JANE AUSTEN: DISCOURSE ANALYST[1]

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> Mrs Elton does not talk to Miss Fairfax as she speaks of her. We all know the difference between the pronouns he she and thou, the plainest-spoken among us; we all feel the influence of a something beyond common civility in our personal intercourse with each other — a something more early implanted. (Knightley in *Emma*: II, XV: 943)

Meta-conversational discourse occurs with surprising frequency throughout Jane Austen's novels. Austen and her major characters constantly reflect on or talk about interaction within a meticulously described social context. Indeed, the detailed analysis of how people make sense of spoken communication is so central to Jane Austen's work that it seems appropriate to call her the first discourse analyst. It would be difficult to find another author who made it such a strict rule to portray spoken interaction with such precision within a limited social setting, based on her own participant observation. This paper will explore the relationship between the representation of conversation in Jane Austen's novels and the explanation of conversation proposed in some recent pragmatic approaches to spoken discourse.

Participant observation is closely associated with the ethnography of communication. For example, Hymes (89) states that "ethnography involves participation and observation", the aim being to discover how members of a speech community make sense of their experience. Closely related to this is Hymes' notion of communicative competence — the knowledge governing appropriate use of language in real-life situations, reflecting culturally determined norms of meaning and behaviour. It is noticeable that almost all critical opinion of Jane Austen written in the

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early nineteenth century, emphasizes the accuracy of her social observation. Southam (9) points out that her novels "continued to be praised throughout the nineteenth century for the accuracy and truth of their picture of life". A Mrs Pole (quoted in Southam: 14), in comments collected by Jane Austen herself on Mansfield Park in 1814, underlines the point, stating: "Everything is natural, & the situations & the incidents are told in a manner which clearly evinces the Writer to *belong* to the Society whose Manners she so ably delineates."

The major Austen critic and editor, R. W. Chapman, also emphasizes meticulous social observation, stating that she was "singularly scrupulous in her regard for accuracy" (121). Chapman (117) points out, for example, that she "hardly ever permits herself a male conversation without a female audience". Such an apparent lacuna is consistent with a deliberate intent to avoid conversations which she herself could never have observed or participated in. Every conversation in her novels was within her own range of experience and took place in highly familiar social settings. Austen required of herself the kind of accuracy which only frequent participant observation could provide. Before discussing or allowing her characters to discuss the nature of social communication, the reader was provided with an accurate transcription of communication within a meticulously described social context. To transcend reality, it was necessary to simulate social communication so skilfully that no reader could doubt its authenticity.

The difficulty of recording reliable samples of private conversation is rarely disputed. The so-called "observer paradox" never applies more pertinently than to intimate conversation. Once it has been recorded in anything like an ethical manner, it can no longer deserve the name of intimate conversation. How does one avoid the influence of an observer or the effect of a microphone or video camera? And yet the most intimate conversations, those that are not available to any but the participants within the smallest of social circles, are among the most common and the most important conversations which we ever take part in. Several reputable linguists still resort to so-called "fabricated examples" which are presented as acceptable samples of real conversation often with minimal information about context. (See for example Hoey, 75.) When a novelist makes it a rule to create plausible conversations with the precision and care of a trained participant ethnographer, the observer's creative role is

openly acknowledged and the reader may then evaluate the success or failure of the illusion of authenticity in the staged interaction. In interpreting the "fictional" dialogue in Jane Austen's novels, it must, of course, be acknowledged that the primary context of communication is the communication between the writer and her readers. The immediate context of the dialogues themselves within the small family circles of upper-middle class Georgian society has to be seen as a secondary contextual level embedded within this primary framework of communication.

When, in *Emma*, Knightley opposes "plain speech" to "common civility" he does far more than characterize the communication between Mrs Elton and Miss Fairfax. He raises a central concern of human communication, in whatever context it might occur, and a very central concern of modern pragmatics:

> Mrs Elton does not talk to Miss Fairfax as she speaks of her. We all know the difference between the pronouns he she and thou, the plainest-spoken among us; we all feel the influence of a something beyond common civility in our personal intercourse with each other — a something more early implanted. (II, XV: 943)

When Knightley speaks of "a something more early implanted", he is made to refer to the very nature of cooperation in human communication: an overriding concern, not only of *Emma*, but of all of the major novels of Jane Austen. By opposing politeness to plain speech, Knightley also mirrors a central theme of Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal work on politeness: the opposition between efficient rational informational exchange in terms of Gricean categories such as quantity and quality, and the exigencies of politeness in face to face interaction.

