

# Jane Austen's Children

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Jane Austen was, as we all know, a maiden aunt. At first glance, what she displays in her fiction seems to be precisely a maiden aunt's attitude towards children: affectionate, but concerned they should be well-behaved and properly directed, and show due respect to their elders. While she may now and then use them to further her plots, say the critics, they are more commonly kept in the background: "The unimportance of children in Jane Austen's fiction is shown by their ghostliness,"<sup>1)</sup> maintains David Grylls. Yet there is enough material to support a much more positive attitude towards her younger characters. The important ones are, in fact, the precursors of the youthful heroes and (particularly) heroines of Victorian fiction.

Sixteen-year-old Frederica in *Lady Susan* (written around 1794) is the first to be presented for our sympathy. She is parcelled off to school at the beginning of the novel, in preparation for a match of her mother's choosing. To this mother, the Lady Susan of the title, Frederica is "a stupid girl" who "has nothing to recommend her"<sup>2)</sup>; but Mrs. Catherine Vernon, Lady Susan's sister-in-law and hence Frederica's aunt, has already warned us that this woman can use language "to make black appear white"(1898). We are ready to judge Frederica for ourselves. And we can. It is true that she is only given one out of the forty-one letters in this early epistolary novel, and that the focus is on the scheming mother; it also seems likely that Austen "has taken young Frederica's plight as a *donnée* from popular stories . . . about innocent girls sent to hateful schools to force them to marry hateful men."<sup>3)</sup> Yet it is wrong to ignore, as critics

generally do, the author's attempts to establish her character.

Far from being feeble, and spending all her time "weeping or playing the pianoforte,"<sup>40</sup> as Margaret Drabble claims, Frederica takes two bold steps in the novel—she runs away from the school, and, after being ignominiously retrieved and restored to her unwilling parent, she begs Reginald de Courcy, whom her widowed mother is trying to entrap for herself, to save her from being married off to a man whom she has long disliked. Not only does she have some spirit, but she is also discovered by her aunt to have firm principles: "*there* I believe she is not to be injured, even by her mother, or all her mother's friends"(1326), writes Catherine Vernon. Moreover, she has, despite the earlier neglect of her schooling, and her mother's constant harping on her intellectual poverty, "a very superior mind to what we have ever given her credit for"(1318). This is no doubt a result of her fondness for books, for she spends most of her time neither weeping nor practicing the piano, but reading (1311). Add to these good qualities the pleasing appearance and disposition commented upon by her aunt, and we have reason to take her mother's mocking description of her as a "heroine in distress"(1322) entirely seriously.

All this is very Richardsonian, but the ending shows the high spirits of the young Austen. What better retribution for such a mother than that the eligible object of her scheming should end up marrying her daughter instead; while she herself is left with her daughter's spurned suitor, a "silly and impertinent and disagreeable"(1315) man?

The manipulation of children is something which Austen clearly detests. Girls recently arrived at marriageable age may be in most danger of being "sacrificed to policy or ambition," or at least made to "suffer the dread of it" (1315); but the exploitation of younger children, too, disturbs her. Lady Susan sets out to win her sister-in-law's heart by learning the names of all her children, and pretending special fondness for

“one in particular, a young Frederic, whom I take on my lap and sigh over . . .”(1297). Luckily, Catherine Vernon, a loving mother in the tradition of Richardson’s Pamela and Fielding’s Amelia, who sits in the nursery with her little ones while they dine (1313), is discerning enough not to be taken in by such displays. In *Sense and Sensibility*, which Austen began working on next, in about 1795, another small child is made use of by a scheming adult. Mrs. John Dashwood encourages her husband to go back on the promise made to his dying father: whatever financial help he gives to his stepmother and half sisters, she says, will diminish the legacy of “our poor little boy” (12). In whittling down the provision he thinks of making for them, she goes on to reveal a meanness and greed which has nothing at all to do with maternal affection. The children in these cases do not suffer from such strategies; there is nothing, here, like the harm which results from the cruel child exploitation shown by Dickens and his contemporaries. Austen’s disapproval is nonetheless evident.

