love
so well nor flirt so well, as she might do
either singly. . . ."

(NA, p. 151)

Other women serve as foils to them: Miss Thorpe to Catherine Morland, Lydia Bennet to Elizabeth Bennet, Mary Crawford and Bertram girls to Fanny Price, Elizabeth Elliot to Anne Elliot. Fanny Price can't love Henry Crawford as he is morally weak; she cannot esteem him as a man. He attaches little importance to great principles of conduct. For Mary Crawford "this sin of the first magnitude" is a trifle. There is a clash of tones
in the novels—one of moral good-sense, the other of its opposite. This produces great heat in discussion and an added charm in the heroines.

The heroines are careful about serious things. Elizabeth Bennet is playful at times. However, on serious occasions and in serious matters, she is at once thoughtful. She wishes that she could speak comfortable things to Jane when Charles Bingley seems to have forgotten Jane. However, being honest, she finds that she cannot do so: "I wish I could say anything to comfort you," replied Elizabeth, "but it is wholly out of my power." She rejects Mr. Collins and pities his wife. The seriousness, coupled with a single-mindedness of motive, creates in the heroines sufficient confidence in themselves and in their observations.

II

Jane Austen's heroines often possess some salient characteristics of their creator, gaining thereby greater intensity and self-confidence. She nowhere presents full or forthright self-portraits. However, she has definitely some sympathies with some of her heroines.

The deep brother-sister relationship between Fanny Price and William Price, the sisterly relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Bennet, between Elinor and Marianne are a clear and happy reflection of her own
relationships with her brothers and sister. When writing *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen herself was twenty-one, the age of Elizabeth Bennet. Elizabeth Bennet also shares many opinions and traits of her creator. For example, she shares Jane Austen's humorous turn of mind and does not "hold to ridicule what is wise and good". She also possesses her creator's cheerful outlook. The novelist says:

"But it was her business to be satisfied . . . and certainly her temper to be happy."  
(PP, p. 239)

So irony is scarcely directed against her. Elizabeth and Emma are almost akin to a self-portrait. Anne Elliot is the nearest approximate to her. Jane Austen's two brothers were in the Navy, and she was fond of them. She also envied the lot of sailors' wives:

"For a time we shall now possess many of the advantages which I have often thought of with Envy in the wives of Sailors or Soldiers." -l

Many characters in *Persuasion* are from the Navy. Anne at the end is extremely happy to be the wife of a sailor: "She glorified in being a sailor's wife" (P, p. 252). It is believed that Jane Austen has described her own love-affair in the story of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth. It is not easily discernible what details she actually took from

1. SL, L.N. 29, p. 46.
her own life and what she created from "maiden meditation, fancy free". But her heroines share her essentially maidenly attitude towards life. No heroine is allowed to have a child; the novel nears its end as soon as the heroine marries the hero. Jane Austen also calls Elinor "my Elinor". She admires Elizabeth Bennet and does not know how to treat those who do not like her:

"I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like her at least I do not know." 1

About Emma Woodhouse, she observes that nobody but she will like her. All these tend to establish that Jane Austen shared many characteristics with the creatures of her imagination. However, as a conscious novelist, she maintained distance and control over her material. Probably in Anne Elliot she comes quite near to actual self-portrait; hence her observation about Anne Elliot, that she is "almost too good for me".

Though she herself was a writer from early age, no heroine of hers is a writer. Some women novelists in her time had done that: a young lady in Mrs. Skinn's Old Maid (1771) writes a vivacious note of eight or nine hundred

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1. SL, L.N. 76, p. 132.
2. Ibid., L.N. 141, p. 174.
words; in *The Recess* (1783-85), the dying Matilda composes three huge volumes of reminiscences. But Jane Austen went only as far as bookish girls, Catherine Morland and Miss Thorpe. A character generally scribbles something when he or she is seriously disgusted or discontented. Esther in *The Family* (1967), for example, tries to seek consolation in verse-writing. Jane Austen's characters are never placed in such embarrassing situations. Being a cheerful realist, she is, by and large, at peace with her society. So are her heroines. The solution of their problems is sought within their society. Ordination in *Mansfield Park* has rightly been interpreted as an image of orderliness and restoration to order. Jane Austen also did not like most contemporary novels and romances. Hence the introduction of a writer would probably have betrayed her identity—the identity she took care to conceal as long as she possibly could. She had a niece, writing novels, and she conscientiously guided her. But in her own field—three or four families in a Country Village—she did not include any woman writer.