It is often through her dialogue that Jane Austen communicates her essential meanings to the reader. Babb (244 passim) refers to the technique of "metaphoric indirection" in Jane Austen's dialogues. By metaphoric indirection, he refers to speeches which constitute apparently innocent contributions in the immediate context of a conversation, but which in some way reveal deeper concerns to the reader. This is far more than an occasional technique. It pervades what Babb calls the whole "fabric of her dialogues", which he characterizes as "the implications woven into the language of the speakers themselves" (Babb: 5). The

averted reader that Jane Austen herself claims to write for is required to identify the real concerns of both the characters and the author who portrays their interactions, by inferring the indirect, but essential metaphorical value of an apparently innocent contribution to a conversation.

Implicature

> [A] 'said he,' or a 'said she' would sometimes make the dialogue more immediately clear — but
>
> 'I do not write for such dull elves
>
> As have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves.'
>
> (Letter to Cassandra 29. 01. 1813)

Almost two hundred years before Grice provided an explicit and plausible pragmatic explanation of the inferential process in conversation, the appreciation that Jane Austen required of her readers seems to foreshadow in some detail the Gricean notion of "implicature" and its development into relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson). Grice defines conversational implicature as what participants can themselves imply in addition to what they say. To cooperate in conversations, participants are then required to recognize and respond to each other's implicatures. Characters in Jane Austen are often divided into those who can read social interaction and those who cannot. Her most adept characters, such as Knightley or Elinor Dashwood, do more than merely understand a speaker's ostensive implicatures. Knightley, for example, easily infers that Emma has dissuaded Harriet Smith from accepting Robert Martin's offer of marriage, long before she openly admits this, and is the first to suspect the secret relationship between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax. The main characters may also imply something beyond the range of most other characters that only a select few will fully understand.

In the primary context of communication, that between the author and her readers, the author frequently implies more than the characters actually say or understand themselves. Indeed, Jane Austen delights in revealing her narrative through the eyes of fallible heroines such as Emma, Elisabeth Bennet or Anne Elliot who, for different reasons, constantly misread social conversations. Pinion (xii) suggests that "perhaps the most significant characteristic of Jane Austen is her insistence on the fallibility of judgment in human relationships". In *Emma*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion*, recognizing this fallibility as we listen in on

conversations is essential for a meaningful appreciation of the comedy of errors which ensues. Tannen (15) underlines the dangers inherent in "putting too much confidence in unverified and, as it turns out, completely false evidence", pointing out that "in a society which relied so much on conversation it is a constant danger", and that Jane Austen was "particularly aware" of this "crucial truth". The reader is not only directed (or misdirected) by the author into making appropriate (or inappropriate) inferences. He or she may also deconstruct the process, making inferences that the author never implied. Hence, the demands and possibilities of implicature at all these different levels are capable of almost infinite subtlety.

As significant aids to the inferential process, Grice proposes four conversational maxims that depend on a "Cooperative Principle". The Cooperative Principle requires speakers to make their contributions "such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which . . . [they] are engaged". (Grice 1975: 45) Grice's maxims (1989: 26/27) are not only intentionally subordinated to this Cooperative Principle, but are also embedded within a theory of implicature which considers as important the conventional meaning and reference of words, the context "linguistic and otherwise", background knowledge and participant assumptions about mutual knowledge (Grice 1989: 369). Jane Austen's novels meticulously set up a dynamically developing context in which all of the above must be retrieved by the attentive reader. The social requirements of politeness are best understood, according to Brown and Levinson, in opposition to this basic presumptive framework.

Grice's Maxims (Relating to what is said).

Quantity	1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). 2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
Quality	Try to make your contribution one which is true. ("Supermaxim") ("More specific maxims") 1. Do not say what you believe to be false. 2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation	Be relevant

(Relating to how what is to be said is said).

Manner	Be perspicuous. ("Supermaxim") ("Various maxims") 1. Avoid obscurity of expression. 2. Avoid ambiguity. 3. Be brief. (avoid unnecessary prolixity). 4. Be orderly.

