THE COMIC ELEMENTS IN JANE AUSTEN'S WORKS

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THE COMIC ELEMENTS IN JANE AUSTEN'S WORKS

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CONTENTS

I. COMIC ELEMENTS DEFINED.------------------------------------------17

A. The nature of comedy.
   a. Comedy appeals to the intelligence.
   b. Absence of feeling necessary.

B. Comic elements.
   a. Disproportion in life.
   b. Social function of laughter.

C. Kinds of disproportion.
   a. Physical.
   b. Spiritual.
   c. Temporary.
   d. Permanent.

D. Conditions of
   a. Time
   b. Space.

II. JANE AUSTEN'S POSITION AS A COMIC WRITER IN ENGLISH

LITERATURE-----------------------------------------------8-18

A. Criticisms on Jane Austen for lack of passion.
   a. F. W. Cornish.
   b. Andrew Lang.

B. English national temperament.
   a. Incapable of clear perception.
   b. Rare productions of pure comedy.
C. Shakespearean comic characters discussed.
   a. Falstaff and Dogberry.
   b. Mixture of feeling and laughter.
D. English prose.
   a. Inadequacy for pure comedy.
   b. Genius rather than intelligence.
E. Other English comic writers considered.
   a. Fielding.
   b. Goldsmith.
   c. Meredith.
F. Jane Austen's temperament and prose.
G. Comic elements in Jane Austen's works.
   a. Comic elements of character.
   b. Comic elements of situation.

III. COMIC ELEMENTS OF CHARACTER.

A. Bergson's theory: comedy, the only art aiming at types instead of individuals.
B. Difficulties and modifications.
   a. Typical qualities in tragedy.
   b. Individual qualities in comedy.
   c. Difference in emphasis rather than in quality.
C. Stupidity as a comic element.
D. Pride as a comic element.
E. Sensibility as a comic element.
F. Prejudice as a comic element.
IV. COMIC ELEMENTS OF SITUATION

A. Two kinds of comic situations.
   a. Comic elements dependent upon situation.
   b. Comic elements dependent upon character.

B. Four illustrations.

V. COMPARISON WITH THE COMIC ELEMENTS IN CHINESE LITERATURE

A. Fiction and drama do not occupy important places in Chinese literature.

B. No work of comedy as such in Western literature.

C. Chinese drama.
   a. Beauty in its poetry.
   b. Characters all types.
   c. Plot always conventional.
   d. Habit of mixing tragic and comic elements in a single play.
   e. Comic elements chiefly dependent upon physical disproportions and comic situations.

D. Mencius’s parables.
   a. Comic elements of character.
   b. Frequent use of dramatic irony.

E. Wu-Chen-Ngen’s "Travels to the West".
   a. Monkey King and Pig Monster.
   b. Comic characters drawn on a gigantic scale.
   c. Comparable to Rabelais.

F. Li-Yü-Cheng’s "The Story of the Mirror and the Flower".
   a. Comedy of situation, comparable to "Gulliver’s Travels".
b. Adventures in the country of women.

G. Tsao-Hsieh-Ching's "The Dream of the Red Chamber"
   a. General features of the work.
   b. Background of the writer.
   c. Tragic tone and irreconciliability of the writer change the effect of comedy.

E. Summary of the section.

VI. CONCLUSION.-----------------------------------83-84

A. Four fundamental principles of Comedy.
B. Final estimation of Jane Austen.
C. Attitude of a comic writer.
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By comic elements we mean the essential qualities which an author employs to produce the effect of comedy. But what is comedy?

Among many answers to this complicated and puzzling problem, the most brilliant one that has ever been made is, perhaps, Horace Walpole's famous aphorism: "Life is a comedy to the man who thinks and a tragedy to the man who feels." "To the man of intellect", Mr. Palmer adds to this aphorism, "who stands aside looking critically at life as at a procession of amusing figures, life is a comedy. It intrigues the intellect. It is stuff for paradoxes. It is a cobb of irony and mischance--a festival of fools. To the man of quick feeling, easily vibrating into sympathy with his kind, life, on the other hand, is a tragedy. It touches his sensibilities. It is full of opportunities for sorrow. It is a feast with invisible hands forever writing on the wall."

George Meredith calls comedy "the fountain of sound sense," and thinks "It laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it."

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/1/ Palmer: Comedy, p. 9
/2/ Meredith: Essay on Comedy, pp. 92, 140
Bergson, in analyzing the meaning of the comic, points out three facts: (1) The comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly humane, (2) Absence of feeling usually accompanies laughter, and (3) The comic must have a social signification and laughter is a sort of social gesture. In illustrating the second point, he tells us, "It seems as though the comic could not produce its disturbing effect unless it fell, so to say, on the surface of a soul that is thoroughly calm and unruffled. Indifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion. I do not mean that we could not laugh at a person who inspires us with pity, for instance, or even with affection, but in such a case we must, for the moment, put our affections out of court and impose silence upon our pity. In a society composed of pure intelligences there would probably be no more tears, though perhaps there would still be laughter; whereas highly emotional souls, in tune and unison with life, in whom every event would be sentimentally prolonged and re-echoed, would neither know nor understand laughter. Try, for a moment, to become interested in everything that is being said and done; act, in imagination, with those who act, and feel with those who feel; in a word, give your sympathy its widest expansion: as though at the touch of a fairy wand you will see the flimsiest of objects assume importance, and a gloomy hue spread over everything. Now step aside, look upon life as a disinterested spectator: many a drama will turn into a comedy." He arrives at the following conclusion: "To produce the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligenc, pure and
If we grant that comedy appeals to intelligence rather than to emotion, the next question we have to ask is, what are the essential qualities which appeal to our intelligence? It is true that "life is a comedy to the man who thinks", but a man might think a thousand times without laughing at all. There must be some phases of life which are essentially comic, and at which, when a man sees clearly and distinctly through his intelligence, he could not help laughing. What are these comic elements?

The difficulty of this problem lies not so much in finding the comic elements as in finding terms which are not only suitable to define them but which will embrace all comic elements. Many writers fail to define comedy and comic elements because they easily fall into the error of taking a part to represent the whole, and, when other comic elements, which they have neglected, appear, their definitions become inadequate to explain them. Let try to make our definition as general and as flexible as possible and start with our analysis with self-evident facts.

In the first place, we do not laugh unless we see some disproportion in life. The complexity of life constantly demands quick response and quick adjustment. It would be too much exertion for us if we did not have habits, customs, and preconceptions to simplify our motions and to lessen our exertion. They give us standards to follow; they tell us what must logically or habitually come; they prepare us to give proper response without much effort; they save us from examining and thinking of everything; and gradually they train
us to have a strong sense of proportion. Objectively, everything must have a generally accepted proportion of form, size, color, and sequence.

Subjectively, everybody must have a generally acknowledged proportionate response to everything he feels, sees, says and does. If we see anything out of its generally accepted proportions such as, an exceedingly large nose, over long or over short legs, we laugh at it. If we see anybody out of his generally acknowledged proportions such as, a chatter-box, a miser, a fool, a person of excessive sentimentality, a man suddenly sprawling in the street, we laugh at him. This laughter at the disproportion in life is essential to our existence. Without it, life would be much harder, or even impossible.

In real life, everything must be simple, ordinary, expected, and every response must be easy, habitual, correct. When we think of the fact that we are compelled to see thousands of objects every time we open our eyes, to give response to every object we see, when we think of the same number of objects and responses through our senses, it is impossible to imagine the exertion we have to make if we find everything and everybody new, strange, and extraordinary. They must have definite proportions. If they have not, they must pay the penalty of being laughed at because they attempt to demand more exertion from us. The function of laughter is to check anything different out of proportion, to keep everything and everybody in strict conformity with society, and to make life easier and therefore possible. Bergson is quite right in calling laughter "a sort of social gesture."

Now disproportions are found in the whole range of life.

1/ Bergson: Laughter, p.20
They may be physical or spiritual. They may temporary or permanent. Falstaff's fatness is certainly laughable, but his invincible wit in every disadvantageous position is ten times as laughable. Thersites is laughed at by all the Greek heroes because of his talkativeness, but Bacchus is only laughed at when he goes down to hell to fetch the best tragedian to amuse the Athenian citizens. "If we hold a mask," Hazlitt says," before our face, and approach a child with this disguise on, it will at first, from the oddity and incongruity of the appearance, be inclined to laugh; if we go nearer to it, steadily, and without saying a word, it will begin to be alarmed and be half inclined to cry: if suddenly take off the mask, it will recover from its fears, and burst out laughing; but if, instead of presenting the old well-known countenance, we have concealed a satyr's head or some frightful caricature behind the first mask, the suddenness of the change will not in this case be a source of merriment to it, but will convert its surprise into an agony of consternation, and will it scream cut for help, even though it may be convinced the whole is a trick at bottom."

This illustrates the fact that disproportions are all about us and at every moment and can be only perceived and laughed at when there is pure intelligence, without the mixture of other feelings. Ordinary people cannot see all of them because they they can rarely see an object with detachment. It is as a disinterested spectator of life that the comic writer can call to our attention the disproportions in life and make us laugh at them, though we are unconscious of what he is doing. Once we see and laugh at the disproportions, which

"I/ Hazlitt: Lectures on English Comic writers, p. 6"
we are liable to cause or have caused we shall try to avoid them. This process will help us to adjust ourselves to suit the best and wisest standards of life in society. This is why Meredith says, "Sensitivity to the comic laugh is a step in civilization. To shrink from being an object of it is a step in cultivation." Since comedy is a social gesture in essence and its aim is to correct nonconformity with the standards of society, a comic writer always accepts the world. "He had no comic sense, or he would not have taken an antisocial position which is directly opposed to the comic."

Further analysis reveals to us that disproportions in life, the elements of comedy, are conditioned, to a considerable extent, by time and space.

Sannio was considered by the Roman public a comic character just as Shylock was considered so by the Elizabethan audience. As we read these two plays now, we perhaps sympathize more than we laugh because times have changed our attitude toward these characters and their situations is therefore quite different. When we are about to laugh our sympathy immediately interferes. Indeed, we have developed such ready sympathy that it comes to us so quickly as to make laughter impossible. This is not the work of a day. It has developed under a process of evolution. Another good instance is the laughing at a man suddenly sprawling in the street. The majority of people still laugh at this disproportion, but the moment we realize our lack of sympathy, we go immediately to help rather than stand by and enjoy our laughter. This process of evolution is going on all the time. Many

[I] Meredith: Essay on Comedy, p.145
things that people laugh at at one time cease to be laughable at another time.

When we turn our attention to the condition of space, the importance is even more evident. Different nations have different languages, different customs, and different backgrounds; consequently they have different conceptions of disproportion. "The Frenchman," Mr. Palmer says, "violently explodes into laughter at something which leaves the Prussian cold as a stone. An Englishman sees very little fun in Alcèste. A Frenchman sees in Falstaff no more than a needlessly fat man. Try to be funny in a foreign land, and you will probably only succeed in insulting or disgusting or annoying or shocking somebody. A joke cannot be translated or interpreted. A man is born to see a particular sort of joke; or he is not. You cannot educate him into seeing it. In the kingdom of comedy there are no papers of naturalization."

Although Mr. Palmer exaggerates the difficulty in translating a joke and in understanding the jokes of another race, he does make evident the fact that space plays a very important part in conditioning the comic elements or disproportions in life.