A charming illustration of how children *should* be treated occurs in *The Watsons*, started soon after *Lady Susan* was offered for publication, but never completed. Here, the contrast between the two women characters, Miss Osborne and Emma Watson, and the good nature of one of them (Emma), are brought out by their treatment of ten-year-old Charles Blake. As the sister of Lord Osborne of Osborne castle, Miss Osborne has been described to Emma as “very great”(111); but if she is great in position and manner, she is not great in heart. She breaks her promise to keep her first two dances at a Surrey ball for the lad, her ex-tutor’s nephew, who is “uncommonly fond of dancing”(121) and has been looking forward to the honour for a whole week. Emma, although not of the Osborne party, observes both his excitement and his disappointment, and at once offers to take the floor with him: “Emma did not think or reflect; –she felt and

acted—.” Nor does she regret her kindly impulse. Others (including Miss Osborne) find it surprising that such a lovely woman should give her attention to a child, but she herself feels as much pleasure as she bestows, for she is genuinely interested in him and glad to restore his spirits. This is all greatly to Emma’s credit, of course. When Miss Osborne remarks in passing, “Upon my word Charles you are in luck . . . you have got a better partner than me,” and the boy answers happily, “Yes” (122), we know it is nothing but the simple truth.

The incident is important in bringing Emma, with her unaffected kindness and her beauty, to the attention of the Osbornes and the dashing Tom Musgrave, and must naturally recommend her to the boy’s uncle, who is now a clergyman with a “quietly—cheerful, gentlemanlike air”(124). We know from Austen’s sister, Cassandra, that these were to be the principal actors in the unfolding narrative. But the child seems to be more than a device to bring out character and set plot in motion. He is striking in himself, “a fine boy”(120) with a “fine countenance and animated gestures”(121), who, having made a strong “effort of boyish bravery” (122) to overcome his disappointment at being ditched by Miss Osborne for a certain Colonel Beresford, is radiant upon being asked to dance by Emma, and responds well to her questions during the dance. Later he chats to her freely, and asks her to visit his mother and come and see a “monstrous curious stuffed fox there [at the castle] and a badger”(124). When the Osborne party leaves, “Charles shook her by the hand and wished her ‘goodbye’ at least a dozen times”(127). There is much here to suggest a keen appreciation of the candour and enthusiasm of childhood, and the trust that can be put in it; we feel sure that if the narrative had continued so as to bring Emma and Mr. Howard together, as originally intended, Charles would have continued to play a role in it.

Children do have a place in Austen’s fictional world, then; and it is not

just as puppets. The best proof of her respect for the child as an individual is in *Mansfield Park* (1814), which Grylls has (rather strangely, since he quotes Angus Wilson on its 'proto-Victorianism'<sup>5b</sup>) little to say about. This novel deserves our close attention. In it, ten-year-old Fanny Price is brought to live with her aunt and uncle, the Bertrams, on their Northamptonshire estate. Like little Jane Eyre at the same stage in her life, she is "small of her age"(454) and overwhelmed by her older, more advantaged and vivacious cousins. Removed from the large Portsmouth household which she, as the eldest daughter, has been accustomed to importance in, and especially missing her elder brother, William, she is as miserable at first as any of the solitary children of later nineteenth-century novels. C. S. Lewis was perhaps the first to spot her Brontëan situation at her uncle's house.<sup>6</sup> Much is made of the failure of all but her cousin Edmund to appreciate her her sufferings: "Her feelings were very acute, and too little understood to be properly attended to." The picture of this lonely, despondent child wandering around the grand house, "often retreating towards her own chamber to cry"(455), reminds us of Frederica in *Lady Susan*, and Q. D. Leavis has made out a case for *Mansfield Park* as a later version of that earlier novel.<sup>7</sup> However, Fanny is considerably younger than Frederica at this stage, and in changing the focus from the uncaring mother to the forlorn pre-adolescent, Austen is indeed stepping into a new century.

Significantly, Fanny turns out to be one of the few young women in the novels whose assessment of others, and understanding of her own heart, are sound. There is a touch of Catherine Morland's silliness when she expects the chapel at Sotherton to contain "aisles . . . arches . . . inscriptions . . . banners"(497), but she does not require the astringent dose of common sense which the heroine of *Northanger Abbey* (drafted 1798-9) has to swallow. She shows some very natural resentments and jealousies,

but does not have to be set right about herself like Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse. This is partly because the heroines of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1816) have a keen sense of their own importance, while she has none.

