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The 1979
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JANE AUSTEN'S NOVEL OF MANNERS AND THE LIBERAL ARTS IN 1979--

WHAT COMMON GROUND?

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April 19, 1979

> The great moral labor of any age is probably not in
> the conflict of opposing principles, but in the ten-
> sion between a living community and those principles
> that are the distillation of its experience.
> —Wendell Berry,
> A Continous Harmony

Last quarter, tongue poised in my cheek, I told my students as we read Jane Austen that their entire educational experience had led them to that moment, and that they, in fact, would need all the resources they had gained in that experience to comprehend and appreciate what these novels were about. Some of you may see in the title of this lecture a similar facetiousness, if you're charitable enough not to see it as pretentious. For Jane Austen, born in 1775, wrote only six short novels and this "mere slip of a girl," as one chauvinistic deprecator once called her, would herself never have expected such a claim to be made on her behalf.

In fact, some of you may not have read any of Austen's novels, published over the span of six years from 1811 to 1817. Others of you have probably not read them since high school or college, and if you were forced to read them, you may share the opinion of a later writer whose own works are often forced on unwitting school children, though with generally happier impressions. Mark Twain, says Ian Watt, "echoed the distaste of generations of schoolboys who have been forcibly exposed to Pride and Prejudice in the lower grades: 'Jane Austen's books ... are absent from this ship's library. Just that one omission alone would make a fairly good library out of a library that hadn't a book in it.'"[1] Twain had more than his schoolboy memories as reason for disliking Jane Austen, reason we will examine later. But as we begin the exploration of common ground between Jane Austen's world and ours, I quote another critic whose description of Jane Austen's ideal reader sums up, without tongue in cheek, a justification for our consideration of her works here: "a hardy little band ... whose heads are screwed on right and whose hearts are in the right place ...."[2]

In this exploration of common ground between Austen and issues not apparently connected, I am not exactly a pioneer. All authors are subject to interpretation which fits the predilections of the critic; in the case of Jane Austen, someone observed that "the implications drawn from her novels range from the comfortably conservative to the protorevolutionary ...."[3] The implications I hope to draw in this lecture are that the vision of the moral life which is projected in her novels has relevance to the vision of the moral life which should be projected in our Christian liberal arts curriculum. It is not a question of transferring the values wholesale from her novels to our life, for there are significant differences between that world and ours, differences which should not be minimized. But in the process of examining her values and the differences between the world of her novels and our era, I hope to illuminate an area of concern which I believe needs particular attention in the liberal arts curriculum, namely the relation between, and integration of, private and public morality.

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An early nineteenth-century English novel of manners seems as unlikely a source of congeniality with latter twentieth-century American life as any. The word manners itself puts us off, likely as we are to understand the term to denote priggish concern with external behavior. We're likely to remember the phrase as spoken by a peevish elderly aunt reminding us that good manners require keeping our elbows off the table. Like Huck Finn, we may too often find manners to mean required behavior which is at best uncomfortable to the human body and at worst oppressive to the human spirit. It may be exaggerating only slightly to say that the term manners as commonly used today describes primarily an externally-imposed code of behavior which, for the Huck Finns among us, is also an arbitrary code tied to an elite social group's mores. Adopting the manners of this group is really "putting on airs," pretending to be something which one is not. Everything that is spontaneous or exuberant about human life seems to be squelched in this definition of the term manners.

Given this definition it is not surprising that Mark Twain finds Jane Austen's novel of manners offensive. His own novels exposed the conformity of fake gentility; his quintessential hero's greatest joy is to escape the pretensions of "sivilization." The antithesis is well illustrated in another of his statements about Austen's novels: "Whenever I take up Pride and Prejudice or Sense and Sensibility, I feel like a barkeeper entering the Kingdom of Heaven."[4]

Since I know most of this audience would be embarrassed to find themselves on the side of the barkeeper, let us move on to recover a more sympathetic definition of the novel of manners. The best definition as it applies to the novel is one advanced by Lionel Trilling (If frequency of quotation is any verification of its accuracy, then it is undoubtedly the most accurate.):

> What I understand by manners, then, is a culture's hum and buzz
> of implication. I mean the whole evanescent context in which its
> explicit statements are made. It is that part of a culture which
> is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions
> of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the
> arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis,
> or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special fre-
> quency or a special meaning. They are the things that for good or
> bad draw the people of a culture together and that separates them
> from the people of another culture. They make the part of a culture
> which is not art, or religion, or morals, or politics, and yet it
> relates to all these highly formulated departments of culture. It
> is modified by them; it modifies them; it is generated by them; it
> generates them.[5]

As this quotation implies, the aspect of human life which the novel of manners transforms into art is human social relationships, or to use one of the definitions from the Oxford English Dictionary, the modes of life, customary rules of behavior, conditions of society peculiar to one group of people. Usually the novelist must confine himself or herself to a rather small stratum of society to do adequate justice to all those aspects of life which are observable in human social relationships. As Trilling says, "in any complex culture there is not a single system of manners but a conflicting variety of manners ...."[6]

This overarching definition of the term manners has subtler nuances as it is used in the novels themselves. When Jane Austen uses the phrase, "easy and open manners" to describe a character's public behavior, she is talking about visible aspects of personal relationship. But in her view of character, the visible also can reveal the invisible, the motives which animate individual behavior. Manners "imply feelings and beliefs, moral attitudes which stand as their ultimate meaning and warrant,"[7] and the "fools and bores" which appear in Austen's novels have bad manners because they share a "deficiency of awareness, indifference to others' feelings or privacy, obtuseness about their own motives."[8] Their lack of good manners means they lack "the proper deference and concern for others and oneself."[9] As these definitions show, good and bad manners have moral implications.

One of the listings in the OED makes the implication explicit: "a person's behavior or conduct, in reference to its moral aspect; moral character, morals." Even though the dictionary's last-cited quotation for this meaning is 1794, it is not obsolete coinage in Austen's novels, as a conversation from her novel Mansfield Park shows. The context is a young clergyman's explanation to a smart young woman of fashion that his profession is not to be undervalued. "I cannot call that situation nothing which has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally, which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence."[10] Here manners are explicitly related to their source--religion and morals. As the conversation progresses, the fine distinction between various shades of the term is made even clearer for the deliberately obtuse young woman: "Miss Crawford must not misunderstand me, or suppose I mean to call clergyman the arbiters of good breeding, the regulators of refinement and courtesy, the masters of the ceremonies of life. The manners I speak of might rather be called conduct, perhaps, the result of good principles; the effect, in short, of those doctrines which it is (the clergyman's) duty to teach and recommend." Good breeding, refinement, courtesy, the ceremonies of life--all these terms convey the outward manifestations of the well-mannered but conduct implies both outward and inward. David Lodge has noted that there are two constellations of words in Mansfield Park which imply this duality; the one group establishes "social or secular value," words like appropriate, correct, discretion, propriety, harmony, respectable, and the other group establishes "moral or spiritual order" in words like conscience, duty, good, principle, right, wrong. He points out that Austen uses these words to create "a world in which the social values ... are highly prized ... but only when they are informed by some moral order of value which transcends the social."[11]

Another character in Emma makes a similar distinction between a trivial and profound understanding of the term good manners, in this criticism: ".....your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very 'amiable,' have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy toward the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him."[12] As the action of the novel progresses, this judgment is shown to be correct, but it is perceptible in very subtle ways; one of the things which the heroine must learn is to discern such subtleties and on the basis of such discernment to regulate her own conduct. It is useful to quote Trilling again in this regard: "The great novelists know that manners indicate the largest intentions of men's souls as well as the smallest and they are perpetually concerned to catch the meaning of every dim implicit hint."[13]

In the novel to which I have just referred, the turning point revolves around a breach of good manners which, by our standards, may seem trivial. Emma Woodhouse, the heroine, makes a joke about another character's admittedly tiresome trait of talking far too much. Her friend, Mr. Knightley, cannot let it pass. Although it is a lengthy passage, the full conversation deserves quotation:

> 'Emma, I must once more speak to you as I have been used to do: a privilege rather endured than allowed, perhaps, but I must still use it. I cannot see you acting wrong, without a remonstrance. How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation? --Emma, I had not thought it possible.'

