Unconscious Motives in Jane Austen's *Emma*

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The words 'unconscious' and 'unconsciously' occur twenty times in Jane Austen's six novels,[1] with various levels of meaning. The simplest instance is the 'unconscious Marianne' of *Sense and Sensibility* (p. 333), unconscious because she has fallen asleep. The word is applied in a similar way to the trees of Norland Park, in Marianne's romantic imaginings about them after her departure: 'you will continue the same; unconscious of the pleasure or the regret you occasion, and insensible of any change in those who walk under your shade!' (p. 27). When Catherine Morland is despatched so unceremoniously from Northanger Abbey, and the post-chaise passes the turning to Woodston, she thinks of Henry Tilney 'so near, yet so unconscious' (p. 230), and her grief and agitation are excessive.

In these instances 'unconscious' means inert, or unaware, or lacking the capability of awareness.[2] On other occasions it applies to a state of abstraction, or of absorption in other things. Thus Marianne Dashwood is spared the impertinent stares of the young man selecting a toothpick-case which are felt by her sister, 'by remaining unconscious of it all; for she was as well able to collect her thoughts within herself, and be as ignorant of what was passing around her, in Mr. Gray's shop, as in her own bed-room' (p. 221). When at Uppercross Anne Elliot finds herself conveyed into the carriage through Captain Wentworth's intervention, and so spared the fatigue of the walking-party, she is so affected that 'her answers to the kindness and the remarks of her companions were at first unconsciously given. They had travelled half their way along the rough lane, before she was quite awake to what they said' (pp. 91-2). In *Mansfield Park,* Mr Yates becomes so enthusiastic in his report of the theatricals to Sir Thomas Bertram that he does not realize the effect he is having — 'relating every thing with so blind an interest

1 All references are to the Oxford edition of R. W. Chapman (1923). I am indebted to Professor J. F. Burrows for assistance from the computerized concordance of Jane Austen at the University of Newcastle, N.S.W., in the preparation of this paper.

2 In Marianne Dashwood's address to the 'unconscious' trees, Jane Austen may have been making fun of the Romantic habit of investing nature with sentient powers.

as made him . . . totally unconscious of the uneasy movements of many of his friends as they sat, the change of countenance, the fidget, the hem! of unquietness.' (pp. 184-5).

Here 'unconscious' and 'unconsciously' are used of characters in some degree or other of inattention, through their concern with something else. They could presumably be shaken out of it, as Mrs Dashwood is by her daughter-in-law's insinuations about Elinor's interest in Edward Ferrars — remarks made 'so expressively . . . that Mrs Dashwood could neither pretend to be unconscious, nor endeavour to be calm' (p. 23). She instantly leaves the room.

The contrast of awareness and unawareness becomes very interesting. To the uncomplicated Catherine Morland, observing the coquetry of Isabella Thorpe, 'it seemed . . . that Captain Tilney was falling in love with Isabella, and Isabella unconsciously encouraging him; unconsciously it must be, for Isabella's attachment to James was as certain and well acknowledged as her engagement' (p. 148). The same Catherine is relieved at the end to find that General Tilney could have had no fault to find with her, 'nothing to accuse her of, nothing to lay to her charge, but her being the involuntary, unconscious object of deception which his pride could not pardon' (p. 244). Elizabeth Bennet, rejecting Darcy's first proposal, insists that if she has 'occasioned pain to any one', then 'it has been most unconsciously done' (p. 190), and one element in her reflections afterwards is that 'it was gratifying to have inspired unconsciously so strong an affection' (p. 193). When at the end of *Persuasion* Captain Wentworth is brought to realize that Anne 'had never been supplanted' in his feelings, he summarizes his history by saying that 'he had been constant unconsciously', though 'only at Uppercross had he learnt to do her justice, and only at Lyme had he begun to understand himself' (pp. 241-2).

The issues of awareness and unawareness are now becoming issues of volition and involition, complicity and innocence. Catherine Morland is relieved to have been only an 'involuntary' cause of offence to General Tilney, and she acquits Isabella of any complicity in encouraging his son by seeing the encouragement as 'unconsciously' given. Elizabeth Bennet is sure she has done nothing to win Darcy's regard, but finds it 'gratifying' to have unconsciously inspired it. Captain Wentworth's has not been so passive a role. He had set out to forget Anne Elliot, and had convinced himself that he had done so; he had imagined himself indifferent, only to discover that 'he had been constant

unconsciously, nay unintentionally'; and so achieved the opposite of what he had set out to do.

