

FEMALE FRIENDSHIP IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS¹

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THE novels of Jane Austen investigate female friendship and in the process discuss an androgynous ideal based on eighteenth-century categories of sense and sensibility. The androgynous potential of a woman is expressed through her friendship, which allows her to develop toward androgyny in the company of a complementary friend. At the same time the novels illustrate the actual non-androgynous state of women through their stress on the precariousness of friendship. In the fictive world of Austen it is endangered by social restrictions and pressures, by the friends' own conventionality, and finally by the author's fear.

Carolyn Heilbrun has defined androgyny as "a condition under which characteristics of the sexes and the human impulses expressed by men and women are not rigidly assigned"; it implies a "reconciliation between the sexes" and opens a full range of experience to all human beings.² The dichotomous psychology of the eighteenth century separated sense or reason from emotion or sensibility and associated the first with men and the second with women. In this form the dichotomy opposes androgyny; yet if the elements are expressed in one person, the dichotomy can give way to unity, suggesting an androgynous ideal in which the positive traits of "masculine" reason and "feminine" sensibility combine. Among the many authors who used the dichotomy in the late eighteenth century, Jane Austen was one of the few to understand the potentiality and comment on it.

Reason or sense can be defined as the faculty which discerns truth and creates virtue. It is associated with the head, intellect, judgment, moral fineness, will, independence, decisive action and self-control. There is rarely discussion of the effect of its excess, but occasionally writers mention its tendency in isolation toward harshness on others, immoderate caution and cynicism. Sensibility, an extremely complex

¹ A version of this paper was presented at the Jane Austen Bicentennial Convention held in Alberta in October 1975.

² Further notes toward a recognition of androgyny, *Women's Studies*, 2, no. 2 (1974), 143.

literary and psychological term, was used by philosophers, poets, and novelists to denote an instinctive benevolence. It is associated with the heart, feeling, intuition, spontaneity and passivity. In excess it becomes self-indulgent emotionalism—a dangerous quality which renders its possessor susceptible to all pitiful and erotic objects without discrimination. It can substitute a wallowing in sensation for the right judgment and action associated with reason at its best.

The commonplace nature of the dichotomy of sense or reason and sensibility or emotion emerges from its wide use by writers and its assumption by many more. In *Emile* (1762) Rousseau, the most influential philosopher of the period, separated the qualities and gave reason to his hero and sensibility to his heroine. Since it was axiomatic that reason should rule, the psychological polarization justified a social situation: the heroine is ruled by the hero, for whom, it almost seems, she was created. The ideal of complementary reason and sensibility suggested here occurs not in one person or sex but in the male/female relationship—a relationship in which the head must rule the heart. Certainly it is a far cry from the androgyny of Heilbrun.

Mary Wollstonecraft, the feminist thinker of the 1790's, inherited the complex of ideas connected with the reason/sensibility dichotomy; she was well aware of its social implications and treats it harshly in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Describing the superiority of men which male philosophers have attributed to themselves through their use of the dichotomy, she writes ironically "they have laboured to prove, with chivalrous generosity, that the sexes ought not to be compared; man was made to reason, woman to feel: and that together, flesh and spirit, they make the most perfect whole, by blending happily reason and sensibility into one character."³ She asserts that Rousseau by stressing only sensibility for women has reduced them to "half being[s]."⁴

Certainly many women in the late eighteenth century were unhappy with the ideal of sensibility, and several attacked it vehemently. The most common target is sensibility in excess. Jane West, for example, in her dedication to *A Gossip's Story* (1797) states that she wrote to expose to ridicule excessive and affected sensibility; while Helen Maria Williams, in the advertisement to her novel *Julia* (1790), claimed that her purpose was "to trace the danger

³ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792; New York: Norton, 1975), p. 63.

⁴ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 39.

arising from the uncontroled indulgence of strong affections” or sensibility.⁵ Sometimes, however, women saw the danger not only in excess but also in exclusiveness, for the woman of sensibility is shut out from masculine sense. Mary Ann Hanway’s *Ellinor* (1798) was written partly to show the misery for women of an indulgence in “the susceptibility of the heart,” and to indicate the improvement that would occur if sense and wit were allowed to “regain their empire.”⁶

Female writers were, then, concerned with preventing their readers from accepting sensibility alone as a female ideal. It was a large step, however, from modifying the sexual characteristics to rejecting them completely and replacing them by an androgynous character of the type Heilbrun describes. The nearest philosophical approach to such replacement is in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft.