The heroines' confidence and faith in personal observations impart them freshness and light, as the novelist

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herself shares these characteristics with them. Jane Austen likes to stick to her field of personal experience or observation. She confines herself to her field of country gentry, as she knows this field far more deeply than any other. She could base her novels about life outside her own experience, as for example on her reading. After all, she was an avid reader, and there are probably more echoes of books in her novels than is generally conceded. But, in her works she speaks only those things which are within her knowledge and experience. She also imparts to her heroines this quality: insistence on their personal observations and decisions. Elizabeth Bennet is not convinced about Charles Bingley's sincerity by assurance only. She has had no occasion to have the proof of his sincerity:

"I have not a doubt of Mr. Bingley's sincerity," said Elizabeth warmly, "but you must excuse my not being convinced by assurances only."

(PP, p. 96)

She herself observes Mr. Bingley's attention towards her sister and concludes that he loves her. She herself wants to go to Hunsford, as she is not satisfied with the account of place and persons given by Mr. Collins and his plain wife. She realizes that Mr. Darcy loves her. But she wants to judge and study him:

"Let me first see how he behaves," said she, "it will then be early enough for expectation."

(PP, p. 335)
Fanny Price, by and by, forms her own convictions, and despises vulgarity in the Bertram girls. Catherine soon comes to know about the empty-headedness of Miss Thorpe. Anne Elliot's feeling heart for Captain Wentworth can be heard beating all along. However, she personally wants to see and observe whether he has changed or not. Emma Woodhouse does things in her own way. It slowly dawns upon her that she has a blurred vision. This confidence lends to the heroines charm and life. Firm faith in themselves, whether right or wrong, keeps them going.

III

Jane Austen's heroines love to stay at home. Catherine Morland is the first heroine who leaves home for the outside world. When Henry Tilney wants to know if Catherine Morland has been abroad, as her knowledge is quite vast, she instantly replies: "Oh, no, I only mean what I have read about" (NA, p. 106). To be stay-at-home was also characteristic of country girls of South England in Jane Austen's age. It is the city girls who are often keenly interested in journeys and outside living. Moreover, journeys in those days meant a lot of expenditure and inconvenience--more so for young ladies. Even when some heroines leave home, they carry the home with them. Catherine Morland has Mrs. Allen to act as mother when she is away to Bath. Elizabeth
Bennet is accompanied by her uncle and aunt when she embarks on a tour. While at Mansfield Park, Fanny Price feels homesick for quite some time—till Edmund Bertram comes forward to be her guide and sympathiser. Then, with the passage of time she becomes accustomed to life at Mansfield Park; it becomes a 'home' for her. Her "East Room" in Mansfield Park supplies her more comfort than the whole of Portsmouth town can do.

Letters serve the purpose of circulating news and schemes. To women in the family, they are family letters full of family accounts. It is a favourite hobby of Jane Austen and also that of her heroines. Miss Eleanor asks Catherine Morland to write to her letters when the latter comes back home:

"You must write to me, Catherine," she cried; "you must let me hear from you as soon as possible . . . and then, till I can ask for your correspondence as I ought to do, I will not expect more."

While leaving for Hertfordshire, Charlotte Lucas asks Elizabeth the favour of regular correspondence with her. And Elizabeth at once condescends:

"I shall depend on hearing from you very often, Eliza."
"That you certainly shall." (PP, p. 146)

Lydia's argument that she, as a married woman, will have no
time for writing letters, is ridiculed:

"Write to me very often, my dear."
"As often as I can. But you know married
women have never much time for writing. My
sisters may write to me. They will have nothing
else to do."

