Illustration: Marylou Murray

JANE AUSTEN'S JUVENILIA. . .

Fran Beer

Même dans ses premiers travaux on découvre sous des apparences de rêve le cercle vicieux dans lequel les femmes sont enfermées. La façon dont elles sont élevées ne les arme pas pour un mariage égalitaire. A sa manière astucieuse, Austen nous montre ce que les jeunes filles ne devraient pas devenir. Plusieurs de ses personnages sont de "ravissantes idiotes" mais elle utilise la satire pour discréditer la féminité traditionnelle et en fait, elle encourage les femmes à réagir.

Beneath the surface of Jane Austen's pretty drawing-room world lurks a very vicious circle: women are educated for nothing; no profession is open to them; their inadequate education creates a class of helpless, mindless creatures, excessively reliant on charm and artifice, in cutthroat competition for the marriageable men. And beneath Austen's own reserved exterior, as manifested in her novels, beats a powerfully independent heart, which recoils at the narrow circumstances of the women of her times and strives for a solution that will allow for dignity and integrity within the existing social constraints.

Austen's feminism, however, does not begin with her mature novels. We are lucky to have three slender volumes of her juvenilia — together they total fewer than 250 pages — written when she was between the ages of fifteen and eighteen: These writings, witty and irreverent, reveal her precocious intellectual liberation, her capacity for iconoclasm, her profound rejection of the mould into which her society believed its female half ought to be compressed.

To see the kind of conditioning our teenage author was up against, let us look at some popular notions of the late eighteenth century, specifically as they are advanced in a treatise called *An Inquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* by Thomas Gisborne, M.A., written in 1796 and successful enough to be in a fourth edition by 1799. His work proposes to define female duty from childhood through to "Decline of Life," but it is with the early chapters that we are concerned: "The Character of the Female Mind" and "On Female Education."[1] Gisborne is the sort that makes religion look like a male-chauvinist plot. The foremost authority on whom he calls is God (you girls may be so foolish as to doubt me, but don't mess with the Big Boss). Thus women are called to their duties "both by reason and revelation," God "ordains" the tasks for which they are physically "destined." The "female form. . . He has cast in a smaller mould, and bound together by a looser structure" than that of men. So women are obviously unfit for any work outside the home. Correspondingly, God has adopted a "plan of discrimination between the mental powers and dispositions of the two sexes." Everything that requires "reason" is reserved for men (you guessed it: *all* the interesting professions); to women, fragile and emotional creatures that they are, He has allotted qualities appropriate to their "intended" sphere: "spriteliness and vivacity," "powers adapted to unbend the brow of the learned, to refresh the over-laboured faculties of the wise," "modesty, delicacy, sympathizing

sensibility." It is natural, argues Gisborne, that after God has bestowed all necessary intellectual powers on men, "He would impart them to the female mind with a more sparing hand." But, to protect these weaker creatures, He has granted them the power to fascinate: elegance and grace compensate for "defect of muscular vigour."

The authority of God is bolstered, as might be expected, by the requisite guilt trip. If you obey, says Gisborne, you will be granted your heavenly reward and will have the fulfillment of making others happy in this life. You will "diffuse throughout the family circle the enlivening and endearing smile of cheerfulness"; your influence will be like "the dew of heaven which. . . nourishes every herb of the field"; you will be a source of comfort to your husbands in sickness and in health; you will be the font of "piety and rectitude" for society.

The corollary is that if you disobey, you will be responsible for the moral decay of those around you. This is a real danger since women are, in their frailty, prone to a range of vices: "unsteadiness of mind," "habits of frivolousness," "a thirst for admiration and applause," "vanity and affectation," "fickleness through caprice," "irritability, . . . fretfulness, . . . sudden excesses, . . . groundless discontent, weakness and pusillanimity."[2]

Not surprisingly, the chapter on female education pays scant attention to questions of curriculum. Grammar and spelling are all right (we do like these girls to be able to write pretty letters), as are geography, "select parts of. . . history," "popular and amusing facts in astronomy." Dancing, music, and drawing, the "ornamental acquisitions," are permissible but must not be allowed to encourage vanity. Corruptible as girls are, French books and romances are seen as actively dangerous, as are schools, since they may excite "the spirit of competition," which, in weak natures, can so easily lead to conceit and envy. As girls learn more, they must be taught that their new knowledge will better enable them to obey God. Even as they are "educated" they are reminded of their fragility — physical, emotional, intellectual, moral — and of the Divine Plan which forbids them to aspire beyond their sphere. To erase God's work, warns Gisborne, is not only impossible but is also "the height of folly and presumption."