Applying this Gricean framework to Jane Austen's representations of conversation provides an intriguing means of exploring common themes from a different perspective. The nature of social interaction is a major theme in *Emma*. It is no coincidence that one of Austen's rare editorial comments on human nature is also a reference to the fallibility of human interaction which relates directly to the Gricean maxim of "quality". "Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken." (*Emma* III, VIII: 1034). By the time Emma exclaims to Jane Fairfax, "Oh, if you know how much I love everything that is decided and open" (III, XVI: 1052), the evidence of all we have read underlines the irony of putting these words into Emma's mouth. The novel has shown that Emma herself is claiming a value that she has constantly found impossible to live up to, and which does not appear to be an "approved" value of the author either.

The theme of open and honest communication is explicitly established in the early chapters of *Emma*. The loss of her governess, Mrs Weston, deprives Emma of "one to whom she could speak every thought as it arose" (I, I: 770). Once the value of truthful, direct and open speech has been established as a theme, we are then provided with an impressive array of conversations in which the maxim of quality is persistently flouted. The dissimulation of Jane Fairfax, which is so repugnant to Emma, is in fact always matched by her own. She tells Harriet Smith that they may safely visit Miss Bates because no letter from Jane Fairfax is expected, only to simulate pleasure in the presence of Miss Bates at the prospect of suffering the long monologue about the letter that has unexpectedly arrived. The major turning point of the novel is when

Emma dramatically fails to dissimulate and finally lets Miss Bates know her true feelings — that Miss Bates talks too much to little effect — during the Box Hill outing. Direct speech is immediately opposed to the negative social impact it has and the way it disturbs the harmony of a large social gathering. It is the outspoken Knightley who reproaches Emma for what amounts to her failure to conceal her true feelings. Directness is once more subjugated to the demands of social "propriety" or politeness and the need to act in accordance with one's social position.

Babb (242) argues that "the underlying motif in Jane Austen's fiction is surely the disparity between appearance and reality, a problem that has haunted men's minds for centuries — all of which may suggest that the works are less limited than is often imagined." The secret relationship between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax makes *Emma* more than any other of Jane Austen's novels a detective story in which a writer invites a reader to indulge in the analysis of social interaction to distinguish between appearance and reality. Once again, implicatures generated in relation to the maxim of quality provide the key to the mystery. Frank Churchill's frequent visits to the Bates' home provide the reader with the main clue. After the ball, the unforgetful and dependable Mrs Weston is reminded of a promise apparently made only the previous evening that she herself cannot remember:

> 'For my companion tells me,' said she, 'that I absolutely promised Miss Bates last night, that I would come this morning. I was not aware of it myself. I did not know that I had fixed a day, but as he says I did, I am going now.' (II, IX: 911)

The reader is not only being invited to doubt the sincerity of Frank Churchill and suspect that he must have some strong motive for his frequently contrived visits to the temporary home of Jane Fairfax. Providing us with the evidence of Churchill's duplicity, his self-deprecatory "I am the wretchedest being in the world at a civil falsehood." — to which Emma responds "I am persuaded that you can be as insincere as your neighbours when it is necessary." — allows Austen to indulge in one of her favourite ironic implications. We might note that the subject of the "falsehood" was the piano that Churchill himself had offered secretly to Jane Fairfax. Through the constant staging of life-like conversations in which "openness" is opposed to "falsehood", and "insincerity", a central

dilemma of societal values and indeed of all social communication is exposed.

Conversation as Action

It has often been noted that in Jane Austen, there are no lurid descriptions of fatal duels, no violent deaths, no popular uprisings, no highwaymen, no battles, no naval encounters and only one accident, in an age which abounded in such potentially exciting events. The action in Jane Austen's novels consists of social encounters. Tanner (25) refers to the many critics who "have been drawn to note the brilliance of much of the dialogue", comparing it to dramatic dialogue commonly associated with the theatre.

The dialogues are frequently hostile encounters between antagonists in which words may cut to the heart and cause lasting injury. Where respect for accuracy makes it necessary to acknowledge the more violent customs of Georgian England, the rare acts of violence are deeply embedded in conversations. The potential drama of the duel between Willoughby and Colonel Barton (II, IX: 128) is reduced to a brief reference in a conversation between Barton and Elinor, in which the real drama lies in the further revelation of the true character of Willoughby. As Tanner suggests (35), "linguistic experience is stressed almost to the exclusion of bodily experience". Jane Austen uses the interactions between key antagonists in much the same way that other novelists use physical action. The duel-like nature of these encounters is echoed throughout Jane Austen's work. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the verbal encounters between Darcy and Elizabeth in the drawing room at Netherfield, and the antagonistic confrontation between Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Elizabeth, are more than just comic interludes. They represent important turning points in the dramatic development of the central relationships.