This does not mean what critics have often taken it to mean, that she has an inferiority complex: she has confidence enough in her own judgment, has been the “instructress”(455) of her own brothers and sisters in the past, and will adopt the role again with her sister Susan later. It is just that in the Bertram household, continually put down by a “misplaced distinction”(626), her circumstances are such that she really has no power. At first she is exactly what Avron Fleishman has called her, “a frail spirit fighting the battle of life with weapons inadequate to cope with the society in which she exists.”<sup>8)</sup> As her circumstances change, however, and she is proved right—first about the amateur theatricals which her uncle returns to interrupt, and then about the Crawfords—her power increases, and she is eventually able to triumph over characters like Mary Crawford who are endowed with more verve and audacity. What is more, it is increasingly obvious that a lack of physical energy does not betoken any lack of strength and depth in her emotions, as it seems to in the case of her indolent aunt, Lady Bertram. Even Henry Crawford, to whom she shows the utmost reserve, cannot help noticing the “capabilities of her heart” (582).

There are two other heroines who share Fanny's clarity of vision and deep feelings: Elinor Dashwood, the well-governed nineteen-year-old in *Sense and Sensibility*, and Anne Elliot in Austen's last complete work, *Persuasion* (1818), who loses her mother at fourteen, and is subsequently overshadowed by her two sisters. Anne too is “nobody”(1146) at the beginning of the novel, and rises to redeem her elders at the end. But there are important differences between these two, and Fanny. Because

of the controlling design of the earlier novel, it is Elinor's ability to subdue her emotions which is stressed; Anne, now in her late twenties, has already endured her youthful heartbreak. It is only in Fanny that the early development of personality is explored: its qualities, no less intense than steady, are shown in the very making, and they are such as to ensure her emergence (like Richardson's heroines before her, and Jane Eyre, for instance, after her) from victim to 'victrix'.

Fanny's advantages over the Bertrams and the Crawfords, in the matter of upbringing, are therefore worth examining in detail. They seem, at first, rather negative ones. For instance, although she is the first-born girl in her own family, she is not spoiled like her female cousins. Her elder brother William is her mother's darling, and there is soon a brood of children younger than herself to occupy Mrs. Price's attention. While her mother is harassed, unsuited either temperamentally or by her own upbringing to dealing with a large family under straitened circumstances, her father, a naval lieutenant, is soon disabled from active service and divides his time between drinking and lounging around the docks. It can be said of her as of Susan that "The blind fondness which was forever producing evil around her, *she* had never known"(674). Fanny is not more indulged materially than she is emotionally. To her cousins' scorn, when she arrives at Mansfield Park, she has only two sashes. She has of course none of the superficial refinements of Maria and Julia. She has never learnt French, cannot appreciate her cousins' piano duet, and is so far from having artistic discernment that she cannot tell the difference between water-colours and crayons. Certainly, she is not up to making artificial flowers or "wasting gold paper"(455) with the other two girls on her first day with them. Nor has she been "admirably taught"(458) in a private schoolroom, as they have been, by a resident governess and visiting masters: her utter ignorance of rote-learned facts about history,

geography, mythology and so on is a source of wonder to them. There is no need at all to worry about their losing sight of Fanny's inferiority, as Sir Thomas had once feared, nor of Fanny's doing so either—even without their Aunt Norris's constant reminders.

All this is not without its ill effects on Fanny. Sir Thomas himself foresees the danger of “depressing her spirits too far”(453). Fanny will never have the attractive ardour of a child like Charles Blake, who has been properly encouraged by his elders (“the true secret of education,” Locke had said, is “to keep up a child's spirit easy, active and free,”<sup>9</sup>) while at the same time guiding him to self-mastery). She will not even have “the more fearless disposition and happier nerves”(719) of her sister Susan, who takes her place as the eldest girl in the Portsmouth household. Nevertheless, the good effects outweigh the bad, which are themselves fortunately offset by various factors. To the enlightened, Fanny's education as a whole person is not, in the end, to be found wanting.