Now this image of women is identical to that demolished so eloquently by John Stuart Mill 70 years later in *The Subjection of Women* (1869):

> What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing — the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others. . . . In the case of women, hot-house and stove cultivation has been carried on. . . for the benefit and pleasure of their masters. . . (who then) indolently believe that the tree grows of itself in the way they have made it grow, and that it would die if one half of it were not kept in a vapour bath and the other in the snow.[3]

And as Jane was writing her juvenilia, Mary Wollstonecraft was working on *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792, in which she argued forcibly for women's education as an antidote to the vanity and sentimental excess to which these hothouse products were inevitably prone. But of course, in 1790, fifteen years old, in the heart of rural Hampshire, Austen would not have had access to such voices. She was on her own.

Nonetheless, we see from her earliest work that Austen's indignation runs high. Her first targets are the sorry creatures who are turned out by the system: vain, mercenary, selfish, devoid of sense, intellectual depth, or personal integrity, addicted to fads and fits of superficial sentimentality. These proclivities, of course, Gisborne warned against but what he failed to see was that girls brought up in the hothouse tradition would — with rare exceptions — turn out as defective human beings. While the juvenilia were intended only for her family and close friends (an avid audience), they are seed material for the host of awful women who appear in her later work: Isabella Thorpe, Lucy Steele, Lydia Bennet, Maria Bertram, Augusta Elton, Elizabeth Elliott, to pick one from each novel. And Austen's tactic, early and late, is the same: by showing graphically, with irresistible wit, the negative instance, girls will see just what it is that they do *not* want to become. The rest must be up to them, as it is to Eliza Bennet or Fanny Price or any of her real heroines. Society cannot be counted on to encourage their independence. It is a question of private integrity.

An appalling catalogue of negative female qualities emerges from the sequence of short burlesques found in Volume the First. The lovely Charlotte, one of the stars of *Frederic and Elfrida,*[4] prepares to take leave of a dear friend "whom she found surrounded by Patches, Pomatum & Paint with which she was vainly endeavouring to remedy the natural plainness of her face. 'I am come my amiable Rebecca, to take my leave of you for a fortnight. . . . Beleive me this separation is painfull to me, but it is as necessary as the labour which now engages you.' " Soon, "with a heavy heart & streaming Eyes did she ascend the lovely vehicle which bore her from freinds & home." Rebecca, handicapped by ugliness as only a hothouse flower can be, is vain and desperately reliant on artifice; Charlotte is bitchy, as she draws attention to the all-too-evident fact of her friend's homeliness, and absurd in her sentimental excess, as she embarks on a mere two-week trip. No sooner is our Charlotte in London than she accepts two proposals in swift succession: "It was not till the next morning that Charlotte recollected the double engagement she had entered into; but when she did, the reflection of her past folly, operated so strongly on her mind, that she resolved to be guilty of a greater, & to that end threw herself into a deep stream." The list of the charming Charlotte's qualities expands to include irresponsibility, impetuousity, and overall empty-headedness.

Elfrida, another of Charlotte's friends, has, because of the "delicate frame of her mind,"

postponed her wedding to Frederic for eighteen years. Upon discovering her fiancé's growing passion for another, she conveniently "fainted & was in such a hurry to have a succession of fainting fits, that she had scarcely patience enough to recover from one before she fell into another." This bravura performance quickly brings Frederic around. "He flew to her & finding her better than he had been taught to expect, was united to her Forever. . . ." Elfrida's strong suit lies in the direction of manipulation, duplicity, self-service.