(PP, p. 330)

Letter-writing or keeping a diary, says Henry Tilney, is a
woman's accomplishment. They can make even small things
interesting. A woman writes long and engaging letters.

Mr. Bennet confesses that he is not fond of writing
letters:

"Let me write for you," said Jane, "if you
dislike the trouble."
"I dislike it very much," he replied, "but
it must be done."

(PP, p. 303)

The heroines generally write long letters, replete with
family accounts and minute details about social
activities.

They are feminine in nature and make-up. Womanly
accomplishments—talking, walking, music, needlework, dance
etc. —are attributed to most of her heroines. Jane
Fairfax is criticized for being reserve even by Mr.
Knightley. She has not an open temper, he complains.
It is such a difficult thing to love a reserve person.

People are surprised when Fanny Price is reported to know
neither music nor drawing. Jane Austen's excessive love
for dress, gowns and fashions is shared by the younger heroines like Catherine Morland. Other heroines, too, are careful to dress well, without having an obsession or excitement about dress. They share a grown-up woman's view towards dress, and are not very "dressy". They are womanly. Catherine is shy and feminine. She can be at the most bold and that, too, on special occasions only. It is, for example, at the crucial hour at Northanger Abbey that

"She stept boldly forward, carelessly humming a tune, to assure herself of its being so, peeped courageously behind curtain, saw nothing on either low window seat to scare her."

(NA, p. 167)

However, soon she is surprised at her own thought:

"Catherine sometimes started at the boldness of her own surmises, and sometimes hoped or feared that she had gone too far."

(NA, p. 188)

Fanny Burney's heroines, though virtuous and beautiful, are often weak and diffident. The frequent use of negatives and 'dashes' on their part indicates lack of confidence in their general outlook. Evelina, for instance, reports her conversation with Mr. Villars:

"... and ought I to be stranger to the cause, when I see deeply sympathised in the effect?"

"Cause, Sir!" cried I, greatly alarmed, "what cause?--I don't know--I can't tell--I--" -1

Jane Austen's early heroines share this aspect of feminine frailty to an extent. Catherine Morland speaks in negatives, particularly in the earlier part of the novel. However, she gradually acquires confidence. Other heroines speak assertive language and display sufficient self-assurance. Edward Ferrars observes that shyness on the part of women is not a symptom of confidence:

"Shyness is only the effect of a sense of inferiority in some way or the other" (SS, p. 94). When Elizabeth learns of Lydia's elopement, she at once musters courage and thinks of her return home:

"Oh! where, where is my uncle?" cried Elizabeth, darting from her seat as she finished the latter, in eagerness to follow him, without losing a moment of the time so precious."

(PP, p. 276)

She does not faint or fail. At the time of the Cob incident, Anne Elliot reveals her courage and presence of mind. It is, probably, too much to suggest that one finds in heroines, like Emma, some elements of the "new woman", although F.W. Bradbrook points out that they, "without being Blue Stocking or self-conscious Feminists", have some of the confidence and independence of the new woman. In comparison to Richardson's and Fanny Burney's heroines, they

do remind one of the confidence of the "new woman". But their overall outlook is both feminine and amiable. Theirs is a fine woman's world. It is the world of bustles, shopping and theatrical shows. The day spent, while Elizabeth Bennet is with the Gardiners, is typical and characteristic:

"The day passed most pleasantly away: the morning in bustle and shopping, and the evening at one of the theatres."

(PP, p. 152)

The notion of woman as an equal to man is alien to Jane Austen's heroines. No heroine pleads for such rights. Elizabeth Bennet defends herself and speaks about her worth and capability to Lady Catherine de Bourgh. But the new woman is not discernible even in her most spirited refutation of charges levelled against her. She goes only so far as: "He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal" (PP, p. 356). Anne Elliot stresses the feminine delicacies of woman:

"I believe in a true analogy between our bodily frames and our mental; that as our bodies are the strongest, so are our feelings; capable of bearing most rough usage, and riding out the heaviest weather."