The whole question of 'intention' calls for closer analysis. In a critical scene between Fanny Price and Edmund in *Mansfield Park,* when Fanny finds that 'almost unconsciously she had now undone the parcel he had just put into her hand' (p. 262), the 'unconsciously' points to her being 'overpowered by a thousand feelings of pain and pleasure' (p. 261), and also to her already knowing that the parcel contains the present of a gold chain. It is another instance of the intentness of the mind on something else, as in Anne Elliot's automatic responses to her companions in the gig. There is an incident in *Pride and Prejudice* which is a little different. When in the drawing-room at Netherfield Miss Bingley has failed in a number of stratagems to gain Mr Darcy's attention, she proposes to Elizabeth that they together 'take a turn about the room'. At this Mr Darcy looks up, 'and unconsciously closed his book' (p. 56). The 'unconsciously' signals the same absorption as Fanny Price experienced, and also something more. Mr Darcy's mind is intent on Elizabeth but he does not know that it is: he is in the grip of a motive which is concealed from himself.

There is a parallel in *Mansfield Park,* in the account of Sir Thomas Bertram's neighbourly attitude to the Grants and the Crawfords at the Parsonage. While 'infinitely above scheming or contriving for any the most advantageous matrimonial establishment that could be', Sir Thomas 'could not avoid perceiving in a grand and careless way that Mr. Crawford was somewhat distinguishing his niece — nor perhaps refrain (though unconsciously) from giving a more willing assent to invitations on that account' (p. 238). Sir Thomas is amenable to invitations to dine with the Crawfords because it may promote a match for Fanny, but this is a motive he is not altogether conscious of entertaining.

One does not need to study the occurrences of 'unconscious' and 'unconsciously' in Jane Austen to know that her characters may be actuated by motives of which they are only partly aware. Readers have always been responsive to these implications in the narrative, without necessarily formulating them in such terms.[3] It is a more

3 See especially the references to R. W. Chapman below, and the analyses of J. F. Burrows, *Jane Austen's Emma* (Sydney University Press, 1968) and John Hardy, *Jane Austen's Heroines* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984). There is a sensitive account of some other unspoken significances in the novels in Penny Gay, 'The Romanticism of *Persuasion*', *Sydney Studies in English,* V (1979-80), 15-20.

extensive subject than I can deal with here — such words as 'artless' and 'insensible' would equally repay study — and I shall confine myself to illustrating some aspects of it in *Emma*.

Emma is the most finely crafted of the novels, so that it takes on some of the qualities of detective fiction. Why does Frank Churchill go to London to get his hair cut? Why is there confusion over Mr Perry's plan to set up a carriage? Why does Jane Fairfax refuse to have anyone else collecting her mail? There are constant minor challenges of this kind to the reader, but the narrative is enriched much more by the play of unconscious motives within it.

There is an instance of 'unconscious' in the simple sense of 'unaware' or 'not apprised of' when Mr Weston, despite a touch of the arm from his wife, speaks enthusiastically to Emma of the imminent arrival of Frank Churchill in Highbury. 'Emma could look perfectly unconscious and innocent, and answer in a manner that appropriated nothing' (p. 189). Here 'unconscious' would also have the sense of 'unembarrassed', suggesting freedom from that 'consciousness' that may denote a state of confusion in a heroine. (Jane Fairfax will be caused a 'deep blush of consciousness' (p. 243) by Frank Churchill's remarks about the pianoforte.) In this case it is also a manner that is partly assumed, as Emma cannot acknowledge anything that may be passing between Mr Weston and his wife. This is the kind of 'unconsciousness' which Mrs Dashwood found it impossible to maintain.[4]

There is an instance of 'unconscious' in the sense of 'preoccupied' when Emma makes her contrite visit to Miss Bates after the excursion to Box Hill. She is so taken up with Miss Bates's explanations about Jane Fairfax that she sits 'musing on the difference of woman's destiny, and quite unconscious on what her eyes were fixed' (p. 384). Miss Bates assumes that she is gazing at the piano, and launches into further explanations. The issue of innocence and complicity arises in another of Emma's musings, when she decides to acquit Jane Fairfax of having seduced Mr Dixon's affections from his wife. 'If it were love, it might be simple, single, successless love on her side alone. She might have been unconsciously sucking in the sad poison, while a sharer of his

4 The word 'unconsciousness' occurs only once, when in *Persuasion* Anne Elliot is upset to hear that Captain Wentworth's sister is to come to live at Kellynch, but helped in overcoming her agitation 'by that perfect indifference and apparent unconsciousness, among the only three of her own friends in the secret of the past, which seemed almost to deny any recollection of it' (p. 30).

conversation with her friend; and from the best, the purest of motives might now be . . . resolving to divide herself effectively from him and his connections by soon beginning her career of laborious duty' (p. 168). Such a Jane Fairfax may properly be viewed with both 'complacency' and 'compassion'.