At a time when duelling was common, and frequently portrayed in popular Georgian novels, Elinor and Lucy Steele's intimate conversations often resemble subtle encounters between skilled fencers. Whereas Elinor and Marianne wound each other only unintentionally in their more intimate encounters, Lucy Steele draws Elinor into the social equivalent of a fight to the death. Lucy's revelation to Elinor of her secret engagement to Edward is to be understood on several levels. Such a revelation after a very limited acquaintance breaches the principle of cooperation

and the maxim of quantity, revealing far more than is required at the start of a superficial relationship. It can only be seen as a surprise assault on an unprepared rival. Lucy perceives a potentially insuperable strategy in letting Elinor know that she is aware of Edward's attachment to her rival. The surprise attack wounds and almost disarms Elinor, who has to use all her skill of self-control to affect a dignified withdrawal and fight again another day. The force of social norms over what can be said and what can be acknowledged to have been said, the ability to mean and understand more than is said, is fully exploited in the recurrent duels. While both understand each other in essentials and neither is blind to the deeper undertones of their communication game, both of them are either prevented or protected from direct speech by powerful underlying forces of social propriety. Norms of social decorum dictate that Elinor must not acknowledge to Lucy what both of them know. Namely, that Elinor is attached to Edward who returns her affection. On his side, Edward may not acknowledge this to Lucy, or even to Elinor, because he is engaged to Lucy and feels it is a point of honour not to break off the engagement. By making Elinor her "confidante", Lucy is exercising all her social guile, confident that Elinor will never consider it possible to contravene the social norms of polite conversation.

Jane Austen's characters are constrained by social convention and, in the case of the main characters, by moral principles that dictate appropriate social conduct. If this were not the case, Edward and Elinor, for example, could simply ignore Lucy. But it is inconceivable that Edward and Elinor should act in opposition to their own values. While Lucy is equally subject to the social norms of conversational etiquette, she has a short-term advantage. She subjects herself to no moral principles, exploiting the short-term weakness of her opponents' moral principles to the full. But if we allow ourselves a more radical deconstruction of the creative process itself, it is tempting to ask why a young lady in Lucy Steele's situation should be represented as she is. Jane Austen appears to be championing an elitist minority which aspires to "superior" moral values. If we step back from the author's staging of the values in the novel and her characterization of fictional personalities, which is the unique prerogative of the author, young women like Lucy Steele could be seen as victims of society who must fight for survival. The Lucy Steeles of Georgian England had no personal fortune and few educational

opportunities; they lived at a time when women were barred from the professional or commercial spheres reserved for men. Left with few options, they had only their native cunning, or, dare we say, their common *sense* to survive.

Intimate Conversation

> We have neither of us anything to tell; you, because you communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing. (II, V: 102)

In our discussion of *Emma*, we noted that the maxim of quality is in fact presented as undesirable in all but the most intimate of relationships. In these relationships, however, it is also shown to be problematic. While the two rivals in *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor and Lucy, understand each other only too well, the "intimate" communication between the sisters, Elinor and Marianne, is fraught with misunderstandings. The fatherless Dashwood family is, in some respects, the most close-knit and harmonious of all Jane Austen's families, but this harmony is tested to the full when both Elinor and Marianne face serious personal problems. Elinor discovers that Edward is secretly engaged to Lucy Steele, but she is sworn to secrecy by Lucy herself. Her younger sister, Marianne, is suspected of a secret engagement with Willoughby. Written correspondence with an admirer in Georgian society would normally be confirmation of such an engagement. While the real affection between the sisters is not in doubt, neither feels able to confide in the other:

> 'You are expecting a letter then?' said Elinor, unable to be longer silent.
>
> 'Yes, a little — not much.' [A lie]
>
> After a short pause, 'you have no confidence in me, Marianne.'
>
> 'Nay, Elinor, this reproach from *you* — you who have confidence in no-one!'
>
> 'Me!' returned Elinor in some confusion; 'indeed Marianne, I have nothing to tell.' [A lie]
>
> 'Nor I,' answered Marianne with energy, 'our situations are alike. We have neither of us anything to tell; you, because you communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing.' (II, V: 102)

It is noticeable that the story can only end once harmonious and open communication between the two sisters has been restored. The gentle

irony that accompanies the rather implausible ending leaves us in no doubt as to the author's perception that such harmony is rarely the norm:

> Between Barton and Delaford, there was that constant communication which strong family affection would naturally dictate; — and among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands. (III: XIV: 232)