Not only is she not spoiled, as Tom Bertram, Henry Crawford, and their sisters are, but her privations are instrumental in building up her character: Sir Thomas realizes later “the advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure” (719). Two influences may have been at work on Jane Austen here. She was an avowed admirer of Maria Edgeworth, daughter of the eccentric educationalist, and author of such popular stories for and about children as those collected in *Moral Tales* (1801). It is her adult novels which Austen is known to have read, yet the austere attitudes towards children's early training, which the lesser writer imbibed from her father, may well have influenced the greater one.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as those who discuss the amateur theatricals episode have cause to point out, Austen was interested in Evangelicalism at this time. Certainly, her concern with the role of the clergy in the novel reveals her interest in contemporary reformist senti-

ment. Little wonder then that her heroine's background is seen in a favourable light, as a sort of standing rebuke to those who cushion their children from harsh reality instead of preparing them to tackle it.

The ordinary, somewhat detached observation of even the most affectionate maiden aunt (which Austen is known to have been) might have encouraged her to hold the same opinion. Yet in this book which deals with Edmund Bertram's ordination, religion clearly does play a very definite and positive role in forming Fanny's character. Whatever else may be lacking in the Price family, a respect for the church is not. Indeed, on Sundays when the parents and children dress up "in their cleanest skins and best attire"(681) to attend the Garrison chapel, her mother is to a large measure redeemed of all shortcomings: "a very creditable and tolerably cheerful looking Mrs. Price, coming abroad with a fine family of children"(682) is shown to her best advantage on the occasion of Henry Crawford's visit to Fanny in Portsmouth, later in the novel. This episode both indicates the source of Fanny's high principles, and suggests that they might later have been imparted to Henry. For no contrast is drawn between the erstwhile flippant young man and the now handsome, God-fearing family. Rather, his tenderness towards Fanny, and his sense of duty towards the poor people on his Norfolk estate, are both increased at this point. Sir Thomas later comes to regret deeply that his own children, like the two Crawfords, have had so little practical connection with the church in their *youth*: "principle, active principle, had been wanting"(714), he says. That their knowledge of religion too has been confined to the theoretical, he recognizes as the root of Tom's and his daughters' failings. We never see Fanny in church as a child. In this, her most moralistic novel, Austen does not eschew subtlety. Yet Fanny's cry in the chapel at Sotherton, "A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer, is fine!"(497) is enough to suggest the lasting influence on her of

those Portsmouth Sundays.

While Fanny's spiritual and moral education is not neglected, nor is that of her feelings. Her beloved brother William helps to make up for the lack of parental involvement, just as Edmund does much to compensate for the inadequate responses of the other Bertrams to her, at Mansfield Park. William is "her constant companion and friend"(456) as a child, and it is he whom she misses so desperately on first leaving home. When sixteen-year-old Edmund helps his cousin to write her first letter to William from there, ruling lines for her, sharpening her pencil and advising her on spelling, he becomes her second source of much-needed emotional support. Moreover, like a good parent, he becomes her mentor: "his attentions were . . . of the highest importance in assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures"(459). By recommending books to her, and discussing them with her, "he encouraged her taste and corrected her judgement" and with just the incentive which Locke had recommended, esteem or "judicious praise"(460), he enters her heart to share it with William. How ironic it is, and what a reflection on the lack of "active principle" in the Bertram upbringing, that even such an excellent tutor should prove susceptible to the affectations of the Crawfords—more susceptible, indeed, than the girl whose mind and sensibility he has helped to form.

For Fanny has a chance to convince everybody of the superiority of this education which circumstances have combined to give her. In Austen's novels, as we have seen, elders are not necessarily betters; respect for them is *not* invariably recommended. Fanny's sound and firmly established values appear when she refuses to be pressured by the Bertrams, Edward included, into marrying Henry Crawford. Upset by Sir Thomas's accusations of "wilfulness" and "digusting . . . independence of spirit"(629), she nevertheless holds out against him, to be vindicated when

Henry later elopes with the recently married Maria. It is only now that Sir Thomas realizes how much the education of his own children has been at fault. But such is the author's belief in her heroine, and disapproval of him as father/guardian, that there is never any question that Fanny should have obeyed him, even at the beginning.