Now we have seen that comedy appeals to intelligence rather than to emotion. The function of comedy is to laugh at the disproportions in life in order to make us conform to the best standards of life in society. These disproportions in life may be physical or spiritual, permanent or temporary, and are subject to the changes of time and space. With all these ideas in mind, let us see what sort of disproportions Jane Austen makes use of in her works.

/1/ Palmer: Comedy?p.1
II

Cornish, in summing up his study of Jane Austen, says, "Her novels make no display of idealism, romance, tenderness, poetry, or religion. Her relation to that side of life is to be sought (and may be found) in what others said of her, and in unobtrusive indications which may be observed here and there between the lines of her private letters and her published works." Andrew Lang, in his "Letters to Dead Authors", addresses Jane Austen thus, "Your heroines are not passionate, we do not see their red wet cheeks, and tresses dishevelled in the manner of our frank young Maenads. What says your best successor?----she says of Miss Austen: 'Her heroines have a stamp of their own. They have a certain gentle self-respect and humour and hardness of heart------Love with them does not mean a passion as much as an interest, deep and silent.'

Both these remarks are true, but they serve to praise Jane Austen's true merit as a comic writer rather than to do otherwise. For Comedy, as we have mentioned at the outset, appeals to intelligence,

1/ Cornish: Jane Austen, Englishmen of Letters, p.236

2/ Lang: Letters to Dead Authors, p.83
pure and simple. Since comedy is the work of the head, the writer must always keep his head cool. The moment he lets his heart rule, the Muse of Comedy immediately flies away. Idealism, romance, tenderness, poetry, or religion, are all enemies of comedy, and the greatest enemy is passionate love. For love is blind; it makes us insensible to the laughter of others, insensible to everything in the world. It is the strongest feeling in life. It renders us disproportionate more easily than any other feeling. If the writer is too much influenced by this passion, or if he causes his reader to be overwhelmed by this passion, the spell of comedy is immediately broken. Neither the writer nor the reader is sensible to laughter. They become perhaps objects of comedy instead of spectators of comedy. Imagine Emma or Elizabeth with "red wet cheeks" and "dishevelled tresses"! Can there be anything more absurd and more shocking?

No, Jane Austen is too great a comic writer to do that sort of thing. She always remains clear-headed and sees everything in clear outline and perspective. Thus she is able to see and to set down all sorts of disproportions in life, which we pass by without noticing them.

Generally speaking, most critics agree that Englishmen cannot see things so clearly and disinterestedly as the French. This character of the national temperament accounts perhaps for the comparatively rare productions of pure comedy in English literature. Congreve's "The Way of the World" was almost epoch making in English dramatic history, and even Shakespeare did not write pure comedy in the strict sense. As Palmer says, "Shakespeare's figures are not a criticism of life—no great English literature is that. It is a piece of life imaginatively realized. Falstaff is not judged: he is accepted.
Dogberry is not offered as a fool to ridicule by his intellectual betters. We are not asked to deride him. We are asked to become part of his folly. Falstaff appeals to Falstaff in ourselves. Dogberry is our common stupidity, enjoyed for the sake of the dear fool that is part of every man. Shakespeare's laugh includes vice and folly in a humour which is the tolerance of nature herself for all her works. This humour lies at the other extreme from the critical laugh of pure comedy."

If we accept this interpretation, we are in danger of upsetting the definition we have laid down for comedy, because here we seem to encounter a new sort of comedy which is not a social gesture. The audience seems to enjoy and tolerate rather than to correct and check the dispropotions in life. This is a very vital point any misunderstanding of which will make further analysis impossible. Let us try to find what the real trouble is.

In the first place, we are compelled to admit that, in spite of our tolerance and enjoyment, Falstaff and Dogberry still display disproportion. Dogberry is a fool, but he is a charming fool. That is why we tolerate and enjoy his folly. In spite of that, folly is a disproportion in life. Falstaff's fatness is unquestionably a physical disproportion. His vices are spiritual disproportions. His most comic quality is his invincible wit, which makes his vices so amusing, so entertaining, and so charming that we cannot help enjoying them. Indeed, we like them so much that we seem to have not the least inclination to correct them by means of our laughter. However, is not Falstaff's ready wit something strange; extraordinary, and unexpected? Does not every turn of his speech take us by surprise? Laughter, as

/1/ Palmer: Comedy, p.23
a social gesture, is always aimed at something strange, extraordinary, and unexpected, so as to keep up the generally accepted proportions. Now this function has been exercised by every human being for many generations and we have so used to it that we become unconscious of it. We cannot help laughing at disproportions, but nine times out of ten we do not know that we want to prevent them. It would be quite wrong to expect everybody's every laugh to have a conscious purpose, especially when laughter is mixed with a strong desire for enjoyment. The function of laughter is too subtle for ordinary eyes to perceive, but still it is clear if we only realize that we do laugh at Falstaff's and Dogberry's disproportions and the very fact that Shakespeare, as a representative English writer, everywhere allows feeling to blind our intelligence and causes us to desire disproportions rather than to shrink from them excludes him from the realm of pure comedy.

Besides the above characteristic of the national temperament, or because of this characteristic, English prose has always enough genius, but very seldom has enough intelligence. Arnold, after quoting from Taylor's sermon on Lady Carbery, says, "That passage has been much admired, and, indeed, the genius in it is undeniable. I should say, for my part, that genius, the ruling divinity of poetry, had been too busy in it, and intelligence, the ruling divinity of prose, not they enough. But can any one, with the best models of style in his head, help feeling the note of provinciality, the want of simplicity, the want of measure, the want of just the qualities that make prose classical?" This lack of intelligence in English prose renders the production of pure comedy very difficult. "English comedy," Palmer

1/ Arnold: Essays in Criticism, First Series, p.51
says, "cannot successfully walk in the sun. It suspects the clarity of good prose. Pure comedy is a foreigner and will not be naturalised. English comedy, indeed, is like English prose—- It is not the pure and simple thing. There will be simple comedy in England when there is simple prose." He then compares English prose with French prose thus: "A French man can say what he means; he has evolved the art of writing plain French. An Englishman cannot say what he means: there is no such thing as plain English. A Frenchman cannot catch at the infinite in harmonies and rhythms of speech, in words that are steeped in centuries of vague emotion, in lines that beat with a rhythm of the feet of expired generations. His verse is simply better prose than the prose he usually writes—-more clearly and neatly cut. His Alexandrine is an excellent device for the conveying of good sense, diaphanous and transcendental. He says only what is worth saying and what is intelligible. The Englishman, on the other hand, cannot clearly say anything that is worth saying unless it be too deep for words. It is impossible to understand an Englishman unless he is saying something so obvious that it need never have been said. As soon as he begins to say something worth saying he becomes incoherent. His prose when it is worth reading is not prose at all. He cannot speak rationally of love or hatred or jealousy. An aphorism does not express him unless he is pretending to be continental. He cannot talk; he can only sing. Sainte-Beuve talks clear good sense about books and people; but Charles Lamb hums a jolly tune. Molière clearly explains the jealousy of Arnophe; but Shakespeare sings the jealousy of Leontes. If we are to write pure comedy, we must find another
language. Only a foreigner can clearly express anything really im-
important. An Englishman, if he is not a genius, can only feel unutter-
able things, say they are indescribable, and leave them to the poets.

When we take the English national temperament and the nature
of English prose into consideration, we are surprised to find that
Jane Austen, as a successful comic writer, is really unique in the
history of English literature. She is one of the very few English
writers to catch the true spirit of comedy. Meredith puts her side
by side with Fielding and Goldsmith, but they are by no means her
equals. Underneath his hearty and boisterous laughter, Fielding
has too much sympathy with his characters and too vivid and too en-
gaging a personality to be a disinterested spectator of life. More-
over, his characters are fanciful types and his comic elements depend
chiefly upon comic situations and physical disproportions. "Joseph
Andrews" is very much like Jane Austen’s "Northanger Abbey." The
former is a burlesque of Richardson’s "Pamela", while the latter is
a satire upon Mrs. Radcliffe’s Gothic romance. But when we compare
the comic elements of these two books, what a great difference we
find! In spite of the burlesque purpose, every disproportion in
Jane Austen’s work is still the logical outcome of character, while
Fielding leads his characters into all sorts of impossible situations
and vulgarities, and then laughs at them heartily and without restraint.
Jane Austen never lets her work sink below the level of high comedy,
but Fielding actually writes farce. Fielding’s is a hearty laughter
while Jane Austen’s is a silvery laughter.

/1/ Palmer: Comedy, p. 60-61
/2/ Meredith: Essay on Comedy, p. 132
Goldsmith's naïve and healthy humour is undoubtedly very enjoyable. His "Vicar of Wakefield" is a small gem of English literature. It is a very wonderful work, but it is by no means pure comedy. The good nature of the writer permeates every line of the book. The vicar is such a lovable man that we like him too much to laugh at him. Just as in the case of Falstaff, our feelings are torn between affection and laughter. Moreover, we have great sympathy with the vicar throughout the entire book. We share his happiness as well as his misfortunes. This book, in spite of its charms, is still too English to be admitted into the realm of pure comedy.

Then how about George Meredith? He has written that famous treatise "An Essay on Comedy", and his novels, such as "The Egoist" and "The Ordeal of Richard Feveral", are undoubtedly based upon his theory. However, George Meredith's prose style is not a good vehicle for pure comedy. In spite of his penetration and insight into character, in spite of his deep understanding of the comic spirit, in spite of his careful work, he is still too English to be a really successful writer of pure comedy.

The more we consider these writers, the more we must admire the success of Jane Austen. She has been criticised for no display of idealism, romance, tenderness, poetry, or religion. She has been blamed for treating love not as a passion, but as an interest, deep and silent. As we have seen these are hindrances to pure comedy. The English national temperament can hardly abstain from them, and consequently pure comedy is impossible. It is truly cause for wonder that Jane Austen's genius could make her so very different from her fellow countrymen. She looks at life clearly and distinctly and sees
all sorts of human disproportions.

With this temperament it is perhaps not so surprising that her prose style is also quite different from the usual English prose style, and is the best possible vehicle for pure comedy. There are no decorative elements like Carlyle's, no picturesque descriptions like Ruskin's, no wilful obscurity and artificial mannerisms like Meredith's, no stylistic devices like Macaulay's, no exaggerations like Dickens', no moralizings like Thackeray's, no philosophical bent like George Eliot's, no bitterness like Swift's, no vulgarity like Fielding; no sinister irony like Hardy's. She easily finds a definite word to express a definite thing, and expresses it in a simple, and exquisite way. There is no ambiguity and no mistake in the image she presents. Because she allows her intelligence full play, there in her prose what Matthew Arnold might call "a kind of aerial ease, clearness, and radiancy; her novels are filled with "sweetness and light".

Perhaps we might venture to say that Jane Austen's prose style is the most un-English, and as a whole, she is the most un-English writer that England has ever produced. It is true that in her life she never travelled very far and her experiences were limited; it is also unmistakable that the scenes and characters in her works are all English, even locally English; but her tendency to see clearly and distinctly and her simple, definite, and exquisite prose style are French rather than English. Compare a few dialogues in Molière's comedy with those in Jane Austen's novels, the similarities in temperament and style are quite noticeable.