It is the guileless Mr Woodhouse who is found to be possessed by forces outside his conscious control. Early in the novel, on the visit of Mr John Knightley and his family, Emma's diplomatic skills are taxed when the conversation turns to their having made an excursion to the sea in the autumn, instead of coming to Hartfield. Mr Woodhouse cannot suppress his solicitude: Perry has many doubts about the sea; if they were going to the sea at all, Perry would have recommended Cromer, not South End; if that entailed a distance of a hundred miles rather than forty, then it would have been better to stay in London altogether than travel forty miles into 'a worse air' — 'this is just what Perry said. It seemed to him a very ill-judged measure' (p. 106). Mr John Knightley's outburst at Perry and his advice cannot finally be averted, although the object of it is largely blameless. 'Mr Woodhouse was rather agitated by such harsh reflections on his friend Perry, to whom he had, in fact, though unconsciously, been attributing many of his own feelings and expressions' (p. 107).

This exhausts the occurrences of 'unconscious' and 'unconsciously' in *Emma,* but not of course the study of those who are partly unaware of the mainsprings of their own behaviour. The last chapter of Volume I is occupied with the disagreement between Emma and Mr Knightley over Frank Churchill. His failure to arrive as promised is of little consequence to Emma at this time, recuperating as she is from Mr Elton's proposal and her interview with Harriet Smith, but she feels bound to behave with her usual animation, and also to enter into the disappointment of Mr and Mrs Weston. She therefore objects to Mr Knightley about the conduct of the Churchills in keeping Frank away, saying 'a good deal more than she felt' on 'the advantage of such an addition to their confined society in Surry; the pleasure of looking at some body new; the gala-day to Highbury entire, which the sight of him would have made' (p. 145). The interview deserves considering at some length, especially from Mr Knightley's point of view, for the way in which his rational judgement is affected by motives which are obscure to himself. The process is perceptible even in the opening exchange:

> "The Churchills are very likely in fault," said Mr. Knightley, coolly; "but I dare say he might come if he would."

"I do not know why you should say so. He wishes exceedingly to come; but his uncle and aunt will not spare him."

"I cannot believe that he has not the power of coming, if he made a point of it. It is too unlikely, for me to believe it without proof."

"How odd you are! What has Mr. Frank Churchill done, to make you suppose him such an unnatural creature?"

"I am not supposing him at all an unnatural creature, in suspecting that he may have learnt to be above his connections, and to care very little for any thing but his own pleasure, from living with those who have always set him the example of it. It is a great deal more natural than one could wish, that a young man, brought up by those who are proud, luxurious, and selfish, should be proud, luxurious and selfish too. If Frank Churchill had wanted to see his father, he would have contrived it between September and January. A man at his age — what is he? — three or four-and-twenty — cannot be without the means of doing as much as that. It is impossible".

"That's easily said, and easily felt by you, who have always been your own master. You are the worst judge in the world, Mr. Knightley, of the difficulties of dependence. You do not know what it is to have tempers to manage."

"It is not to be conceived that a man of three or four-and-twenty should not have liberty of mind or limb to that amount. He cannot want money — he cannot want leisure. We know, on the contrary, that he has so much of both, that he is glad to get rid of them at the idlest haunts in the kingdom. We hear of him for ever at some watering-place or other. A little while ago, he was at Weymouth. This proves that he can leave the Churchills."

"Yes, sometimes he can."

"And those times are, whenever he thinks it worth his while; whenever there is any temptation of pleasure." (pp. 145-6)

Jane Austen has so far permitted herself only one comment: the 'coolly' that accompanies Mr Knightley's first pronouncement. It effectively insulates him from the view of Frank Churchill's visit as a 'gala-day to Highbury entire', and helps explain his readiness to fix the responsibility for Frank Churchill's non-appearance on Frank Churchill himself. His points are at first rationally urged ('It is too unlikely, for me to believe it without proof'), but the charge that he is supposing Frank Churchill to be 'an unnatural creature' provokes him to language of greater warmth. For one unable to believe without proof, he can find Frank Churchill 'proud, luxurious and selfish', capable of extricating himself from the Churchills whenever 'the idlest haunts in the kingdom' beckon. We may already feel running through Mr Knightley's comments the awareness of a young man with a temperament and a mode of existence very different from his own — and that he is 'a young man' Emma will innocently mention four times.

