

# Jane Austen and the Art of Revision: Reading, Fiction, Feminism

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## Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	v
INTRODUCTION .....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: Reading in the Novels .....	12
“An Illiterate Villain”: Austen’s Characters and the Problem of Illiteracy.....	14
Literary Judgment: Austen’s Readers Judge Her Characters .....	22
Literary Judgment: Characters Judge Each Other .....	32
The Austenian Heroine: A Reader, Never a “Reading Miss” .....	38
The Library and the Novel: Eighteenth-Century Reading as Intrinsically Gendered .....	48
CHAPTER TWO: “Powers of a Very High Kind”.....	50
Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges: “Rapid and Unstudied Effusions”.....	51
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i> and <i>Mary De-Clifford</i> : A Source Universally Unacknowledged.....	62
Mary and Marianne: <i>Mary De-Clifford</i> as an Antecedent of <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> .....	86
“Telling her Mournful Story”: Austen’s Endings as Feminist Responses .....	103
CHAPTER THREE: The Feminist Quixote: Austen’s Defense of the Novel in <i>Northanger Abbey</i> .....	117
“Questionless:” <i>The Female Quixote</i> as <i>Northanger Abbey</i> ’s Feminist Forerunner.....	119
Catherine’s “Quixotism”: <i>Northanger Abbey</i> and Novels .....	127
The Gothic and the Quixotic: Fiction as Female Empowerment .....	138
CHAPTER FOUR: “A Shadow has Fallen”: <i>Mansfield Park</i> and the Evangelical Novel.....	148
The Evangelical Argument and the Critics: Is <i>Mansfield Park</i> Evangelical? .....	150
The Evangelical novel: Austen, Evangelicalism and <i>Cælebs in Search of a Wife</i> .....	159
Mary Waldron, “The Frailties of Fanny,” and <i>Mansfield Park</i> as an Anti- <i>Cælebs</i> .....	169
<i>Mansfield Park</i> as a Social and Feminist Critique of Evangelicalism .....	182
CHAPTER FIVE: An “Imaginist” and a Quotationist: Reading and Writing in <i>Emma</i> and <i>Persuasion</i> .....	195
Emma Woodhouse: Writer and Re-writer.....	196
<i>Emma</i> : Sources and Anti-Sources .....	203
Conduct Books, Didactic Discourse, and “Gratitude” in <i>Emma</i> .....	215
<i>Persuasion</i> , Conduct Books, and Literature’s Efficacy .....	221
The Literature of <i>Persuasion</i> .....	225

“I will not allow books to prove anything”: Anne’s Attitude(s) Towards Literature.....	232
AFTERWARD.....	235
Works Cited—Primary Sources.....	238
Works Cited—Secondary Sources.....	241
Works Consulted—Primary Sources .....	245
Works Consulted—Secondary Sources .....	246
APPENDIX I: Lists of Notable References and Allusions.....	249
APPENDIX II: Timeline: Jane Austen’s Reading Culture.....	260

## ABSTRACT

The wealth of criticism on Jane Austen and her fiction—recent feminist criticism in particular—neglects insight crucial to understanding her political and literary messages. Austen was an avid and indiscriminate reader—a reader of novels, poetry, periodicals, didactic works, and history, among other genres. Because the depth and breadth of Austen’s reading is often disregarded, the extent to which her reading appears, strategically revised, in her own writing, is largely (or entirely) overlooked in recent criticism. This thesis identifies Austen’s dissatisfaction with certain contemporary writings as a primary motive for her composition and aligns her genius with her success in revising and reinterpreting the popular eighteenth-century works she knew so well. Austen’s use of her reading—in allusion, parody, and thematic reference in addition to outright revision—reveals the ways in which she differs from her predecessors, in her political and social beliefs as well as her literary style. This thesis uncovers previously unknown or disregarded sources for Austen’s work and, in analyzing these sources in concert with Austen’s own novels, reveals her criticism of the patriarchy. It traces Austen’s attitude towards her predecessors and contemporaries throughout her writing career, from the burlesque of her *Juvenilia* to her more measured use of literature in *Emma* and *Persuasion*. In recognizing the literary context of Austen’s work—a context familiar to her intended audience, but often forgotten by modern readers—critics and fans alike can interpret Austen’s alleged ambiguities with greater clarity.

## INTRODUCTION

There is a tradition among Jane Austen biographers—one only recently beginning to be questioned—about Austen’s literary engagement and the nature of her “sources.” She has long been known as an admirer of Johnson and Cowper. Her main novelistic influences are often thought to be Richardson (*Sir Charles Grandison* was a favorite) and contemporary female novelists such as Smith, Edgeworth, and, of course, Burney (*Camilla* was another favorite). These major influences can be seen in her letters and in the allusions and references made in Austen’s fiction writing; they are certainly a large part of her literary background. Yet they are only the most obvious and broad influences on Austen. Traditionally, Austen’s allusiveness and the importance of her reading have been relegated to marginalia in Austen criticism—these topics make great footnotes, but for the most part, that is all they have been used for. In fact, Austen read voraciously and far more widely than the image of her as Richardson and Burney’s follower suggests. More surprising, however, is the extent to which her reading appears and influences her own novels in a global way: Austen’s reading does not just permeate her writing, but drives it.

It is important to study Austen’s many allusions and references in order to comprehend her works as her contemporary readers easily would have done. Editors are still uncovering and debating subtle references to eighteenth-century works appearing in Austen’s fiction. Understanding these references is of course useful in order to more clearly follow Austen’s immediate meaning. For instance, a knowledge of popular eighteenth-century literature will explain to us a strange moment in *Pride and Prejudice* when Elizabeth jovially insists that Mr. Darcy and the Bingley sisters remain as a threesome in their walk, as “[they] are charmingly

grouped, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoiled by admitting a fourth” (58, 482; vol. I, ch. 10). This reference to the picturesque may be meant to be obliquely demeaning to the three walkers: as Pat Rogers’s editor’s notes tell us, Gilpin’s *Observations* remarks on the rules regarding cows on a hillside (three is picturesque, but two or four is unacceptable) (Gilpin 254; vol. II). This is an example of a relatively minor allusion, the explanation of which helps us understand this minor moment in the novel, but which is relatively unimportant to understanding Austen’s works overall. Many of Austen’s allusions are similarly subtle—yet most of them are far more important in interpreting the novels’ plots and, more importantly, their themes.

For instance, in *Emma*, understanding Harriet Byron’s two favorite novels, *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Children of the Abbey*, informs us of the complexity of *Emma*’s engagement with contemporary literature and of its messages about women. Both novels contain heroines thought to be illegitimate, like Harriet, but who are secretly heiresses. This is just what Emma imagines Harriet to be—and what Harriet must secretly hope for herself. Emma forces Harriet to act the part of such a heroine, again and again, and eventually realizes that Harriet cannot conform to this standard novel plot. Here, we see Austen reexamining and undermining the tropes and idealistic plots of certain contemporary novels—but at the same time, she suggests the power that novels like this can give to women. Imagining and enacting plots like these allows Emma (and even Harriet) to gain power over their own lives.

Austen grew up within a reading culture—she participated in amateur family theatricals, enjoyed poems written by her mother, and may have contributed to her brothers’ periodical, *The Loiterer (Letters)*. The Austens were unabashed novel-readers, and probably enthusiastic critics of whatever they might be reading. Claire Tomalin is one of the first Austen biographers to

emphasize this literary atmosphere in the Austen household—but we can see it in each of Austen’s novels. For Austen, reading is important: she delineates her characters in part through their reading habits and by comparing them to characters in popular literature. Instances of this kind of “literary” description and judgment in the six novels are discussed in Chapter One.

While Tomalin’s picture of Austen’s childhood—wild, unsupervised, and precocious—may seem far-fetched to those readers of her adult works accustomed to imagining her as a prim yet keen observer of human nature, this view of Austen’s life, and especially her reading experience, is justified. We find support for it not only in what historians have learned about the Austen household, but, more forcefully, in Jane Austen’s three volumes of juvenilia. The stories Austen wrote between the ages of twelve and eighteen show her familiarity with many popular works of the time—she makes not-so-subtle allusions to Charlotte Smith, Oliver Goldsmith, William Gilpin, Fanny Burney, and Samuel Richardson, to name a few (*Juvenilia*). Moreover, the juvenilia reveal a keen sense of literary humor and an uncanny skill for burlesque, surprising in such a young writer.

The subject matter of the stories is often shocking when one considers that the author is an eighteenth-century girl: drunkenness, brawling, and thievery are all common pastimes of the heroes and heroines of her tales. Tomalin suggests that some of the audacity of Jane’s plots comes from the influence of her adolescent brothers (Tomalin 64). While the stories do point to an authoress surrounded by male badinage, this is a relatively minor source of Austen’s early inspiration. The stories, in fact, are Austen’s first written responses to what she saw as unsatisfactory reading experiences. She spoofs novelistic tropes, inflating their absurdities and revealing their inconsistencies. Austen’s early awareness of the shortcomings of her predecessors is uncanny—surpassed only by her ability to burlesque them.

One can imagine the various members of the Austen household applauding Jane's first forays into storytelling. Austen tradition tells that drafts of the later novels were often read out loud *en famille*; it is a reasonable surmise to say that these first stories, often dedicated to a family member, were intended for the collective amusement of the household. George Austen certainly encouraged his daughter's literary aspirations: the second (and probably the third) blank journal to make up her three-volume set of stories was a gift from him (*Juvenilia* xxv-vi).

Austen's reactions to her source material in the juvenilia, are, though insightful critiques for a young girl, rather simplistic. They are wholly negative responses dedicated to exaggerating the flaws common in novels or to parodying specific works, and make no concessions in favor of the works parodied. The stories are silly in tone, written somewhat disjointedly, with little plot to hold episodes together and one-dimensional dialogue and characterization. However, they are remarkably perceptive and wry, and they reveal Austen's keen critical eye for literature. Though the stories do no more than parody the works they reference, they do so completely and cleverly. Only in "Catharine" does Austen come near her mature narrative style, letting the parody take a back seat to her heroine's story (*Juvenilia* 242-295). Here, we get a hint of how Austen must have progressed from the style of the juvenilia to her early drafts of *Lady Susan*, *Susan* (*Northanger Abbey*), *Elinor and Marianne* (*Sense and Sensibility*), and *First Impressions* (*Pride and Prejudice*). As importantly, the juvenilia tell us what it is that first drove Austen to write—not, as many readers believe, the need to describe human nature with precision and wit (as she does succeed in doing in her later novels)—but the need to expose and critique the writing of others and challenge the assumptions made about literature in general.