Being equipped with these two instruments, a simple style and a calm temperament, Jane Austen sees more disproportions in life

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*I* Arnold: *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 133
and puts them down in her works better than any other English writer. But we must remember that she did not record every disproportion she saw. That is not only impossible but inartistic. The most important thing that distinguishes a real artist from an ordinary writer is the power of selection and arrangement.

These disproportions which are essential in low comedy and farce and which Dickens and Fielding most make use of in their works are physical disproportions. Jane Austen is a writer of high comedy. She has too fine a taste to at mere physical disproportions. Characters like the red-nosed Peggotty and the awkward Pickwick are the last to engage her attention. She only selects disproportions of character. There is practically no person with physical disproportions in her novels. If there is any, his physical disproportions are of the least importance for her comedy. Most of her ladies are beautiful and accomplished; most of her gentlemen are educated and handsome. If they are not all very rich, they all have a comfortable living, which enables them to be well dressed, and therefore not to provoke any laughter because of the disproportions of their appearance.

Disproportions of character, then, are what Jane Austen endeavors to depict in her works. Stupidity, sensibility, pride and prejudice are her favorite themes, which she develops through various characters, and under various circumstances. Some of the disproportions of character are hopelessly permanent, like those of Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins, Mrs. Jennings, and Mrs. Norris. Some of the disproportions of character, on the other hand, are only due to temporary self-insensibility and are subject to change; the moment the persons become aware
of their disproportions they immediately correct them. An example is in the case of Emma.

These individual disproportions of character are always presented clearly and amusingly either through their own speeches or through the remarks of others. But the most successful method which Jane Austen employs, is to create certain situations, in which the disproportions of two or more characters come to a clash. The most famous scenes in her works are chiefly based upon this method. The clash of Darcy's pride and Elizabeth's prejudice is repeated again and again. This is comparatively easy because once the disproportions of character are clearly shown the rest is not difficult to manage. Sometimes, however, it takes a long time to create a certain comic situation. The carriage scene between Emma and Mr. Elton is prepared for from the first chapter when Emma boasts of her power to make matches. There are also numerous incidents and numerous delineations of character which gradually and inevitably lead to the most comic situations. The library scene between Mr. Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, and Elizabeth after Mr. Collins's proposal is prepared for from the opening of the book, when Mrs. Bennet expresses her eager desire to get her daughters married. These situations are the hardest tests for comic writers. It not only requires deep character insight but also fine dramatic genius. It not only requires a power of selection but also a power of arrangement. Disproportions of character are interesting, but unless they are so arranged as to lead up to certain dramatic situations, they easily become very dull.

1/ Emma Chap. XV, p.III-120
2/ Pride and Prejudice Chap. XX, p.100
Here also Meredith falls short.
III

Perhaps the most amazing feature of comedy, which Bergson points out in analyzing the comic in character, is that comedy is the only art which aims at types instead of individuals. After illustrating the object of art, especially that of tragedy, he says, "Altogether different is the object of comedy. Here it is in the work itself that the generality lies. Comedy depicts characters we have already come across and shall meet again. It takes note of similarities. It aims at placing types before our eyes. It even creates types, if necessary. In this respect it forms a contrast to all the other arts. The very titles of certain classical comedies are significant in themselves. Le Misanthrope, l'Avare, le Joueur, le Distrait, etc., are names of whole classes of people; and even when a character comedy has a proper noun as its title, this proper noun is speedily swept away, by the very weight of its contents into the stream of common nouns. We say "a Tartuffe", but we should never say "a Phèdre" or "a Polyeucte." 

/1/ Bergson: Laughter, p.I63
The reason for this is, "On the one hand, a person is never ridiculous except through some mental attribute resembling absent-mindedness, through something that lives upon him without forming part of his organism, after the fashion of a parasite; that is the reason this state of mind is observable from without and capable of being corrected. But, on the other hand, just because laughter aims at correcting, it is expedient that the correction should reach as great a number of persons as possible. This is the reason comic observation instinctively proceeds to what is general. It chooses such peculiarities as admit of being reproduced, and consequently are not indissolubly bound up with the individuality of a single person,---a possibly common sort of uncommonness, so to say,---peculiarities that are held in common."

Such works of Jane Austen as "Pride and Prejudice", "Sense and Sensibility", "Persuasion" certainly suggest to us by their titles that the author aims at types rather than individuals and the repetition of the same theme through different characters again proves that Bergson's theory is correct. However, we must not forget that Jane Austen is famous for her characterization. Macaulay, for this reason, compares her with Shakespeare. He says that while Shakespeare "has left us a greater number of striking portraits than all other dramatists put together"; and though "Shakespeare has had neither equal nor second", Jane Austen is to be placed among the writers who, in the point noticed above, "have approached nearest to the manner of the great master;" Whately writes of some of her conversations:

/I/ Bergson: Laughter, p. 169-170
/2/ Cornish: Jane Austen, p. 233
as comparable to Shakespeare's. "Like him, she shows as admirable a discrimination in the character of fools as of people of sense; a merit which is far from common."

Now, how can we reconcile these two opposite facts? If Jane Austen is a true comic writer, it seems that her characters ought to be types and that fine characterization might endanger the typical quality which comedy demands. Then, how can she be famous for her fine characterization? The fact is this: both in tragedy and in comedy, the characters have individual as well as typical qualities. Hamlet's melancholy is individual, but he is a prince, a lover, a son with a dear father murdered. These characteristics are typical qualities which he shares with many others of the same class. Emma's pride is typical, but her disposition, her manner, her mind, her environment makes her distinctly individual instead of typical. The essential difference between tragedy and comedy lies in the emphasis rather than in the quality. Characterization, which, in great drama, is only next to plot in importance, is required both in tragedy and in comedy.

Taking the most favorite comic elements and the most successfully drawn comic characters in Jane Austen's works into consideration, we might divide her characters into four types.

The first and the most common type is grouped under the head of stupidity. A large number of her characters belong here; among the most famous are Mr. Collins, Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Jennings, Miss Steele, Mrs. Palmers, Mr. Rushworth. The immense number of this type can only be accounted for by the immense number in real life.
Because they supply so much material for comedy that some thinkers even consider life, as a whole, a comedy, and it is no wonder that there should write about the whole ship of fools. It is not only the great number which gives a large quantity of disproportion in life but also their character which makes everything they do, think, feel, or speak, out of proportion. Take out the fools from Jane Austen's works, and you lose the major part of her comedy. Other comic elements might be higher in quality, deeper in penetration, richer in suggestion, but they cannot be so common, so evident, so instructive, and so essential for the purpose of comedy, for comedy is nothing but laughter at the disproportions of life through the perception of pure intelligence. When George Meredith thinks, "A society of cultivated men and women is required, wherein ideas are current, and the perceptions quick, that he (the great comic poet) may be supplied with matter and an audience," he is only right in regard to the audience, which, of course, must have seen enough intelligence to see the disproportions as the writer sees them, but in regard to matter, there is no reason for the comic poet to limit his field to society of cultivated men and women. It is true that they supply matter for a finer type of comedy, but it does not follow that outside of them there can be no comedy.

Stupidity, judging from the success of the treatment in Jane Austen's works, can be used for high comedy. One of the most famous comic characters is Mr. Collins, whose stupidity everywhere provokes great mirth. His solemn composure, his foolish remarks, his

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1/ Brant: Das Narrenschiff
2/ Meredith: Essay on Comedy, p. 75
worship of Lady Catherine, his wonderful courtship, and his absurd letter of condolence make an unforgettable impression on the reader.

Here is his proposal to Elizabeth:

"Believe me, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that your modesty, so far from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your own perfection. You would not have been less amiable in my eyes had there not been this little unwillingness; but allow me to assure you that I have your respected mother's permission for this address. You can hardly doubt the purport of my discourse, however your natural delicacy may lead you to dissemble; my attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as I entered the house I singled you out as the companion of my future life. But before I run away with my feelings on this subject, perhaps it will be advisable for me to state my reasons for marrying and, moreover, for coming into Hertfordshire with the design of selecting a wife, as I certainly did."

Mr. Collins surely has great self-control, for he goes on to state his reasons without being carried away by his feelings.

"My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (Like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly, which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honor of calling patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too!) on this subject; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Hunsford—between our pools at quadrille, while Mr. Jenkinson was arranging Miss De Bourgh's footstool—that she said, Mr. Collins, you must marry. A clergyman like you must marry. Choose properly, choose a gentlewoman, for my sake and for your own; let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her."

---And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most imitated language of the violence of my affection—"/I/

When Lydia elops with Wickwar the whole Bennet family is in great trouble, and Mr. Collins sends Mr. Bennet a letter of condolence.

"My dear Sir—I feel myself called upon, by your relationship, and my situation in life, to condole with you on the grievous affliction you are now suffering under, of which we were yesterday informed by a letter from Hertfordshire. Be assured, my dear sir, that
Mrs. Collins and myself sincerely sympathize with you, and all your respectable family, in your present distress, which must be of the bitterest kind, because proceeding from a cause which no time can remove. No arguments shall be wanting on my part that can alleviate so severe a misfortune, or that may comfort you, under a circumstance that must be, of all others, most afflicting to a parent's mind. The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this. And it is the more to be lamented, because there is no reason to suppose, as my dear Charlotte informs me, that this licentiousness of behaviour in your daughter has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence; though at the same time, for the consolation of yourself and Mrs. Bennet, I am inclined to think that her disposition must be naturally bad, or she could not be guilty of such an enormity at so early an age. Howsoever that may be, you are grievously to be pitied in which opinion I am not only joined by Mrs. Collins, but likewise by Lady Catherine and her daughter, to whom I have related the affair. They agree with me in apprehending that this false step in one daughter will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others; for who, as Lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family? And this consideration leads me, moreover, to reflect, with augmented satisfaction, on a certain event of last November; for had it been otherwise, I must have been involved in all your sorrow and disgrace. Let me advise you, then, my dear sir, to console yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child from your affection forever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offence.---I am, dear, etc., etc. /I/

Another equally prominent figure in the same book is Mrs. Bennet, whose only business is to get her daughters married. Her eager desire and her character are best revealed in the following conversation between her and her husband in the opening paragraphs of the novel, after she has heard the news of Mr. Bingley's arrival.

"My dear Mr. Bennet," said his lady to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?"
Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.
"But it is," returned she; "for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it."
Mr. Bennet made no answer.
"Do you not want to know who has taken it?" cried his wife impatiently.
"You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it."
This was invitation enough.
"Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Nether-
field is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it that he agreed with Mr. Norris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week."

"What is his name?"

"Bingley."

"Is he married or single?"

"Oh, single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!"

"How so? how can it affect them?"

"My dear Mr. Bennet," replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome? You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them."

"Is that his design in settling here?"

"Design? nonsense, how can you talk so! But it very likely he may fall in love with one of them and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes."

"I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better; for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you the best of the party."

"My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty."

"In such cases a woman has not often much beauty to think of."

"But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he comes into the neighbourhood."

"It is more I engage for, I assure you."

"But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account; for in general, you know, they visit no newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not."

Mr. Collins and Mrs. Bennet represent the high water-mark of Jane Austen's use of stupidity as a comic element of character. Before we leave this type something must be said about Mrs. Jennings who is no less laughable a figure. Jane Austen writes of her as "a good-humoured, merry, fat, elderly woman, who talked a great deal, seemed very happy, and rather vulgar. She was full of jokes and laughter, and before dinner was over had said many witty things on the subject.