> Emma recollected, blushed, was sorry, but tried to laugh it off. 'Nay, how could I help saying what I did? --Nobody could have helped it. It was not so very bad. I dare say she did not understand me.'

> 'I assure you she did. She felt your full meaning. She has talked of it since. I wish you could have heard how she talked of it--with what candour and generosity. I wish you could have heard her honouring your forbearance in being able to pay her such attentions, as she was for ever receiving from yourself and your father, when her society must be so irksome.'

> 'Oh!' cried Emma, 'I know there is not a better creature in the world: but you must allow, that what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended in her.'

> 'They are blended,' said he, 'I acknowledge; and, were she prosperous, I could allow much for the occasional prevalence of the ridiculous over the good. Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its chance, I would not quarrel with you for any liberties of manner. Were she your equal in situation--but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done indeed. --You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honour, to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her--and before her niece, too--and before others, many of whom (certainly some,) would be entirely guided by your treatment of her. --This is not pleasant to you, Emma--and it is very far from pleasant to me; but I must, I will, --I will tell you truths while I can.....(III, VII).'

The result of this interaction (a result which proves that Emma deserves to be the heroine) is serious self-examination:

> Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life. She was most forcibly struck. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates....'

Time did not compose her. As she reflected more, she seemed
but to feel it more. She never had been so depressed.......
Emma felt the tears running down her cheeks almost all the
way home, without being at any trouble to check them, extra-
ordinary as they were (III, VII).'

Out of context, the agitation, mortification, and grief which this
rich, young, beautiful heroine feels over a faux pas may seem inflated.
But Jane Austen is the last author to deserve the charge of melodrama,
for in this situation Emma for the first time truly sees herself as one
whose actions have moral implications and it is this vision of self which
leads to important changes in her perceptions and in her behavior. It is
not that she has acted immorally in all instances; her devotion to a trying
father shows that she can act rightly when she is aware that right action
is a clear social expectation. But lack of awareness, even in seemingly
trivial situations, leads to bad manners, to disregard and hurt of others,
in short, to bad morality.

What this incident, and many others in all of the novels, illustrates
is that any human interaction can theoretically be amplified to encompass
the most profound and far-reaching moral dimensions. Jane Austen is far
too aware of the human incapacity to bear such a burden of awareness to
press for the amplification of every interaction. But it is the possibility
of such amplification which allows us to see that in the world of her novels
the drawing room is a microcosm of the entire world of moral action. Because
her novels are comedies rather than tragedies, the power of small human actions
are not allowed to reach their potential for destruction, but as in all classic
comedy, before the comic resolution occurs, the potential lies just beneath
the surface.

Perhaps Jane Austen is uncongenial--or unconvincing--as a moralist to
certain twentieth-century readers, not because she is a comedian, but because
her novels speak with such moral certainty on the basis of such apparently
trivial grounds. Readers of twentieth-century novels look for the moral
ambiguity which we all experience as moral actors. For example, a contemp-
orary novel which presented the interaction of Emma and her father would
concentrate on the difficulties she experienced, or would explore the ways
in which she inflicts concealed anger at his burdensomeness on her or on
others. Although I think we must give Jane Austen credit for the ability
to perceive the moral ambiguities in human relationships, we must also
recognize that it is not the understanding she chooses to portray most
forthrightly. All of her characters' basic goodness or badness, stupidity
or wisdom, is inherent in them from the beginning of their appearance in
the novels, but these basic characteristics are only revealed as they inter-
act with other human beings. We do not know whether characters are good or
bad until we have seen them in a range of interactions, from tête à têtes
to large gatherings; their character is revealed not in their introspection
but in their social dealings. In fact, we are generally admitted to a char-
acter's (usually the heroine's) introspection only after some public event
has required the kind of self-scrutiny Emma has undergone. All this is to
say that it is in their manners that human beings' morality is ultimately
revealed.

There is ambiguity in the novels, however, not in moral action but in
human perception of that action, for good manners can also cover up bad morals.

Emma misjudges the characters of others on the basis of their ostensibly good or bad manners; only when she becomes aware of how her own manners and conduct affect others is she able to see rightly the good and bad in others. This situation is repeated in other Austen novels--the character sees herself (or sometimes himself, e.g., Wentworth in Persuasion), sees her own mistaken conduct or judgment, and on the basis of that vision, sees others and the world aright.

This very brief summary of the relationship between manners and morals in the works of Jane Austen is common knowledge to her close readers and critics. And the question--what significance can the personal moral histories of young women in nineteenth-century English villages have for us?--is also a common one. If you noted the dates of publication of Austen's novels you may have also noted that they coincided with cataclysmic historical changes: the ascendance of romanticism, the Napoleonic wars, the industrial revolution. Yet none of these events appears directly in the novels, even though careful readings shows that the books do reflect and take account of a changing social background. If Austen had included explicit references to the political, economic, and intellectual revolutions which were raging around her, then her novels' significance would be apparent to us, for we have heard over and over how these events affected our present situation. But to see those country drawing rooms as a microcosm of her world, let alone ours, seems to require super-normal vision.

Yes, vision outside the normal range of our times. For we have come to accept as normal, as perhaps Austen's contemporaries were beginning to accept, a distinction between the morality which guides our private human relationships and the morality which governs relationships in the public sphere. I understand the public sphere to denote the place where human beings participate in an economic, political, intellectual and religious human order; in this sphere one's action directly affects more than the individual actor or one's family. Directed toward the maintenance of the communal structures of human order, action in the public sphere is visible to all. I understand the private sphere to be the place where human beings participate in an emotional and physical order for the satisfaction of basic human needs; in this sphere action is inter-and intra-personal and is directed toward the maintenance of the household and its residents. Action in the private sphere is largely invisible to all but those who legitimately belong to the small circle of family or friends who belong to the household. (In Jane Austen's vocabulary, the term friends is often a substitute for extended family.)

The assumption about the relationship between private and public moral decisions which Austen's novels seem to make is that there is no qualitative difference in motive or in the criteria by which moral actions are judged. What is relevant for Emma in her household and friends in the small village of Highbury is relevant for Mr. Knightley, the village magistrate and wealthy landowner, or for Darcy, an even wealthier aristocratic landowner, or for Mr. Martin, the gentleman farmer, or for Mr. Gardiner, the London businessman, or for Mr. John Knightley, the London solicitor. Because the major actions of all her novels revolve around the moral discoveries of young women, we may be inclined to read them merely as extremely skillful masterpieces whose artistry transformed then-current conventions of popular romantic fiction. Yet I would argue that her choice of young women as heroines reveals more than transmuted convention, reveals even more than her own perception that she should write about what she knew first hand. It reveals that in even those whose lives seem most remote from the action of the public sphere, there can be moral significance--private and public.

In the drawing room the public and private spheres are not separate. Rather the one is collapsed into the other. The drawing room is a microcosm of the country's life and it is a place where the individual may "be" himself or herself. The "religion and morals," to use words of Austen quoted earlier, which serve as the source of good manners in the drawing room are the same religion and morals which undergird the national life and animate personal decisions.