In her book, Wollstonecraft pleads for the androgynous woman, a woman of strong feeling and even stronger sense or reason, a woman whose aim is the “imitation of manly virtues or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character.”⁷ She admits that such a woman will be labelled “masculine” but, nonetheless, she holds her up as an ideal—one clearly in opposition to the “half being” posited by Rousseau in *Emile*. That women should retain sensibility is implied by Wollstonecraft’s continued emphasis on kindness and benevolence, but because they have accepted the need for this quality she need not plead for it.

Jane Austen seems not to have read *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*—at least she does not refer to it in her correspondence—but she shows herself aware of the androgynous potential of the psychology of her time to reconcile what had been isolated and polarized. Her awareness leads to conclusions very different from Wollstonecraft’s.

In her novels, Austen frequently presents two women, one of whom is primarily associated with sense, or those qualities that cluster around it, and the other with sensibility. In neither woman is the concept of androgyny realized and neither seems alone to be Austen’s ideal. Yet the existence of the pair indicates that an androgynous ideal beyond both women is possible: a woman of

⁵ *A Gossip’s Story* (1797; New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974) and *Julia* (1790; New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974).

⁶ *Ellinor; Or, the World As It Is* (1798; New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974).

⁷ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 8.

balanced sense and sensibility of the kind Wollstonecraft approves. In addition, its existence allows to women a relationship outside the male/female one, a relationship in which each friend tends to assume the good qualities of the other and so moves toward the androgynous center.

The suggestion that a woman should strive to develop through a female relationship is a radical one in fiction and seems to oppose the commonplace idea that she should aim primarily at finding her complement in the reasonable man. In her early novels Austen seems attracted to the possibilities and potentialities of female friendship. Later, however, she comes to apprehend its socially disruptive implications, its threat to the traditional patriarchy and marriage which she sometimes wishes to modify but never to destroy. With such an apprehension, she moves from attraction to outright rejection of close female friendship. Approaching or withdrawing, however, Austen reveals her understanding of the power of female association and through it the possibility of an androgynous ideal embodied in a woman.

The movement toward and from the androgynous ideal expressed in female friendship can be detected in a brief résumé of Austen's plots. We may begin with the three early novels first written in the 1790's and revised many years later, and end with the three works of her maturity written in the early nineteenth century.⁸

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne is the heroine of sensibility who learns control through her sister Elinor, her guide in word and deed. The friendship between the two sisters is stressed in the beginning of the novel; at the end it is diluted but not destroyed by their marriages to men of sense. In *Northanger Abbey* the heroine of sensibility, Catherine Morland, takes as her friend and guide an artful young woman, Isabella Thorpe. She finds, however, that Isabella is a false guide, and she moves from friendship—which the novel shows to be romantic and adolescent—to an adult affectionate marriage. This marriage is not completely destructive of female friendship, for Isabella has a successor in the sensible Elinor Tilney.

As in *Sense and Sensibility*, so in *Pride and Prejudice*, the two heroines Jane and Elizabeth are friends as well as sisters. In the course of the book each learns something from the other; Elizabeth

⁸ The dating of Austen's novels is a problem. Several youthful works were substantially revised for publication many years later. The first major published work is *Sense and Sensibility*, which appeared in 1811, but the first major work to be written, probably in 1797, was *Northanger Abbey*; it was published in 1818, after Austen's death.

gains some of Jane's reasonable intellectual humility, while Jane assumes some of Elizabeth's openness of feeling. Elizabeth sees her mistaken conceptions of Darcy, the hero, whom she initially dislikes, and of Wyckham, the villain, whom she first approves; she comes to realize that she should have controlled her spontaneous reactions and sensations. On the other side, Jane, who has once lost a lover because she hid her true feelings, learns to control her emotions less.

Although present in *Pride and Prejudice*, the pattern of sense and sensibility is more blurred than in the other two books of the 1790's. Elizabeth is not entirely a heroine of sensibility, for she lacks instinctive benevolence, and the passive Jane has the self-control but not the independence of reason. Neither sister takes on the roles of actor and mentor. Toward the end of the novel when another sister brings disaster on the family by eloping, neither Jane nor Elizabeth has sufficient independence or will to act. It is the hero, Darcy, who becomes both actor and guide to the family.