/I/ Pride and Prejudice Chap.I, p.1-2
of lovers and husbands; hoped they had not left their hearts behind in Sussex, and pretended to see them blush, whether they did or not. "She had only two daughters, both of whom she lived to see respectably married; and she had, now, therefore, nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world."

These few strokes are sufficient to show Jane Austen's clear perception of character disproportion and her clever manner of presenting it. Perhaps we need not mention Miss Steele's constant allusion of "beaus" and her listening at the door at her sister's tête-à-tête with her lover, or Mrs. Palmer's indifference to her husband's cold demeanor, or "poor Mr. Rushworth's" "two-and-forty speeches". The most remarkable thing about Jane Austen is that she very seldom allows her feeling to blind her intelligence as many English writers do. Stupidity is laughable but it also very easily arouses sympathy and pity. If the comic writer is not careful enough to guard against these feelings the Muse of Comedy immediately flies away. King Lear is foolish in dividing his kingdom and in disinheriting his filial daughter and banishing his faithful servant, but who can laugh at him? "The grave-diggers of Hamlet," says Dowden, "the

/I/ Sense and Sensibility Chap.VII, p.29
/2/ ibid Chap.VIII, p.30
/3/ ibid Chap.XXI, p.107
/4/ ibid Chap. XXXVIII, p.236-239
/5/ ibid Chap.XIX, p.92-95
/6/ Mansfield Park Chap.XV, p.127, Chap. XVII, p.144, Chap.XVIII, p.150
porter turning the key of hell-gate on the night of murder in Macbeth, Lear's poor fool jesting across the storm upon the heath, the clown whose basket of figs conceals the worm of Nilus--these are humous figures created in the service of pity and terror."

When fools are "created in the service of pity and terror" they become tragic rather than comic characters. Their disproportions can no more be clearly perceived with pure intelligence. This again proves that comedy appeals to intelligence, pure and simple.

The second comic element Jane Austen employs very often in her works, is pride. The best representatives of this type are Emma, Darcy, Sir Walter Elliot, and Mrs. Elton. Stupidity belongs mostly to persons of lower intelligence, but pride always finds her victims among persons of higher intelligence. Strictly speaking, everybody has more or less pride, at least the pride of possessing enough good sense. Descartes remarks, "Every one thinks himself so abundantly provided with it, that those even who are the most difficult to satisfy in everything else, do not usually desire a larger measure of this quality than they already possess." It is due to this very self-satisfaction that people become cut of proportion. They cannot see their own folly and they are insensible to the outside world. That is why pride has occupied a very prominent place in comedy. Although this fault is common to every one, people of lower intelligence and of lower social position usually have less of it. Harriet Smith in "Emma" is an example. She does not demand more than she deserves. She is quite conscious regarding her intelligence and her social posi-

/1/ Dowden: Shakespeare as a Comic Dramatist, in Representative English Comedies, p.658

/2/ Descartes: Discourse on Method, p.1
tion. It is not until Emma tries by every means to arouse her pride that she begins to cherish the hope of marrying Mr. Elton, but still she refuses Mr. Martin's proposal with a heavy heart. Pride is usually in proportion to the intelligence and social position. There are exceptions, but generally speaking this holds true.

"Emma Woodhouse," as Jane Austen presents her at the opening of the book, "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her." However, "The real evil, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself." /1/

The comedy begins when she feels proud of having made a successful match for Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor and determines to make another one for Mr. Elton. Both her father and Mr. Knightley advise her to invite Mr. Elton to dinner and help him to the best of the fish and the chicken, but leave him to choose his own wife, but Emma thinks she has the power of making matches. She tries by every means to make Harriet and Mr. Elton love each other. She raises Harriet's hope on the one hand and gives encouragement to Mr. Elton on the other. As a result, Harriet is persuaded to refuse Mr. Martin's proposal, which, in her position, she ought to have accepted, and the worst thing is that Mr. Elton, instead of falling in love with Harriet, falls in love with Emma. The following is the conversation between Emma and Harriet concerning Mr. Martin's proposal:

/1/ Emma Chap. I, p. I
/2/ ibid Chap. I, p. I-2
"You think I ought to refuse him, then?" said Harriet, looking down.

"Ought to refuse him! My dear Harriet, what do you mean? Are you in any doubt as to that? I thought—but I beg your pardon; perhaps I have been under a mistake. I certainly have been misunderstanding you, if you feel in doubt as to the purport of your answer. I had imagined you were consulting me only as to the wording of it." Harriet was silent. With a little reserve of manner, Emma continued,—

"You mean to return a favorable answer, I collect."

"No, I do not; that is, I do not mean—What shall I do? What would you advise me to do? Pray, dear Miss Woodhouse, tell me what I ought to do."

"I shall not give you any advice, Harriet. I will have nothing to do with it. This is a point which you must settle with your own feelings."

"I had no notion that he liked me so very much," said Harriet, contemplating the letter. For a little while Emma persevered in her silence; but beginning to apprehend the bewitching flattery of that letter might be too powerful, she thought it best to say,—

"I lay it down as a general rule, Harriet, that if a woman doubts as to whether she should accept a man or not, she certainly ought to refuse him. If she can hesitate as to say 'Yes' she ought to say 'No' directly. It is not a state to be safely entered into with doubtful feelings, with half a heart. I thought it my duty, as a friend, and older than yourself, to say thus much to you. But do not imagine I want to influence you."/I/

This persuasion is, of course, enough to influence her beautiful and stupid friend. After Harriet has determined to refuse Mr. Martin, Emma says to her:

"Perfectly, perfectly right, my dearest Harriet; you are doing just what you ought. While you were at all in suspense, I kept my feelings to myself; but now you are so completely decided, I have no hesitation in approving. Dear Harriet, I give myself joy of this. It would have grieved me to lose your acquaintance, which must have been the consequence of your marrying Mr. Martin. While you were in the smallest degree wavering, I said nothing about it, because I would not influence; but it would have been the loss of a friend to me. I could not have visited Mrs. Robert Martin of Abbey Mill Farm. Now I am secure of you forever."

Harriet had not surmised her own danger, but the idea of it struck her forcibly. not

"You could have visited me!" she cried, looking aghast. "No, to be sure you could not; but I never thought of that before. That would have been too dreadful! What an escape! Dear Miss Woodhouse, I
would not give up the pleasure and honor of being intimate with you for anything in the world."/1/

So far Emma's success is complete; she does save Harriet for Mr. Elton; but unfortunately when the curtain rises on the next scene we find Emma, not Harriet, the object of Mr. Elton's love!

To restrain him as much as might be, by her own manners, she was immediately preparing to speak with exquisite calmness and gravity of the weather and the night; but scarcely had she begun, scarcely had they passed the sweep-gate and joined the other carriage, than found her subject cut up, her hand seized, her attention demanded, and Mr. Elton actually making violent love to her, availing himself of the precious opportunity, declaring sentiments which must be already well known, hoping, fearing, adoring, ready to die if she refused him, but flattering himself that his ardent attachment and unequalled love and unexampled passion could not fail of having some effect, and, in short, very much resolved on being seriously accepted as soon as possible. It really was so. Without scruple, without apology, without much apparent diffidence, Mr. Elton, the lover of Harriet, was professing himself her lover. She tried to stop him, but vainly; he would go on and say it all. Angry as she was, the thought of the moment made her resolve to restrain herself when she did speak. She felt that half this folly must be drunkenness, and therefore could hope that it might belong only to the passing hour. Accordingly, with a mixture of the serious and the playful, which she hoped would suit his half and half state, she replied,--

"I am very much astonished, Mr. Elton. This to me! You forget yourself—you take me for my friend. Any message to Miss Smith I shall be happy to deliver; but no more of this to me, if you please."

"Miss Smith! Message to Miss Smith! What could she possibly mean!"/2/

The spell is broken; the lover goes away; however, a short time after, he comes back with a new Mrs. Elton, who becomes the second representative of this type, although her character is by no means as amiable as Emma's. She is fond of talking about herself and tries in every way to establish her own superiority. The following conversation between Emma and Mrs. Elton is one of the most wonderful dialogues Jane Austen has ever written.

/1/ Emma Chap.VII, p.46
/2/ ibid Chap.XV, p.II6-II7
"I do not ask whether you are musical, Mrs. Elton. Upon these occasions a lady's character generally precedes her; and Highbury has long known that you are a superior performer."

"Oh no, indeed! I must protest against any such idea. A superior performer! very far from it, I assure you. Consider from how partial a quarter your information came. I am dotingingly fond of music—passionately fond—and my friends say I am not entirely devoid of taste; but as to anything else, upon my honour my performance is mediocre to the last degree. You, Miss Woodhouse, I well know, play delightfully. I assure you it has been the greatest satisfaction, comfort, and delight to me to hear what a musical society I am got into. I absolutely cannot do without music; it is a necessity of life to me; and having always been used to a very musical society, both at Maple Grove and in Bath, it would have been a most serious sacrifice. I honestly said as much to Mr. E. when he was speaking of my future home, and expressing his fears lest the retirement of it should be disagreeable; and the inferiority of the house too—knowing what I had been accustomed to—of course, he was wholly without apprehension. When he was speaking of it in that way, I honestly said that the world I could give up—parties, balls, plays,—for I have no fear of retirement. Blessed with so many resources within myself, the world was not necessary to me; I could do very well without it. To those who had no resources it was a different thing; but my resources made me quite independent. And as to smaller-sized rooms than had been used to, I really could not give it a thought. I hoped I was perfectly equal to any sacrifice of that description. Certainly I had been accustomed to every luxury at Maple Grove; but I did assure him that two carriages were not necessary to my happiness, nor were spacious apartments. 'But', said I, 'to be quite honest, I do not think I can live without something of a musical society. I condition for nothing else; but without music life would be a blank to me!'"

"We cannot suppose," said Emma, smiling, "that Mr. Elton would hesitate to assure you of there being a very musical society in Highbury; and I hope you will not find he has outstepped the truth more than may be pardoned, in consideration of the motive."

"No, indeed, I have no doubts at all on that head. I am delighted to find myself in such a circle; I hope we shall have many sweet little concerts together. I think, Miss Woodhouse, you and I must establish a musical club, and have regular weekly meetings at your house or ours. Will it be a good plan? If we exert ourselves, I think we shall not be long in want of allies. Something of that nature would be particularly desirable for me, as an inducement to keep me in practice; for married women, you know—there is a sad story against them, in general. They are but too apt to give up music."

"But you who are so extremely fond of it, there can be no danger, surely."