The drawing room is an appropriate spatial symbol of this disinclination to separate the public and private since it is neither wholly public nor wholly private. (This is another term which can't be accurately translated into its closest contemporary American equivalent, living room. The OED lists the meaning relevant to these novels as this: "shortened from withdrawing room.....originally a room to withdraw to, a private chamber attached to a more public room.....now, a room reserved for the reception of company.") The drawing room is a place where the demands of public and private are acknowledged and, perhaps, mediated. It is in the drawing room that the public is invited to co-exist with the private, both in terms of the people who meet there and in terms of the conversation they share. It is there that the exercise of good manners is called for, and perhaps where they may be best cultivated, away from the exigencies of either exclusively public action (a decision on a battlefield or on a judge's bench, for example) or exclusively private action (an examination of one's feelings or a declaration of love or feeding the baby). I can think of no better phrase to describe the significance of the activity which goes on in the drawing room than one Austen herself uses in Persuasion--"little social commonwealths."[14]

Both private and public "business" of such little social commonwealths was carried on in drawing rooms (and sometimes perhaps even the business of the larger commonwealth in the "real" drawing rooms of the country). You will remember that the mores of the time did not permit young men and women to meet alone, so all courtships were carried on in public places, under the scrutiny, as it were, of the entire commonwealth. Thus, an individual's manners in the company of others were the only revelation of an individual's character before a private commitment to marriage was made between two people. And even after the engagement had taken place, except for the possibility of short walks in the outdoors or on the city street, private communication had to take place wherever time and space could be found within a more public place, say a ballroom or drawing room. "Drawing rooms are arranged for social distances, but, if properly ordered, permit but do not force personal ones."[15] The limits of such communication required the expression of individual sensibilities in public and conventional ways. Contrary to our twentieth-century expectations, such limitations on communication and behavior did not necessarily result in the absence of individuality, for there are many kinds of "personalities" portrayed as admirable in Austen's novels. The limitation was that such individual expression of personality could not depart so far from convention that the manners or public social behavior concealed rather than revealed a person's true character (Wickham and Darcy in Pride and Prejudice or Mr. Elliot in Persuasion); characters who attempt to abolish these limitations are faulted because they are "themselves" at the expense of others (Marianne Dashwood).[16]

It is not that individuality and privacy are not valued, as some moderns might assume. The point is that their full expression is not called for in social settings and may, in fact, be harmful.[17] It is the proper balance of private and public which allows each to co-exist with order and elegance; neither is allowed to take precedence or to crowd out the other. This balance

is possible because both find their axis in the same moral and religious base.

If the drawing room represents the place where this balance can best be seen, then marriage represents the human institution which best incorporates public and private concerns. Jane Austen is writing in a fictional tradition which had its birth in social changes that acknowledged the importance of personal choice in one's marriage partner. In fact, one important defense of the significance of Austen's fiction rests on the case that the choice of a marriage partner--or a choice not to marry--is one of the most crucial decisions an individual makes in a lifetime. So, this argument goes, novels whose action revolves around that choice deal with universal human concerns. Certainly this is true but Austen's novels recognize and reveal the importance of marriage as a public act as well. Who one marries affects the family and the neighborhood. And in a time when rigid class structures are being softened, who one marries also affects the nation. The public significance of marriage is illuminated in a situation involving a secret engagement in Emma. It is wrong for a couple to conceal their commitment to marry each other, not because they are wrong to have chosen each other, but because once the choice has been made, they have not consulted the opinion of those most directly concerned--their immediate families. In addition, their concealment may lead to misinterpretation of their actions harmful to themselves and others. The public "right to know" is based on the understanding that a marriage has public and social consequences; hence, the requirement that any marriage be announced from the parish pulpit three weeks before it takes place--the publishing of the banns. "Marriage represents for [Austen].....not merely the act of choice within society but, more importantly, the union of social with natural inclinations."[18]

The truth, then and now, is that each marriage has a private and a public history; each marriage has a private and a public face. The best marriages are those in which the public and private dimensions of that face merely represent different profiles, not different masks. By Jane Austen's time, it was generally recognized that a good marriage required a private dimension, but most of her readers would not have had to be reminded that its public or social dimension carried equal weight.

Thus, marriage represents an analogy of the human concerns which must be balanced and mediated in any arena which touches both the private and public sphere of human life and in the drawing room those aspects of the marriage which touch both spheres are apparent. On the one hand, the most private interactions do not occur there; the marriage is not consummated in the drawing room. On the other hand, the license or marriage settlements and the religious ceremony which signify the public aspect are recorded and kept in public buildings. But the drawing room where the new couple receives the company of others exists as a place because of their private attachment and for the incorporation of that private attachment into the public realm. The little social commonwealths whose life goes on in the drawing room, then, is a microcosm of the larger, "real" commonwealth.

When we use the figure of a microcosm, we must assume the existence of a coherent world view, a unified cosmos. It is the particular kind of coherence on which Jane Austen builds her microcosm that makes her seem alien to many contemporary readers or which, at best, requires patient translation to contemporary students (although to us as Christians it should not seem all that alien or untranslatable). For the drawing room to function as

microcosm, of paramount importance is the belief that human language has meaning, that human experience is communicable and apprehensible through the words of human discourse. Underlying this assumption, of course, is the belief that life too has meaning. This is said so beautifully by one of Jane Austen's recent critics that I will allow Stuart Tave to speak in his own words:

> There is a definable reality, not to be made or unmade, to which Jane Austen's men and women must bring themselves; and it is in proportion to their success that they make or unmake their own lives.[19]

> As time and space are not subject to individual desires but are determinate realities, measurable by public standards, words are the defined means by which men and women speak and hear not a private or imagined meaning but the reality common to society. Nor are words, any more than space and time, the impositions of gross necessity upon the satisfactory expression of life; they are, rather, life's necessary fulfilling form (21).

> That tight and demarcated little world, which may seem to us so restricted in its scope and in its assumptions about reality, becomes enormously exhilarating and liberating; it offers to those who are capable of exerting themselves to discover its meaning the control of the essential qualities of their lives; it challenges our own narrowness, our assumption of powerlessness or rebellion. .....She knows, and she shows us in her novels, messy lives, and most people are leading them, even when the surface of life seems proper; but custom is not the first fact of life. Life is not a disorder to be ordered, a given mess on which those of tidy compulsions impose a tidiness. It is not a meaningless heap from which meaning is extracted by reduction and exclusion. Meaning is the first fact. It is obscured by inexperience, by miseducation, by deception, above all by internal blindness, but it is there and it is clear to the opened eye (33-34, italics mine).

Most of us know rather well the larger lineaments of the transcendent moral and religious order which informs Austen's world view. It is Renaissance Christian humanism, tempered by an Enlightenment emphasis on reason. It assumes a deity who is in control of the universe and human beings who, by God's leave, have the capacity to inhabit that universe with a degree of order and human happiness if they will exercise the proper responsibility. It is possible both to know what is right and to act upon that knowledge. In fact, it is assumed, everyone knows what is right and on this shared knowledge rests a coherent social order. Mr. Knightley, in Emma, says this clearly: "'There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chuses, and that is, his duty; not by manoeuvring and finessing, but by vigour and resolution'" (I,XVIII). Brushing aside the excuses Emma attempts to make that the young man in question might be hindered by circumstances from carrying out his promise to visit his father, he replies: "' ... they (who might hinder him) know, as well as he does, as well as all the world must know, that he ought to pay this visit to his father.... Respect for right conduct is felt by everybody'" (I, XVIII).

Still arguing for the young man, Emma replies that Mr. Knightley's superior social position and greater maturity prevent him from understanding the difficulties which lesser mortals might encounter in carrying out their duty: "'He may have as strong a sense of what would be right, as you can have, without being so equal under particular circumstances to act up to it'" (I, XVIII). Mr. Knightley's response is short and telling: "'Then, it would not be so strong a sense. If it failed to produce exertion, it could not be an equal conviction'" (I, XVIII).