"Your feelings may be the strongest," replied Anne, "but the same spirit of analogy will authorise me to assert that ours are the most tender . . . ."

(P, p. 233)

The heroines are not cynical towards men. Anne remarks
to Captain Harville, there is no question of sex-rivalry or animosity, as both man and woman are held to be "fellow-creatures". Anne observes:

"I hope to do justice to all that is felt by you, and by those who resemble you. God forbid that I should undervalue the warm and faithful feelings of any of my fellow-creatures."

(P, p. 235)

Thus the question of equality of woman with man is just irrelevant. Jane Austen makes Anne Elliot hint at her this conviction, when Captain Harville wants to decide about the superiority of sexes:

"But how shall we prove anything?"
"We never shall. We never can expect to prove anything on such a point."

(P, p. 234)

Though often spirited and vivacious, the heroines are never extreme personalities. They do not have any strong sense of revolt. They like moderation in hopes and fears. That imparts them a peculiar penetration with respect to marriage and domestic life. Almost every novel can be read as the story of the heroine's natural and consistent release from a wrong person. The heroines penetrate into the worthlessness of the wrong man. Women are the best judges of men. Marianne has to be disillusioned in Willoughby, Elizabeth Bennet in Wickham, Edmund Bertram in Mary Crawford. The release is chiefly because of the clear and strong
perception of the heroine. The contrast also serves to bring to the fore the right man in the Jane Austen world.

Self-knowledge gives them the discriminating power to look beneath physical appearances. They are averse to flattery. When Edmund Bertram praises Fanny, she turns away and says: "Oh, don't talk so, don't talk so" (MP, p. 198). Emma Woodhouse is only once flattered by Frank Churchill. All praise of Elizabeth's personal allurements by Mr. Collins is outright dismissed as flattery. Elizabeth is indifferent to it.

Women are enamoured of beauty. However, that is not the final goal with grown-up heroines. There is no ugly woman in any of Jane Austen's novels. Indeed, to be beautiful is a good thing for women in their world. But intelligence and agility in the sphere of their activity count most. When Emma Woodhouse learns that Harriet Smith also loves Mr. Knightley, she is naturally shocked; she has a jealousy that has a cause. The Bingley sisters feel jealous of Elizabeth Bennet when Mr. Darcy is seen to be inclined towards her. Such a streak of jealousy is in keeping with feminine nature and is in no way distasteful.

To refute the charge of woman's inferiority, Jane Austen eventually emphasised the feminine attainments as her strength. By a charming display of good manners she aided the cause of women's emancipation. She was confident of the resourcefulness of women, and stressed it. She, therefore,
neither favoured the idea of woman as man's equal nor the old and general convention of female inferiority. Woman had her own important identity. Gregory's objection to "natural frankness" of woman is meaningless. A woman should not "give the lie to her feeling". Woman was a good creature, capable of many things. Home was her proper and favourite field. She was an important companion and fellow of man, with great competence to make him the 'happiest creature' in the world.

Jane Austen's opinion of women is quite favourable and high. Those who start with malice towards women charge them with inconstancy in love. This allegation is refuted beyond doubt. Rather, it is established that constancy is woman's forte. Jane Austen is aware of the fact that all critics, despite their best endeavours, start with some bias towards their own sex. Still, the impartial view her heroines seek to hold is of woman's constancy. Anne Elliot observes to Captain Harville:

"All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it), is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone."

(P, p. 235)

Women do not easily forget their love. No woman deceives any man, though there are men, like Willoughby, Wickham and Mr. Elliot, who play with the feelings or lives of some women.
Jane Austen portrays woman realistically. She is often interested in the type of the girl who does not try to substitute a false, romantic fictionalised view of life for actual experience. She has no illusions about women. When Henry Tilney praises them exceedingly, it is made clear that he is not serious. Miss Tilney asks Henry Tilney to speak out his opinion about women to Catherine Morland:

"Tell her that you think very highly of the understanding of women."