"I should hope not; but really, when I look around among my acquaintance, I tremble. Selina has entirely given up music—never to be said of Mrs. Jeffereys—Clara Partridge that was—and of the two
Elinor’s, now Mrs. Bird and Mrs. James Cooper; and of more than I can
enumerate. Upon my word, it is enough to put one in a fright. I
used to be quite angry with Selina; but really, I begin now to compre-
head that a married woman has many things to call her attention. I
believe I was half an hour this morning shut up with my house-keeper."
"But everything of that kind," said Emma, "will soon be in
a regular train——"
"Well," said Mrs. Elton, laughing, "we shall see."
Emma, finding her so determined upon neglecting her music,
had nothing more to say. /1/

Mrs. Elton’s irresistible pride, which makes her try to
show off her musical taste, and her difficulty in dodging Emma’s
sharp inquiry fill the whole atmosphere with the spirit of comedy.
But we must not fail to notice that Emma’s pride belongs to an intelli-
gent person without enough experience, while Mrs. Elton’s pride be-
longs to a hopeless fool. That is why Emma’s character could improve
while Mrs. Elton’s character remains unchanged. The same comparison
may be drawn between Mr. Darcy and Sir Walter Elliot. The former,
corrects himself as soon as he realizes his mistake, while the latter
will remain forever “a man who, for his own amusement, never took
up any book but the Baronetage.” /2/

The third important comic element is sensibility. For this
characteristic, no character is so well-known as Marianne. She forms
a strong contrast to her sister Elinor, who, unlike Marianne, uses
her good sense and makes use of her feelings with moderation and with
intelligence. Marianne is fond of excessive expression and of extreme
indulgence. She thinks where there is real feeling self-control is
impossible. She is dissatisfied with her sister’s attitude toward her
lover. Very soon after, she meets Mr. Willoughby, whose apparent

/1/ Emma Chap. XXXII, p. 248-249
/2/ Persuasion Chap. I, p. 1
character suits her ideal in every respect. Their first conversation is described thus:

It was only necessary to mention any favourite amusement to engage her to talk. She could be silent when such points were introduced, and she had neither shyness nor reserve in their discussion. They speedily discovered that their enjoyment of dancing and music was mutual, and it arose from a general conformity of judgment in all that related to either. Encouraged this to a further examination of his opinions, she proceeded to question him on the subject of books: her favourite authors were brought forward and dwelt upon with so rapturous a delight that any young man of five-and-twenty must have been insensible indeed not to become an immediate convert to the excellence of such works, however disregarded before. Their taste was strikingly alike. The same books, the same passages, were idolized by each; or if any difference appeared, any objection arose, it lasted no longer than till the force of her arguments and the brightness of her eyes could be displayed. He acquiesced in all her decisions, caught all her enthusiasm; and long before his visit concluded, they conversed with the familiarity of a long-established acquaintance./1/

When they become lovers Marianne shows even more sensibility.

When he was present she had no eyes for any one else. Everything he said was clever. If their evenings at the park were concluded with cards, he cheated himself and all the rest of the party to get her a good hand. If dancing formed the amusement of the night, they were partners for half the time; and when obliged to separate for a couple of dances, were careful to stand together, and scarcely spoke a word to anybody else. Such conduct made them, of course, most exceedingly laughed at; but ridicule could not shame, and seemed hardly to provoke them./2/

Then Willoughby suddenly leaves her. We find:

She was awake the whole night, and she wept the greatest part of it. She got up with a headache, was unable to talk, and unwilling to take any nourishment, giving pain every moment to her mother and sisters, and forbidding all attempt at consolation from either. Her sensibility was potent enough.

When breakfast was over she walked out by herself, and wandered about the village of Allegham, indulging the recollection of past enjoyment, and crying over the present reverse for the chief of the morning.

The evening passed off in the equal indulgence of feeling. She played over every favourite song that she had been used to play to Willoughby, every air in which their voices had been oftener joined, and sat at the instrument gazing on every line of music that he had

/1/ Sense and Sensibility Chap.X, p.40-41
/2/ Ibid Chap.XI, p.46
written for her, till her heart was so heavy that no further sadness could be gained; and this nourishment of grief was every day applied. She spent whole hours at the pianoforte, alternately singing and crying, her voice often totally suspended by her tears. In books, too, as well as in music, she courted the misery which a contrast between the past and present was certain of giving. She read nothing but what they had been used to read together.

Such violence of affliction, indeed, could not be supported forever; it sank within a few days into a calmer melancholy; but these employments, to which she daily recurred, her solitary walks and silent meditations, still produced occasional effusions of sorrow as lively as ever.

If we define sensibility as seeing too much value in a certain object we may also define prejudice as seeing too little value in a certain object. Every object has a definite value which it deserves according to the social standard of a definite time and a definite space. It is equally out of proportion if we overestimate or underestimate the value. Marianne's disproportion, as we see, is chiefly due to her seeing too much value in her love, and, as a result, she does give it proportionate responses, which social standards demand. That is why she is laughable. Let us proceed to examine the opposite set of comic characters who see too little value in certain objects. This brings us to the fourth comic element employed by Jane Austen in her works, namely, prejudice.

Let us see how this element works in the case of Mr. Thorpe.

"Have you ever read 'Udolpho', Mr. Thorpe?"

"'Udolpho'! O Lord! not I. I never read novels. I have something else to do."

Catherine, humble and ashamed, was going to apologize for her question; but he prevented her by saying, "Novels are all so full of nonsense and stuff; there has been a tolerably decent one come out since 'Tom Jones', except the 'Monk'. I read that t'other day; but as for all the others, they are the stupidest things in creation."

"I think you must like 'Udolpho', if you were to read it; it is so very interesting!"

"Not I, faith! No, if I read any, it shall be Mrs. Rad-

/I/ Sense and Sensibility Chap.XVI, p.73
cliffes's; her novels are amusing enough; they are worth reading; some fun and nature in them.

"'Udolpho' was written by Mrs. Radcliffe," said Catherine, with some hesitation, from the fear of mortifying him.

"No, sure; was it? Ay, I remember; so it was. I was thinking of that other stupid book, written by that woman they made such a fuss about—she who married a French immigrant."

"I suppose you mean 'Camilla'?"

"Yes, that's the book. Such unnatural stuff! An old man playing at see-saw. I took up the first volume once, and I looked it over, but I soon found it would not do; indeed I guessed what sort of stuff it must be before I saw it. As soon as I heard she had married an immigrant, I was sure I should never be able to get through it."

"I have never read it."

"You had no loss, I assure you. It is horridest nonsense you can imagine. There is nothing in the world in it but an old man's playing at see-saw and learning Latin. Upon my soul, there is not."

After we hear the brilliant remarks of this wonderful critic, let us hear Sir Walter Elliot's objections to naval officers.

"Yes, it is two points offensive to me; I have two strong grounds of objection to it. First, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honors which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of; and secondly, as it cuts a man's youth and vigour most horribly. A sailor grows old sooner than any other man; I have observed it all my life. A man is in great danger in the navy of being insulted by the rise of one whose father his father must have disdained to speak to, and of becoming prematurely an object of disgust himself than in any other line. One day last spring, in town, I was in company with two men, striking instances of what I am talking of: Lord St. Ives, whose father we all know had been a country curate, without bread to eat----I was to give place to Lord St. Ives, and a certain Admiral Baldwin, the most deplorable personage you can imagine—his face the color of mahogany, rough and rugged to the last degree, all lines and wrinkles, nine gray hairs of a side, and nothing but a dab of powder at top. 'In the name of heaven, who is that old fellow?' said I to a friend of mine who was standing near (Sir Basil Vorley). 'Old fellow!' cried Sir Basil—'it is Admiral Baldwin. What do you take his age to be? 'Sixty,' said I, 'or perhaps sixty-two.' 'Forty,' replied Sir Basil—'forty and no more.' Picture yourselves my amazement. I shall not easily forget Admiral Baldwin. I never saw quite so wretched an example of what a seafaring life can do; but, to a degree, I know it is the same with them all: they are all knocked about, and exposed to every climate, and every weather, till they are not fit to be seen. It is a pity they are not knocked on the head at once before they reach Admiral Baldwin's age."
We know, in "Mansfield Park", Mrs. Norris has no sympathy for Fanny Price. She always regards Fanny as inferior to her cousins. When they come to tell their mother and aunt how she cannot put the map of Europe together, or how she cannot tell the principal rivers in Russia, or how she never heard of Asia Minor, or how she does not know the difference between water colors and crayons, Mrs. Norris says to them:

"Very true, indeed, my dears, but you are blessed with wonderful memories, and your poor cousin has probably none at all. There is a vast deal of difference in memories, as well as in everything else, and therefore you must make allowance for your cousin, and pity her deficiency. And remember that, if you are ever so forward and clever yourselves, you should be always be modest; for much as you know already, there is a great deal more for you to learn."

"Yes, I know there is, till I am seventeen. But I must tell you another thing of Fanny, so odd and so stupid. Do you know, she says she does not want to learn either music or drawing!"

"To be sure, my dear, that is very stupid indeed, and shows a great want of genius and emulation. But, all things considered, I do not know it is as well that it should be so: for though you know (owing to me) your papa and mamma are so good as to bring her up with you, it is not at all necessary that she should be as accomplished as you are; on the contrary, it is much more desirable that there should be a difference." /I/

Prejudice may be developed from various causes. Mr. Thorpe's prejudice is due to his ignorance; Sir Walter Elliot's prejudice is due to his vanity; Mrs. Norris's prejudice is due to her lack of sympathy. As a matter of fact, all the four comic elements, stupidity, pride, sensibility, and prejudice, are closely related to each other, and very often two or three of them are found in the same character. What the comic writer tries to do is to select one predominant element and make it the theme of his work. Tartuffe may have other disproportions of character but Molière only takes his

/I/ Mansfield Park Chap. II, p.16
hypocrisy for his theme; M. Perishon may have other comic elements but with La Biche his pride alone is the chief of comic element. What is true of Molière's and La Biche's comic characters is also true of Jane Austen's.

Furthermore, there is no reason to suppose that Jane Austen limits herself to the four comic elements above mentioned. There are a great number of others which also serve to produce the effects of comedy; only they do not occupy so important a place in her works as these four comic elements do. One of the reasons is the writer's apparent fondness for making use of them, and another more important reason is the importance of these four elements in real life. We cannot pass a day without seeing exemplifications of these four comic elements about us. If these elements were to be eliminated, life would be very different. As it is, the use of Comedy need never dread a lack of material.
IV

Disproportions of character are laughable when taken by themselves, but when they are carefully selected and cleverly arranged so as to lead up to certain comic situations they become doubly effective.

There are two kinds of comic situation: the first depends upon the comic elements of the situation itself, while the second is the logical outcome of comic elements of character. The comic situations in Aristophanes' "The Frogs", Goldsmith's "She Stoops to conquer", Swift's "Gulliver's Travels", and Cervantes' "Don Quixote" all belong to the former kind. They involve neither deep character development nor penetrating psychological study; the situations are comic enough to hold the attention of the audience.

The comic situations of the latter kind, on the other hand, cannot do without character. This type of comedy is always called "high comedy" and is sometimes called "comedy of character". The former type may easily become farce, that is, a series of dramatic incidents based upon an impossible comic situation, as in "The Frogs"
and "Gulliver's Travels", or it may be comedy with farcical elements, as in "She Stoops to Conquer" and "Don Quixote," or it may be comedy with typical characters and conventional devices, as in Terence’s "Two Brothers" and Plautus's "The Captives". High comedy, if successful, cannot become any one of these because it cannot do without highly individualized characters. It offers a more difficult and delicate task for the author because both character insight and dramatic genius are required to make it successful. To this class of high comedy or comedy of character Jane Austen's works belong.

We have already mentioned the library scene in "Pride and Prejudice" and the carriage scene in "Emma", but there are still many others. On one occasion, in "Sense and Sensibility", Jane Austen brings Lucy, Elinor, Edward, and Marianne together. Lucy has told Elinor of her engagement to Edward, but Marianne is ignorant of it and takes it for granted that Edward is Elinor's lover. Her ignorance together with her sensibility renders the situation intensely comic.