In the world of these novels, the socio-political structure which best embodies the transcendent universe is also traditionally Christian---a hierarchical human society tempered by the seventeenth-century English revolution. People know what right conduct--their responsibility--is because they know their place and are, in general, content with it. And the changes which are taking place in the class structure, the admission of men in trade into genteel circles (the Gardiners in Pride and Prejudice, the Coles in Emma) or the increasing importance of the naval profession (in Persuasion) are salutary changes because these new people revitalize the old order at the same time that they accept its basic presuppositions.

Admittedly, this summary is a broad caricature of the underlying political, economic and social structure of the novels based only on infer-ence, and Lionel Trilling reminds us that we should not be so naive as to mistake "Jane Austen's England" for the "real England, except as it gave her the license to imagine the England which we call hers. This England, especially as it is represented in Emma is an idyll."[20] Many other readers see in her last novel, Persuasion, evidence that even the imaginary England of the idyll was disintegrating. The couple who are united in marriage at the end of Persuasion do not make their home in a long-established ancestral seat. In fact, we do not know where they live. We only know that the great-est threat to their happiness is another war which he, as naval officer, might be called to participate in.[21]

The existence of this inferred political and economic structure is an important issue in our consideration, however, because it raises the question whether the moral world Jane Austen presents can exist in any other human society than the one embodied in these novels. Is the vision that the public and the private do not exist as separate moral entities only clear in more "primitive" societies or in an agrarian economy with a tightly-organized social structure where each individual's role is fixed? And an even more devastating question comes to mind: what of those whose existence the novels never even acknowledge? Servants exist only as functionaries, not as individual human beings. Shopkeepers, agricultural laborers, factory workers, or even those who build and run the factories--none of these, in fact the majority of the people who make up the denizens of the real world, appears in Austen's created world. (Being charitable to the rural poor is one way that we see Emma and Anne Elliot doing their duty, but these poor really do function as "objects" of charity, not as people.) To raise these questions as a means of faulting Jane Austen's art (rather than as a means of understanding its moral relevance to us) would be to draw some questionable conclusions about the relationship between literature and life. The world of the novels is a created world which does not need to mirror the real world in order to be a moral universe. And after all, a drawing room is not large enough to hold everybody.

The drawing room only functions as a moral arena for those who are truly at home there, which leads to the reiteration of the point I have been trying to make. Where one is truly at home is where one best exercises, tests, and practices one's moral muscles so that they are flexible and responsive in all other situations. There is no other place besides the drawing room where it is more or less appropriate to act morally. Both the public and the private sphere are approached from the drawing room so that they cannot be conveniently separated. And if one is truly at home in the drawing room--at ease because he or she is fully aware of the pitfalls and possibilities it offers for the exercise of human moral potential--one will also be at home in the public and the private realms.

In ignoring the existence of people who are not at home in the drawing room, these novels do not allow us to draw the inference that the lower classes might have their own comparable spaces. It is tautological but true that to ignore the existence of others is to assume those others do not exist (which is not to accuse the historical Jane Austen of such an attitude in her actual life). This could be said another way: those who we do not see acting in the public sphere do not touch our lives, and since they have no public lives we of course make no conjecture about their private lives.

The enormous economic, political, social, and ideological changes of the nineteenth-century were partly caused by the refusal of the ostensibly powerless to be ignored, and if there is anything the novels of the later nineteenth-century teach us it is that such people do have private, individual lives; the struggle of protagonist is to make known to himself or herself an individual life defined in opposition to the social environment. Only after one has found the self in private can one find meaning in becoming part of a social group. In these novels, and in most novels written since, it is the self, not meaning, which is "the first fact." Since meaning is not inherent in existence, it must be created, and that creation begins with the only apparent first fact--"I." Thus the settings one remembers from Victorian novels are not drawing rooms but wind-swept moors or unpeopled country roads, or bustling, anonymous city streets, or private parlors or studies--all places where the "I" can know itself as separate. In these novels drawing rooms are more likely to be places of pain or humiliation, places of dis-ease; if any one would be at home there, he or she is soulless. The places where human beings do gather happily together is more likely to be of the sort to which no one but the family or closest friends would come--the kitchen or the family breakfast room or parlor, in other words, the place where the public world cannot intrude.[22]

Mark Kinkead-Weekes makes the difference between Austen and later novelists explicit in his observation that

. . .the final antithesis between her art and that of Bronte or Lawrence lies not only in her temperament but in her perception of life as primarily social, even when her vision of a whole society bound together by shared value begins to fade.... The passionate individualism of Bronte and Lawrence, their implicit belief that the social is ultimately less real than the private, would have been inconceivable to Jane Austen and foreign to all her experience.[23]

I am going to try to trace this change of attitude with a simplistic scenario that does not really get at the complexity of changes from Jane Austen's world to ours but which I hope will help characterize the difference in attitude toward the public sphere. It goes something like this: when people, individuals, are ignored, oppressed, powerless, they feel their existence is denied by those who operate in the public sphere, i.e., those whose action in the public sphere affects their lives even though their existence is ignored. In revolt against this invisibility and against others' control of their lives, in their determination to assert the fact of their existence by asserting that fact of which they are most certain-- that they do exist, the powerless must deny the public sphere the right to define their private existence. In this denial, however, they must also deny the importance of the public, must refuse to see action in the public sphere as meaningful action. But to deny the public sphere as a meaningful place of action also removes it from moral constraints. In fact, the public sphere still does exist, despite this denial, and still does influence private lives, but the refusal to acknowledge the possibility of meaningful participation in the public sphere as a moral actor makes it an entity divorced from private moral concerns and also no longer subject to the same moral constraints. Eventually, this becomes true both for those who act and those who are acted upon. The separation of the two spheres has become complete.

The most obvious fictional example I can think of in which this separation occurs appears in Dicken's Great Expectations in the characters of Wemmick and Jaggers; Wemmick's little cottage where he lovingly cares for an aged parent is not known to exist by either his employer or any of the other people with whom he interacts in Jagger's office. The interactions in his official role are strictly determined by the requirements of the legal system, and any attempt to establish a relationship upon personal grounds is summarily squelched. Wemmick's features visibly soften as he leaves his work in Little Britain farther and farther behind and as he gets closer to his suburban home. With its tiny moat and drawbridge, it is a literal sign of the symbolic castle that in English common law every Englishman's house is, except that now it is not a defense against an outside enemy. Like Pogo, the enemy is "us," that self which operates in and is consequently part of the public sphere.