The two women of *Mansfield Park*, the first of Austen's later novels, are presumed friends but are proved enemies. They resemble the women of Austen's earlier novels, however, by their clear difference in qualities. Fanny Price, the dependent poor relation in a wealthy household, is meek, sensitive, and emotional; the independent Mary Crawford on the other hand is active, willful and calculating. The novel presents a struggle between the two women for the same man and, consequently, a struggle between the two sets of qualities the women embody. The outcome is not a modification of both sets but the complete rejection of the attributes of Mary Crawford. Both women exist in the shadow of Mansfield Park, a hierarchical domain which enshrines many of the positive values of the book; of this domain Fanny Price alone shows herself a worthy inhabitant.

In *Emma*, the poor, timid and affectionate Harriet is befriended by the wealthy, self-confident and frequently insensitive Emma. According to the hero Mr. Knightley, their friendship is in many ways detrimental to both, and the action of the novel bears him out. Marriage more or less destroys it: Harriet's absence from Emma's house during her engagement "was not to be regretted. The intimacy between her and Emma must sink; their friendship must change into a calmer sort of goodwill."⁹

Anne Elliot and Louisa Musgrove in *Persuasion* are opposed in qualities, but they cannot function as complements in the book, for

⁹ *Emma* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 430.

Louisa is a far less defined character than Anne and she is not given the status of a heroine. She interacts very little with Anne whose consciousness largely binds the novel. The psychological isolation of Anne Elliot resembles Fanny Price's; she has no satisfactory sister and, like Fanny, she seeks no equal female friend. Reserved and quiet, she contrasts with the other women but she finds her complement only in the independent and energetic hero.

It is clear from the outline that, in their use of two heroines, Austen's novels fall into two main categories, those in which the women have a close relationship and in which the qualities associated with sense and sensibility are divided between them, and those in which the women are hostile to each other and in which the qualities are antithetical, not complementary. The early novels of the 1790's primarily follow the first pattern, while the later follow the second. In the early novels the possibility of exclusive female friendship is destroyed by marriage, but female friendship of some sort continues; in the later books, the marriage relationship is exclusive. To see the distinction in greater detail, we should look at the most extreme example of each type: *Sense and Sensibility*, which presents friendship in its most positive form and *Mansfield Park* which presents it in its most negative.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen gives her version of the favorite theme of women novelists of the 1790's: the disastrous effect of over-indulged sensibility and the need for its control by sense. The women who primarily embody the qualities of sense and sensibility are two sisters, Elinor and Marianne. They have a close relationship and frequently express their love for each other; it is best seen in the concern of Elinor for Marianne in her illness: "Hour after hour passed away in sleepless pain and delirium on Marianne's side, and in the most cruel anxiety on Elinor's."¹⁰

Early in the novel, Marianne is associated with excessive sensibility. Her love for her mother is demonstrative and her affection for her home is expressed with great warmth in effusive literary language, so often the mark of sensibility. Marianne sees no worth in the person who fails to share her literary raptures and exuberant affections and she thus passes over the sensible and worthy Colonel Brandon for the sentimental but unworthy Willoughby.

Egoism—a large component of excessive sensibility—is seen as the

¹⁰ *Sense and Sensibility* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 312. Page numbers refer to this edition.

cause of this faulty judgment, for Marianne considers that the pleasurable effect of her lover on her must prove his essential goodness. Elinor comments on such egoism when she muses on the “injustice to which her sister was often led in her opinion of others, by the unstable refinement of her own mind and the too great importance placed by her on the delicacies of a strong sensibility and the graces of a polished manner. . . . She expected from other people the same opinions and feelings as her own, and she judged of their motives by the immediate effects of their actions of herself” (pp. 201–202).

More harshly Mary Wollstonecraft made the same association of female sensibility and egoism in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

Women are supposed to possess more sensibility, and even humanity, than men, and their strong attachments and instantaneous emotions of compassion are given as proofs; but the clinging affection of ignorance has seldom anything noble in it, and may mostly be resolved into selfishness.¹¹

Against the selfishness of excessive and exclusive sensibility is placed the proper pride and altruism of sense. Such sense is not merely the absence of sentimental display, as in the vapid Lady Middleton, whose “calmness of manner” is really a mask of emptiness. Instead it is a calmness willed and learned, the reward of struggle. So Elinor, struggling and suffering, is the true embodiment of sense in the novel.