It was a very awkward moment, and the countenance of each showed that it was so. They all looked exceedingly foolish; and Edward seemed to have as great an inclination to walk out of the room again as to advance farther into it. The very circumstance, in its unpleasantest form, which they would each have been most anxious to avoid, had fallen on them. They were not only three together, but were together without the relief of any other person. The ladies recovered themselves first. It was not Lucy's business to put herself forward, and the appearance of secrecy must still be kept up. She could therefore only look her tenderness, and after slightly addressing him, said no more.

But Elinor had more to do; and so anxious was she, for his sake and her own, to do it well, that she forced herself, after a moment's recollection, to welcome him, with a look and manner that were almost easy and almost open; and another struggle, another effort, still improved them. She would not allow the presence of Lucy, nor

1/1 Pride and Prejudice Chap. XX, p. 100
1/2 Emma Chap. XV, p. 111-120
the consciousness of some injustice towards herself, to deter her from saying that she was happy to see him, and that she had very much regretted being from home when he called before in Berkley Street. She would be frightened from paying him those attentions which, as a friend and almost a relation, were his due, by the observant eyes of Lucy, though she soon perceived them to be narrowly watching her./I/

Elinor's exertions seem to save the situation from its extreme awkwardness. She gives Edward some assurance and he has courage to sit down and to feel at ease. Unfortunately Elinor goes out to relieve her feelings under the pretence of fetching her sister. When Marianne comes in, the situation becomes even more awkward than before because her pleasure in seeing him is like all her feelings, strong in itself, and strongly expressed. She meets him with a hand that wishes to be taken, and a voice that expresses the affection of a sister.

"Dear Edward!" she cried, "this is a moment of great happiness! This would almost make amends for everything!"

Edward tried to return her kindness as it deserved, but before such witnesses he dared not say half what he really felt. Again they all sat down, and for a moment or two all were silent, while Marianne was looking with the most speaking tenderness, sometimes at Edward and sometimes at Elinor, regretting only that their delight in each other should be checked by Lucy's unwelcome presence. /2/

The situation comes to a climax when Lucy, eager to take revenge, joins their conversation.

"But why were you not there, Edward? Why did you not come?"
"I was engaged elsewhere."
"Engaged! But what was that, when such friends were to be met?"
"Perhaps, Miss Marianne," cried Lucy, eager to take some revenge on her, "you think young men never stand upon engagements, if they have no mind to keep them, little as well as great."

/I/ Sense and Sensibility Chap.XXXV, p.210-211

/2/ ibid Chap.XXXV, p.211-212
Elinor was very angry, but Marianne seemed entirely insensible of the sting, for she calmly replied,---

"Not so, indeed; for, seriously speaking, I am very sure that conscience only kept Edward from Harley Street. And I really believe he has the most delicate conscience in the world---the most scrupulous in performing every engagement, however minute, and however it may make against his interest or pleasure. He is the most fearful of giving, of wounding expectation, and the most incapable of being selfish, of anybody I ever saw.---Edward, it is so, and I will say it. What! are you never to hear yourself praised? Then you must be no friend of mine; for those who will accept of my love and esteem must submit to my open commendation."

The nature of her commendation, in the present case, however, happened to be particularly ill suited to the feelings of two thirds of her auditors, and was so very unexhilarating to Edward that he very soon got up to go away.

"Going so soon!" said Marianne: "my dear Edward, this must not be."

And drawing him a little aside, she whispered her persuasion that Lucy could not stay much longer.

The success of this scene is due chiefly to the use of dramatic irony, but without Marianne's sensibility and Lucy's selfishness the situation would be so comic, and when there is clash between comic elements in the character of Marianne and of Lucy the comic strain rises to its highest point. Another successful scene is found in the same book, when Mrs. Jennings attacks the youngest sister to give the young man's name, Margaret answers by looking at her sister, and saying,

"I must not tell. May I, Elinor?"

This, of course, made everybody laugh, and Elinor tried to laugh too. But the effort was painful. She was convinced that Margaret had fixed a person whose name she could not bear with composure to become a standing joke with Mrs. Jennings.

Marianne felt for her most sincerely; but she did more harm than good to the cause by turning very red and saying in an angry manner to Margaret,---

"Remember that, whatever your conjectures may be, you have no right to repeat them."

"I never had any conjectures about it," replied Margaret; "it was you who told me of it yourself."

/I/ Sense and Sensibility Chap. XXXV, p. 212-213
This increased the mirth of the company, and Margaret was
eagerly pressed to say something more.
"Oh, pray, Miss Margaret, let us know all about it," said
Mrs. Jennings. "What is the gentleman's name?"
"I must not tell ma'am. But I know very well what it is,
and I know where he is too."
"Yes, yes, we can guess where he is: at his own house at
Norland, to be sure. He is the curate of the parish. I dare say."
"No, that he is not. He is of no profession at all."
"Margaret," said Marianne, with great warmth, "you know that
all this is an invention of your own, and that there is no such person
in existence."
"Well, then, he is lately dead, Marianne, for I am sure
there was such a person once, and his name begins with an F." /I/

There can be no doubt that every reader is impressed by the
clever management of this comic situation, but the secret of its suc-
cess again depends upon character, and when Marianne's sensibility
clashes with Margaret's innocence the comic situation becomes the most
dramatic.

"Mansfield Park" is considered by Cornish the least dramatic
of Jane Austen's novels. /2/ Comparatively speaking, this statement is
true but here and there we still find comic situations cleverly
managed to produce dramatic effect. When all the young people are
busily engaged in their rehearsal, Jane Austen purposely lets the
very serious and dignified Sir Thomas come back at a most inopportune
moment. Everybody is terrified when the door of the room is thrown
open, and Julia, appearing at it, with a face all aghast, exclaims,
"My father is come! He is in the hall at this moment." Everybody,
who knows Sir Thomas's character, immediately gives up all hope of
the rehearsal and the performance. The members of the family go to

/I/ Sense and Sensibility Chap. XII, p. 52-53

/2/ Cornish: Jane Austen, p. 197
receive Sir Thomas and the Crawfords return home, but Jane Austen purposely and mischievously leaves Mr. Yeats behind, confident in the renewal of the rehearsal and remaining in the theater. So when Sir Thomas goes to look around his house he has the opportunity of meeting him.

Sir Thomas had been a good deal surprised to find candle burning in his room; and, on casting his eye round it, to see other symptoms of recent habitation and a general air of confusion in the furniture. The removal of the bookcase from before the billiard-room door struck him especially, but he had scarcely more than time to feel astonished at all this, before there were sounds from the billiard room to astonish him still further. Some one was talking there in a very loud accent—he did not know the voice—more than talking—almost hallooing. He stepped to the door, rejoicing at the moment in having the means of immediate communication, and opening it found himself on the stage of a theater, and opposed to a ranting young man, who appeared likely to knock him down backwards. At the very moment of Yeats perceiving Sir Thomas, and giving, perhaps, the very best start he had ever given in the whole course of his rehearsals. /I/

The situation is noticeably arranged by the writer but it is still the logical outcome of character, and the clash of Sir Thomas's seriousness and Mr. Yeats's insensibility again intensifies the comic effect.

In all the three instances mentioned above, we have seen that the clash of the comic elements of character is always essential in heightening the comic effect of the situation. This device is repeatedly employed in "Pride and Prejudice"; in fact, it recurs almost at every meeting of the hero and the heroine. Darcy represents pride, while Elizabeth represents prejudice. They are in constant disagreement, and every clash between them serves to intensify the effect of the comic situation. We see them together at a

/I/ Mansfield Park Chap. XIX, p. 164
They stood for some time without speaking a word, and she began to imagine that their silence was to last through the two dances, and at first was resolved not to break it; till suddenly fancying that it would be the greater punishment to her partner to oblige him to talk, she made some slight observation on the dance. He replied, and was again silent. After a pause of some minutes, she addressed him a second time, with—

"It is your turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy, I talked about the dance, and you ought to make some kind of remark on the size of the room or the number of couples."

He smiled, and assured her that whatever she wished him to say should be said.

"Very well; that reply will do for the present. Perhaps, by-and-by I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones; but now we may be silent."

"Do you talk by rule, then, while you are dancing?"

"Sometimes. One must speak a little, you know. It would look odd to be entirely silent for half an hour together; and, yet, for the advantage of some conversation ought to be so arranged as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible."

"Are you consulting your own feelings in the present case, or do you imagine that you are gratifying mine?"

"Both", replied Elizabeth archly; "for I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds. We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to posterity with all the éclat of a proverb." /1/

On another occasion, Darcy, drawing near Elizabeth, says to her,

"Do not you feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?"

She smiled, but made no answer. He repeated the question, with some surprise at her silence.

"Oh," said she, "I heard you before; but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say 'Yes', that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have, therefore, made up my mind to tell you that I do not want to dance a reel at all; and now despise me if you dare."

"Indeed I do not dare." /2/

Comparatively speaking, an arrangement of this kind is not

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/I/ Pride and Prejudice Chap.XVIII, p.81

/2/ ibid Chap.X, p.44-45
difficult, if the writer can see the comic elements of character; nevertheless, a dramatic genius is required to make the scene effective, especially with characters like Larcy and Elizabeth whose intelligence is on such a high plane that failure is inevitable, if the situation is not in the hands of a great artist.
Before we entered upon our discussion of Jane Austen's works, we had tried to establish four fundamental principles of comedy: first, that comedy appeals to intelligence rather than to emotion; second, that the function of comedy is to laugh at the disproportions in life in order to make us conform to the best standards of living in society; third, that these disproportions in life may be physical or spiritual, permanent or temporary; last and most important of all, that these disproportions in life are subject to the changes of time and space. We have employed these four fundamental principles to examine Jane Austen's works in connection with the works of other important comic writers in Western literature, and we have found that if we admit the conditions of time and space, the three former principles are true in different European literatures at different times. The success of Jane Austen's works is chiefly due to their agreement with these principles. However, in spite of the differences of time and space, there is a certain unity
in European literatures as a whole. They have all come from the same origins, namely, Israel, Greece and Rome, and no sooner was new literary tradition established than it naturally spread to all parts of Europe. Consequently, the differences resulting from differences of time and space are not extremely great. Therefore, even if we find these principles valid for Western literature, we may still doubt whether they hold true for a literature from a totally different civilization which for several thousand years, in fact, until the middle of the last century, had had little or no connection with the stream of European culture. A comparison between Jane Austen and some of the most prominent Chinese writers, therefore, is necessary and interesting for the further estimation of our fundamental principles regarding comedy.

Before we take up any work of Chinese literature for comparison, we must first bear in mind several important facts, without understanding which misconceptions are inevitable.