In Wemmick's case, the schizophrenia is conscious. The one person who knows Wemmick in both spheres, Pip, is counseled by Wemmick either in terms of "official sentiments" or "Walworth sentiments"; the counsel is different, determined by opposing moralities. The road between the two places is the only space where the existence of both is acknowledged. In the instance in the book when Jaggers learns of Wemmick's home and parent in Walworth, both he and Wemmick are uncomfortable until they ease this discomfort by over-hardening into their public personas. There is no place where Wemmick and Jaggers can be together as both private and public actors. And one way of understanding the lesson which Pip has learned at the close of the book is to realize that his aspirations to be a gentleman, a position which had in the past been defined as holding both public and private expectations of conduct and responsibility, are misguided. The most meaningful direction his life can take is pointed toward the private sphere; the greatest expectations one should entertain are realized in the love and fellowship of family and friends. The public role of gentleman, one who has public recognition and respect presumably because as a gentleman he is required to act on behalf of the public, is hollow, at least for Pip, because his personal and private

claims to that role have their basis in criminal action. Much of the novel leads us to see Pip's situation as a symbol of the national malaise and to assume that all of public life is illegitimately based. In fact, in all of Dicken's novels, those figures who style themselves as public actors are essentially hypocrites or hollow men whose personal and private lives have no substance.[24]

I have been using the terms public and private in ways which sometimes seem to be interchangeable with the dichotomies social vs. personal or society vs. individual. The spatial analogy of two spheres--public and private--has been used as a means of trying to understand them as "places" for moral action, and to understand the importance of a particular place in the novel of manners-- the drawing room--as an arena of both public and private moral relationships. Understood in that sense, the terms social and society and personal and in-dividual are related to the public and the private but not interchangeable. The posing of a conflict between the self (or the individual) and society which is characteristic of nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction may in fact be a result of the loss of a legitimate discrimination between public and private moral action. Individual or private action is understood to be the only kind of moral action possible, whereas action in social or public relationships is assumed to be not chosen but a response to pressures to conform or pressures to participate in an artificial rather than a natural (divinely created) order.[25]

The notion of society as merely a game, or to put it more negatively as Richard Poirer does, of "society in any institutionalized form [as] merely the projection of the fantasies, generally derived from literature, both of children and adults" is what prevents Mark Twain and other American writers from appreciating, much less writing, novels of manners.[26] "Despite the many differences among them, [Twain and other significant American writers of the nineteenth-century] tend to see a necessary division between a part of us that we express by accommodations to social systems, and another, more admirable, even   impractical part, that exists in the imagination only, or in a vocabulary of abstractions, or in relationships to landscapes" (284). Twain's revulsion against Jane Austen is

a blindness to society as she imagines it.... They are appar-ently unable to see, so alien to them is her positive vision of social experience, that she is fully aware of the dangers in society which for them are the dangers of it. The capacity to imagine society as including the threat of conformity and arti-ficiality and as offering, nevertheless, beneficial opportunities for self-discovery is never evident

in their own visions (268). Yet, as Poirer says, Emma's growth in awareness is necessary "to prevent society from becoming what it is condemned for being in Huckleberry Finn" (288).

The only place where Huck Finn can avoid the pressures of conformity and artificiality which to him represents society is his final destination-- the Territories. For Huck and for many Americans, the unsettled frontier or the wilderness provides the only place where they can be themselves, both because it is natural as opposed to artificial and because there are no other human beings in a visible social structure to which one must conform. In the wide open spaces, there is no definable space and the sod house or log cabin is too small for anything but shelter.[27]

In the American imagination, the Territories and the frontier functioned as a mythological as well as a literal place. But nineteenth-century America also saw the emergence of a new kind of place which had not existed in the Old World—the large hotel serving as an urban social center, labeled by a contemporary newspaper "Palaces of the Public." Daniel Boorstin quotes an English visitor's comparison with his own country: "With us hotels are regarded as purely private property, and it is seldom that, in their appearance, they stand out from the mass of private houses around them. In America they are looked upon much more in the light of public concerns, and generally assume in their exterior the character of public buildings."[28] Boorstin notes that cities were judged not by their churches or government buildings but by their hotels. "Hotels were usually the centers of lavish private entertainment (which, being held there, acquired a public significance) and of the most important public celebrations. The hotel lobby, like the outer rooms of a royal palace, became a loitering place, a headquarters of gossip, a vantage point for a glimpse of the great, the rich, and the powerful" (135). The hotel and large boarding house even became home for many middle-class families:

> The European middle classes counted the right to be by oneself or alone with one's family or chosen friends among the amenities, a sign of civilized respectability. But a western traveler who found himself sharing his dinner table and called upon to chat familiarly with a miscellaneous company of common soldiers, farmers, laborers, teamsters, lawyers, doctors, ministers, bankers, judges, or generals, soon discovered that Americans considered the desire for privacy a vice akin to pride (146).

In short, according to Boorstin, "American hotels were a microcosm of American life" (147).

Comparing this American microcosm with the English drawing room of Jane Austen's novels illuminates the difference between the two views of human community and of the relationship between public and private. Unlike the drawing room which allows for a recognition of both spheres, the hotel lobby abolishes the distinction. A wedding ceremony held in a hotel gains public significance, not because the marriage is acknowledged to affect everyone else in the community or is assumed to have some transcendent sanction, but because "the public" may have a glimpse of a private activity. The effect of abolishing the distinction between the spheres as a hotel lobby does is to both deny the public its special significance and to heighten the significance of the private. The artificiality and conformity which are assumed to be the necessary concomitant of human social relationships become glaringly apparent in the neither public nor private space of the hotel lobby. "Lighting out for the Territories" comes to seem an admirable impulse to retain individual integrity and privacy.

I am not able here to adequately delineate all the evidences of our present national life that indicate a retreat from significant action in the public sphere and the accompanying assumption that action in the public sphere at best requires an inevitable moral compromise and at worst is not to be judged by the same moral standards which guide one in private human relationships. But I will briefly sketch some, beginning with an example

which some of you may have heard me use in another context. One of the chief figures in the Watergate scandal betrayed the assumption of different standards for public and private moral action in his response to the question about what his family thought of the language they heard him use on the tapes. They were shocked, was the gist of his answer, because he certainly doesn't talk at home the way he talks at work. I hope you realize I'm not setting up the use of profanity as one of the most sensitive indicators of private or public morality, but I do think the assumption applies to much more crucial moral indicators. Why do most of us automatically assume that anyone in a significant position in politics or in business has been necessarily morally compromised in order to reach that position? We might reply that we see evidences of that compromise all the time so that our cynicism is justified. But the point is that we will still grant the possibility that such morally-compromised people have impeccable private lives. In fact, the existence of a happy, loving family is often trotted out as a defense of someone who has breached the public trust.

A different kind of example: some defenders of the morality of the business world might say that there are just as many "bad eggs" in other baskets, whether politics, academia, or medicine. That statement is certainly true, nor do I want to single out the business world as the only or the worst example of different standards for public and private action; what this defense assumes, however, is that the only kind of action which requires defense on moral grounds is an individual's private action; it assumes that good business ethics is comprised only of not taking money from the till or cheating on expense forms. It does not assume that certain actions which an individual might take as part of a corporate structure, actions which affect the public domain, are morally culpable. Yet does not history show that the serious damage which has been done to our natural environment, say, is a result of public action and public policy?

Or listen to Loren Eiseley on another segment of our society: .....the scientific worker has frequently denied personal responsibility for the way his discoveries are used. The scientist points to the evils of the statesmen's use of power. The statesmen shrug and remind the scientist that they are en-cumbered with monstrous forces that science has unleashed upon a totally unprepared public. But there are few men on either side of the Iron Curtain able to believe themselves in any sense personally responsible for this situation. Individual conscience lies too close to home, and is archaic. It is better, we subconsciously tell ourselves, to speak of in-evitable forces beyond human control.[29]

Eiseley is speaking here in the context of a summary of the effects of the technological revolution, which may be only one facet of the complex changes that have led to the current disjunction between public and private morality. In the rest of the lecture I would like to focus on a particular aspect of nineteenth- and twentieth-century life which I think illuminates the problems of the relationship between public and private spheres of action.

That aspect is the place of women in our society. I said earlier that Jane Austen's choice of young women as a focusing image of moral growth was more than conventional. By affirming the importance of the growth of these

young women, and by showing this growth as taking place in an arena which includes both public and private moral action, Austen's novels see the place where one is most at home as the crucible of moral action. We enact our characters in small matters as well as in large. Thus, even though the society which these novels mirror did not encourage women to operate as equals with men in the public sphere, the novels' vision shows women to be the moral and intellectual equals of men and, even more significant, shows that women need not operate in the public sphere to prove that equality.