Elinor is subjected neither to the satire directed at Lady Middleton nor to the irony aimed at Marianne, and certainly her way of acting is proved superior to her sister’s. Yet there are suggestions even toward the beginning of the book that Elinor’s brand of sense may be qualified.

Often she exceeds sensible caution and refuses spontaneous action. She will not go on the memorable walk on the downs with her sisters because she foresees the rain they later experience; by so doing she avoids both the mess of weather and the “felicity” of sensation they gain from the unsettled day. Later, propriety of action saves her from the public misery of Marianne but it also deprives her of public comfort when her lover appears false.

In addition, Elinor’s commonsensical belief that the least romantic possibility is the correct one leads her into errors of judgment almost

¹¹ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 188.

as often as her sister. She misjudges Willoughby as thoroughly as Marianne and she is less troubled than she ought by Marianne's illness in its early stages, under the mistaken but commonsensical conviction that people do not die of love.

Elinor's sense is further qualified by a hint of its genesis. Both sisters are marked by their relationship to their mother, Mrs. Dashwood. Marianne indulges sensibility because her mother is approving of it: "Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her sister's sensibility; but by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued and cherished" (p. 7); while Elinor may be drawn toward excessive rationality to oppose the mother who slights her for her younger sister. Ultimately her sense may result from her mother's preference for Marianne and be as emotionally based and irrational as her sister's sensibility.¹²

Elinor's relationship with Marianne also contributes to the excess of sense in her nature. Her politeness and propriety are both a social duty and a severe trial to her. The severity is due primarily to Marianne's dereliction, for Elinor is in a way being polite and restrained for two. Marianne may display her feelings and snub the trivial because her sister will always cover for her and smooth over her offences.

Although Elinor is undoubtedly intended to embody more of her creator's ideal than Marianne, the qualifications suggest that beyond both women there is an androgynous ideal which each approaches, although from opposite directions. In the course of the book, the excessive sensibility of Marianne is modified. She learns to control it partly through her disillusion with passionate love but primarily through the influence of her sister; the marriage to the older and wiser husband ratifies the change in her but it is the sister rather than the husband who has primarily caused it.

Elinor is less influenced than influencing—to some extent because she already incorporates a part of Marianne's feeling. She is said by the author to have both understanding and "an excellent heart" and several of her actions support this. For example, her response to Marianne's sorrow over Willoughby's treachery is extreme: she "gave way to a burst of tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne's" (p. 182).

Her relative lack of susceptibility is also partly due to her role in the friendship with her sister. Throughout the novel she judges,

¹² For a succinct discussion of Elinor's relationship with her mother, see Jane Nardin's *Those Elegant Decorums* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973), p. 158.

teaches, and guides Marianne, exhibiting the sort of strength called "masculine" by the writers Wollstonecraft attacks. Because of her role as mentor and guide, then, she is of necessity less malleable than her sister.

Yet there are subtle changes in Elinor. For example, the similarity between her and Mrs. Dashwood increases as she echoes her mother in excusing her lover's inconsistent behavior. Mrs. Dashwood went to similar trouble for Willoughby and was judged by Elinor as blinded by the unreasonable partiality of sensibility. Again, toward the end of the novel, Elinor seems to approach Marianne in emotional display when she runs from the room on hearing that her lover, Edward Ferrars, is not married to her rival; such action can serve the cause of sense in hiding emotion, but it may also indicate a greater willingness to indulge in feeling.

Austen's Elinor and Marianne take comfort in themselves when they experience disappointments in the male world outside their entirely female home. When Willoughby and Edward Ferrars appear to have failed them, they prepare to gain what strength they can from each other, and they are eager to be gone to their joint home. The passionate and wrongheaded relationship of Marianne and Willoughby has been especially destructive of friendship, preoccupying Marianne to such an extent that no one else but herself and her beloved have been of any importance. When it disintegrates, it is replaced by the comforting sisterly friendship, which it had formerly displaced; the friendship substitutes for passion and serves to heal the wounds it caused.