Emma, of *Edgar and Emma*, watches hopefully from her window as the coach of Edgar's family draws up. When her beloved fails to descend, though she had no reason to expect him, she "began to tremble. . . turned pale. . . sunk breathless on the Sopha." She must have a confidant and none is near. So she "unbosomed herself without restraint" to Thomas the footman. Later, in the parlour, she overcomes her timidity and accosts Edgar's mother: "Mrs Willmot, you do not stir from this House till you let me know how all the rest of your family do, particularly your eldest son." She learns that Edgar is away at college and her grief is such that, "retiring to her own room, she continued in tears the remainder of her Life." This girl embodies the traits of self-indulgence and self-importance, reinforced by an inordinate appetite for bathos and self-pity.

Spontaneous "intimacies" get the lampoon in *Henry and Eliza*, whose Duchess "no sooner beheld our heroine (Eliza), than throwing her arms around her neck, she declared herself so much pleased with her, that she was resolved they never more should part." Predictably, the two are soon arch-foes: the lovely Eliza runs off with the Duchess's daughter's wealthy fiancé. The Duchess's bad judgment and impulsiveness, and Eliza's opportunism and exploitation of her good looks, exhibit an array of qualities ranging from mental vacancy to vicious cynicism.

Love and Freindship, the principle entry in Volume the Second, continues in the same vein, the chief difference being that the central characters leave a wider wake of destruction. On Laura's introduction to her dearest Edward: "no sooner did I first behold him, than I felt that on him the happiness or Misery of my future Life must depend." On her first meeting with co-star Sophia: "we flew into eachother's arms. . . after having instantly unfolded to eachother the most inward secrets of our Hearts." Financial irresponsibility is almost a point of honour for them: they steal from their friends and "would have blushed at the idea of paying their Debts." The two girls invariably faint, whether they are responding to displays of tender sensibility or desertion by their husbands. In fact, the unfortunate Sophia meets her untimely end because she is so incautious as to faint after the evening dew has fallen. These girls have progressed, in mental and moral defectiveness, to a nearly pathological state.

Austen's laughter is as loud as ever but the outrage seems to be escalating. While the best-selling Gothic and sentimental novels of the eighteenth century idealized women who were chronically passive and helpless, given to regular bouts of fever and fainting, she shows them up as wonderfully silly, but also as irresponsible, corrupt parasites. Austen is, in these two volumes, making use of a well-established tradition of satire: human (in this case, female) vice and folly are shown in all their absurd detail so as to discredit them and encourage by implication their opposite. The means are delightful but the end is didactic.

Ridicule, however, is not her only device in the juvenilia. Volume the Third is largely devoted to an unfinished novel entitled *Catharine, or the Bower*, which includes a wider range of female characters. One, Camilla, silly, vain, pretentious, looks back to the girls in volumes one and two, the deficiencies of her character stemming from the inadequacy of her education: "those years which ought to have been spent in the attainment of useful knowledge and Mental Improvement, had all been bestowed in learning Drawing, Italian and Music. . . . and she now united to these Accomplishments, an Understanding unimproved by reading and a Mind totally devoid of either Taste or Judgement."

But Kitty, by contrast, is Austen's first heroine. She is isolated, an orphan; her girlhood friends have been disposed of, one in an unhappy marriage, the other as a governess. Still she resists the temptation of a hasty intimacy with Camilla until she has had a chance to measure her character. Kitty's response to stress is not to weep or to faint, but to retire to her Bower: "(here) she always wandered whenever anything disturbed her, and it possessed such a charm over her senses, as constantly to tranquilize her mind and quiet her spirits." Self-reliance, discretion, independence, these are the kinds of qualities, we begin to see, that a girl must possess, and nurture, if she is to stand up to the popular tide.