Most Austen critics, if they consider the juvenilia at all, view these stories as playful early expressions, shockingly different from the style and content of the published novels. But

readers of the juvenilia should be impressed with the extent of Austen's early reading and her easy incorporation of allusions, even with her eye for parody. Few critics think to compare Austen's primary purpose for writing the juvenilia with her later novelistic motives. Her first attempts at prose are seen as childish exercises, imaginative enough, but lacking in every attribute for which the mature works are applauded. Austen's juvenilia, however, are important components of her literary career and it is crucial to keep them in mind when interpreting her later works. Her main drive for writing, seen in the composition of her early stories, also motivates the first drafts of her three early novels. Approaching Austen's mature works through the context of her early instinct for burlesque as well as the lighthearted and open literary environment of the Austen family is one way for longtime readers to discover hidden motives for her writing and interpret previously undiscovered meanings in her first two published novels in particular.

While most critics who address Austen's literary influences mention certain names, they do not usually examine the widespread influence of reading and literature on Austen's approach to writing and her messages about the novel. To see this overarching theme, it is necessary to examine not just the traditional and obvious influences, but to seek out and analyze Austen's relationship with more obscure sources. Chapters Two through Four examine Austen's novels as responses to or rewritings of single, more obscure source works. Chapter Two argues that both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* contain specific and general responses to the novel of a family friend, *Mary De-Clifford*. Chapter Three investigates *Northanger Abbey* as, not a critique and parody of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, but as an affirmation of the novel as a genre and a renovation of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*. Chapter Four shows Austen becoming bolder in her strategic revision of contemporary literature—it argues that *Mansfield*

*Park* is a response to Hannah More's *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* and to the genre of the Evangelical novel in general.

Through Austen's first four novels, then, she is expanding on her first impulse to interrogate and correct the literature of her time—she moves from rewriting parts of a novel, to cleverly defending the novel as a genre by writing her own, to criticizing an entire genre through her writing. Chapter Five, however, shows Austen taking a step back from such pointed, individual rewritings, and, with *Emma* and *Persuasion*, seeking to evaluate literature's value in general and especially in women's lives. Viewing all of Austen's novels against their literary context—against their sources and anti-sources—leads, almost inevitably, to a feminist reading of Austen. What she most often is rewriting or reinventing in her source material is the depiction (or lack thereof) of women's lives. Even in the works of Burney and other female novelists, Austen finds passages and attitudes to qualify, reverse, or rewrite. Through Austen's dissatisfaction with the male-dominated world of literature, we can see, far more clearly, the dissatisfaction with the patriarchy expressed in her novels.

## CHAPTER ONE: Reading in the Novels

Studying Jane Austen's literary allusions and her attitude towards her literary predecessors and contemporaries is an inherently detail-oriented task. Yet it is in the details of Austen's work, rather than in any sweeping statement, that critics have always found hints of her true opinions on global matters. The six novels are, rather unexpectedly, centered around not just Austen's responses to specific works of literature, but around Austen's views on the value of reading itself. This is a dramatic claim to make—yet the abundance of examples where reading appears as a deciding factor or as a subtle indicator of the worth of Austen's characters shows it to be a valid one. As a voracious reader and re-reader of all types of books, Jane Austen was clearly an advocate for reading and for the importance of literature in a life like her own. It is therefore not surprising that her novels are filled with references not only to popular books, but also to acts of reading. To advocate that Austen, actively or not, subtly used instances of reading as well as allusions to convey her judgments on everything from class and gender position to politics, is only extending this argument in its logical direction.

On the surface, it might seem that Austen uses her characters' literary preferences as simple markers of their worth—all her heroes are well-read and are book owners, while most of her villains are revealed to have an underdeveloped appreciation for literature. A genuine appreciation of the value of the written word (and of novels) is always a good sign in an Austen character. However, Austen takes a far more nuanced stance on the importance of literacy in determining character. Her contemporary society—the society of the gentry and the aristocracy—openly valued people by what kind of books they read (or professed to read). Austen not only tackles the issue of false bibliophiles in her novels, but addresses the

complexities involved in disentangling the disadvantages class and gender cause in the pursuit of literary experience. Austen's novels, of course, only deal with a certain, specific subset of readers. She describes the lives of the gentry, only occasionally straying to describe the reading habits of such characters as the gentleman-farmer Mr. Martin (in *Emma*) and Fanny's lieutenant father Mr. Price (in *Mansfield Park*). In any discussion of Austen's use of reading to expose societal problems, it must be acknowledged that she refrains from describing a whole section of the population—those who cannot read. Her social commentary is limited to those for whom reading is an option. Within this very limited group, however, Austen, by associating characters—male or female, rich or relatively poor, high-born or struggling to maintain gentility—with kinds of reading, reveals her critique of the patriarchy.

Austen uses reading as a kind of marker of character—even the smallest supporting characters are defined by their relationship to books, and every heroine's personality is linked to her degree of literariness—but she insists that interpreting this marker is every bit as tricky as interpreting other kinds of behavior. Austen allows certain characters to successfully use reading as a measure of personal worth, but they can only do so because Austen, with her own remarkable understanding of human nature, is directing them—and as the author she cannot herself be mistaken. Austen, however, often depicts characters who misuse the social criterion of reading, to their injury. She also takes care to expose the fallacy of this way of thinking, showing her readers how it only perpetuates the unfair privilege of the rich and the male. She suggests that society's attitude towards reading is a reason for the stigma surrounding the novel as a genre, and, more importantly, that it contributes to the way women, especially “reading women,” are treated.

*“An Illiterate Villain”: Austen’s Characters and the Problem of Illiteracy*

One simple example of Austen’s use of reading as a personality marker is her use of the word “illiterate.” Being “illiterate” is an unambiguous sign of a bad character in any of Austen’s novelistic worlds. However, the word “illiterate” means something very specific to Austen, and it is a term which, in an eighteenth-century context, is intrinsically connected to issues of class.

The term can, of course, hold its modern meaning—to be literally unable to read—but when used in literature, it can contain a host of other meanings. In many cases, “illiterate” is an epithet that has been overused to the point that it does not even necessarily refer to reading habits.

Sometimes, the term is used as an indication of low class rather than any indication of actual literacy. The term was used rather indiscriminately in the novels of Austen’s time, and she parodies this usage in her juvenilia. In one instance in “Love and Freindship” she humorously exaggerates the term’s novelistic usage: her heroine describes a man who disturbs her by snoring, saying of him, “What an illiterate villain must that Man be! ... What a total want of delicate refinement must he have, who can thus shock our senses by such a brutal Noise! He must, I am certain, be capable of every bad action! There is no crime too black for such a Character!” This quote reflects the contemporary usage of the word—here, “illiterate” seems to be simply a synonym for “villainous.”

In Austen’s mature writing, however—in her six published novels, at least—she uses the word illiterate specifically; to her it means someone not well versed in literature<sup>1</sup>, someone uncultured. She applies this term solely to members of the gentry, who of course do know how to read—they may just not have the inclination or the intelligence necessary to apply themselves to

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<sup>1</sup> The OED definition includes not just “unable to read, i.e. totally illiterate” but also “without book-learning or education” and “more generally, characterized by ignorance or lack of learning or subtlety (in any sphere of activity).”

reading (and understanding) the literary works that Austen finds valuable. We must note that Austen's idea of "great literature" is certainly different from that of society, which presumably prizes histories, moral essays, and the classics above all else and abhors novels. Austen, of course, read novels extensively and defended their merit in her letters and in her published works, and though she enjoyed certain kinds of history as well as other works of non-fiction and even read conduct books, she was no classical scholar. Austen's conception of illiteracy, therefore, is a specific and unusual one, and she uses this appellation sparingly. She is not concerned with the plight of any actual illiterates, in the modern sense; she censures those of the middle to upper class who *can* read, but do not. "Illiterate," therefore, is an epithet that, if applied by Austen's narrator directly, is an infallible determiner: the "illiterate" character cannot be a positive force in the novel, and can be given no true respect by the novel's heroine.

Austen takes care, however, to distinguish her accusations of "illiteracy" from society's relatively malicious use of the term—a use that often serves to enforce class boundaries. Her definition of true literacy is certainly removed from that of contemporary society. Austen understands that class and gender affect one's ability to become literate, both in the actual sense of learning to read and the gentrified sense of being well-read. She only damns her characters with this severe epithet when they not only do not read extensively, but are also incapable of appreciating books and truly taking their messages to heart.

Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility* is a prime example of a heroine who deserves Austen's censure because she lacks the empathic capacity, rather than the means, of being truly literate. Lucy is introduced almost immediately as being illiterate—it is part of her character. She is, in Elinor's words,

naturally clever; her remarks were often just and amusing; and as a companion for half an hour Elinor frequently found her agreeable; but her powers had received no aid from education: she was ignorant and illiterate; and her deficiency of all mental improvement, her want of information in the most common particulars, could not be concealed from Miss Dashwood, in spite of her constant endeavour to appear to advantage. (146; vol. I, ch. 22)

Lucy's illiteracy, though Elinor might have excused her for it if she had been more delicate in general, is one of her major faults. Elinor pities Edward, finding it impossible to imagine that he truly admires Lucy, asking herself, "Could he ever be tolerably happy with Lucy Steele; could he, were his affection for herself out of the question, with his integrity, his delicacy, and well-informed mind, be satisfied with a wife like her—illiterate, artful, and selfish?" (160; vol. II, ch. 1). Illiteracy is held equal with the blackest of Austenian faults—artfulness and selfishness—and it is almost synonymous with these faults in Lucy's case. Lucy cannot be a true reader because she is artful and selfish, and even if she were to be educated by reading, she would not be truly literate as Elinor and Marianne are.