At the end of the book, when a domestic future together has been prevented by marriage, the friendship of the two sisters endures. Indeed, because of Austen's notorious restraint in describing the raptures of heterosexual love, we are left with a very cool impression of the marriages. Certainly they do not preclude the friendship of the two sisters; rather, they partially echo it in their approach to equality. In neither couple is the man so socially or intellectually superior to his wife as he is in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, or *Emma*. Colonel Brandon has perhaps the age and sense of Mr. Knightley or Edward Bertram, but he is so shadowy a figure that his superiority to his wife is not greatly evident. In addition, the marriages almost include the sisters' friendship when the narrator asserts that part of their joy is their closeness to each other in their new homes.

In spite of some ultimate reassertion of traditional values of mar-

riage and the complementary psychology it seems to imply, *Sense and Sensibility* is positive in its presentation of female friendship. Marriage is undoubtedly preferred to it, but it is marriage which does not completely exclude friendship. The female relationship is allowed as escape and refuge, and there is emphasis on the development and growth toward androgyny of the partners within it.

Turning to *Mansfield Park*, we find that the scheme of female friendship with its androgynous possibilities is not merely modified but thoroughly inverted. *Mansfield Park* is the first Austen novel to concentrate on a single good young woman and to consign almost all the others to the perdition of spinsterhood or exile. The polarity is the more surprising as these "bad" young women clearly embody qualities given to one of the satisfactory heroines of the early novels who contributed to the potential androgynous whole.

Fanny Price, the heroine of the novel, has much of the sensibility of Marianne. She rhapsodizes over nature in Marianne's fashion and she is moved by the poetry that expresses it. She has, too, the moral fineness of Elinor. Indeed she seems at first sight intended by her creator to suggest that androgynous wholeness which the earlier novel implied through two women. Yet many readers have been uneasy about Fanny. One, for example, feels that she is not to be trusted because of her use of "the language of Gothic sensibility" and another that her morality is "cold."¹³ Every perception of hers is, however, supported by the story and it seems that we are to accept her as the complete woman. Here perhaps is the problem. She is the complete woman rather than the complete person, which, tentatively and intermittently, both Elinor and Marianne aspire to be. She has the firm morality often associated with "masculine" sense, but avoids the willpower and energy; she brings to the "feminine" character of sensibility only that which does not modify it. Fanny, then, represents not a fulfillment of Austen's androgynous suggestions but their obliteration and replacement by a new feminine ideal. Austen appears still uneasy with the character of sensibility alone, but feminine sensibility, joined with moral fineness, is accepted. Through Fanny Price she reestablishes a modified dichotomy of masculine and feminine and rejects the ideal of androgyny that Wollstonecraft saw as its destroyer.

¹³ Among the critics who find Fanny Price most unpleasant are Mary Lascelles in *Jane Austen and Her Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), Joel Weinsheimer in "Mansfield Park: Three Problems," *NCF* (September 1974); and D. W. Harding in "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," *Scrutiny* (VIII).

In the friendship of the two heroines, there is often strength. Together Elinor and Marianne could take some control of their destiny and they could gain a certain self-sufficiency, associated with men rather than women. Denied a female friend or denying herself one, Fanny Price finds a complement only in a man, who confirms her in the sensibility and delicacy associated with women; although he does not tamper with her moral sense, he gives her no incentive to acquire other "masculine" qualities.

Fanny begins life with a favorite brother rather than with the usual sister. When she is ten she is moved from her family home, and her brother is succeeded by Edmund, her cousin. After her brother leaves following a short visit, it is to Edmund that Fanny immediately turns for comfort and sustenance. The daughters of the family offer no alternative, for they have been reared to accept that Fanny is not their equal or their concern; as their father puts it plainly, she "is not a *Miss Bertram*."¹⁴

Through her adolescence, Edmund takes the place not only of the sister but also of the mother or older woman, for all the females in her world prove defective, from the vegetable Lady Bertram to the selfish and mean-spirited aunt, Mrs. Norris. It is Edmund who assists in the "improvement of her mind" and who "encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment" (p. 22). We hear of him teaching Fanny to think, feel, read, and write.