She resumes with the argument that 'It is very unfair to judge of any body's conduct, without an intimate knowledge of their

situation' (p. 146). Mr Knightley is able to answer with conviction:

> "There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chuses, and that is, his duty; not by manoeuvring and finessing, but by vigour and resolution. It is Frank Churchill's duty to pay this attention to his father. He knows it to be so, by his promises and messages; but if he wished to do so, it might be done. A man who felt rightly would say at once, simply and resolutely, to Mrs. Churchill — 'Every sacrifice of mere pleasure you will always find me ready to make to your convenience; but I must go and see my father immediately. I know he would be hurt by my failing in such a mark of respect to him on the present occasion. I shall, therefore, set off to-morrow.' — If he would say so to her at once, in the tone of decision becoming to a man, there would be no opposition made to his going."
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> "No," said Emma, laughing; "but perhaps there might be some made to his coming back again. Such language for a young man entirely dependent, to use! — Nobody but you, Mr. Knightley, would imagine it possible. But you have not an idea of what is requisite in situations directly opposite to your own. Mr. Frank Churchill to be making such a speech as that to the uncle and aunt, who have brought him up, and are to provide for him! — Standing up in the middle of the room, I suppose, and speaking as loud as he could! — How can you imagine such conduct practicable?" (pp. 146-7)

It is the authentic Mr Knightley who speaks of duty and upright behaviour, and who will speak again of the obligations owed to Mrs Weston. Emma's reply 'laughing' does not deflect him ('Depend upon it, Emma, a sensible man would find no difficulty in it'), and the paragraphs which then follow (which I do not quote) serve essentially to delineate a contrast between Mr Knightley the man of principle and Frank Churchill as the man who has yet to perceive these standards and to live by them. The contrast is offered to Emma ('although unconsciously', one might be tempted to add), but leaves her innocently unconverted. 'Innocently' perforce, as she cannot be expected to perceive Mr Knightley as a suitor when such an idea has not yet entered the conscious mind of Mr Knightley himself. Her simple view that a man may fail these exacting standards, and still be attractive — perhaps even more attractive — meets a heated rejoinder:

> "We shall never agree about him," cried Emma; "but that is nothing extraordinary. I have not the least idea of his being a weak young man: I feel sure that he is not. Mr. Weston would not be blind to folly, though in his own son; but he is very likely to have a more yielding, complying, mild disposition than would suit your notions of man's perfection. I dare say he has; and though it may cut him off from some advantages, it will secure him many others."
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> "Yes; all the advantages of sitting still when he ought to move, and of leading a life of mere idle pleasure, and fancying himself extremely expert in finding excuses for it. He can sit down and write a fine flouishing letter, full

> of professions and falsehoods, and persuade himself that he has hit upon the very best method in the world of preserving peace at home and preventing his father's having any right to complain. His letters disgust me." (pp. 148-9)

Mr Knightley is genuinely surprised by Emma's claim 'You seem determined to think ill of him', and also vexed:

> "Me! — not at all," replied Mr. Knightley, rather displeased; "I do not want to think ill of him. I should be as ready to acknowledge his merits as any other man; but I hear of none, except what are merely personal; that he is well grown and good-looking with smooth, plausible manners." (p. 149)

He has named exactly those qualities in Frank Churchill which a rival would fix upon, and it is not surprising that the disagreement should reach its climax as Emma goes on, all unwittingly, to praise in Frank Churchill all the rather specious attributes which Mr Knightley himself lacks. He will be an acquisition to Highbury society for his youth, his effortless charm, his ability to speak well on every subject, and his ease in adjusting his conversation to his hearers. It is this version of Frank Churchill, the opposite to himself, and preferred to himself, that is responsible for Mr Knightley's warmth:

> "Well, if he have nothing else to recommend him, he will be a treasure at Highbury. We do not often look upon fine young men, well-bred and agreeable. We must not be nice and ask for all the virtues into the bargain. Cannot you imagine, Mr. Knightley, what a *sensation* his coming will produce? There will be but one subject throughout the parishes of Donwell and Highbury; but one interest — one object of curiosity; it will be all Mr. Frank Churchill; we shall think and speak of nobody else."
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> "You will excuse my being so much overpowered. If I find him conversible, I shall be glad of his acquaintance; but if he is only a chattering coxcomb, he will not occupy much of my time or thoughts."
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> "My idea of him is, that he can adapt his conversation to the taste of every body, and has the power as well as the wish of being universally agreeable. To you, he will talk of farming; to me, of drawing or music; and so on to every body, having that general information on all subjects which will enable him to follow the lead, or take the lead, just as propriety may require, and to speak extremely well on each; that is my idea of him."
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> "And mine," said Mr. Knightley warmly, "is, that if he turn out any thing like it, he will be the most insufferable fellow breathing! What! at three-and-twenty to be the king of his company — the great man — the practised politician, who is to read every body's character, and make every body's talents conduce to the display of his own superiority; to be dispensing his flatteries around, that he may make all appear like fools compared with himself! My dear Emma, your own good sense could not endure such a puppy when it came to the point." (pp. 149-50)