Miss Bingley, in *Pride and Prejudice*, similarly demonstrates her shallowness, artfulness, and selfishness when she reveals what she truly thinks of reading and people who read. In one of her caustic comments, we see her disregard for reading: "'Miss Eliza Bennet,' said Miss Bingley, 'despises cards. She is a great reader, and has no pleasure in anything else'" (40; vol. I, ch. 8). Elizabeth takes this as it is meant—as an insult. Miss Bingley, since she cannot enjoy reading herself, thinks women who do are pretentious and tries to paint Elizabeth as a literature snob. Yet when she is in company with Darcy, Miss Bingley tries to affect a taste for reading very similar to the pretentious taste she attempts to attribute to her rival. Miss Bingley reads to impress

others, notably Darcy: “Miss Bingley's attention was quite as much engaged in watching Mr. Darcy's progress through *his* book, as in reading her own; and she was perpetually either making some inquiry, or looking at his page” (60; vol. I, ch. 11). She cannot even sustain enough interest in her book to complete this farce. Austen makes it clear that this kind of behavior reveals the inconsistency in Miss Bingley's character:

At length, quite exhausted by the attempt to be amused with her own book, which she had only chosen because it was the second volume of his, she gave a great yawn and said, “How pleasant it is to spend an evening in this way! I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of anything than of a book! When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library.” (60; vol. I, ch. 11)

Austen is not just judging Miss Bingley because her attention wanders—in this same scene, Elizabeth becomes so interested in the conversation that she forgets her book—but because her motives for reading are clearly impure. Austen makes Miss Bingley's thoughts transparent here; it is easy to see how her actions completely belie her words. After proclaiming the sublimity of reading, “She then yawned again, threw aside her book, and cast her eyes round the room in quest for some amusement” (60; vol. I, ch. 11). In this episode at Netherfield, readers, and Elizabeth, learn how shallow and malicious Miss Bingley really is. It is, however, her affectation of being interested in reading, rather than her actual disinterest, which reveals her character.

Illiteracy is not always a signal that a character will be a villain—just that he will not be one deserving of the respect of the novel's protagonists. Mr. Collins, we find out, is “not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society; the

greatest part of his life having been spent under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly<sup>2</sup> father; and though he belonged to one of the universities, he had merely kept the necessary terms” (78; vol. I, ch. 15). His uncultured father is a major cause of his deficiency of sense, along with his natural tendencies to silliness.

In Collins’s case, illiteracy is the cause of an unworthy character’s defects, not so much a symptom (though it must be remembered that Mr. Collins only affects to be a reader of books—when he visits Mr. Bennet’s library he only pretends to read). In the case of Fanny Price’s father, however, Austen casts his illiteracy as more of a symptom; it shows Fanny his defects as a father:

he was more negligent of his family, his habits were worse, and his manners coarser, than she had been prepared for. He did not want abilities but he had no curiosity, and no information beyond his profession; he read only the newspaper and the navy-list; he talked only of the dockyard, the harbour, Spithead, and the Motherbank; he swore and he drank, he was dirty and gross. (450; vol. III, ch. 8)

Mr. Price’s “illiteracy” is thrown in with a laundry list of faults, concrete flaws in his behavior that reveal to Fanny his true character and his failure as a father. Austen hints that had he applied himself to read more, he could have improved himself—he does not want abilities—but his choice not to interest himself in reading beyond his immediate profession shows his fatal deficiency.

It is important to note that this observation of Mr. Price comes from Fanny, not Austen’s narrator. Fanny is shocked by her father’s manners and his illiteracy because she has spent a decade being indoctrinated into the ways and the thinking of Mansfield. She does not consider

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<sup>2</sup> (An interesting combination, as it points out just how much a privilege reading was—books were expensive—and because it links reading with generosity.)

that it is logical for her father to read only what pertains to his profession—when would he have time, and how could he obtain the money necessary to develop a taste for books like that of Sir Thomas? In this case, as in so much of *Mansfield Park*, Austen’s message lies in the discrepancy between Fanny’s perception and the narrator’s. Astute readers should take notice when the narrator is conspicuously silent, as on the topic of Fanny’s home and her judgment of it.

Still, the narrator does not work to validate Mr. Price in readers’ eyes—she generally supports Fanny in her negative feelings about her parents. What is really wrong with Mr. Price’s reading habits is that they allow him to neglect his daughters and behave rudely. Having “no information beyond his profession” means that Mr. Price cannot be expected to empathize with the female members of his family, who are presumably less interested in the navy list and Spithead than he is. It also means that Mr. Price can have no idea of what his behavior should be according to the polite world—of what he is lacking in comparison to “gentlemen.” Readers sense that part of Fanny’s shame and frustration with the way things are run in the Portsmouth household is because its inhabitants have no idea of how gross and coarse they are. This is a pretty problematic judgment coming from Fanny, and is even more problematic if it is endorsed by Austen. But the narrator, very subtly, refuses to align herself with Fanny in this sweeping judgment of her parents (and by extension of poverty and the lower classes). While it is undeniable that all is not right at Portsmouth—Mrs. Price cannot manage her servants or her children, and Mr. Price does not display much affection towards his daughters—these defects seem to highlight Fanny’s priggishness as much as they do the Prices’ faults. Fanny solves all the problems she encounters at Portsmouth with money—she purchases a knife to solve her sisters’ quarrel (459; vol. III, ch. 9), buys buns to eat because the food her parents serve disgusts her

(479; vol. III, ch. 11), and, of course, ameliorates the family's cultural deprivation by subscribing to a local circulating library (461; vol. III, ch. 9).

The narrator of the story simply describes what Fanny does at Portsmouth, giving no indication of approval or disapproval. The events must speak for themselves. Readers must navigate the subtleties of Austen's plotting, especially when thinking about literacy and illiteracy. For example, it is from Mr. Price's newspaper—his main source of reading and “the accustomed loan of a neighbor” (441; vol. III, ch. 7), that Fanny learns of Maria's elopement. Mr. Price's reading is proven to be practically useful, and provides information that Fanny would not otherwise have received. Of course, Fanny is too refined to read the gossip column of a local paper—though Mary assumes, in her letter to Fanny, that she has read about the affair. It is ironic that this piece of crucial information is conveyed through a source that Fanny looks down upon, but which her father is not ashamed to read and make use of. Perhaps Austen simply used Mr. Price and his newspaper as a plot device, as a neat means of revealing Maria and Henry's affair—but perhaps she was conscious that in having Mr. Price make a discovery that Fanny could not, doubt is cast upon Fanny's way of life and her ideas about proper reading. Austen herself was an avid newspaper reader, and often comments in her letters to Cassandra about just such gossip stories.

Similarly, in *Emma*, the only direct appellation of a character as “illiterate” comes not from the narrator, but from the heroine herself. When Emma uses illiterate as an epithet, she does not have the weight of Austen behind her. Austen does not fault characters for not having the means or the leisure to cultivate a literary life. She would not censure Mr. Martin, as Emma does, for being a farmer and therefore having limited time and interest available for pleasure reading. Like Mr. Price, Mr. Martin reads literature related to his profession—“the Agricultural Reports”

(28; vol. I, ch. 4)—but he has also read some of the most popular works of the time, notably *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *Elegant Extracts*. He is not diligent, however, in following Harriet’s instructions to read *The Romance of the Forest* (and in fact he had “never heard of such books before [she] mentioned them” [28; vol. I, ch. 4]), a fact that Emma exploits in order to turn Harriet against him. To some readers, a disinterest in *The Romance of the Forest*, a gothic romance and the first major success of Ann Radcliffe, is not only logical in a responsible male farmer, but a sign of his manhood and his practical nature.

Emma’s use of the word “illiterate” is unkind, almost malicious, and shows what kind of character *she* is more than it illuminates Mr. Martin. By the end of the novel, Emma is supposed to have learned not to judge people below her, and probably regrets the statements she made about a respectable farmer: “What has he to do with books? And I have no doubt that he *will* thrive, and be a very rich man in time—and his being illiterate and coarse need not disturb *us*.” This statement shows how Emma believes she is being appropriately polite and condescending to Mr. Martin—but she is really being condescending in the modern sense of the word. In a later comment she reveals her true feelings, saying to Harriet, “*You* banished to Abbey-Mill Farm!—*You* confined to the society of the illiterate and vulgar all your life!” Here Emma equates illiteracy with vulgarity—but what is more troubling, she sees both as a necessary consequence of what she thinks of as “low breeding”.

As Elspeth Knights notes in her essay “‘The Library, of Course, Afforded Everything’: Jane Austen’s Representation of Women Readers,” “Robert Martin’s limited and practical reading is indicative of his inferior social status, according to Emma whose pretensions are deflated by the author’s use of exactly the same code,” pointing out that one of the books Emma judges Mr. Martin for reading in isolation is *Elegant Extracts*—the same book that Emma and

Harriet “(mis)use,” according to Knights (Knights 19). Emma, like Fanny, wrongly and harmfully uses the eighteenth-century emphasis on literacy as a character attribute in order to put down someone she should respect.

### *Literary Judgment: Austen’s Readers Judge Her Characters*

There are many other key instances in Austen’s novels where readers are shown how to perceive characters through information given about their reading habits. Austen even uses this literary judgment in her famous opening lines of *Persuasion*: “Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage...” (3; vol. I, ch. 1). This half-sentence tells readers everything they need to know about Sir Walter; all that follows is just Austen’s elaboration on this description. Sir Walter’s daughter Elizabeth is revealed to be like him since she also reveres “the book of books”—later in the story she is more acutely delineated when we hear her tell Anne,

“Oh! you may as well take back that tiresome book she would lend me, and pretend I have read it through. I really cannot be plaguing myself for ever with all the new poems and states of the nation that come out. Lady Russell quite bores one with her new publications.” (233; vol. II, ch. 10)

This display of Elizabeth’s cavalier attitude towards reading, and of her artifice, cements readers’ opinions of her. This is one of the rare moments in the novel when we hear Elizabeth actually speaking, and it removes any pity a reader—or Anne—might be feeling for her. Furthermore, it emphasizes her political as well as personal self-centeredness: she has no interest in the state of the nation and cannot foresee that national events—even revolutions and wars—could ever affect her status.

Other supporting characters—Charles Musgrove and Captain Benwick in particular—are defined by their reading (or lack thereof). In introducing Charles, Austen says

...a more equal match might have greatly improved him; and...a woman of real understanding might have given more consequence to his character, and more usefulness, rationality, and elegance to his habits and pursuits. As it was, he did nothing with much zeal, but sport; and his time was otherwise trifled away, without benefit from books or anything else. (46-47; vol. I, ch. 6)

The implication is that Charles would have been made more refined and (romantically) appealing had he been told to read, and helped along the literary process. Even members of his family recognize this to some extent—Louisa reveals “They think Charles might not be learned and bookish enough to please Lady Russell, and that therefore, she persuaded Anne to refuse him” (95; vol. I, ch. 10) Though this was not the case, it still demonstrates that characters feel bookishness is a quality upon which they may judge others.