Edmund's influence extends still further: the small importance Fanny has at Mansfield Park is owing entirely to him. He insists that her needs be sometimes considered and without him she is completely unable to obtain comfort. Indeed she is almost devoid of will on her own behalf. In his absence she tires herself to faintness in the hot sun or becomes sickly for lack of the riding he alone institutes; when he does not attend to her directly, she suffers and pines, and he blames himself for his remissness: "His own forgetfulness of her was worse than anything which they had done. Nothing of this would have happened had she been properly considered" (p. 74). If Edmund is not there to mix her wine and water, Fanny not only does not have it, she does not want it; if he will not attend her on a unique and longed-for excursion, she had rather not go. Edmund in fact takes over for Fanny all the functions of Mrs. Dashwood, Elinor, and Willoughby for Marianne: "Loving, guiding, protecting her, as

¹⁴ *Mansfield Park* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 10. Page numbers refer to this edition.

he had been doing ever since her being ten years old" (p. 470). He more than complements her: he envelopes her.

The femininity of Fanny is implicit in her relationship with Edmund. She is always too delicate or too sensitive and emotional for action and so she is constantly being revived by her cousin who must act for her. Tears spring quickly and easily to her eyes and her blushes constantly prevent her speech. Her femininity is made explicit several times during the novel. In one place, Fanny is described as "so truly feminine"; in another, she is said to have "that sweetness which makes so essential a part of every woman's worth in the judgment of man" (p. 294). In Henry Crawford's view, her femininity appears so idealized that she has "some touches of the angel" in her (p. 344). She is truly a man's woman and the "judgment of man" is implied in Austen's evaluative remarks on her.

In "sweetness" and femininity Fanny surpasses other Austen heroines. She differs from them in other respects also. In no other Austen novel is there such a social distance between the hero and the heroine. Fanny is far below the Bennet and Dashwood sisters in social and economic status. This lowliness and poverty contribute to her femininity if this is associated with dependence and passivity. Fanny owes all earthly things to Edmund, as the book suggests she should, while poverty with its spiritual advantages adds to her effortless identification with virtue. At the end of the novel when the union with Edmund is fulfilled, it is stressed that his love is founded on "the most endearing claims of innocence and helplessness" (p. 470), while his esteem, like his father's, is caused by the goodness which results from "the advantages of early hardship" (p. 473).

Fanny's antithesis, Mary Crawford, is the woman we would expect as Fanny's complement and her friend. She appears to have the will-power, energy, and reasoning ability we have come to associate with one of the Austen heroines, and we might at first assume that by the end of the novel her energy would be well directed and her will chastened, at the same time as Fanny's passivity and sensitivity would be modified. But this is not the case. Fanny's femininity cannot be modified; it is presented as an absolute good, and it implies the repression of those qualities that are unfeminine but which in previous books have been considered proper in moderation in at least one of the female friends—qualities such as energy, active independence, wit, and humor, as necessary as sensitivity, delicacy, patience and moral niceness to the androgynous mind. So the potentially Woll-

stonecraftian Mary Crawford is condemned in terms of the Rousseauian femininity she in great part lacks and which she sought to modify in Fanny.

Mary's wooing of Fanny to friendship is consistent and intense. She constantly praises her to Edmund, his father, and to her own brother and sister. Frequently she invites Fanny to visit and on the rare occasion when Fanny does, finds her arrival "delightful." In social trials, she shields Fanny from the worst assaults, giving sympathy against the persecuting aunt and active help against the demanding cousins. So pressing is her suit in word and deed that at one point "a sort of intimacy" occurs between the two women, but the narrator—so notoriously partial to her heroine that she calls her "my Fanny"—is quick to assure us that it was "an intimacy resulting principally from Miss Crawford's desire of something new, and which had little reality in Fanny's feelings" (pp. 207-8). The reader could not doubt it, even though the narrator had once diverged from censure sufficiently to mention "the really good feelings by which Mary Crawford was almost purely governed" in her kindness to Fanny (p. 147).

From the beginning of their acquaintanceship Fanny rejects Mary Crawford as harshly as she later rejects Henry Crawford. She is always mindful of the other woman's faults, invariably thinks the worst of her, and goes beyond all others in naming her "ungrateful" and "cruel." She sees Mary Crawford as mercenary and debauched because lively and speculating, and she can give her little credit for the sincere affection the relatively humble and impoverished Edmund has inspired in her. In company Fanny refuses to laugh at Mary's wit or smile at her sallies, and she is mortified when forced in any way into her debt. She is aghast at any possibility of a bond between them and bitterly laments that "it was Miss Crawford to whom she was obliged, it was Miss Crawford whose kind exertions were to excite her gratitude" (p. 159). The fact that Miss Crawford can exert herself at all seems odious to Fanny; the fact that she can oblige is truly horrifying.