Overall, Kitty reveals a nature that is at once affectionate and lively, open and unaffected, loyal, courageous, and eminently reasonable. A marvellously Austenesque episode brings the characters of both Camilla and Kitty into relief. The girls have been preparing for a neighbourhood ball (always a big event for Austen heroines, and especially here as Kitty's life is so drab), but Kitty wakes up with a violent toothache, which gets worse as the day progresses, and prevents her from going to the ball with the others. Camilla's reaction shows her in all her splendid silliness: "To be sure, there never was anything so shocking! . . . I wish there were no such things as Teeth in the World; they are nothing but plagues to one, and I dare say People might easily invent something to eat with instead of them. . . . But you wo'nt have it out, will you? . . . I declare I had rather undergo the greatest Tortures in the World than have a tooth drawn." Kitty's response, more striking for the contrast, reveals her quiet good sense: "she was not so totally void of philosophy as many Girls her age. . . . She considered that there were Misfortunes of a much greater magnitude than the loss of a Ball, experienced every day by some part of Mortality. . . .

She soon reasoned herself into. . . . Resignation and Patience."

The walls of her existence are high and narrow; like a prisoner, she cannot escape. The equipment for survival has to be found within: emotional equilibrium, reason, self-reliance, spiritual resilience. Kitty foreshadows Austen's late, lonely heroines — Fanny Price, Jane Fairfax, Anne Elliott — who must bear in isolation the full burden of their worst pain.

Miss Percival, Kitty's maiden aunt, is in some ways the most interesting of the women in *Catharine*: she is another casualty of the system but, unlike Camilla or the girls in volumes one and two, she is presented as a pathetic, rather than a ridiculous, case. Her character is a tangle of fears: of men, of sickness, of Kitty's energy and sexuality, of the evening dews and damps. She guards her niece with near-hysterical jealousy and lashes out at her when a young man kisses her hand: " 'Profligate that I knew you to be, I was not prepared for such a sight. . . . Oh! Catharine, you are an abandoned Creature!' Yet she was most excessively fond of [Kitty], and miserable if she saw her for a moment out of spirits." Here repression, lack of personal fulfillment, and defective reason are take to their inevitable, neurotic conclusion. Freud would have had a field day with Miss Percival.

Early Austen, again looking forward to Mill, shows us the terrible waste in human potential inherent in a system that rears half its population as an inferior species. The subjugated woman, argues Mill, is a poor creature who drags the rest of society down with her. And young Jane, with nothing to go on but her own personal sense of morality, exhorts her comrades to say goodbye to the greenhouse and the snow, lay claim to their rightful humanity, and grow to their full and natural stature.

Notes

1. Thomas Gisborne, M.A. *An Inquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, fourth edition, London, 1799, chs. 2 and 3.
2. I can't help but be reminded here of the famous twelfth-century diatribe against women by Andreas Capellanus in the *Art of Courtly Love:* "Not only is every woman by nature a miser, but she is also envious. . . greedy, a slave to her belly, inconstant, fickle. . . disobedient and impatient. . . spotted with the sin of pride. . . a liar, a drunkard, a babbler. . . given to wantonness. . . never loving any man in her heart." In both cases, the men begin by appearing to admire women; and both get so carried away by their virulent misogyny that it seems they only stop because they have run out of breath, or ink.
3. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, 3rd printing, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1974, pp. 22-23.
4. Austen's juvenilia are reprinted in Volume VI, *Minor Works, The Works of Jane Austen*, ed. R.W. Chapman, London, 1954. Chapman preserves Austen's spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

The Man I Love, Loves John Wayne.

Vancy Kasper

The man I love, loves John Wayne.
I can't take him out to dinner
'cause a Man don't do that:
Take money from a Woman?
No Sir!

'You won't find John Wayne
in no show like Midnight Cowboy'
he tells me.
There's lotsa folks in Owen Sound
burned up about that show;
wants their money back.
Thought it was 'bout real cowboys
roundin' up the herd at midnight.
It was really 'bout two guys
who wants to be together all the time.
Oh, ya don't think so eh?
Well, that show ain't no show John Wayne'd go in,
I'll tell ya that!'

The man I love, kissed me once so sweet,
Lifted me three feet in the air.
But since I got more and more enthusiastic,
he says things like:
'Your capacity to f____ is unreal.' And,
'A man can't be turned on **all** the time!'

'What do you mean?' I say,
'I only see you once every three weeks!'

'That's what I mean,' he says.
'The trouble with Women is. . .
They crowd ya.'