This vision is lost in Victorian fiction. The Victorian home, in reality and in much fiction, became the haven from the exigencies of the workaday world, a place where the man could retreat from the physical, mental, and sometimes moral exertion which characterized the world of work, or action in the public sphere. In the home, as passive and gentle angel, the wife radiated tenderness and healing calmness, providing a refuge from the outside world. In exchange for the possibility of acting in the public sphere, she was given the right to rule as moral superior in the private sphere. Especially "for the middle class industrialist and businessman impelled by the 'economic motive,'. . .the wife played the double role of agent of peace and 'second conscience.' Her mission was to help him resist the 'snares of the world around him, and temptation.'"[30]

This separation of public and private roles into sexually-determined roles is a perversion of the Austenian ideal of the drawing room as microcosm because the home is no longer the place where both public and private can function, nor is it the place where one tests one's moral principles in social interactions which have their counterparts in public and private interactions. Rather, it leads the way to the acknowledgement of different standards of moral action for public and private. The morality of the private sphere is intended to influence the public sphere—"the woman.....source of all virtue and purity, appeared as the good conscience of Victorian society,"[31] but the possibility also exists that no moral constraints will apply to public life if this tenuous influence is lost. In fact, the possibility of such loss was one of the reasons advanced against giving women the right of suffrage. Once she took to the hustings and to interaction in public life, it was argued, woman's purity and sanctity would be tainted and men would have suffered an irreparable loss. That there might conceivably be no conscience for society left is the frightening implication lurking beneath this argument.

Victorian women (or at least the ideal middle-class wife), then, are seen as morally purer than men, as creatures who need to be protected from the evils which necessarily follow from participation in the world of business, politics, and perhaps even of thought. But an implication of the inferiority of women also hides in this scheme. Women are not strong enough, it is assumed, to carry on the hard business of the world. So their presumed moral superiority is turned against them and they are cast as social and intellectual inferiors. Some of Jane Austen's may appear on the surface to be like the favorite popular Victorian heroine, suffering and still,[32] but what we as readers and also some of the other characters come to realize is our mistake in thinking that crucial moral action takes place only in public affairs.[33] The difference between Austen's heroines and a heroine like Amelia Osborne in _Vanity Fair_ is that her heroines do act when circumstances call upon them to do so. It is not their _lack_ of action which makes them morally superior; it is that all their

actions are based on the same principles. Those principles which operate at hearth and home also operate, by implication, in the street and in the office.

This Victorian ideal was also one to which Americans aspired as its society became increasingly middle class. We must remember to distinguish between the ideal and the actuality, however, since in both England and America many women were forced for economic reasons to work outside the home, whether in a factory or on the farm. The sign of success for the man was the financial ability to keep his wife out of the public economic order. (Was it possibly inferred that the more the man required the shelter of the private home as a retreat, the more power he must hold in the public realm?)

A corollary to the increasing separation between public and private spheres of action was a polarization between the affective/emotional and cognitive/intellectual domains of human personality with the assumption that women by nature represented the former and men the latter. The effect of this polarization, a result which seems ironic in view of my thesis, was that ". . .religion, benevolence and sentimental literature offered early nineteenth-century upper- and middle-class women the greatest opportunities for participation in public life."[34] "Moreover, with increased toleration and, in America the movement toward disestablishment of the churches, organized religion took a less direct role politically. Rather than communicate an articulate political theory comparable with that of Puritanism, nineteenth-century religion concentrated on personal life."[35] The result was that as the century progressed women exercised their moral guardianship not only at home but also in the public domain through benevolent and reforming societies.

We owe a debt to those reformers. But the effect or relegating "moral guardianship" to only one group of people and, at that, to people who are presumed to be inferior by those who control the national life is not salutary.[36] Moral concerns and moral criteria are assumed to be irrelevant to public action because those who express such concerns are irrelevant to public life.

Such individual and social polarization, between feelings and thought, between morality and action, between women and men, results in an unhealthy personal and social schizophrenia. Elizabeth Janeway conjectures about another effect of relegating the world of action to men and the world of the domestic to women, an effect especially apparent in American middle-class families' move to the suburbs:

     .....It was a move based on a view of woman's role as being pretty well nonexistent outside the family. It accepted a picture of the world as divided between man, the breadwinner, and woman, the homemaker. As we know, this puts the children outside the world of work, on the woman's side of the line. Should we, then, be quite so surprised as we are that some middle-class young people don't take work seriously and find that an expressive, emotional way of life, seen in our social mythology as typically feminine, is the one they prefer? Should we be quite so astonished at their willingness to substitute a private, seemingly controllable drug-world where one can find satisfaction and relief at will for an unknown, external world of event and striving whose laws are strange to them, whose demands seem threatening and whose rewards have no attraction?[37]

You are all probably aware that we, as a Christian institution with historic ties to the evangelical movement, are as implicated as any segment of our society in a disastrous polarization. We know the religious commitment of many of our students is primarily emotional and affective and their moral concerns are primarily individual and private. We know their difficulties in choosing a vocation and the struggles they express as they weigh that choice against what seem to be more attractive and fulfilling private interests. We know all this because in some ways our curriculum revisions and our concern with the integration of the disciplines and of faith and learning are attempts to help our students discover ways to wholeness.

Yet I believe we have not yet clearly recognized or acknowledged that a split between public and private action and morality is one of the disjunctions which needs the healing of integration. Part of this is due to our evangelical heritage which has uncritically accepted the Victorian middle-class ideology that women should remain pure from contact with the world of action and that their unchanging destiny as female human beings is to be only wives and mothers who make home a haven for their husbands and children. (We have as evangelicals always made an exception for female missionaries as long as they perform their public ministries out of our sight in some foreign land.) We have accepted views of human gender and human sexuality which assume certain cultural characteristics of masculinity and femininity to be immutably linked to the biological characteristics of male and female, views which are supported by research in neither the natural or social sciences. We have deified modes of family life and of piety which are not universal but tied to one social class which itself has had a very short existence in the span of human history. Most serious, in accepting a polarization of feelings and thought, of heart and mind, of individual and social, of private and public, we have ignored the biblical witness which clearly presents a wholistic vision of individual and social human life.

Until we acknowledge the pervasiveness of this polarization in our own subculture, we will not be able to help our students find wholeness, because integration necessarily requires the recognition of the disparate elements that must be synthesized to create a new whole.

Both the "human potential" movement in psychology and the women's movement have been responses to our current malaise, responses which deplore the disastrous effects of the polarization I have outlined. The human potential movement attempts to revitalize individual and private life by getting people in touch with and expressing their feelings, by coming to a new sense of one's body, by recognizing that each of us, man or woman, has masculine and feminine characteristics. The goal of all this is people whose self-awareness allows them to enter into honest, open relationships with other self-aware people. But can this not also turn into another version of Huck Finn's solution? There are no more physical spaces on the frontier to flee to from the pressures of conformity or the demands of public life so one explores the territories inside oneself. One might ask, though, what are we developing all this human potential for?

The women's movement of the 1960's and '70's was triggered by the isolation and loneliness that the suburban, middle-class "mystique" of femininity produced; it received further impetus from younger women involved in the protest movement of the '60's who found that the men in these movements were not willing to allow

women equal partnership. Here too women were asked to play a purely private role of satisfying the emotional and physical needs of the men who were actively involved in protesting public policy and changing public life. The popular press--and some members of the movement itself--has distorted the best of the solutions which have come from the raised consciousness of women's plight in our society. The distorted view assumes that differences between men and women are to be abolished, that family life is archaic, that giving women power in the public sphere will solve the environmental crisis and put an end to all war. Contrary to these distortions, the more thoughtful voices in the movement deserve our hearing because they do aim for a society which acknowledges that men and women by and large share the same human needs. Both men and women are thinking and feeling creatures who bear responsibility for the care of children and for the state of the nation.[38]

But even as we listen to those voices, we must not repeat the mistake our Victorian forebearers made of uncritically accepting a prevailing ideology.