In the first place, fiction and drama do not occupy important places in the history of Chinese literature. In earlier times, the majority of the Chinese literary men occupied themselves chiefly with lyrical poetry and classical prose. They regarded fiction and drama with disdain. Twenty years ago, an average Chinese father or teacher would not even allow his boys to read novels and plays lest they might be corrupted by them. Once in a while, we had a great dramatist or a novelist, but they had to fight against the social convention. They got no reward; they won no respect. By the sheer power of their genius, by their irresistible impulse of their
creative force, and through long years of hard work, they struggled to give the nation an invaluable work of pure art. In spite all the difficulties the genuine merit of their works was gradually realized by the public. People read them, praised them, and could not live without them. They appealed to persons in different walks of life; even some of the classical scholars had to read them and comment on them, although they gave them not the equal rank with the classics. Two results of this attitude are natural: first, the intrinsic value of these works was not fully realized and appreciated; and second, the majority of the geniuses were discouraged and found expressions in other fields, and as a result, there was no gradual development of theory and technique. Dr. Hu-Shih, the most prominent leader in the New Literary Movement during the last decade in China, whose new discoveries about the life of several important novelists, and whose editions and reevaluation of their works have exercised considerable influence upon modern Chinese literature, says in one of his essays: "In former times, people considered Tze (song) a mere poetic pastime and regarded it with disdain; popular songs and plays fared even worse; fiction received still greater contempt. During the last thirty years there has been a reaction--------Through the influence of Western literature, modern Chinese have begun to respect and appreciate Chinese fiction.--------We now realize that Su-Tung-Po's and Huang-Shang-Hu's poetry does not represent their time as well as do their Tze (songs); Yao-Sih's and Chu-Yang-Shan's classical prose does not represent their time as do Kwan-Han-Ching's and

/I/ The Chinese make a careful distinction between Shih(poetry) and Tze (songs). The former is serious, classical, while the latter is light, popular, singable, and written about love. They have also different forms of structure and different systems of rhyme.
and Ma-Chih-Yuan's dramas; Kwei-Yü-Queng's and Tong-Shün-Chih's classical prose does not represent their time as well as do the novels, "Ching-Ping-Mei" (Gold, Vase, Plum Flower) and "Hsi-Yü-Chi" (Travels to the West); Fang-Pao's and Yao-Lei's classical prose does not represent their time as well as do the novels, Hung-Lu-Mong" (The Dream of the Red Chamber) and "Ju-Lin-Wai-Shih" (The Irregular History of the Confucian Scholars). Consequently, our attitude toward the history of Chinese literature must undergo a great change.

In the second place, there is, in Chinese literature, no work of comedy as we understand the term in Western literature. We have already pointed out that since the majority of the literary men found expression in other fields it was but seldom that any of them wrote novels and plays, and there was, therefore, no gradual development of theory and technique. The writers never thought of their works in terms of tragedy, comedy, and novel. Moreover, the Chinese as a whole are a very practical people; the Chinese mind is not as speculative and as critical as the Western mind; theory is the last thing to engage their attention. The beauty of the Chinese drama lies very little in plot, characterization, or in any fundamental theory underlying it. It is operatic. It is all written in poetry, with here and there some dialogue or soliloquy in prose. Its beauty can only be judged and appreciated from the lyrical quality of its poetry. Professor Wang-Kuei-Wei, who is the greatest

/I/ Actually the names of the three women characters in the novel.

/2/ Ku-Shih: Essays, Second Series Vol. 4 p. 262-263
authority on the Chinese drama of the Yuan dynasty, the Golden period of the Chinese drama, says, "The drama of the Yuan dynasty does not occupy an important place in the history of Chinese literature," and when he judges the value of it he remarks, "What is the beauty of the Yuan drama? One word is sufficient; that is, its "naturalness." All great literatures are natural, but the Yuan drama is the most significant in this respect, for the dramatists of the Yuan dynasty had no great fame, no high position, and no profound scholarship. When they wrote drama they had no idea of passing it down to posterity. They wrote according to their interest and to amuse themselves and others. They did not question the awkwardness and the commonplace of their plots; they did not try to conceal the crudeness and superficiality of their ideas; they did not care about the inconsistency of their characters. They described only the feelings of the heart and the conditions of the time, but truth and power are everywhere in their works." /2/

Since the Chinese dramatists did not pay attention to plot, idea, and character, it is no wonder that they did not develop any theory of comedy. Of course, there are comic elements in their works, but there are very few plays that can be called comedy. In practically every play there is the mixture of tragic and comic elements. The heroes and heroines must undergo certain reverses of fortune but, in the end, good must be rewarded and evil must be punished. The characters are all types and actors are specialized according to the different types they represent. Under these circum-

/I/ From a letter to the writer in 1926, two years before he died.

/2/ Wang-Kuei-Wei: History of Drama in the Sung and Yuan Dynasties, p.140-141 (王國維宋元戲曲史)
stances, we can hardly expect either comedy of character or comedy of situation, such as we find in Jane Austen's works.

There are many examples in Chinese drama which will illustrate the use of physical disproportions and farcical situations as comic elements, but since they do not serve our purpose in comparing them with Jane Austen's works we may leave them. Chinese fiction also has the same drawback, but in the hands of great novelists characterization arrives at a very high level, because, unlike the Chinese dramatists, the aim of the Chinese novelists is not to write poetry, and they are not handicapped by the conventions of stage and actor. It is not difficult to find comic elements of character in these works, but, so far as the whole work is concerned, there is no Chinese novel which can be called comedy of character, as we may call some of Jane Austen's works, such as "Emma" and "Pride and Prejudice". Practically every one of them has some tragic incidents as well as comic incidents. If there is no tragedy in the European sense, there is also no comedy.

Before we turn to some of the most comic scenes in Chinese novels it might be interesting to cite a few parables in Mencius's works which exhibit comic elements of character. It is surprising to notice that Mencius lived in the fourth century B.C., there are more than two thousand years between him and Jane Austen, and yet his clear perception of character disproportions and his manner of presenting them in their sharp outlines make his parables full of the comic spirit. Of course, it almost sounds ridiculous
to compare Jane Austen with Mencius, but let us see how Mencius, in one of his parables, employs pride as a comic element.

A man of Ts'e had a wife and a concubine, and lived together with them in his house. Whenever he went out, he would get himself well filled with wine and flesh, and then return, and, if his wife asked him with whom he ate and drank, they were sure to be wealthy and honorable people. The wife informed the concubine, saying, "When our good man goes out, he is sure to come back having partaken plentifully of wine and flesh. I asked with whom he ate and drank, and they are all, it seems, wealthy and honorable people. And yet no people of distinction ever come here. I will spy out where our good man goes." Accordingly, she got up early in the morning and secretly followed her husband wherever he went. Throughout the whole city, there was no one who stood or talked with him. At last he came to those who were sacrificing among the tombs beyond the outer wall on the east, and begged of them what was left over. Not being satisfied, he looked about, and went to another party:--and this was the way in which he got himself satiated. His wife returned, and informed the concubine, saying, "It was to our husband that we looked up in hopeful contemplation, with whom our lot is cast for life:--and now these are his ways! " On this, along with the concubine, she reviled her husband, and they went together in the middle hall. In the mean time the husband, knowing nothing of all this, came in with a jaunty air, carrying himself proudly before his wife and concubine./I/

Although the translation does not do justice to the clear and precise style of Mencius's prose, the effect of comedy is unmistakable. No Chinese who reads this parable can help laughing at this man's pride in show of superiority before his wife and concubine. The use of dramatic irony is also remarkable. The home-coming of the husband could easily be put on the stage with success.

Selfishness is used in another of Mencius's parables. This is a story about the Emperor Shun, who was badly treated by his father and step-brother, when he was still a common citizen, although the Emperor Yao had married his two daughters to him. Shun was a very filial son. He did everything his father commanded him.

/1/ Works of Mencius, Book IV Part I
His parents set Shun to repair a granary, to which, the ladder having been moved, Koo-Sow (his father) set fire. They also made him dig a well. He got out but they, not knowing that, proceeded to cover him up. Seang (his step-brother) said, "Of the scheme to cover up the city-forming prince /I/ the merit is all mine. Let my parents have his oxen and sheep. Let them have his storehouses and granaries. His shield and spear shall be mine. His lute shall be mine. His bow shall be mine. His two wives I shall make attend me to my bed." Seang then went away into Shun's palace, and there Shun was on his couch playing on his lute. Seang said, "I am come simply because I was thinking anxiously about you." At the same time, he blushed deeply. /2/

Seang's selfishness makes him boast of his success and express his self-satisfaction, but the surprise of suddenly finding Shun in his palace puts him in an awkward position. Here again we see the use of dramatic irony. Seang's character is well depicted in these few strokes.

More amusing is the story of Tsze-Ch'an, who was considered the wisest man of his time. But, when the wisest man is deceived he becomes an object of comedy. This is also a disproportion of character, but, in this case, it is only temporary because it is the mistake of the wise.

Formerly, some one sent a present of a live fish to Tsze-Ch'an of Ch'ing. Tsze-Ch'an ordered his pond-keeper to keep it in the pond, but that officer cooked it, and reported the execution of the commission, saying, "When I first let it go, it appeared embarrassed. In a little while it seemed to be at ease, and then swam away joyfully." Tsze-Ch'an observed, "It had got into its element! It had got into its element!" The pond-keeper then went out and said, "Who calls Tsze-Ch'an a wise man? After I had cooked and eaten the fish, he says, -"It had got into its element! It had got into its element." /3/

The translation here is more difficult because the description of the fish is a master piece. A slight change of a single word

/I/ It was said that Shun was so virtuous that wherever he lived, the people would flock to live near him and thus he could form a city.

/2/ Works of Mencius, Book V Part I

/3/ ibid
loses half the effect. But here again we see the use of dramatic irony. The comic element depends upon Tsze-Ch’an’s wisdom and the pond-keeper’s art of lying. Character, however, is even more deeply portrayed in the following story.

Chung belonged to an ancient and noble family of Ts’e. His elder brother Tae received from Ko a revenue of 10,000 chung, but he considered his brother’s emolument to be unrighteous, and would not eat of it, and in the same way he considered his brother’s house to be unrighteous, and would not dwell in it. Avoiding his brother and leaving his mother, he went and dwelt in Woo-Ling. One day, afterwards, he returned to their house, when it happened that some one sent his brother a present of a live goose. He, knitting his eye-brows, said, “What are you going to use that cackling thing for?” By-and-by his mother killed the goose, and gave him some of it to eat. Just then, his brother came into the house, and said, “It’s the flesh of that cackling thing”, upon which he went out and vomited it.

Chung’s disproportion is caused by his carrying his principles too far. As a matter of fact, Chung is really an admirable person, but Mencius does not approve of his attitude. So he presents him in this comic manner by showing his disproportions. Mencius has the ability to perceive the laughable and has the art of presenting without spoiling its comic effect. The following dialogue shows how quickly Mencius can see the laughable and how cleverly he can produce its comic effect;

Tae-Ying-Che said to Mencius, “I am not able at present and immediately to do with the levying of a tithe only, and abolishing the duties charged at the passes and in the markets. With your leave I will lighten, however, both the tax and the duties, until next year, and I will then make an end of them. What do you think of such a course?

Mencius said, “Here is a man who every day appropriates some of his neighbour’s strayed fowls. Some one says to him, “Such is not the way of a good man,” and he replies, “With your leave I will diminish my appropriations, and I will take only one fowl a month, until next year, when I will make an end of the practice.”