The potential for misinterpreting intimate social encounters is a central concern in all Jane Austen's novels. A serious misinterpretation or an inability to reveal true feelings in intimate conversation often occurs early in the novel. Once the problems of communication, misrepresentation or self-revelation are resolved, the narrative has inevitably reached its resolution. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, the mistaken confidence given by Elizabeth Bennet to Wickham's apparently plausible revelation about Darcy is at the heart of the intrigue. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny cannot reveal her love of Edmund to anyone, least of all to Edmund himself. She finds herself obliged to play the role of confidante to Edmund, when he tells her of his love for Mary Crawford, while Fanny must conceal her own attachment from her only intimate interlocutor, as it is he who is the cause of her suffering. Jane Austen rarely illustrates intimate conversations that are harmonious. Indeed, the only perfect agreement between intimates (if we may exclude the implausible happy-endings common to each narrative) is the agreement between the wealthy John Dashwood and his wife in perhaps the most famous of all Jane Austen's staged conversations (I. II: 6–9), in which they agree with mutual satisfaction to disregard the dying wishes of Mr Dashwood senior to provide for his wife and daughters.

The Art of Persuasion

The two protagonists of Austen's last major novel, Frederick Wentworth and Anne Elliot, are — in contrast to the earlier novels — both mature adults, one a successful naval captain, the other a model of refined Georgian education and accomplishment. Yet *Persuasion* more than any other novel underlines the enormous human capacity for misinterpreting

communication in direct proportion to its personal importance. Former lovers, Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth find themselves in the same social circle again. In spite of their strong mutual attachment, Anne had been persuaded eight years earlier to renounce what both her family and her intimate friend, and surrogate mother, Lady Russell had considered an unsuitable match. Captain Wentworth and Anne are now both convinced of each other's indifference. The intrigue is only resolved when Wentworth and Anne finally overcome their constant tendency to misunderstand each other at every social encounter. What is important is not Anne's failure to communicate with her father and sisters, all of whom are presented as mere caricatures; it is rather the inability of the two main characters, portrayed in realistic psychological and social detail, to communicate successfully, until Austen contrives to rescue them.

Sperber and Wilson (39) point out that "failures are to be expected" as a normal part of face to face communication, underlining the fact that fallibility of judgment is a common feature of all interaction. For Sperber and Wilson, the inferential process depends on an assumption that any utterance is intended to be optimally relevant. The difficulty lies in a person's inability to retrieve a speaker's intended implicature in a situation that is of critical personal importance. When she meets Wentworth again, the strength of Anne emotions prevents her from giving proper consideration to the possibility of his continued attachment. The reverse is also true. All their misreadings of their social encounters stem from this fact. Sperber and Wilson maintain that participants in a conversation only share the possible conditions for making reasonable assumptions, but often fail to do so. A listener, assuming the optimal relevance of what s/he hears, interprets the communicator's "ostensive behaviour" but may easily misread the intended implicature of the speaker.

Pragmatic representations of implicature of this kind are mainly concerned with the rationality of communication: with thoughts and assumptions, rather than with emotional states and desires. In *Persuasion*, Anne's inability to draw correct implicatures is presented as something of an inner battle between rationality and emotion. While she and Wentworth share important background knowledge, which could supply a "mutual cognitive environment" unavailable to all other characters, in their particular context they misread each other's behaviour in almost direct proportion to the strength of their emotions. Jane Austen explores with

apparent detachment how strong emotion inhibits rational communication. The reader is invited to sympathize with Anne's emotional states, but at the same time is able to observe her constant errors, by sharing rational assumptions with the author.

Let us consider in detail just one very short extract of small talk in social conversation which takes place in the Musgroves's drawing room in chapter VIII of *Persuasion*. Frederick is speaking to the Musgrove girls and to Admiral Croft, but Anne, who still loves Wentworth, is an attentive listener. The first response is from Admiral Croft, Wentworth's brother-in-law, the second from Louisa, who is being linked romantically to Wentworth by their entourage. The Asp was the first ship captained by Wentworth, which is under jocular discussion by the two expert sailors:

> '. . . It was a great object with me, at that time, to be at sea, — a very great object. I wanted to be doing something.'
>
> 'To be sure you did. — What should a young fellow, like you, do ashore, for half a year together? — If a man has not a wife, he soon wants to be afloat again.'
>
> 'But Captain Wentworth,' cried Louisa, 'how vexed you must have been when you came to the Asp, to see what an old thing they had given you.'

