

## Chapter X

### CONCLUSION

After a long neglect, the study of narrative technique in novels is increasingly being recognized by critics as a valuable way of gaining new insights to assist interpretation and criticism. This has resulted in widespread recognition that Jane Austen's use of language is of exceptional distinction and possesses a degree of subtlety with which had not always been credited. A thorough and detailed examination of her narrative has been carried out and led to the conclusion that, in her novels, she initiated a considerable number of narrative devices; events are told either by the impersonal narrator, or by one or more of her characters, or through the epistolary art, or through direct and reported conversation. As impersonal narrator, Jane Austen speaks very little in order to introduce themes or characters, to provide necessary information or to pass comment. Dialogue plays a very vital part in her narrative. Her ability to create dramatic and realistic conversations is highly praised by both earlier and later critics; and, indeed, the epithets "real" and "natural" are the most common epithets of admiration bestowed upon her works.

Only after careful rereading of Jane Austen's novels, does one fully appreciate her use of all kinds of narrative devices which, though they may be distinguishable, are not always separable. In one passage alone, all kinds of narrative devices may easily be found unobtrusively integrated; for example:

He [Mr. Knightley] had found her agitated and low. - Frank Churchill was a villain. - He heard her declare that she had never loved him. Frank Churchill's character was not desperate. - She was his own Emma, by hand and word, when they returned to the house; and if he could have thought of Frank Churchill then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow.

(Emma, chapter XLIX, page 340)

The first sentence is spoken by the impersonal narrator; whereas in the second the narration is shifted to express the private thought of Mr. Knightley so that we can follow the sequence that runs through his head. In the third sentence the narrative is in the form of reported speech, whereas in the fourth and fifth sentences the narrative quickly returns to the thought of Mr. Knightley. In the last sentence, the impersonal narrator steps in to make fun of the sudden change of Mr. Knightley's attitude, observing that "if he could have thought of Frank Churchill then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow".

It is her ability to manage various kinds of narrative devices in one short passage - using a style in which narrative, comment, dialogue, and interior monologue (or reported speech) very frequently and unobtrusively merge into one another - that marks Jane Austen as "a novelist of unusual distinction", "unique among the novelists of her sex".<sup>1</sup>

Attention has also been paid to her staple items of vocabulary,

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Wright, Jane Austen's Novels (Middlesex, 1962), p. 7.

to the characteristic patterns of her syntax and, above all, to her outstanding ability to employ irony. This is important; because, if one lacks sensitivity to the tone which she imparts to each novel, by her particular choice of vocabulary and phrasing, he is likely to miss much of the subtlety of her novels.

From a study of her syntax, one learns to appreciate her command of a wide variety of sentence patterns; similarly, vocabulary analysis gives us a clear insight into the extraordinary care she exercises in her choice of language, even in its smallest details, so as to make it conform with the aesthetic pattern of the whole. Moreover, neutrality is incompatible with Jane Austen's manner of presenting her narrative. Her tone varies according to her characters' habitual modes of expression, their situations, and the episodes in which they are involved. Ironic tone is the most vital ingredient of her art of narration. The best way to describe Jane Austen's narration briefly but completely is to quote her own comments on Robert Martin's letter:

The language though plain, was strong and unaffected, and the sentiments it conveyed very much to the credit of the writer. It was short, but expressed good sense, warm attachment, liberality, propriety, even delicacy of feeling.

One could hardly have a better description of Jane Austen's inimitable language and style.

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