"Miss Morland, I think very highly of the understanding of all the women in the world . . . ."

"That is not enough. Be more serious."

"Miss Morland, no one can think more highly of the understanding of women than I do. In my opinion, nature has given them so much, that they never find it necessary to use more than half."

His sister again tells us that he is "not in a sober mood" (NA, pp. 113-114). When Henry Tilney denounces women's understanding, he is equally non-serious. Miss Tilney rightly asks Catherine Morland not to hear what he says:

"Perhaps the abilities of women are neither sound nor acute, neither vigorous nor keen. Perhaps they may want observation, discernment, judgment, fire, genius and wit."

The use of 'perhaps' is significant. Miss Tilney at once warns Catherine: "Miss Morland, do not mind what he says" (NA, p. 112). So women are neither ideal beings nor accursed creatures, neither godly nor devilish, neither
The heroines are creatures of this world, endowed with earthly hopes and fears. A perfect woman is honest, selfless, obliging and tender. Edmund asks Fanny Price to become an ideal woman:

"You have proved yourself upright and disinterested; prove yourself grateful and tender-hearted; and then you would be the perfect model of a woman." (MP, p. 347)

These are all feminine traits, but these do not exhaust womanly accomplishments. Miss Bingley mentions a great many things as the requisites of an accomplished woman:

"A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking . . . ." (PP, p. 39)

The acquirements she prefers are more showy, less solid or substantial. This is obviously to ridicule the idea of the 'perfect' woman who exists nowhere. Mr. Darcy adds another quality: an improvement in mind because of her extensive reading. It is important. A realist and satirist Elizabeth Bennet remarks: "I never saw such a woman." An ideal woman is essentially womanly and virtuous in nature. When Elizabeth Bennet is taunted by Miss Bingley, she observes: "I deserve neither such praise nor such censure" (PP, p. 37).
They are, indeed, amiable and rational creatures and they should be regarded as such. Mrs. Croft frankly remarks to her brother, Captain Wentworth:

"I hate to hear you talking so like a fine gentleman, as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures."

(P, p. 69)

To satisfy Mr. Collins about her real intention to reject his proposal, Elizabeth assures him:

"Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart."

(PP, p. 109)

In her explanation, the emphasis is on "feeling", "truth", "heart" and "rational". These summarise Elizabeth as a heroine and also an ideal woman: an honest and intelligent woman. In this respect Jane Austen's heroines are admirable. Persons with strong manly impulses are likely to see little to admire in a heroine like Emma Woodhouse. But a woman may appreciate and understand her in the right spirit. H.R. Steeves observes:

"At all events, Emma seems to be a woman to be praised or dispraised by men, but to be properly known and valued only by women."

Their essentially feminine and forthright nature makes Jane Austen's heroines amiable and agreeable. Jane Austen uses the device of 'reflecting solitude' for her heroines. The highest conception of solitude is to regard it as a time for self-analysis, for finding a pattern in all that befalls us. It is the time when one comes to terms with one's self and with life. Her heroines make use of solitude for this purpose, of course, in their own manner. They are especially fond of solitary walks where they get ample opportunity for reflection.

Jane Austen's novels can be read as the novelist's search towards a rational and amiable woman. In Sense and Sensibility her endeavour is to give sense to sensibility in the character-study of Marianne Dashwood. In Elizabeth Bennet she concentrates upon a sincere, straightforward and intelligent woman. Here Jane Austen is nearest her goal. In Northanger Abbey Catherine Morland moves towards this ideal in the later half of the novel. In Fanny Price, the rational view develops slowly, yet steadily. In Emma Woodhouse the development from a "vain spirit" to a "serious spirit" is a progress towards the same aim. Persuasion is a novel of somewhat different nature. Yet, Anne Elliot, too, displays the outlook of a rational young woman, growing wiser after every experience.

Her heroines insist on knowing all the relevant facts,
grasping all possible details. Jane Austen's ideal woman is an honest, amiable and rational creature—who is neither entirely bad nor wholly perfect.