“If you know that the thing is unrighteous then use all dis-

/1/ Works of Mencius, Book III Part II
patch in putting an end to it:—Why wait till next year?" /I/

The next writer whom we wish to consider is Wu-Chen-Ngen (1505-1580), the author of "Travels to the West", the greatest creator of Chinese mythology. The story is about a Chinese monk in the ninth century, who went to the West to fetch the Buddistic bible back to China. He had to encounter eighty-one difficulties. Fortunately he acquired three disciples on the way; the first was the Monkey King, the second the Pig Monster, the third the Water Monster. The Monkey King and the Pig Monster are two of the most delightful creations in Chinese literature. They can be said to occupy the same positions as Gargantua and PantagrueI in Western literature. The revolt of the Monkey King against the God of Heaven and the disturbances which he causes in the heavenly palace are two of the most comic scenes in Chinese literature. The dignity and seriousness of the God of Heaven are placed in sharp contrast with the playful spirit of the Monkey King. The Pig Monster is a sort of simple minded, straightforward, and epicurean character. He is extremely lazy; his appetite is so great that he is never satisfied with any meal; he is ugly, yet he is very fond of women. Both of them are monsters with human characters. They are different from other characters because they have individualities. They represent some types of human character. They are essentially comic. With a very few exceptions, everything they say, everything they do is laughable. They are as different from Jane Austen's beautiful ladies and smart gentlemen as the North Pole from the South Pole, but essentially they are disproportions in life just the same. They are depicted with an immensely large

/I/ Works of Mencius, Book III Part II
brush on a gigantic scale. The comic effect increases with their size. The best way to comprehend them is to think of them in connection with the characters of Rabelais.

Another famous writer is Li-Yü-Cheng (1763-1830), whose novel, "Ching Hua Yuan" (The Story of the Mirror and the Flower) always reminds us of Swift’s "Gulliver’s Travels". There are three travelers in the book who go into a dozen strange countries, such as the country of gentlemen, the country of black teeth, the country of women. The adventures of the three travelers in the last country are the most famous. Like Swift, the writer takes this opportunity to satirize the inequality of women in Chinese society. This country is ruled entirely by women. Men are confined at home just as women are confined in China. Men have to powder their faces, bind their feet, and try by every means to make themselves charming. When the three travelers go ashore, they find a woman sitting in her home. Her hair is long and glistening; her ears are adorned with beautiful earrings; her feet are only three inches long; her fingers are soft and tender; her eyes are attractive; but looking carefully at her mouth they find a long beard. This, of course, makes them laugh, but the beautiful lady cries at them:

You have beards on your faces; undoubtedly you are women; but you have put on men’s clothes to deceive others. You don’t care about the difference between men and women. You pretend to look at women but you really want to look at men. You shameless women! You go back and look into the mirror! You have forgot your sex! Are you not ashamed? You are lucky to have met me. If you should meet someone else, he will think you are men trying to look at women. He will beat you half dead! /I/

/I/ The Story of the Mirror and the Flower, Chap. 32
The comedy of situation rises to its highest point when one of the travelers is chosen to be the empress and has to undergo all sorts of embarrassing and painful experiences. The whole is a very marvelous piece of work. The comic element is better and more delightfully employed than in "Gulliver's Travels" because the writer is not so bitter as Swift. However, this kind of comic situation is not what we see in Jane Austen's works.

All the Chinese writers above mentioned serve to give some idea of the comic elements in Chinese literature, but they cannot be compared with Jane Austen. "Travels to the West" deals with giants, monsters, and Gods; "The Story of the Mirror and the Flower" deals with comic situations; the Chinese dramatists pay attention to poetry rather than to character and plot, and the comic elements in their works are chiefly physical disproportions and comic situations. The nearest thing in Chinese literature to the comic elements in Jane Austen's works is in Mencius's parables, but we can only say that Mencius possesses the genius of comic writer, which not find proper expression in the field of comedy. There are still other famous comic characters in Chinese novels, such as Lu-Chih-Sheng and Li-Kuei in "Shui-Hu-Chuan" (The Story of the Water Castle), but they are more or less rather than individuals. Their comic elements again depend mostly upon physical disproportions and comic situations. Put a rough and greedy warrior into a solemn and quiet Buddhist temple and let him create all sorts of disturbances, or put a monk in place of a bride and let him beat the bridegroom, and you will
certainly provoke a great deal of laughter, but this kind of laughter, although it is cleverly handled, is quite different from what we find in Jane Austen's works.

High comedy cannot do without character. If we wish to find a proper Chinese writer to compare with Jane Austen, we must find a writer with great powers of characterization. He may not be a writer of pure comedy or he may not even be a comic writer at all, but he is still the nearest. This introduces us to the greatest novelist in Chinese literature, Tsao-Hsih-Ching, the author of "The Dream of the Red Chamber".

"The Dream of the Red Chamber" is and remains a great marvel and a great mystery in the field of Chinese fiction. It is a gigantic work and it is also a careful work. It consists of one hundred and twenty chapters, each of which contains about ten thousand words. There are more than one hundred characters in the book; each has his or her individuality; they all live and breathe. The characterization is so sharp and so subtle that some of the characters, like Hamlet and Macbeth, are capable of many interpretations and have aroused many discussions. So far as we know, there is no novel in the world written on such a large scale and yet with such consummate workmanship. It is a realistic representation of the manners of the time, just as "Simplicissimus", "Les Comedies Humanes", and Dickens' whole collection of novels are representatives of their times, but the amazing thing is that there is unity of theme and characters in the whole book, and like Jane Austen's works, it occupies itself largely with detailed descriptions of family life. It is perhaps the first Chinese novel which breaks away from the convention of a
happy ending. It is more a tragedy than a comedy, but there are many comic scenes which are the natural outcome of highly individualized characters.

All the incidents and characters are centered around three chief characters, Pao-Yü, the hero, Tai-Yü, and Pao-Chai, his two beautiful cousins. Pao-Yü loves Tai-Yü but his sister-in-law, for her selfish purpose, influences their grandmother and arranges for Pao-Chai to marry him. Tai-Yü dies while the wedding is taking place. After a short period of married life, Pao-Yü disappears and later is seen once by his father accompanying a monk and a Taoist. From the recent research of Dr. Hu-Shih we know definitely the author's name of which we were not sure a few years ago, and we know also something about the life of the writer. He was born some time between 1718 and 1720 and died about 1865. His father was so immensely rich that he had entertained the emperor several times, while the later was taking a trip to the south. Tsao-Hsi-h-Ching spent his youth more or less in the same fashion as the hero of the novel, with many beautiful cousins and maidservants around him. Then the family became poor and he was disillusioned with life. His last years were devoted to writing his novel:

From this brief summary of the story and the life of the writer we already notice pure comedy is impossible for such a work and such a writer. In the first place, the tragic note is noticeable everywhere in the book. The highest touches of character comedy

/I/ Hu-Shih: Preface to "The Dream of the Red Chamber"
are the scenes between the three chief characters, but no sooner is there a comic scene than Tae-Yü's sensibility comes to drive away the Muse of Comedy. As we have seen in Jane Austen's works, sensibility is one of the favorite comic elements of character; but Tae-Yü's sensibility, described by a disillusioned author, wins our sympathy and pity rather than laughter. The same thing is true of the hero. His character is very eccentric. He loves women and hates men, because, according to his conception, man is made of mud while woman is made of water; therefore, woman is pure and man is foul. He despises all standards of commonplace morality, even loyalty to the king. He always thinks of death and hopes that when he dies all his girl friends will shed so many tears for him that their tears will float his corpse to the sea and let it be scattered to an immense number of fine particles and vanish to nothing. This idea of regarding the will to live as the source of evil and attempting to annihilate all desires and consciousness derives its origin undoubtedly from Buddhism and is generally the attitude of a highly intellectual man disillusioned with everything in life. With this idea in the writer's mind, of course, we cannot expect him to accept the social standards of life and consequently we cannot expect him to be a comic writer.

The eccentricities of the hero have everywhere provoked a great deal of laughter, but only the laughter of fools or of practical persons. If the reader has any intelligence at all, he will

/Wang-Kuei-Wei: Essay on "The Dream of the Red Chamber"
discover that, underlying every eccentricity of the hero, there is
unmistakably some serious touch of life, which, when we think of it,
will immediately cause us sadness instead of laughter. As a matter
of fact, the hero is the person who is the laugher, not the laughed
at. Human beings, to him, are the most stupid and miserable beings
in the universe. Their life is so irrevocably and so blindly led
on by their inborn desires and so closely bound by family ties
and social standards that they can never free themselves, so far as
they do not understand the meaning of life.

There are other comic scenes which have become very famous,
such as, the entrance of a country woman, Liu-Lao-Lao, into
Ta-Kuan-Yuan, the wit of the hero's sister-in-law, Feng-Tse and her
amorous encounter with Chia-Lian, the rudeness of Hsih-Pan; but they
cannot be compared with the scenes between the three chief characters,
which are the finest touches of character comedy. Unfortunately, the
writer's irreconciliability with society and the tragic note of the
whole book everywhere change the effect of comedy.

From this brief survey, several things stand out clearly.
First, in spite of the differences of civilization and of history,
the comic elements in Chinese literature are still the disproportions
in life, spiritual or physical, temporary or permanent, and most
important of all when they are not perceived through intelligence,
pure and simple, and when they are mixed up with feeling, the effect
of comedy is immediately spoiled. Generally speaking, the majority
of the comic elements in Chinese literature are physical disproport-
tions and comic situations. There is no pure comedy of character,
as we have observed it in Jane Austen's works, because most of the comic characters in Chinese drama are types and some of the individualized comic characters in great novels are again spoiled by the conventional mixture of tragic and comic elements in a single work or by the writer's irreconciliability with society.
VI

After all the analysis and comparisons, we may end as we began by restating the four fundamental principles of comedy:

1. Comedy appeals to intelligence rather than to emotion.
2. The function of comedy is to laugh at the disproportions in life in order to make us conform to the best standards of life in society.
3. These disproportions in life may be physical or spiritual, permanent or temporary.
4. These disproportions in life are subject to the changes of time and space.

What we can say about Jane Austen's works is closely related to these four fundamental principles.

I. Jane Austen is a successful comic writer because she perceives disproportions in life through the sheer power of intelligence.
2. JANE AUSTEN IS A WRITER OF HIGH COMEDY BECAUSE THE DIS-
PROPORTIONS OR COMIC ELEMENTS SHE EMPLOYS IN HER WORKS
ARE LOGICAL OUTCOMES OF HIGHLY INDIVIDUALIZED CHARAC-
TERS.

3. JANE AUSTEN IS A SUCCESSFUL WRITER OF HIGH COMEDY BE-
CAUSE SHE KNOWS HOW TO ARRANGE THE COMIC ELEMENTS OF
CHARACTER SO AS TO LEAD THEM INTO CERTAIN DRAMATIC
SITUATIONS IN WHICH THE CLASH OF THESE CHARACTER DIS-
PROPORTIONS' HEIGHTENS AND INTENSIFIES THE EFFECT OF CO-
MEDY.

Before we leave the subject we may cite a passage from
"Pride and Prejudice" which illustrates the real attitude of a comic
writer:

"The wisest and best of men," (said Darcy) "--nay, the
wisest and best of their actions--may be rendered ridiculous by a
person whose first object in life is a joke."

"Certainly," replied Elizabeth, "there are such people,
but I hope I am not one of them. I hope I never ridicule what is
wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, do
divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can."/I/

/II/ Pride and Prejudice. Chap.VI, p.49-50