Emma's conciliatory suggestion that 'We are both prejudiced' is

quickly rebutted by Mr Knightley for his part ('Prejudiced! I am not prejudiced'), and he declares Frank Churchill 'a person I never think of from one month's end to the next' with a degree of vexation (p. 150). From 'coolly' we have moved to 'rather displeased' to 'warmly', subsiding into 'a degree of vexation', while Emma 'cannot comprehend why he should be angry.' Mr Knightley cannot comprehend it himself. Neither of them has yet met Frank Churchill. But the idea of him as a possible suitor to Emma has taken Mr Knightley out of his comfortable role as mentor into the uncomfortable role of a jealous rival. It is this new mode of behaviour, expressed in such language as 'professions and falsehoods', 'chattering coxcomb' and 'insufferable fellow', but still not understood by Mr Knightley himself, which leaves Emma so puzzled at the end, at the same time acknowledging how much she esteems him:

> To take a dislike to a young man, only because he appeared to be of a different disposition from himself, was unworthy the real liberality of mind which she was always used to acknowledge in him; for with all the high opinion of himself, which she had often laid to his charge, she had never before for a moment supposed it could make him unjust to the merit of another. (pp. 150-51)

The arrival of Frank Churchill in Highbury does not give Mr Knightley much relief from these pressures. They are felt indirectly by Emma in his 'provoking indifference' (p. 257) to the ball which Frank Churchill is arranging, and in his 'very cheerful look' (p. 262) when the project falls through. When Emma happens to praise Frank Churchill's handwriting, his response is curt: 'I do not admire it,' said Mr Knightley. 'It is too small — wants strength. It is like a woman's writing' (p. 297). At the end of Volume II, when Mr John Knightley fears that the impending visit of her nephews may be troublesome to Emma, if her engagements 'continue to increase as much as they have done lately' (p. 311), he touches inadvertently on a sensitive spot:

> "There can be no doubt of your being much more engaged with company than you used to be. Witness this very time. Here am I come down for only one day, and you are engaged with a dinner party! — When did it happen before, or anything like it? Your neighbourhood is increasing, and you mix more with it. A little while ago, every letter to Isabella brought an account of fresh gaieties; dinners at Mr. Cole's, or balls at the Crown. The difference which Randalls, Randalls alone makes in your goings-on, is very great."
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> "Yes," said his brother quickly, "It is Randalls that does it all." (pp. 311-12)

Yet we should be wary of interpreting all of Mr Knightley's behaviour as governed by a suppressed jealousy of Frank Churchill. At the beginning of the novel his relationship to Emma is still to some extent that of mentor to pupil, and Mr Knightley is hardly to be thought of as training Emma to be his future bride. Her respect for his opinion is partly an expression of this relationship. Having persuaded Harriet to reject Robert Martin, she is disconcerted that Mr Knightley should disapprove:

> Emma . . . was really feeling uncomfortable and wanting him very much to be gone. She did not repent what she had done; she still thought herself a better judge of such a point of female right and refinement than he could be; but yet she had a sort of habitual respect for his judgement in general, which made her dislike having it so loudly against her; and to have him sitting just opposite to her in angry state, was very disagreeable. (p. 65)

When Frank Churchill returns undaunted from London with his hair cut, Mr Knightley is the critic with whom Emma debates in her mind:

> "Mr Knightley, he is *not* a trifling, silly young man. If he were, he would have done this differently. He would either have gloried in the achievement, or been ashamed of it. There would have been either the ostentation of a coxcomb, or the evasions of a mind too weak to defend its own vanities. — No, I am perfectly sure that he is not trifling or silly." (p. 212)

It follows that Mr Knightley becomes for Emma a standard by which other men are measured. She is not always conscious of this, even when she urges Harriet Smith to compare Robert Martin with the 'well educated, well bred men' she has met at Hartfield. When Harriet concedes that Robert Martin 'has not such a fine air and way of walking as Mr Knightley', she earns a quick reproof:

> "Mr. Knightley's air is so remarkably good, that it is not fair to compare Mr. Martin with *him*. You might not see one in a hundred, with *gentleman* so plainly written as in Mr. Knightley." (p. 33)

Is there already here an implication that Mr Knightley is Emma's special preserve? If so, it would be strengthened by her satisfaction at his arriving at Mr Cole's in his carriage, for he was 'too apt, in Emma's opinion, to get about as he could, and not use his carriage so often as became the owner of Donwell Abbey' (p. 213). Mr Knightley is the standard which comes to mind when Mr Weston presses Emma to arrive early at the Crown to approve of the arrangements before the ball begins, and she finds half of the company invited on the same errand:

> Emma perceived that her taste was not the only taste on which Mr. Weston depended, and felt, that to be the favourite and intimate of a man who had so many intimates and confidantes, was not the very first distinction in the scale of vanity. She liked his open manners, but a little less of open-heartedness would have made him a higher character. — General benevolence, but not general friendship, made a man what he ought to be. — She could fancy such a man. (pp. 319-20)

It is the party at Mr Cole's which creates the first major disturbance in the relationship of mentor and pupil. Mr Knightley is found to have brought his carriage only for the sake of conveying Jane Fairfax and Miss Bates. Emma's praise of his readiness 'to do any thing really good-natured, useful, considerate, or benevolent', and her interesting interpretation of his actions as not those of 'a gallant man' but 'a very humane one', considering Jane Fairfax's ill-health, are cut short by Mrs Weston's suggestion of a match between the two.

> "Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax!" exclaimed Emma. "Dear Mrs. Weston, how could you think of such a thing? — Mr. Knightley! — Mr. Knightley must not marry! — You would not have little Henry cut out from Donwell? — Oh! no, no, Henry must have Donwell. I cannot at all consent to Mr. Knightley's marrying; and I am sure it is not at all likely. I am amazed that you should think of such a thing." (p. 224)

Mrs Weston's reasonable argument that Mr Knightley's decision to marry cannot be set aside on account of 'a boy of six years old, who knows nothing of the matter' is met by Emma's 'I could not bear to have Henry supplanted', and by general considerations of the imprudence of the match, interspersed with such exclamations as 'Jane Fairfax, too, of all women!' and 'Jane Fairfax mistress of the Abbey!' Emma would not have Mr Knightley 'for his own sake' do so mad a thing, despite Mrs Weston's seeing 'nothing unsuitable' in the match:

> "But Mr. Knightley does not want to marry. I am sure he has not the least idea of it. Do not put it into his head. Why should he marry? — He is as happy as possible by himself; with his farm, and his sheep, and his library, and all the parish to manage; and he is extremely fond of his brother's children. He has no occasion to marry, either to fill up his time or his heart." (p. 225)

There are no adverbs to indicate how these words are spoken, nor any hint of the expression on Emma's face as she creates a picture of Miss Bates haunting Donwell, and thanking Mr Knightley all day long for his great kindness in marrying Jane. Although she gains

ground over Mrs Weston, Emma's train of thought is revived as she notices Mr Knightley so attentive to Jane Fairfax's singing:

> Her objections to Mr. Knightley's marrying did not in the least subside. She could see nothing but evil in it. It would be a great disappointment to Mr. John Knightley; consequently to Isabella. A real injury to the children — a most mortifying change, and material loss to them all; — a very great deduction from her father's daily comfort — and, as to herself, she could not at all endure the idea of Jane Fairfax at Donwell Abbey. A Mrs. Knightley for them all to give way to! — No — Mr. Knightley must never marry. Little Henry must remain the heir of Donwell. (pp. 227-8)

Emma is somewhat reassured by concluding that the pianoforte could not have been given by Mr Knightley, and by noticing that he does not take the opportunity to ask Jane Fairfax to dance. 'Emma no longer had an alarm for Henry; his interest was yet safe; and she led off the dance with genuine spirit and enjoyment' (p. 230).

The narrative here is eloquent with the unconscious motives beneath its surface. Emma's opposition to the match is expressed in terms of its injustice to little Henry as the heir of Donwell, the evil to Mr Knightley of a 'shameful and degrading connection' with Miss Bates, the contentment he already enjoys with his farm, his sheep and his library, and the new social precedence that would be accorded to Jane Fairfax ('A Mrs. Knightley for them all to give way to!'). Emma's conscious mind is as yet far from the realization that 'Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself' (p. 408), but this is the unconscious feeling which underlies her response.