Here, incidentally, is a major difference from the case of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*. Having taken the purely materialistic advice of her improvident father and her godmother Lady Russell, Anne has rejected the promising but penniless Charles Wentworth, whom she really loves. She pays a high price for her obedience: "Her attachment and regrets had, for a long time, clouded every enjoyment of youth; and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effect"(1159). Anne is certain, later, that the advice was completely wrong. Even so, looking back, she considers that it was proper for her to have obeyed Lady Russell at the time: "I was perfectly right . . . To me, she was in the place of a parent"(1287). Park Honan sees this as evidence of Austen's "countering the philosophy of Shaftesbury and matching the tough eighteenth-century rationalism of Joseph Butler,"<sup>(11)</sup> and he is surely right. *Persuasion* is sometimes considered to be the most Romantic of Austen's novels, but in its approach to this centrally significant issue it is much less Romantic than *Mansfield Park*. Fanny's revolt against Sir Thomas is by no means simply a show of Shaftesburian feeling: Fanny is in fact resisting the claims of the man whom David Devlin has convincingly associated with Shaftesburian values.<sup>(12)</sup> But in supporting this revolt Austen is championing the judgment of the idealistic, passionate young against that of older people, whose so-called sense derives only from their worldly interests.

Fanny's development and Edmund's ordination are the two pivotal and interwoven concerns of *Mansfield Park*. The balance of human interest is on the former, but the latter is equally essential to the plot (it is

the only stumbling-block to Mary Crawford's acceptance of Edmund) and theme. The two come together very satisfyingly at the end. Forced to make a right appraisal of Fanny's background, Sir Thomas sees his shortcomings as a father and a man, and is set on the road to spiritual recovery. "Sick of ambitious and mercenary connections"(719) he can become the true patron not only of Fanny herself, but also of the parsonage, where Edmund, having recovered from his infatuation with the worldly Mary Crawford, finally settles down with Fanny. It is true that there is no overt spiritual message at the end of the novel. We never do get to hear Edmund preaching: Henry Crawford may scarcely have seen a "clergyman out of his pulpit" in London; we never see Edmund in it, in Northamptonshire. For here, as elsewhere in Austen's novels, the Church is shown as part of the fabric of everyday life in the community, the "private character" and "general conduct"(501) of the incumbent being the greatest guarantee of its spiritual health. This bill, we can be quite sure, Edmund with the support of Fanny will fit excellently. The regenerative power of the child in this work is all that the most demanding Victorian Evangelical might wish.

*Mansfield Park*, then, reveals a concern with the child which spills over into related areas—education, the family, the Church, and society as a whole. To focus on the noisy Price household as a mirror of Aunt Jane's impatience with undisciplined children is to miss the depth of this concern (though, while on the subject of the Prices' other children, we should note that they, like Fanny, benefit from their essentially sound background and a little help from the Bertrams, and all turn out to Sir Thomas's satisfaction). It is easy to be misled by minor child characters in Austen's fiction. Lady Middleton's troublesome brats in *Sense and Sensibility*, those puzzling neices and nephews who actually enjoy being tossed up to the ceiling by Mr. Knightly in *Emma*, Anne Elliot's demanding little nephews—such

children, along with others like the Gardiners' more pleasantly lively foursome in *Pride and Prejudice*, give some clues to the author's attitude towards children, but no idea of the seriousness with which she considered their potential for good, or the acerbity she reserved for those who fail to help them realize it.

Often considered her profoundest work, *Mansfield Park* has one more clue to the future for us. In dealing with Fanny's place in both her homes, Austen probes more incisively than anywhere else into the psychology of childhood and the emergence of adult emotions. Gilbert Ryle writes generally that the "theme-notion is the connection . . . between fraternal and conjugal ties"<sup>13</sup>; exploring the central relationship more boldly, R. F. Brissenden goes so far as to suggest that "the alliance between Edmund and Fanny has distinctly incestuous overtones."<sup>14</sup> That Brissenden is reminded here of the role of incest in earlier novels (including *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*) is not surprising, but Fanny's increasingly romantic attachment to the brotherly Edmund is quite different in kind from the picaresque manoeuvres in Fielding's plots. It is more like the yearnings of later nineteenth-century heroines for brother- or father-figures, of which Cathy's for Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is only the most intense and obvious example. Possibly inspired by an event from the author's own childhood, the adoption of her elder brother Edward into another branch of the Austen family, the emotion expressed here is one of "sisterly regard" turned painful and almost hopeless "tenderness"(718).