The stated purpose of this lecture series and the title for this lecture both imply that the interests we pursue as scholars have a direct bearing on our mission, a mission we have just recently articulated as the education of scholar-servants. That label has both private and public implications; scholars carry out their work in the privacy of their study or laboratory but the results of that work are to be publicly disseminated and may also have application for public affairs. We also speak of public servants but the root metaphor is from the private household. I trust that we will not assume the servanthood of our male students is exercised only in the public realm and the servanthood of our female students is exercised only in the private realm of home or church kitchen. Our colleague, Professor Mel Foreman, recently reminded some of us on the priorities commission that the models for scholar-servanthood come from the communal life of the family, the neighborhood, and the ancient university, whereas many of our modes of operating institutionally come from the corporate life of contemporary bureaucracy. The latter model, I would add, could not exist without polarization between public and private spheres since it denies the relevance, even the existence, of the private and the individual.

Jane Austen's vision of an integrated moral life is also rooted in the communal life of family and neighborhood, but as we have seen, it cannot be transferred wholesale to a society that is urban, technological, democratic, and pluralistic. Yet as Christians we share her implicit conviction that the best human society is based on a commitment to principles called forth by someone or from something beyond the individual wills and desires of its members.[39] Part of our mission is to create an equally-compelling vision-- for our students and for our society--of an integrated moral life based on our best understanding of the biblical witness.

Israel existed as a people and as a nation because Jahweh made a covenant with them, a commitment to care for them as their sovereign, to provide for them the best human life in return for their complete allegiance. How

were they to express that allegiance? By committing themselves to the welfare of each other. And even though the family and tribe provided the basic structure for the expression of this commitment, any human being who chose allegiance to Jahweh could become a child of the covenant; in the same spirit, obedience to the demands of the covenant required special concern for those who were marginal in the family and tribal structure: the widowed, the fatherless, the alien.[40]

In the New Testament, the universality of the covenant is expressed in Jesus' summary of the commandments as love for God and for one's neighbor as for oneself. In the command to love neighbor as the self we see that neither the needs of the individual nor the society are ignored. Adn in the story of the Good Samaritan which follows we see that our neighborhood is the world. In the Last Supper, when Jesus and his disciples celebrate the Passover, the sign of the covenant, he invokes a new covenant whose sign is his blood shed for many; his sacrifice is for the world. It is the binding of all human beings into a community that is the vision of the biblical covenant, a community called into existence by One outside itself: "Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy" (I Peter 2:10, RSV).

Surely the affairs of <u>our</u> communal life must be ordered in terms of this vision but how may we project that vision beyond our immediate "tribe"? Can a model of social and individual reality based on a covenant between individuals and peoples work even in our world where many do not affirm a transcendent reality? Peter Berger speaks of "signals of transcendence" (in <u>A Rumor of Angels</u>) which all human beings acknowledge as aspects of their lives even if they do not acknowledge the source of these signals as transcendent. Could we articulate or model in our own community human convenantal relationships so healthy and sound that they provide images of truth to a secular world even if that world does not recognize the ultimate source of that truth?

The images of truth conveyed in Jane Austen's fiction can, if examined carefully, illuminate searchingly our own malaise but they cannot provide images for us to live by. Much of our contemporary fiction has consciously given up a search for images of truth, and the works of those serious novelists who have not abandoned fiction as a means of projecting a moral vision often need as careful translation as the works of Austen need to students, compelled as these writers seem to be by the conviction that bizarre and violent images are the only means to bring us to our senses. Walker Percy explains why:

> The American Christian novelist faces a peculiar dilemma
> today.... His dilemma is that though he professes a belief
> which he holds saves himself and the world and nourishes
> his art besides, it is also true that Christendom seems in
> some sense to have failed. Its vocabulary is worn out....
> There is besides the devaluation of its vocabulary the eg-
> regious moral failure of Christendom.... How does he set
> about writing, having cast his lot with a discredited
> Christendom and having inherited a defunct vocabulary?

He does the only thing he can do. Like Joyce Stephen
Dedalus, he calls on every ounce of cunning, craft, and
guile he can muster from the darker regions of his soul.
The fictional use of violence, shock, comedy, insult, the
bizarre, are the everyday tools of his trade. How could
it be otherwise? How can one possibly write of baptism
as an event of immense significance when baptism is al-
ready accepted but accepted by and large as a minor tri-
bal rite somewhat secondary in importance to taking the
kids to see Santa at the department store? Flannery O'
Connor conveyed baptism through its exaggeration, in one
novel as a violent death by drowning. In answer to a
question about why she created such bizarre characters,
she replied that for the near-blind you have to draw
very large, simple caricatures.[41]

As Christian scholar-servants we share the contemporary novelist's
dilemma of creating images for our society which convey convincing visions
of an integrated moral life. An integrated moral life is also the theme of
much of Saul Bellow's fiction; its appearance in his fiction should not sur-
prise us, nourished as we are by the same Jewish tradition in which he has
his roots. So I think it appropriate to end by quoting from Bellow's Mr.
Sammler's Planet. Sammler's problem is trying to make human sense out of
twentieth-century manners and morals. How can he after what he has exper-
ienced? Left for dead in a pile of corpses in a Nazi death camp, he escaped.
But the gratuitous assaults on human life and dignity he witnesses in New
York City of the 70's seem to be as dehumanizing as the death camps. At
the end of the book he attempts to explain to a bitter and angry young
woman the significance of her father's life, a life like all human lives
full of contradictions but also a life carried out by the constraints of
love and duty. The daughter finds Sammler's explanation unconvincing:
"So he's human. All right he's human.....I thought everybody was born
human."[42] Sammler responds: "It's not a natural gift at all. Only the
capacity is natural."

Alone with the man's body, he mentally whispers this prayer:
Remember, God, the soul of Elya Gruner, who, as willingly as
possible and as well as he was able, and even to an intolerable
point, and even in suffocation and even as death was coming was
eager.....to do what was required of him. At his best this man
was much kinder than at my very best I have ever been or could
ever be. He was aware that he must meet, and he did meet--
through all the confusion and degraded clowning of this life
through which we are speeding--he did meet the terms of his
contract. The terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows.
As I know mine. As all know. For that is the truth of it--that
we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know (286).

* * * * *

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"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach every one his fellow or every one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (quoted in Hebrews 8:10-11, RSV).

We live by an old vision which is yet our hope for the new. Let us be faithful to it.

Notes

[1] Ian Watt, "Introduction," <u>Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays</u>, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 7.

[2] Wayne C. Booth, <u>The Rhetoric of Fiction</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 266.

[3] Avrom Fleishman, "The State of the Art: Recent Jane Austen Criticism," <u>Modern Language Quarterly</u>, 37 (September 1976), 284. This study is indebted to the work of many such critics who will not be explicitly acknowledged. J. Donald Crowley, in "Jane Austen Studies: A Portrait of the Lady and Her Critics," <u>Studies in the Novel</u>, VII (Spring 1975), 137-160, cogently summarizes the last thirty-odd years of a burgeoning critical "industry."

[4] Quoted in Watt, 7.

[5] Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," <u>The Liberal Imagination</u> (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1950), 200-201.

[6] Trilling, 201.

[7] Martin Price, "Manners, Morals, and Jane Austen," <u>Nineteenth-Century Fiction</u>, 30 (December 1975), 267.

[8] Price, 273.