Mr Knightley is therefore seen in a new light when the ball at the Crown finally takes place. Having submitted to Mrs Elton's leading off the dancing ('It was almost enough to make her think of marrying' — p. 325), Emma is more disturbed to see that Mr Knightley is not taking part:

> There he was, among the standers-by, where he ought not to be; he ought to be dancing, — not classing himself with the husbands, and fathers, and whist-players, who were pretending to feel an interest in the dance till their rubbers were made up, — so young as he looked! — He could not have appeared to greater advantage perhaps any where, than where he had placed himself. His tall, firm, upright figure, among the bulky forms and stooping shoulders of the elderly men, was such as Emma felt must draw every body's eyes; and, excepting her own partner, there was not one among the whole row of young men who could be compared with him. — He moved a few steps nearer, and those few steps were enough to prove in how gentlemanlike a manner, with what natural grace, he must have danced, would he but take the trouble. (pp. 325-6)

This is clearly rendered from Emma's point of view, and it is in her perception that Mr Knightley is 'so young', with his tall, firm, upright figure, standing out from the bulky forms and stooping shoulders of the standers-by. His role as mentor has here disappeared. At the end of the chapter Emma is able to ask him to dance, with the comment that 'we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it all improper'. To which he replies 'Brother and sister! no, indeed' (p. 331).

R. W. Chapman commented many years ago on the number of occasions in *Emma* when 'Mr. Knightley comes unbidden, and sometimes unrecognized, into Emma's thoughts' (p. 491). While hesitating to include Emma's reflections on the buildings and grounds at Donwell (p. 358) among these, I should add to them the occasion when Harriet comes to her with her parcel of mementoes of Mr Elton, which she is now ready to destroy. Labelled *Most precious treasures,* the parcel contains a small piece of court plaster and a pencil end without any lead. The pencil end had been discarded by Mr Elton after making a memorandum in his pocket book of Mr Knightley's advice on brewing spruce beer. Emma's feelings are divided between amusement and wonder at Harriet, but her recollection of the episode is also revealing:

> "I do remember it," cried Emma; "I perfectly remember it. — Talking about spruce beer. — Oh! yes — Mr. Knightley and I both saying we liked it, and Mr. Elton's seeming resolved to learn to like it too. I perfectly remember it. — Stop; Mr. Knightley was standing just here, was not he? — I have an idea he was standing just here."
>
> "Ah! I do not know. I cannot recollect. — It is very odd, but I cannot recollect. — Mr. Elton was sitting here, I remember, much about where I am now." (pp. 339-40)

Where Mr Knightley was standing (which Harriet cannot recollect) is imprinted in Emma's memory just as clearly as the image of Mr Elton is in Harriet's: the two girls are for the moment on the same footing.

Mr Knightley again comes unrecognized into Emma's thoughts when Mrs Weston discloses Frank Churchill's secret engagement to Jane Fairfax. 'So unlike what a man should be!' she exclaims. 'None of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness which a man should display in every transaction of his life' (p. 397). If Emma had recognized this as a portrait of the man she loved, Dr Chapman points out, she would not have conveyed it to Mrs Weston. Emma's own immediate concern at the disclosure is for Harriet Smith, whom she

believes to be in love with Frank Churchill; this concern is immediately overtaken by Harriet's confiding that she is in love with Mr Knightley, and that her affections are returned.

The narrative moves to the superb dénouement of Chapter 13 of Volume III, the interview between Emma and Mr Knightley in the shrubbery, he convinced that she is in love with Frank Churchill and she convinced that he plans to marry Harriet Smith. I am concerned only with the rapidity with which Mr Knightley's opinion of Frank Churchill is revised, once he knows that Emma does not care for him. He has hurried from London through concern for her at the news that Frank is to marry Jane Fairfax: 'Abominable scoundrel! . . . He will soon be gone. They will soon be in Yorkshire. I am sorry for *her*. She deserves a better fate' (p. 426). Emma's first explanation, that for her Frank Churchill is no object of regret, is seized upon eagerly by Mr Knightley, but as coming from her reason rather than her heart:

> "He is no object of regret, indeed! and it will not be very long, I hope, before that becomes the acknowledgement of more than your reason. — Fortunate that your affections were not farther entangled! — I could never, I confess, from your manners, assure myself as to the degree of what you felt — I could only be certain that there was a preference — and a preference which I never believed him to deserve. — He is a disgrace to the name of man. — And is he to be rewarded with that sweet young woman? — Jane, Jane, wou will be a miserable creature." (p. 426)

Emma is constrained to speak again to remove the misunderstanding, and when Mr Knightley listens in perfect silence, she explains even further that despite the appearances of her behaviour to Frank Churchill, 'I was somehow or other safe from him.' Mr Knightley is still silent, seemingly deep in thought, and then he answers 'tolerably in his usual tone':

> "I have never had a high opinion of Frank Churchill. — I can suppose, however, that I may have under-rated him. My acquaintance with him has been but trifling. — And even if I have not under-rated him hitherto, he may yet turn out well. — With such a woman he has a chance. — I have no motive for wishing him ill — and for her sake, whose happiness will be involved in his good character and conduct, I shall certainly wish him well." (pp. 427-8)

When Emma also wishes him well, Mr Knightley embarks 'with energy' on the theme of Frank Churchill as 'a most fortunate man!' It is clear that he is still exercised by the contrast with himself.