Charles is blissfully unaware of any deficiency that his lack of interest in books brings him; he is even concerned that others may be damaged by too much contact with literature. He worries about Benwick especially, though he concludes, “His reading has done him no harm, for he has fought as well as read” (237; vol. II, ch. 10). Austen artfully uses Charles’ opinions of Benwick to gently poke fun at both characters, and to examine the way literature can be used as a symptom of or as a prescription for a person’s malaise. Austen plays with this idea in her scenes involving Benwick. His overindulgence in poetry seems to feed his grief, and when Anne ventures to prescribe more prose to him, his “sighs...declared his little faith in the efficacy of any books on grief like his” (109; vol. I, ch. 11) and he accepts her recommendations to placate her.

While Austen does show Benwick recovering from his grief after applying himself more to prose, what really cures him is Louisa. He helps her recover, with the aid of poetry, and as they use poetry as a solace, they fall in love over it. A sign of how much Louisa has changed is her willing submission to quietly listen to poetry, hour after hour. Even Anne finds it hard to believe. She reflects, “The idea of Louisa Musgrove turned into a person of literary taste, and sentimental reflection was amusing, but she had no doubt of its being so. The day at Lyme, the fall from the Cobb, might influence her health, her nerves, her courage, her character to the end of her life, as thoroughly as it appeared to have influenced her fate” (182; vol. II, ch. 6). The catalyst for, or perhaps the first symptom of, this transformation, is her Benwick-induced poetry reading.

Another supporting character, Mrs. Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, is rather unique in her literary tastes. Austen makes a point of her worthy reading habits—Catherine tells us “She very often reads Sir Charles Grandison herself; but new books do not fall in our way” (35; vol. I, ch. 6). Mrs. Morland, very sensibly, reads and re-reads one of Jane Austen’s own favorite novels. She does not, however, share Austen’s obsession with keeping track of new ones. This fits with the picture Austen gives readers of Mrs. Morland’s philosophy of life—she does not read to be fashionable, but because she enjoys it. Yet she takes pleasure in many things, not just reading, and allows her daughter to devote time to cricket and baseball rather than “serious” reading. Austen’s depiction of Mrs. Morland’s reading habits fits perfectly with what we know of her character—she is perhaps rather overstretched as a mother, but she means well.

Though she does not force Catherine to read many “serious” books in the course of her education, Mrs. Morland does seem to see reading as an important tool in forming a well-balanced outlook on life. When Catherine returns from her adventures at the Abbey and is out of

spirits, her mother recommends that she read, almost as if prescribing a home remedy. This is a similar use of reading to that of Benwick in *Persuasion*: Anne prescribes prose to fortify his broken heart. In *Northanger Abbey*, however, when Mrs. Morland uses literature as a sort of salve, she is completely oblivious to the real cause of Catherine's melancholy. Austen presents as comical Mrs. Morland's overt use of a conduct book as a home remedy—Catherine's mother even says to her, "I am sure it will do you good" (250; vol. II, ch. 15) (Mrs. Jennings says the same to Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility* when trying to cure her broken heart with edible delicacies).

In her later novel, though, Austen portrays the instinct to use literature as a salve more subtly. Her own heroine, Anne, lives through literature—when she goes on walks, she thinks of poetry about the seasons (90; vol. I, ch. 10), and she even relates her own love story to the literary canon's treatment of female attachment and fidelity (255). Thus, when Anne tells Benwick it might be better not to indulge his grief by reading poetry, that he should instead fortify his mind with prose, we are inclined to agree with her. Austen's point here is that literature *can* have an important effect on our day-to-day lives, and that, in certain circumstances, we should manage our consumption of it just as we would a medicine. Benwick's overindulgence in poetry is somewhat comical—but in *Persuasion*, Austen shows some sympathy for Benwick's plight (sympathy which she does not overtly show to Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*). Even Anne's advice about prose is somewhat comically presented—but it is worth noting that Austen (and perhaps Anne herself) does not believe that reading prose will actually bring about a "cure" for Benwick. Louisa is Benwick's means to recovery, not the wise counsels of Dr. Johnson. While Anne finds it fitting that the two fall in love over poetry, she does not really believe that the influence of either poetry or prose has afflicted or cured Benwick.

Perhaps she believes that his literary tastes are a symptom of his emotional state—and in prescribing him prose, she is expressing her hope that his symptoms will improve, rather than recommending a means for this improvement.

In showing her characters employing literature in this way—as a way to diagnose or to remedy emotional distress—Austen is not only showing readers how to classify and judge her characters, but also commenting on how literature is sometimes used. She seems to develop a nuanced opinion on this point. In her early career, she gently mocked those who imagine a good conduct book can really shape a young woman’s character. Yet, she later combines this gentle ridicule with an overall insistence that literature does matter in everyday life. In *Persuasion*, Austen’s use of literature goes beyond telling readers how to judge characters—she insists, throughout the novel, that literature can provide solace to thoughtful people, but also that literature can be damaging on a more global scale—especially to women. In Anne’s conversation with Harville, Austen is declaring that the way women are portrayed in literature matters.

Austen begins this insistence on literature’s importance in everyday life in *Mansfield Park*. While literature is certainly portrayed as important in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*—and even more so in *Northanger Abbey*—in these novels Austen, in general, advocates limiting the influence of literature. Marianne is shown to be shortsighted in allowing her decisions about people to be dictated by her literary ideals and Elizabeth takes care to emphasize that she “ha[s] pleasure in many things” other than books (41; vol. I, ch. 8). In *Northanger Abbey*, of course, a large part of Austen’s message involves the difficulties that arise from taking books too seriously. But these themes do not undermine Austen’s overall message that people who read are worthy, and those who cannot appreciate the power of the written word

are not just missing an important part of life—they are wasting the immense privilege allowed them: the privilege of access to books.

Lady Bertram of *Mansfield Park* is a prime example of the way Austen subtly forwards this message. Lady Bertram depends on Fanny to read to her when the others are too busy to entertain her, but she is not interested in the books themselves. She cannot even name the books Fanny reads to her, or the characters they involve, saying insipidly at one point, “She often reads to me out of those books; and she was in the middle of a very fine speech of that man's—what's his name, Fanny?—when we heard your footsteps” (the play in question is *Henry VIII*) (389, 714; vol. III, ch. 3). Her utter disregard for the value of the literature she depends on for a reprieve from boredom tells us how we should see her (and her situation): she is not a malicious character, but she is harmful in her apathy towards Fanny—and in her literary apathy.

While Lady Bertram's disinterest in books confirms readers' negative opinions of her, in other cases an interest in literature can almost redeem a character. Henry Crawford's best quality—and the one that most tempts Fanny to like him—is his love for and understanding of Shakespeare. It is deliberate on Austen's part that the first scene in which Fanny views Henry in a positive light is the one in which she hears him interacting with great literature. She is able to appreciate Henry's careless, casual charm when she sees it employed in reading. Henry's ability to interpret Shakespeare is one of his innate charms; he says it is completely natural:

But Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman's constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them everywhere; one is intimate with him by instinct. No man of any brain can open at a good part of one of his plays without falling into the flow of his meaning immediately. (390-391; vol. III, ch. 3)

Fanny is not impressed with Henry's natural social charms, but is immediately struck with his easy understanding and performance of literature. Even his acting in *Lovers Vows* had impressed her, but she first starts to admire him when she experiences all the best qualities of his acting without the improprieties she perceives in the performance of the play—it is when Henry does justice to the formidable and respectable verses of Shakespeare that Fanny can be tempted by him. Patricia Brückmann notes that Austen's choice of the play Henry reads may be ironic: “*Henry VIII*...lends exactly the right context for [Henry's] attempt to ‘make a small hole in Fanny Price's heart’ (267; vol. II, ch. 6), while he pursues other relationships” (Brückmann 10).

In yet another way, Henry's reading here is a means of exerting his power as a gentleman over the less-privileged, and thus vulnerable, Fanny. Henry's statement that Shakespeare is part of an *Englishman's* constitution is tellingly true. Henry, as part of his gentleman's education, would have grown up learning speeches, often from Shakespeare, and reciting them, in order to cultivate manly public speaking skills. We already know this from Edmund and Tom, who, because their “father wished [them], as schoolboys, to speak well” were encouraged to recite lines and playact parts of Shakespeare (149, 681; vol. I, ch. 13). Tom reminds Edmund, “many a time have we mourned over the dead body of Julius Caesar, and to *be'd* and not *to be'd*, in this very room, for his amusement? And I am sure, *my name was Norval*, every evening of my life through one Christmas holidays” (149, 681; vol. I, ch. 13). But Austen reminds us that it is a matter of course that playacting, though it was approved by Sir Thomas for his boys, would be considered by him as completely unsuitable for young women—“he would never wish his grown-up daughters to be acting plays,” says Edmund (149; vol. I, ch. 13). Perhaps the qualifier is just as much that they are grown up as that they are female—the only explanation readers are given as to the reason for Sir Thomas's assumed disapproval is his sense of “decorum”—but it

seems like Edmund being delicate, avoiding the real reason. The Bertram sisters are eligible females, ready to be married—and as females, their behavior is expected to be examined closely and censured, while male behavior is not.

So Henry, in making his fine Shakespearean speech and doing as much acting as it is possible to do in a spontaneous monologue, is doing something that Fanny simply cannot do—not because she does not have the ability, but because it is socially unthinkable to her. Fanny's appreciation of Henry's skill in reading aloud is vaguely sad. It shows that she could have been an energetic reader or a good actress herself, were she not constrained by her single-minded attention to her social context. Henry is taking advantage of Fanny's position in society, not her mild personality, when he shows off his talent for Shakespeare for her benefit.

In a few instances, Austen portrays a taste for reading as negative, not positive. In works as early as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*, as well as in her last novel, *Sanditon*, characters who are too enamored with reading are parodied. *Northanger Abbey*, of course, is a comprehensive treatise on the evils of taking literature too seriously—though Austen's message is ultimately in favor of reading (and novels), and she reveals the real trouble in *Northanger Abbey* to be the way society treats women, not Catherine's naiveté, as will be discussed in the Chapter Three. In certain of her other works, Austen admits that there is such a thing as too much reading, but this stance towards literature is voiced sparingly in Austen's canon. Mary Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* is a prime example of one such character, and Sir Edward Denham of *Sanditon* is another.