At the end of the novel when Fanny is triumphant, she celebrates her victory by revealing to Edmund a letter written only to herself, in which Mary Crawford wickedly speculates on her lover's inheriting title and fortune. Both the letter and its revelation strike oddly. Nothing in Mary Crawford's earlier speech and action has prepared us for a heartless young woman who wishes a man dead

that she may have his money, and none of her socially shrewd actions has suggested her capable of writing so cynically to the serious and staid Fanny. When we have seen her before, she has been carefully adapting her speech to her listener. In fact the contents of the letter and the unkind divulging of it appear collusion between the narrator and Fanny. Mary Crawford must be damned inside and outside the book.

Mary Crawford's sin as a woman is frequently declared: it is a lack of femininity, a lack as explicitly stated as Fanny's possession. She is described as "not truly feminine" in one place; in another, Austen states that she has "none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling; she saw nature, inanimate nature, with little observation," a telling mark of inadequate sensibility and so of inadequate femininity, which Fanny notices immediately (p. 81). When Edmund is presented as blind to Mary's real character, his blindness is expressed as an appreciation of her femininity; he thought Miss Crawford "perfectly feminine, except in the one instance we have been speaking of" (p. 64). The one instance is important, however; it is her criticism of her uncle, which has suggested a dislike of unworthy or imposed authority. This dislike is, to some extent, revealed in Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* in her attitude toward the "great lady," Mrs. Ferrars, but in her it was moderately and modestly expressed. When Edmund's eyes are opened to Mary's real character and when he comes to share Fanny's opinion, he understands Mary's lack of femininity: she has, he realizes, "no feminine . . . no modest loathings" for the sins of her brother (p. 455). To preserve femininity as an ideal, then, Mary must be ejected, condemned to spinsterhood and loneliness.

In *Mansfield Park*, passionate and sexual love is rejected through Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram in much the same way as it is rejected through Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*. In both books, its rejection is due partly to its selfish and anti-social nature; in both it is seen as perverting not fulfilling women. But in *Mansfield Park*, unlike in the earlier work, the friendship which could exist in place of anti-social, passionate love and help women to develop away from submission and self-abandonment is also avoided. Fanny Price, discarding sexual love in Henry Crawford, retreats to her room alone, rejecting in her passage the proffered friendship of his sister.

In Fanny's sanctioned relationship with Edmund, her cousin, the

male-female dichotomy, blurred where female friendship can be allowed as a partial alternative to marriage, is reemphasized. When Mary Crawford with her active independent qualities is thrown aside by both Fanny and Edmund, such blurring is denied. The androgynous potential she might have represented with Fanny becomes subversive and destructive of femininity. Fanny must find her complement in a man who socially and psychologically completes her. She must remain static within the sexual dichotomy, given good morals indeed but primarily marked by the "feminine" attributes of sensibility and passivity. In marriage she is in no danger of assuming the "masculine" qualities of energy and independence which Wollstonecraft had implored women to gain.

The plots of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*, suggest that Austen was using her double heroines with awareness of their implications. In the early novels, she has a positive attitude toward female friendship and the androgynous potential for women it suggests, although she never allows such friendship to be a substitute for marriage. Later, the ideal seems threatening, inimical to the traditional and hierarchical society which *Mansfield Park* epitomizes. Female friendship with its androgynous possibilities for each partner appears then for the older Austen as the antithesis of traditional marriage—which requires feminine passive qualities in the woman and masculine active qualities in the man, and which cannot tolerate any modification. Its static hierarchy requires domination in the man and prevents development in the woman toward the androgynous wholeness which would destroy the proper marital balance.

In rejecting Mary Crawford and female friendship and by applauding Fanny Price alone—a heroine who combines sensibility with moral fineness, but who refuses the other components of sense—Austen denies the possibility of androgyny and repudiates the principle of female reason, strength, dominance, and activity. She allows these qualities to exist only in men and to be available to women only through the action of fathers and husbands. In *Mansfield Park*, the reductive "feminine" image of Fanny Price waiting patiently for the horse Edmund owns and brings to her casts out the "masculine" image of Mary Crawford "active and fearless," riding like a man and making the horse her own.