[9] Francis R. Hart, "The Spaces of Privacy: Jane Austen," <u>Nineteenth-Century Fiction</u>, 30 (December 1975), 312.

[10] The standard edition of Jane Austen's work is that of R.W. Chapman, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1932-34). Subsequent references will note volume and chapter number and will follow in the text. This conversation appears in Vol. I, Chap. IX of <u>Mansfield Park.</u>

[11] David Lodge, <u>The Language of Fiction</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 101-102.

[12] <u>Emma</u>, I, XVIII.

[13] Trilling, 205.

[14] Cf. "The distances of the drawing room.....are the mirror of social distances outside," in Alistair M. Duckworth, <u>The Improvement of the Estate</u> (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 117.

[15] Hart, 314.

[16] Note Raymond Williams' discussion of the history of the word personality in _Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society_ (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 194-197.

[17] Jane Austen makes this distinction in _Mansfield Park_ when Edmund faults Mary Crawford for expressing her opinions about her uncle's faults to new acquaintances; the criticism is not for holding the opinions, which are probably just, but for expressing them when her only public conversation about her uncle should be the deference due him as her guardian (I, VII). In _Pride and Prejudice_, Elizabeth is dismayed to find that she shares her sister Lydia's opinion that another young woman is "a nasty little freckled thing" though she would never have expressed it aloud in that fashion (II, XVI).

[18] Richard Poirer, "Mark Twain, Jane Austen, and the Imagination of Society," _In Defense of Reading_, ed. Reuben A. Brower and Richard Poirer (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1962), 289.

[19] Stuart M. Tave, _Some Words of Jane Austen_ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 18. Subsequent references will not be noted in text.

[20] Lionel Trilling, "Introduction to the Riverside Edition," _Emma_ (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), xxiii.

[21] Cf. David M. Monaghan's contention that in _Persuasion_ manners cease to serve as a method of private communication in public gatherings and that the novel demonstrates the loss of manners--"polite social intercourse"--as an objective means of determining morality, in "The Decline of the Gentry: A Study of Jane Austen's attitude to Formality in Persuasion," _Studies in the Novel_, VII (Spring 1975), 73-87.

[22] Note that the home of the Prices in Portsmouth which Fanny compares so unfavorably to Mansfield Park is just the sort of place Dickens would use as a setting for family conviviality and warmth.

[23] Mark Kinkead-Weeks, "This Old Maid: Jane Austen Replies to Charlotte Bronte and D.H. Lawrence," _Nineteenth-Century Fiction_, 30 (December 1975),419. The issue is formulated in a slightly different way by J. Hillis Miller in _The Form of Victorian Fiction_ (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), where he suggests that in Victorian novels "there no longer seems to be any supernatural foundation for the society or for the self" (33-34); ". . . many characteristic Victorian novels show that society no longer seems to have a transcendent origin and support. This leads in turn to the discovery that the individual human heart generates the game of society and establishes its rules. Society rests on human feeling and on human will. It is created by the interplay of one mind and heart with another" (140).

[24] George Eliot's fiction, especially _Middlemarch_, might be usefully read as an exploration of the problems of reconciling the demands of public and private spheres.

[25] In The Human Condition (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), Hannah Arendt distinguishes between the public, the private, and the social, arguing that the social has abolished both the public and the private realms, while intimacy has become the substitute for the private. The public realm is that place where everything can be seen and heard and that which is held in common; the private realm is that sphere where the activities necessary to sustaining biological life are carried out. To attain the true possibilities of being human, in the Greek view, means to be visible and active in the public realm and to have a private place of one's own. (Slaves and women, for example, were less than human because slaves had neither, and women had only the private realm.) The social realm is neither public nor private; the image of family which in ancient thought applied only to the private household has been applied to the entire "body of peoples and political communities"; "the collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call 'society,' and its political form of organization is called 'nation' (28).

Arendt's definition of the social might be compared with Raymond Williams' contention (Keywords) that the term society has come to mean the "objective sum of our relationships"; Williams traces the meaning of "society" from its earliest use as human fellowship to its use as an abstraction of the sort Arendt implies.

In attempting to characterize the public and private spheres as places of moral action I am partially following Arendt; she, of course, is not responsible for my distortion of the terms nor am I attempting to use them in the strict sense that she does.

Both Arendt and Williams allude to the pressure of conformity which the term society implies and which Twain, and countless other pseudo-Huck Finns since, understand as the opposite of self definition.

[26] Poirer, 286. Subsequent references will be noted in text.

[27] Cf. Buckminster Fuller's contention that people should not work in rooms with right angles because they sap energy.

[28] Daniel J. Boorstin, The Americans: The National Experience (New York: Random House, 1965), 135. Subsequent references will be noted in text.

[29] Loren Eiseley, The Firmament of Time (New York: Atheneum, 1960),135.

[30] Francoise Basch, Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 8. Marian E. Fowler in "The Feminist Bias of Pride and Prejudice," Dalhousie Review, 57 (Spring 1977), 47-64, claims that Austen consciously echoes eighteenth-century feminists like Mary Wolstonecraft who inveighed against the requirements of female behavior prescribed in eighteenth-century courtesy books. These books anticipate Victorian ideals which see women as more emotional than men and as their intellectual inferiors; Wollstonecraft argues that they teach women to make a distinction between manners and morals and to acquire only the former.

[31] Basch, 8.

32 See Martha Vicinus, ed., <u>Suffer and Be Still</u>: <u>Women in the</u> <u>Victorian Age</u> (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1973).

33 Cf. Irvin Ehrenpreis' contention in "Jane Austen and Heroism," <u>New York Review of Books</u>, XXVI (February 8, 1979) that "Austen's aim was to domesticate the idea of a Christian hero.... In Austen's plots the turning points depend not on physical agonies but on moral insights, on the sacrifice of ease not glory but to duty.... Austen indicates how one may transform commonplace reality into an epic of the individual conscience"(43

34 Ruth H. Bloch, "Untangling the Roots of Modern Sex Roles: A Surve of Four Centuries of Change," <u>Signs</u>, 4 (Winter 1978), 248.

35 Bloch, 249.

36 Cf. Ann Douglas' thesis in <u>The Femininization of American Culture</u> (New York: Knopf, 1977) that as liberal Northeastern U.S. ministers lost public influence, they joined women to create a sentimental, feeling-orient anti-intellectual mass culture.

37 Elizabeth Janeway, <u>Man's World</u>, <u>Woman's Place</u>: <u>A Study in Social</u> <u>Mythology</u> (New York: Delta, 1971), 302-303. My indebtedness to this book in formulating my thesis is great.

38 I don't assume that such participation requires women to give up the care of their children to others if they choose to work at home during the years their children are growing up, nor do I assume that their partici pation in public life cannot be without remuneration. It is also important to recognize that housework and homemaking have economic implications and that performing such tasks is, to some extent, participation in the economi (public) order.

39 Cf. Kinkead-Weekes' analysis of the couple in <u>Persuasion</u>: "What Anne and Wentworth discover in each other and affirm in their final togethe ness is Jane Austen's answer to her world of revolution, war, and flux. It is the power of loving in spite of all that time and change can do: a com mitment so total and final that it is impervious to change. But it is also the ordering of that love by conscience and duty to others, so that no wil full self remains" (417).

40 In the light of the importance of marriage in Austen's fiction, i is noteworthy that the creation stories in Genesis symbolize the fundament nature of humans as relational creatures.

41 Walker Percy, "Notes for a Novel about the End of the World," <u>The</u> <u>Message in the Bottle</u> (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 116-11 See also John Gardner, <u>On Moral Fiction</u> (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

42 Saul Bellow, <u>Mr. Sammler's Planet</u> (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Cre 1970), 277.

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