Mary Bennet is the first of Austen's minor characters to be used as a foil to Austen's other characters in terms of literariness. Austen's portrayal of Mary is one way in which she recognizes that a love for literature is not in fact an infallible sign of a wise and admirable

person. Members of polite society do just what Austen does, judging members of the gentry by whether or not they seem to be well-read. While Austen focuses on characters who are either illiterate and bad, or well-read and good, she sometimes chooses to expose the fallacy of this dichotomous system of judgment by creating characters whose reading has not improved them. She both uses and attacks the way that society measures literary taste: in most cases merely equating it with fashion or social standing and showing no regard for literature in itself.

Mary Bennet's misuse of reading is comparatively innocuous. She cultivates a taste for reading because she has no other talents, and because she believes it to be one of the pieces of a proper lady's education, like playing the pianoforte in front of company. But Mary has not truly engaged with what she reads, and can only parrot important writers, quoting moral maxims from books rather than thinking for herself. When Mr. Bennet asks her, "What say you, Mary? For you are a young lady of deep reflection, I know, and read great books and make extracts," Austen reveals the true value of Mary's kind of reading in her response: "Mary wished to say something very sensible, but knew not how" (7; vol. I, ch. 2). Mary makes extracts—she treats literature as if it is something to be mined for direct use in daily life, but she does not know how to mentally digest the messages of books or respond to them with her own thoughts.

Sir Edward Denham's misuse of literature is far more dangerous, though it is lightly treated by Austen. Again likening literature to a sort of medicine or food, Austen introduces Sir Edward's problem by announcing, "The truth was that Sir Edward, whom circumstances had confined very much to one spot, had read more sentimental novels than agreed with him" (*Later Manuscripts* 183; ch. 8). Sir Edward's addiction to Richardson (a favorite author of Austen's as well) has given him a skewed idea of the world. He thinks that the exaggerated and melodramatic events that happen in novels are commonplace in the real world, and decides to

become a seducer of women. Here, Austen explicitly points out how Sir Edward's reading has gone wrong:

His fancy had been early caught by all the impassioned and most exceptionable parts of Richardson's... With a perversity of judgement [sic] which must be attributed to his not having by nature a very strong head, the graces, the spirit, the sagacity and the perserverance [sic] of the villain of the story out-weighed all his absurdities and all his atrocities with Sir Edward. (*Later Manuscripts* 183; ch. 8)

However, Austen tells us, Sir Edward's fault is not that he reads novels to excess—just that he is unable to apprehend the moral of a book and mistakes the author's meaning. Austen asserts,

...it would be unjust to say that he read nothing else or that his language was not formed on a more general knowledge of modern literature. He read all the essays, letters, tours and criticisms of the day; and with the same ill-luck which made him derive only false principles from lessons of morality, and incentives to vice from the history of its overthrow, he gathered only hard words and involved st'ntences [sic] from the style of our most approved writers. (*Later Manuscripts* 183; ch. 8)

What Austen meant to show readers through the character of Sir Edward is uncertain, since *Sanditon* is cut off soon after we learn of his fascination with Richardsonian seducers. Austen presents Sir Edward as comical, and his ambition to become a famed seducer is not a serious threat, but a joke. Austen's works defy the traditional plot of the sentimental novel—she relegates instances of seduction to minor characters such as Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Eliza in *Sense and Sensibility*, who does not even appear in the novel. Austen depicts seduction not as an everyday event—as the sentimental novels do in order to teach women to guard their chastity—but as a rare one, caused by irresponsible parenting. Sir Edward's

obsession with seduction, then, may have been designed to at once ridicule this novelistic stereotype and counter the common opinion that novels, which profess to imitate reality, are dangerous because they could incite people to start behaving like the heroes and villains they read about.

### *Literary Judgment: Characters Judge Each Other*

While one function of Austen's focus on the importance of literature is to subtly tell her readers how they should perceive each character, Austen is conscious that, in everyday life, reading is one method the gentry use to judge others. She depicts her characters as judging each other by their reading, while simultaneously encouraging her readers to do the same. Austen is in a sense both participating in and criticizing this social system. When her characters judge each other by their reading, Austen is revealing the problems that go along with this method of judgment—but she also shows that in certain hands, this kind of judgment can be a useful social tool. Perhaps Austen can infallibly judge her characters by what they read because she has privileged access into their minds, though she does not believe this kind of infallible judgment is possible in real life. She can tell us when her characters only pretend to love reading, when they use literature as a social crutch, and when they have read only inferior works—knowledge that cannot be truly accessible to others in real life.

Marianne, with her romantic sensibility, is one of Austen's strongest believers in literature as an infallible character meter. Yet she allows herself to be deceived in using this measure, and really just ends up following her intuition rather than the logic of literary taste, as she pretends. The most striking example of this is when she meets Willoughby. Her criteria for

worthy men have already been established—she has lamented to Elinor that Edward’s inadequate poetry reading makes him an unfit mate (20; vol. I, ch. 3)—and so she questions Willoughby about books almost immediately after they begin talking:

... her favourite authors were brought forward and dwelt upon with so rapturous a delight, that any young man of five and twenty must have been insensible indeed, not to become an immediate convert to the excellence of such works, however disregarded before. Their taste was strikingly alike. The same books, the same passages were idolized by each—or if any difference appeared, any objection arose, it lasted no longer than till the force of her arguments and the brightness of her eyes could be displayed. (56; vol. I, ch. 10)

Austen makes it clear that Marianne’s exuberance has deceived her. She believes that she has found out Willoughby’s nature because of his tastes in books and art, but in fact, she has revealed something about his character that only readers can see. Willoughby, unlike Edward, is enchanted with Marianne and agrees with her every opinion because he has no strong opinions of his own. He is not decided or mature enough to disagree with her—which does not appear to be such a fault at the time, but Austen’s readers can, in hindsight, see it as a symptom of a bad character. Here, Austen shows us that an investigation into someone’s literary tastes does yield results. Marianne, however, is not so astute an observer that she can understand what Willoughby’s responses to her literary questions really mean. She is attracted to him, and trusts him instinctually because he is charming—and deceives herself into believing her attraction stems from similarity in taste and a logical evaluation of Willoughby’s character.

Another instance in *Sense and Sensibility* where characters judge each other wrongly based on reading is the case of Mr. Palmer. Both Elinor and Marianne judge him to be heartless

and rude for most of the novel: he is always occupied with his newspaper, and uses it as a tool to disregard the people around him. When he is asked if there is any news in the newspaper, his response is only to reply “No, none at all” and to continue reading (125; vol. I, ch. 19). He continues this behavior so steadily that Elinor is surprised to discover that he is not really ill-natured and is capable of compassion and even politeness. She accepts the invitation to stay with the Palmers because “it was enforced [sic] with so much real politeness by Mr. Palmer himself...joined to the very great amendment of his manners towards them since her sister had been known to be unhappy” (316; vol. III, ch. 3). Once they are at his house and Marianne falls ill, Austen’s narrator reveals that he does feel “real humanity and good-nature” towards Marianne. Though it is not solely Mr. Palmer’s reading of his newspaper that causes Elinor to judge him harshly, this reading habit is an integral part of his behavior. Mr. Palmer is involved in politics, as we learn, and chooses to escape the inane company of his wife by leaning upon an accepted manly activity—reading, not a book, but the newspaper. He is able to read the newspaper while visiting with ladies because they will probably not show interest in it, and he has the excuse that it is necessary for him to read it since he must keep up with politics. The newspaper and his insistence on constantly reading it serve as a sign to the people around him that he is an important politician, elevating his social status without the work of being sociable.

Behind this instance of reading are many social practices which dictate the kind of reading a gentleman can do, and can do in public. Elinor sees Mr. Palmer exploiting these social customs, taking advantage of the fact that he is a man, and powerful, to do what she cannot do with any sort of propriety—ignore his annoying wife. But Elinor’s surface judgment is later revealed to be lacking—it does not hold true when the true comfort of Marianne is at stake. The narrator is able to understand Mr. Palmer and his newspaper, but it takes Elinor more than half

the novel to perceive that the newspaper is a defense against Mrs. Palmer's chatter, and a prop to Mr. Palmer's ego, rather than intentional rudeness from a powerful man.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, however, Austen seems to have faith in the efficacy of literature to gauge the compatibility of two people<sup>3</sup>—at least if the people in question are as intelligent and observant as Darcy and Elizabeth. As Elizabeth tries to avoid Darcy, and he tries to win her over, she insists on either refusing to discuss literature with him or intentionally professing unpopular opinions. At the Netherfield ball, Darcy asks “What think you of books?” and Elizabeth replies, “Books—oh! no. I am sure we never read the same, or not with the same feelings” (104; vol. I, ch. 18). When Darcy insists that “if that be the case, there can at least be no want of subject. We may compare our different opinions,” Elizabeth seems to sense that this conversation would be unwise, and makes an excuse to change the topic. Her instinct seems right—when she and Darcy had begun talking about literature during her stay at Netherfield, he had become interested in debating with her, rather than being offended by her (49; vol. I, ch. 9). Elizabeth's instinctual avoidance of literary topics speaks to her (perhaps unconscious) belief that discussing literature with Darcy might make her like him—or at least that it is the kind of topic that lovers often interrogate each other about, as reading is said to be an important part of a person's character.

In *Northanger Abbey*, too, Austen gives credence to the idea that literary tastes can help people interpret each other. However, it is also clear that while literature should be a determining factor in how to judge another person, one must be sufficiently observant and worldly in order to use this tool successfully. Catherine is supposed to be able to judge John Thorpe (and Isabella),

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<sup>3</sup> Although, if the Darcy/Wickham plot is based, as it seems to be, on the plot of *Tom Jones*, Austen is also commenting subtly about the power literature can have to deceive: in *Tom Jones*, it is the Wickham-like character (Tom) who is the truly honorable one, while the aristocratic stick-in-the-mud (Blifil) is much more akin to Darcy (as Darcy at first appears, from Elizabeth's prejudiced point of view). Austen has cleverly subverted readerly expectations and undermined the plot of *Tom Jones* in making Darcy turn out to be the good one. Had Elizabeth followed Fielding, she would never have discovered her own compatibility with Darcy.

partially from their literary tastes. Yet she is too naïve to really understand what Austen's reader is supposed to, especially with regards to John. She thinks her literary tastes should be led by him. Catherine is "humbled and ashamed" (43; vol. I, ch. 7) that John does not approve of her novel-reading, though he reveals his lack of taste and literary knowledge when he avows that "there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since Tom Jones, except *The Monk*; I read that t'other day" (43; vol. I, ch. 7). To readers of *Northanger Abbey*, this revelation that *The Monk* is among John's favorite books is damning. But Catherine, who has of course not read this scandalous novel and apparently has not heard of it either, is unable to properly judge John for this lapse in taste. She is so unsure of her own judgment (at this point in the novel) that she cannot make use of the clear sign John has given her that he is uncouth and ungentlemanly. Though it was probably not inappropriate, in reality, for a man of Thorpe's station to have read *The Monk* or *Tom Jones*, it was certainly inappropriate to discuss *The Monk* with young ladies or publicly admit to having read it.