> "So early in life — at three and twenty — a period when, if a man chooses a wife, he generally chooses ill. At three and twenty to have drawn such a

> prize! — What years of felicity that man, in all human calculation, has before him! — Assured of the love of such a woman — the disinterested love, for Jane Fairfax's character vouches for her disinterestedness; every thing in his favour, — equality of situation — I mean, as far as regards society, and all the habits and manners that are important; equality in every point but one — and that one, since the purity of her heart is not to be doubted, such as must increase his felicity, for it will be his to bestow the only advantages she wants. — A man would always wish to give a woman a better home than the one he takes her from; and he who can do it, where there is no doubt of *her* regard, must, I think, be the happiest of mortals. — Frank Churchill is, indeed, the favourite of fortune. Every thing turns out for his good. — He meets with a young woman at a watering-place, gains her affection, cannot even weary her by negligent treatment — and had he and all his family sought round the world for a perfect wife for him, they could not have found her superior. — His aunt is in the way. — His aunt dies. — He has only to speak. — His friends are eager to promote his happiness. — He has used every body ill — and they are all delighted to forgive him. — He is a fortunate man indeed!" (p. 428)

Emma's 'You speak as if you envied him' hits the mark exactly, even though it seems to her that they were 'within half a sentence of Harriet'. Once this final misunderstanding is overcome, the rehabilitation of Frank Churchill is complete. The chapter ends with an authorial summary:

> He had found her agitated and low. — Frank Churchill was a villain. — He heard her declare that she had never loved him. Frank Churchill's character was not desperate. — She was his own Emma, by hand and word, when they returned into the house; and if he could have thought of Frank Churchill then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow. (p. 433)

The narrative has still to encompass the supplanting of Mr Knightley in Harriet's affections by Robert Martin, the letter of exculpation from Frank Churchill and Mr Knightley's running comments on it, the interview of Emma and Jane Fairfax, and the persuading of Mr Woodhouse to the merits of his daughter's marriage, achieved at last by his uneasiness about possible raids on his poultry. Although in all this Emma refers playfully to the need to obtain William Larkins's consent for Mr Knightley's move from Donwell to Hartfield, the need to consider one other concerned party has now vanished:

> It is remarkable, that Emma, in the many, very many, points of view in which she was now beginning to consider Donwell Abbey, was never struck with any sense of injury to her nephew Henry, whose rights as heir expectant had formerly been so tenaciously regarded. Think she must of the possible difference to the poor little boy; and yet she only gave herself a saucy conscious smile about it, and found amusement in detecting the real cause of that violent dislike of Mr. Knightley's marrying Jane Fairfax, or any body else, which at the time she had wholly imputed to the amiable solicitude of the sister and the aunt. (pp. 449-50)

Jane Austen's awareness of the unconscious motives of her characters does not lead her towards any Freudian abyss. Her main concern is with the ironical light it casts on their conduct. Mr Knightley is full of wisdom when he is discussing Emma's future with Mrs Weston at the beginning of the novel. 'It would not be a bad thing for her to be very much in love with a proper object' he says. 'I should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return; it would do her good' (p. 41). His sagacity and self-possession desert him the moment she seems to show an interest in Frank Churchill. Emma is so used to being '*first* with Mr Knightley' (p. 415) that she does not discover the true nature of her feelings until she seems likely to be displaced by Jane Fairfax or Harriet Smith. Even the various quarrels of Emma and Mr Knightley may have an element of courtship, like those of Beatrice and Benedict, allowing each to display a heightened version of herself or himself to the other. They each believe themselves to be playing one role, while their behaviour shows them to be unconsciously occupying another: Mr Knightley is a suitor to Emma without realizing it; he rises unbidden and unrecognized in her thoughts. While the dimensions of social comedy are preserved, there is no doubt how intimately Jane Austen knows her characters. When the terms 'unconscious' or 'unconsciously' are part of her vocabulary, there is no reason why in critical discussion they should not form part of our own.