That Jane Austen was the daughter of the century she was born in has been established by nearly two centuries of criticism. Her debts to eighteenth-century thought and fiction are now thoroughly documented. She herself refers to Dr. Johnson in *Mansfield Park*, and we know from both her letters and fiction how much she admired him. Evidence of her debt

to earlier thinkers like Locke and Shaftesbury is particularly strong in this novel. We have also had a few hints, even in this brief study, that her work sometimes looked back to Richardson and Fielding, and that she read the novels of her less important predecessors or contemporaries, like Maria Edgeworth. No full-scale study of her work would be complete without further references to the feminine tradition in which she was writing, especially to Fanny Burney. Nevertheless, her work does more than represent the climax or final flowering of eighteenth-century fiction. She stands, as F. R. Leavis claims, at the beginning of a new, greater age in English fiction. Nor is this simply a question of perfection of form, but, as Leavis says, of her "moral preoccupation."<sup>15</sup> And part of that preoccupation is undoubtedly with the child. The portrait of Fanny in *Mansfield Park* also indicates, for the first time in our fiction, the possibility of intense personal involvement in the child character.

As for the latter, however, we must remember that Fanny is fifteen at the beginning of Chapter 3, and reaches her eighteenth year in the next chapter; also, that there is no other child of similar importance in the *oeuvre*. In this sense it is quite fair to see Austen as a transitional figure. The next adult novel to focus closely on a child character is Dickens's *Oliver Twist* in the 1830s, and the small hero of that novel remains, remarkably, a child throughout. He is nine at the beginning, and twelve or thirteen at the end. The child-cult in fiction dates from Oliver's appearance in February's edition of *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1837.

#### Notes

- 1) *Guardians and Angels: Parents and Children in Nineteenth Century Literature* (London: Faber, 1978), 114.
- 2) *Lady Susan* in *The Penguin Complete Novels of Jane Austen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 1299. Subsequent references to this and other works by

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Austen (except *The Watsons*, see n. 4 below) are to this one volume edition, and will be given parenthetically in the text.

- 3) Park Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 102.
- 4) Introduction to *Lady Susan/The Watsons/Sandition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 15. Subsequent references to *The Watsons* are to this edition, and will be given parenthetically in the text.
- 5) See Grylls, 113, and Wilson, "Dickens on Children and Childhood," *Dickens 1970: Centenary Essays* by Walter Allen *et al.*, ed Michael Slater (London: Chapman and Hall, 1970), 207.
- 6) See "A Note on Jane Austen," partially reprinted as "Two Solitary Heroines" in *Critics on Jane Austen*, ed. Judith O'Neill (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970), 73.
- 7) See "A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings, II," *Scrutiny*, 10 (1941-2): 272-94.
- 8) *A Reading of Mansfield Park: An Essay in Critical Synthesis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1967), 44.
- 9) "Some Thoughts Concerning Education," *John Locke: On Politics and Education* (New York: Walter J. Black, 1947), 238.
- 10) For a different point of view, see Frank Bradbrook's *Jane Austen and her Predecessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), 119. However, speaking more generally, Bradbrook does point out that Austen's "own stories are moral tales in the sense that Maria Edgeworth uses the term," 113.
- 11) Honan, 383.
- 12) See his *Jane Austen and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 64-6.
- 13) "Jane Austen and the Moralists," *Critical Essays on Jane Austen*, ed. B. C. Southam (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, paperback ed. 1970), 112.
- 14) "*Mansfield Park*: Freedom and the Family," *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. John Halperin (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), 165.
- 15) *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 18.

## 要 約

# ジェーン・オースティンの子供達

ジャクリーヌ・バナジー

本稿は、Jane Austen がその作品の中で描く子供達の役割は重要ではないという通説に反論するものである。*Lady Susan* の中での Frederica、*The Watsons* に於ける Charles Blake、*Mansfield Park* の Fanny Price は、Austen が、単に子供達に深い思いやりを抱いていたに留まらず、彼らの善を志向する潜在能力について真面目に考えていたことを示す。確かに、彼女の幾つかの非常に辛辣な言葉は、子供達のそのような潜在能力に応じ、それを巧みに育むことのできなかつた大人達へと向けられている。

Fanny Price の中に芽生えた大人の感情を探り、彼女の年長者への反抗を支援する Austen の筆致は、正に、新たなより偉大なイギリス小説の時代の始まりを示している。数こそ多くはないが、Jane Austen の小説に登場する重要な子供達は、ヴィクトリア朝小説の若いヒーロー、特にヒロイン達の先駆をなすものである。