Again, in *Emma*, Austen shows that more experienced characters cannot be long misled by reading habits alone (or, at least, they cannot be unwillingly misled). Though Emma deceives herself about Mr. Martin, Austen presents this not as a failure of Emma's observational powers, or of literature as a tool, but of Emma's generosity. Emma willfully manipulates Harriet using her ideas about Mr. Martin's reading—it is arguable whether Emma herself believes what she tells Harriet (33; vol. I, ch. 4). Mr. Knightley, an unbiased, intelligent observer, does not judge Mr. Martin badly for reading only what his profession demands. He also does not truly judge Emma for neglecting her reading, and for interacting with literature only through her riddles and extracts. Characters like Mr. Knightley can see beyond what society dictates as good qualities—he respects Jane Fairfax, the typical "heroine"—but he loves Emma.

In what is arguably Austen's most socially progressive novel, *Persuasion*, the error of making quick judgments is a central theme. It is important that while readers are meant to judge characters like Sir Walter and Elizabeth badly because of their reading, none of the characters other than Anne do so. When a character does overtly judge another because of a lack of literary taste, it is seen as old-fashioned and negative. The Musgroves believe that Lady Russell disapproved of Charles as a match for Anne because he was not intellectual enough (95; vol. I, ch. 10). This would have been a slight to the Musgroves' cheerful rusticity, which is portrayed positively by Anne and the narrator.

There is a sort of reversal in *Persuasion* of the traditional way to judge people by their reading. The Musgroves and especially the Crofts are applauded for their kindness and common sense, not their refined tastes in literature. A fine sense for reading is portrayed as a kind of burden—on Captain Benwick and on Anne especially. This reversal parallels the social reversal that *Persuasion* advocates. Just as one should not focus on the blood of one's ancestors to the exclusion of kindness and honor, one should not bury oneself in books and disregard life. This is Anne's advice to Benwick, and it is the advice she cannot take herself—though by the end of the novel she is trying. What really rescues Anne and Benwick from their respective depressions is not a correction in their diet of poetry and prose, but new (or returning) love. Though Austen still values the importance of literature, she has turned away from it as an ultimate guide, or an ultimate solace. Elspeth Knights says something similar, arguing that though Anne is invested in literature, "when her emotions are engaged, a literary response to experience becomes almost impossible to sustain" (Knights 33). This may reflect an evolution in the way Austen treated literature's place in a heroine's life—Anne, like Marianne, likes sentimental poets like Scott and Cowper, but, unlike Marianne, she realizes that turning to poetry to soothe her heartbreak is

ineffectual. Knights also sees the parallel between *Persuasion*'s move towards meritocracy and its attitude towards reading, declaring, "[Anne's] is a literary and social heritage that both supports and binds her in a lonely, domestic oppression" (Knights 21).

### *The Austenian Heroine: A Reader, Never a "Reading Miss"*

While Austen presents the importance of literature differently in her various novels, her heroines' relationship with literature defines them. The heroines exhibit a range of reading habits, from Emma, who values literary taste but cannot commit to steady reading, to Catherine, who reads voraciously—perhaps too much so. Marianne's "sensibility" and wild behavior is closely connected to her literary preferences for Cowper and Scott. Elizabeth Bennet reads novels at least, but insists to Miss Bingley, "I am *not* a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things" (41; vol. I, ch. 8). Fanny Price flourishes under the tutelage of her more fortunate cousin Edmund, and is found to have the capability to learn and develop her taste though she is at first very ignorant. Anne Eliot uses poetry to comfort her and is familiar with not only Scott and Byron, but with whatever works of prose she recommends to Benwick. Each heroine's known literary tastes (and her avowal of those tastes) tell readers how Austen wishes them to perceive not only the heroine, but the entire novel.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, literature is an expression of the heroines' personalities. While Elinor enjoys literature and has taste, she does not impose that taste on others or expect the world around her to conform to her ideas of literary or artistic aesthetics. Marianne, however, judges people entirely on their taste and gets into trouble because of it. Her love of Cowper and Scott seems at once admirable and naïve, since she expects to see poetic ideals in the world around

her. After her illness, however, Marianne's attitude towards literature is no less impractical. She plans to devote herself to reading since she cannot marry Willoughby, declaring to Elinor that "By reading only six hours a-day, I shall gain in the course of a twelve-month a great deal of instruction which I now feel myself to want" (389; vol. III, ch. 10). She has, though, become open to asking others, even the Middletons, for favors—perhaps a sign of personal growth: she explains "Our own library is too well known to me, to be resorted to for any thing beyond mere amusement. But there are many works well worth reading at the Park; and there are others of more modern production which I know I can borrow of Colonel Brandon" (389; vol. III, ch. 10). But Austen will not let her heroine over-indulge in such a course of improving reading: Marianne is rather left to temper her studying with the duties of "a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village" (429-430; vol. III, ch. 14).

Anne Eliot is perhaps the most literate of Austen's heroines—she has had the education of a baronet's daughter, and has had little to occupy her other than books. She even reads Italian. Anne, like Marianne, enjoys poetry—Scott and Byron, as well as Thomson. The only literature she refers to specifically in *Persuasion* is poetry—the genre she tells Captain Benwick can be harmful to those who enjoy it too much (those who are already depressed). It seems that, in the eight years she has been mourning her broken engagement, she has allowed herself to over-indulge in poetry, just as she warns Benwick not to.

Austen does not emphasize Elizabeth Bennet's literary tastes, and has Elizabeth herself disavow them in order to disconcert Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine. Elizabeth has embraced her mother's educational system, which allowed her to choose what she wished to learn, rather than forcing her into a prescribed reading program. The Bennet family reads novels, as we know

from Mr. Collins's shock at this indelicacy<sup>4</sup>—and the girls (perhaps except for Mary) do not seem enamored with Fordyce's *Sermons*. Elspeth Knights calls Elizabeth an "intelligent auto-didac[t]," who, like Frederica [in *Lady Susan*] has been ill-educated by her mother but has remediated that defect by a self-prescribed course of reading (Knights 20). The other girls in the family are free to read only novels and visit the circulating library in Meryton primarily to gawk at officers or shop, as Lydia does in Brighton. It is Elizabeth's instinct, when visiting a strange and unwelcoming house, to pick up a book, but she does not wish to be seen as bookish or pretentious (as Miss Bingley tries to make her seem). Elizabeth is insisting that she is not the social and novelistic stereotype of a "Reading Miss," a woman who "directs her life according to the conventions of sentimental fiction" (Knights 21) and a type Austen burlesques in her juvenilia. Elizabeth wants to make it clear that she is neither a Mary Bennet nor a Catherine Morland. Yet she does not think herself above reading novels, or at least listening to them read to her in the evenings, which seems to be the Bennet family custom.

Catherine Morland has no objection to novels, and only under her mother's guidance does she read more. She is not the perfect heroine: she is unable to make herself enjoy reading dull histories, though "provided that nothing like useful knowledge could be gained from them, provided they were all story and no reflection, she had never any objection to books at all" (7; vol. I, ch. 1). This seems utterly natural in a young girl, though it is indeed shocking in a contemporary heroine. Catherine's good-natured innocence is shown in her honest admission that she cannot abide histories. Austen seems to make Catherine question the reader when she questions Eleanor, saying, "That is, I can read poetry and plays, and things of that sort, and do

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<sup>4</sup> He knows circulating library novels in particular by their "cheap marble-colored bindings" (Erickson 579).

not dislike travels. But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in. Can you?" (109; vol. I, ch. 14). She continues, rather astutely, to expose histories:

I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention. (110; vol. I, ch. 14)

Eleanor, of course, is a “perfect” feminine character. She enjoys doing her duty and reading her histories, and she reads novels but not to excess. Henry, too, admits to reading novels—one mark of his amiableness. But each of these characters is ultra-aware of how their reading is perceived by society—they are controlled readers, and do not allow themselves to become fully involved in what they read, as Catherine does. Catherine’s willingness to admit just how much she is swept up in *Udolpho* shows her ingenuousness and innocence—the qualities that wise but jaded characters like Henry and Eleanor are drawn to.

Emma, whom Jane Austen famously called “a heroine...no one but myself will much like” (Austen-Leigh 157) is the only one of Austen’s heroines who does not enjoy reading. Mr. Knightley neatly sums up Emma’s relationship to reading in a conversation with Miss Taylor:

Emma has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old. I have seen a great many lists of her drawing-up at various times of books that she meant to read regularly through—and very good lists they were—very well chosen, and very neatly arranged...But I have done with expecting any course of steady reading from Emma.

Emma, in contrast with the seemingly perfect Jane Fairfax, has not completed the required reading for feminine accomplishment. Austen emphasizes that Emma is smart, and of course well-informed, but (rather understandably) not inclined to spend hours of her day imbibing the thoughts of others, even literary greats. Emma appreciates the importance of good literature in theory only, and in practice, she prefers real life, which has plots she thinks she can control herself. This instance is characteristic of Emma as a whole. She is not the “perfect” heroine of other novels; she is sometimes lazy and selfish, and often hypocritical. Many readers dislike these qualities in a heroine. Others, however, sympathize with Emma—her admission that she is not as accomplished as Jane Fairfax is humanizing and relatable.

Most readers, however, get stuck on Emma’s hypocrisy—she judges Mr. Martin for being “illiterate” but she herself does not read as much as society dictates a woman of her station should. Precisely because of her station—because of her wealth and especially her social influence in Highbury—no one can question her knowledge of literature. Clearly, Emma has read enough to conduct intelligent conversations and seem well-read, but in comparison to Mr. Knightley—and to Jane Fairfax—she is deficient. It is telling that Emma mentions *Elegant Extracts* and makes a book of extracted riddles. It seems that she might be the kind of shallow reader (almost like Mary Bennet) who is only interested in using literature to make herself sound intelligent and well-read. The difference, however, is that Emma is already intelligent; and she just does not need the help of literature to make her witty remarks and manipulate her world.