This apparently innocent exchange is a typical example of metaphorical indirection. It is disguised as an exchange of little consequence hidden within the harmless banter intended to entertain the ladies at Uppercross. But Austen's reader is always required to search for implicatures — there is a guarantee of relevance in every remark made, even in the most casual social conversations. The first sentence of this chapter states, "From this time Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot were repeatedly in the same circle". Yet, by mutual unspoken agreement, Anne and Wentworth never address each other directly. Wentworth is describing the time he went to sea just after Anne had been persuaded to reject him. This fact is mutually manifest only to Anne and Wentworth. Croft can interpret Wentworth's statement at surface value only, drawing on his own personal experience as a sailor. Addressing himself to the group as a whole on a superficial level of social banter, Wentworth is in fact also addressing himself to Anne, who alone has the shared background knowledge to understand him. Only Anne can recognize the more private reason

Wentworth had for wanting to be at sea. Immediately after this extract, Austen underlines for her reader Anne's emotional state — "Anne's shudderings were to herself alone".

Croft's innocent reference to a man not having a wife, further underlines Austen's art. It is a typical clue for the reader to detect the relevance of every phrase and make the inferential link. The whole intrigue of *Persuasion* hinges on Anne and Wentworth's mutual misreading of each other's feelings after eight years' separation. The reader gradually becomes aware, through Austen's guarantee of relevance, that it is the strength of emotion which prevents Anne from making rational inferences. Louisa is perceived as a potential rival. However, her inappropriate response concerning the Asp once more exposes her unsuitability to the reader. She has totally misread the banter about the state of Wentworth's ship. Austen herself was something of an expert on navy talk — she always closely followed the successful naval careers of two of her brothers. Anne has also acquired eight years' expertise. This is only a small hint to the reader, but it is presented alongside countless others. Anne is surrounded by those who are predicting marriage based on insufficient evidence. The amiable Crofts are predicting marriage for Wentworth and Louisa, as a means of re-enacting their own romantic history. Anne's sister and brother-in-law, Charles and Mary are also speculating out of bias and family interest.

Hence even in this brief extract the reader is able (or rather is required) to ask relevant questions, based on the background information that s/he has been supplied since the start of the novel. Anne's perspective is the perspective of a woman in turmoil who will misinterpret Wentworth's superficial relationship with Louisa Musgrave. Faced with the apparent impossibility of her desire to renew her relationship with Wentworth, Anne mistakes Louisa's naive admiration for attachment. Long before Louisa becomes engaged to Wentworth's friend, Benwick, the reader, carefully trained by Jane Austen in a more neutral appreciation of relevance, must have begun to doubt the existence of a real rival.

Jane Austen exposes on every page the vicissitudes of intimate communication, but at the same time, with delightful irony, she invents a form of intimate communication with her reader in which she improves upon the imperfections of human interaction. Austen offers the reader an absolute guarantee of relevance and patiently trains us in the art of

rational inference. By contrast, the explicit rationality of pragmatic theory alone, while recognizing the importance of fallibility, is more difficult to relate to human communication, underestimating as it does the inevitable intervention of impression and emotion. Or does the true art of *Persuasion* lie in Austen's ability to persuade us to let our emotions get the better of our reason, in spite of the rigorous training she has given us?

This paper has argued that a cross-disciplinary approach to literary or linguistic study has the advantage of providing a broader educational experience. Greenblatt (4) has maintained that the interpreters of literary works should consider "the larger networks of meaning in which both the author and his works participate". Williams (91) strongly implies that the reverse is also true, given the inextricable relationship between different levels of cultural analysis:

> The complex of senses indicates a complex argument about the relations between general human development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and practices of art and intelligence.

This notion of inextricability is supported by Pinion's (xii) suggestion that Jane Austen's "criticism of life . . . provides the key to much in Jane Austen's art and its appreciation by the reader." The novels of Jane Austen have particularly strong claims to be studied not only as works of aesthetic or intellectual activity, but also as representations of a particular way of life. After convincing us of the accuracy of her social description, Jane Austen transcends the details of conversation and makes the fallibility of social interaction itself a central theme. In this paper, I have argued that key pragmatic concepts from the field of discourse analysis can provide important insights into Jane Austen's creative art. Conversely, few pragmatic analyses of conversation are able to match the range or the subtlety of her representations of conversation in a meticulously described social context, and few can provide students of language with a better training in discourse analysis.

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