Fanny Price is another naïve character whose reading habits define her, and who starts out with a less-than-heroic background in literature. She comes to Mansfield Park relatively “illiterate” in the Austenian sense—she “cannot put the map of Europe together” (20; vol. I, ch. 2) and has only learned to read, not been educated as to what a lady should read. As Fanny

progresses through the novel, she becomes gentrified and learns to love reading, under Edmund's tutelage. She is one heroine who does not read novels—a telling sign considering Austen's diatribe on novelists who scorn novels in *Northanger Abbey*. Always cautious and correct, Fanny reads histories, poetry, travels, and moral essays. At one point, Edmund observes her reading with approval, saying, “*You*, in the meanwhile, will be taking a trip into China, I suppose. How does Lord Macartney go on? ... And here are Crabbe's Tales, and the Idler, at hand to relieve you, if you tire of your great book” (183; vol. I, ch. 16). Crabbe's Tales must be *Tales in Verse* (1812), the last reference is to a periodical composed of essays written mostly by Samuel Johnson. The first allusion is somewhat disputed—it is agreed to refer to some version of the published journals regarding George Macartney's journey to and ambassadorship of China, but it is not clear which of several accounts, written by various members of the ambassador's delegation, is meant (Ford 2).

Whichever of the accounts of Macartney's journey Fanny is reading, the fact that this journey is referred to at this moment in *Mansfield Park* (the moment when Edmund gives in and decides to participate in the play, leaving Fanny the lone abstainer) is telling. Peter Knox-Shaw aligns Fanny's refusal to betray her principles and act in the play with Macartney's “refusal to kowtow” to the emperor and his famed integrity (emphasized in Barrow's account of the trip, published in 1807) (Knox-Shaw 213). Joseph Lew, in a similar vein, says that “Macartney teaches Fanny to recognize that a ‘usually’ kind and intelligent despot, is still a despot,” linking Sir Thomas's rule at Mansfield to the Chinese Empire (293). Both of these readings of Fanny's “trip into China” suggest that, hidden behind *Mansfield Park*'s ostensible celebration of the ways of the gentry, is a criticism of the patriarchy. Contemporary readers would have known Macartney's journal, and would have been able to connect his refusal to kowtow not just with

Fanny's refusal to participate in the play, but also with her later defiance of Sir Thomas himself—as Margaret Anne Doody says, “Macartney is an example of someone who said ‘No’” (352).

However, Austen's inclusion of the Macartney reference may not, as these critics assume, serve as an example to Fanny of the kind of fortitude she should embody—rather, the reference seems to illuminate the difficulties of such determination. When Edmund leaves Fanny to her reading after telling her he will participate in the play, he suggests that she will soon forget about the play in her reading—but there is “no reading, no China, no composure for Fanny” (183; vol. I, ch. 16). She is dismayed at this proof of Mary's influence over Edmund, more than at his inconsistency, and concludes, “if at last obliged to yield—no matter—it was all misery *now*”(184; vol. I, ch. 16). If reading Macartney is supposed to encourage Fanny to hold on to her principles, it has failed. She does, in the end, acquiesce to her cousins' wish for her to join in the play—though Austen saves her from actually acting—and she even would have married Henry Crawford had Austen not saved her again with a sudden turn of the plot.

The play itself is another significant allusion with bearing on Fanny's situation. Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* is the story of a privileged Baron who, in his youth, made an innocent young woman fall in love with him and then deserted her to marry someone else. The scenes Fanny found it inappropriate for her cousins to perform are those between a pair of lovers and a mother and son. Certain lines of the play stand out as cannily relevant to the situation at Mansfield. Count Cassel, played by Mr. Rushworth, is a foolish fop like him, but he is also akin to Henry Crawford. At one point he announces “when a man is young and rich...to have made vows but to one woman, is an absolute slight upon the rest of the sex” (Inchbald 39). Similarly, he tells the Baron (a noble and wealthy patriarch like Sir Thomas), “It is in my character to break

oaths in love; as it is in your nature, my Lord, never to have spoken any thing but wisdom and truth” (40). This description of the Baron as wise and ingenuous is meant to be taken ironically by the play’s audience; he is a hypocrite since he used to be just such a seducer of women as Cassel is.

It is possible to argue that though the baron is revealed as a hypocrite in this scene and was irresponsible and cruel to Agatha in his youth, Sir Thomas’s crimes are more insidious. Both the baron and Sir Thomas want their daughters to make good marriages, though they profess to consider their daughter’s wishes above all else. Amelia is convinced that her father will be displeased with Anhalt (her tutor) as a lover, but also says that he will get over his displeasure. In language that strikingly resembles what happens to Fanny when she refuses to marry Henry, Amelia describes how her father will respond to her decision to marry Anhalt: “At first he will start; then grow angry; then be in a passion—In his passion he will call me ‘undutiful:’ but he will soon recollect himself” (26). Sir Thomas does not fly into a passion—his displeasure with Fanny is cold, and perhaps more dangerous because it is deliberate. He does not soon recollect himself, but he does intimate that Fanny is ungrateful (368; vol. III, ch. 1). Sir Thomas does not want to seem as if he is coercing Fanny into a marriage against her will, so he tells her she does not know her own mind. The baron, on the other hand, who has made the mistake of marrying for money and position over love and has realized this mistake, quickly acquiesces to his daughter. Sir Thomas, however, who has also married without love—for beauty—and is left with an insipid wife, has not learned his lesson. The baron’s moment of hypocrisy seems harmless when compared with Sir Thomas’s lifetime of deliberate obliviousness to his family life.

The last reference to literature that Fanny makes is, of course, when she has been exiled to Portland. She has found it to be unbearable, and her homesickness brings “a line or two of

Cowper's *Tirocinium* for ever before her. 'With what intense desire she wants her home,' was continually on her tongue, as the truest description of a yearning which she could not suppose any schoolboy's bosom to feel more keenly." Austen not only quotes Cowper's poem but identifies the quote for her readers, perhaps hoping they might remember the work or re-read it. Though the sentiment of this quote seems very clear, its immediate context in the poem complicates matters. *Tirocinium* is Cowper's manifesto against the practice of sending boys away to school rather than having them privately tutored at home. It is certainly a work that expounds on the evils of homesickness—but its main target is the parents who choose to send their children away. Several lines after the above quote, the poem continues, describing the schoolboy's return home:

Arrived, he feels an unexpected change,  
He blushes, hangs his head, is shy and strange,  
No longer takes, as once, with fearless ease  
His fav'rite stand between his father's knees,  
But seeks the corner of some distant seat,  
And eyes the door, and watches a retreat,  
And least familiar where he should be most,  
Feels all his happiest privileges lost. (Cowper 567-574)

This part of the poem reminds us what we might have remembered already—that Fanny *is* at home in Portland. Cowper's description of homesickness applies not to Fanny's feelings during her stay at Portland, but to her first days at Mansfield. Why, then, does Austen choose to refer to the poem at the end of her novel rather than at the beginning? Perhaps because the reference subtly reveals this very point—that Fanny's rejection of her true home is not fair, even if Austen

makes it unavoidable. The use of this poem in particular is a comment on Mrs. Price's insensitivity as a mother—Cowper tells those parents who send their children away, even for betterment, “Thou well deserv'st an alienated son” (579). Mrs. Price's unfeelingness is certainly a problem in the world of *Mansfield Park*—but it does not follow that Austen's solution to the problems of Portland lies at Mansfield. If we take Cowper's argument to heart, neither an exile to Mansfield (to the impersonal education of a school), nor neglect at home, are acceptable ways of raising children. Fanny's return to Portland shows readers that the only real difference between the two households is money. Fanny survives there only by buying things—first and foremost, by subscribing to a local circulating library.

Fanny's literary journey is the most explicit example in all of Austen's works of how literature and literary taste are intrinsically connected to both class and gender. Most notably, access to books—and to libraries, even circulating libraries—is based on gender and wealth, a fact that Austen does not try to hide. On the surface, Fanny's immediate recourse to a circulating library in Portsmouth seems like a sign of her good taste and benevolence towards the coarser members of her family. But it is simply privilege, not benevolence, that Fanny has learned at Mansfield. She now views as a necessity that which is, in reality, a luxury her family cannot afford. She sees their lack of books and of reading as a symptom of their general coarseness, of their disregard for the finer aspects of life, as she sees all their deficiencies. Fanny (and perhaps the narrator, too) regards her subscription to the library as a means of empowerment—which it certainly is—but, in truth, the empowerment stems from the possession of enough wealth to afford such a subscription. This is one example of the kind of ambiguities and double-meanings that plague readers of *Mansfield Park*. The narrator describes Fanny's subscription as a benevolent and brave act, saying, “wealth is luxurious and daring, and some of hers found its

way to a circulating library. She became a subscriber; amazed at being anything *in propria persona*, amazed at her own doings in every way, to be a renter, a chuser of books!” (461; vol. III, ch. 9) This is the language of power. Fanny can *choose* for herself, she is a renter *in propria persona*—in itself a privileged term, one that only an educated reader would use—the narrator emphasizes that it is a privilege to have such an education as Fanny’s. The mention of the circulating library reminds us that it is only money, in the end, that has saved Fanny from Susan’s fate—that literary taste is a product of wealth, not innate refinement.

### *The Library and the Novel: Eighteenth-Century Reading as Intrinsically Gendered*

Fanny’s application to a *circulating* library in a time of need demonstrates what this relatively new form of library had begun to symbolize in eighteenth-century culture. It was still a privileged section of society who were able to subscribe to such a library—Susan, of course, was excluded from this group until Fanny and her money came along—but these privileged few are no longer just male elites. In Austen’s novels, the private library is exclusively male—it is where Mr. Bennet hides himself away from his household of women, it is what is expected to keep Mr. Knightley busy since he has no wife, and it is what Darcy says must be protected, especially “in such days as these” (41; vol. I, ch. 8). The library is a symbol of male power and of the importance of tradition and ancestry—even the admirable Mr. Bingley is not admitted to the ranks of those men whose family libraries are the works of generations. He is no Colonel Brandon or Darcy or Mr. Knightley, with a name and estate—and thus a library—to preserve in an uncertain political climate.

Austen often depicts the plight of those who cannot possess their own library, especially the plight of the women who are constantly being excluded from the library, a male domain. One

of Elinor and Marianne's prime regrets at being forced out of their family home is the loss of their library. Not even Elizabeth Bennet is allowed into her father's library; it is his sole retreat from his wife and the female world which encompasses him. Mr. Collins, by right of his sex, is allowed in, but only annoys Mr. Bennet with his pretensions of reading (this seems to put Mr. Collins's masculinity into question). General Tilney, too, stays up late in his library doing men's work (reading political pamphlets), though Sir Thomas does not generally occupy the library, but the room his children take over for their play, presumably a study. It is Fanny, in *Mansfield Park*, who is mentioned as accessing the library, not Sir Thomas—though she must of course take her books back with her to the East room.

It is only in *Persuasion* that we see an inherited library neglected. Sir Walter, as we know, only looks into the Baronetage out of all the volumes in his library. Presumably, Anne is the one who reads the other books and takes care of the library—we know that it is she who “mak[es] a duplicate of the catalogue of [her] father's books and pictures” when they move to Bath (41; vol. I, ch. 5). *Persuasion* also provides us with an alternative to Austen's formerly endorsed library type (the male aristocrat's private collection) in Benwick's small collection of volumes, residing on the hand-made shelves of his friend Harville (106; vol. I, ch. 11). Here, Austen finally acknowledges that the way of life that allows for a sedentary collection of hundreds or thousands of books is falling out of style. The stuffy aristocrats who have nothing better to do than to cultivate libraries of thousands of volumes are fading away, to be replaced by active men (and perhaps, or so Austen seems to hope, women). In modern times, she seems to say in *Persuasion*, we must not only change our views about the aristocracy and the patriarchy, but about reading.

## CHAPTER TWO: “Powers of a Very High Kind”

Austen’s first attempts at novel-writing<sup>5</sup> were *Elinor and Marianne* and *First Impressions*, the forerunners of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, respectively. These early versions were probably in the form of epistolary novels and were only later revised into their final forms before publication. Most critics see these early attempts at full-length novels as completely different from Austen’s efforts with the juvenilia. Yet, when we examine what Austen must have been reading in the years leading up to the composition of *Elinor and Marianne* and *First Impressions*, it is clear that her impulse to write still stemmed from a dissatisfaction with or a need to rewrite what she read.

Reading certain dissatisfactory novels could have been the impetus Austen needed to start rectifying their mistakes by composing her own novels, instead of merely burlesquing others’. But it must have taken a novel more objectionable, in Austen’s eyes, than those she fondly mocked in her juvenilia to make her want to include it, strategically revised, in one (or even in two) of her own first compositions. The novel that created this impetus in Austen would not just be overblown, unrealistic, or stylistically flawed, like the subjects of her burlesque in the juvenilia—it must contain both literary and thematic missteps. The work of Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges fits just this description—and, when examined closely, appears, surprisingly, and yet strikingly, in both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. The evidence for this appearance—for Austen’s rewriting of Egerton’s novel in her own—comes through the sheer number of details that link the novels, and from the way Austen changes Egerton’s classist and misogynistic messages, cleverly reversing them in her own writing. When we look closely, we

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<sup>5</sup> (after *Lady Susan*, an epistolary novel finished in 1795 and sometimes grouped with the juvenilia)

can read *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* as, among other things, systematic attacks on the social themes and the style of Egerton's novels.

*Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges: "Rapid and Unstudied Effusions"*

A close reading of Austen's surviving letters to her sister Cassandra yields several references to the works of Samuel Egerton Brydges<sup>6</sup>, the brother of Mrs. Lefroy, a family friend of the Austens and a mentor to Jane. Sir Samuel, made a baronet in 1814 (Bradbrook 125), has been suggested as a likely source for the character of Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion* (*P*: annot. 33-34, note #4)<sup>7</sup>. His novels express a Sir Walter-like reverence for ancestry along with a certain disregard for the financial duty of landed families, and by 1806 he was writing a new edition of Collins' *Peerage of England*, akin to Dugdale's *Baronetage*, Sir Walter's favorite book (Bradbrook, 134). The Austen family was apparently expected to buy and read Egerton's novels out of politeness. But Jane, at least, never had high hopes for his work. In a letter to Cassandra, she reports on reading *Arthur Fitz-Albini* (1798), Egerton's second novel:

My father is disappointed—I am not, for I expected nothing better. Never did any book carry more internal evidence of its author. Every sentiment is completely Egerton's. There is very little story, and what there is told in a strange,

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<sup>6</sup> In his autobiography, Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges mentions Jane Austen once: "When I knew Jane Austen I never suspected she was an authoress...but my eyes told me that she was fair and handsome, slight and elegant, but with cheeks a little too full. The last time I think I saw her was at Ramsgate in 1803: perhaps she was then about twenty-seven years old. Even then I did not know that she was addicted to literary composition." See *Persuasion: An Annotated Edition* page 34, from Brydges, *Autobiography*, II, 41.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Egerton writes, "the greater part of the men who have been advanced from nothing in the last fifty years—they are a miserable set" (Brydges, *Autobiography*, II, 49), a sentiment akin to those of Sir Walter.

unconnected way. There are many characters introduced, apparently merely to be delineated. (*Letters* #12: 23. 1798)

This commentary could be as aptly applied to Egerton's first novel, *Mary De-Clifford* (1792), as his second. While Austen does not specifically mention *Mary De-Clifford* in her surviving letters (the earliest of which was written in 1796), her comments about *Fitz-Albini* suggest she had read it as well. She tells Cassandra, "We have got 'Fitz-Albini'; my father has bought it against my private wishes, for it does not quite satisfy my feelings that we should purchase the only one of Egerton's works of which his family are ashamed" (*Letters* #12: 22-23. 1798).

While characterizing *Fitz-Albini* as Egerton's only shame-inducing novel might make it seem that Egerton's family (and perhaps Austen) approved of his other works, this comment is one of Austen's multi-layered jokes. *Fitz-Albini* would have been embarrassing to Egerton's family not because it was unusually badly written, but because it caused a small scandal among his neighbors (Bradbrook 132). Egerton apparently based several characters in *Fitz-Albini* upon real acquaintances of his—perhaps the reason why the novel became fairly popular, and certainly the cause of his family's discomfort. The Austen family seems to have been spared the indignity of being referenced in *Fitz-Albini*, but that did not keep Jane and her father from searching out caricatures of their neighbors in the novel. Jane writes to Cassandra, "We have not been able to recognise any of [the characters] hitherto, except Dr. and Mrs. Hey and Mr. Oxenden, who is not very tenderly treated" (*Letters* #12: 23. 1798).

Frank Bradbrook, in *Jane Austen and her Predecessors*, argues that Austen intentionally avoided the authorial mistakes of Egerton, not only in refraining from writing recognizable portraits of her acquaintance into her novels (with the possible exception of Egerton himself), but in many other ways as well (Bradbrook 133). He sees Austen as rejecting the sentimentality,

snobbishness, and patriarchalism evinced in *Fitz-Albini* and *Mary De-Clifford*, as well as in Egerton's general outlook on literature. Bradbrook thinks that Austen "disapproved of [*Fitz-Albini*] too strongly even to consider the possibility of ridiculing it," and that "there does not appear to have been even sufficiently interesting material for satire for it to be of use to Jane Austen" (Bradbrook 134). *Mary De-Clifford*, Bradbrook thinks, offers a better target for Austen's satire. He uncovers a convincing connection between *Mary De-Clifford* and Austen's early novels, arguing that Austen was explicitly responding to scenes in *Mary De-Clifford* when writing certain parts of *First Impressions* (Bradbrook 128-131). Bradbrook also argues that Austen was responding generally to *Mary* in *Mary De-Clifford* when she created the character of Marianne.

*Mary De-Clifford* is a sentimental novel whose admirable hero and heroine, each of whom is delicate, wise, and decorous (as well as aristocratic), are restrained in their true love by the inevitable and evil forces of the unscrupulous nouveau-riche. Mary, the heroine, is oppressed by a mother who tries to make her marry the rich Sir Peter Lumm, whose family was only recently raised to the title of baronet from that of merchant. Edward Woodvile, the hero, is from an ancient and noble family, though immense family debts make him an unpalatable suitor in the eyes of Mrs. De-Clifford. George and Mary De-Clifford know better—it is one's bloodlines, not one's financial liquidity, that matters in life. Mary and Woodvile, as they fall in love, take long walks through her estate, together and apart, and delight in the picturesque scenery. Unlike that in many contemporary novels which center around the picturesque—*The Mysteries of Udolpho* for example—the ravishing scenery in *Mary De-Clifford* is never described by the author, creating the sense that Mary is in ecstasy for no apparent reason. Egerton presumably supposes that his readers can imagine the kind of picturesque scenery that would delight a sentimental

heroine—they must have read similar scenes many times over. The lovers, just as sentimental heroes and heroines always do, delight in discussing not only their mutual appreciation of nature, but the best kinds of literature as well. In the end, in what Egerton must have supposed is an injustice of epic proportions, Sir Peter Lumm (the villain of the story) demands, in a letter by his steward, the repayment of a large debt apparently owed him by Woodvile. The two meet in a duel, and Woodvile is tragically shot through the heart. Mary falls ill, then goes insane and dies. Egerton takes care to describe the aftermath of Woodvile's death—not only is Mary condemned to death, as every respectable heroine should be when she is abandoned in love, but no member of her family is ever cheerful again.

Bradbrook's point that Austen may have been parodying *Mary De-Clifford* specifically, rather than the genre of the sentimental novel in general, rests on the persuasive similarities he finds between specific events in Egerton's and Austen's work. The examples he describes certainly are striking—some are similarities of plot and theme, and some are even on the level of language. While many of the ways in which Austen ostensibly mocks Egerton can be taken as critiques of the sentimental genre as a whole, readers who are skeptical must, I think, concede that the specificity of certain of Austen's jabs at sentimentality and traditional novelistic tropes point to a familiarity with Egerton's work. It also logically follows that after parodying specific works in her juvenilia, Austen would take the same approach in her first major works, rather than deciding to attack an entire genre in a general way. The specificity of her attacks on novels is what makes her juvenilia funny. My argument, as well, rests on the persuasiveness and specificity of the similarities between *Mary De-Clifford* and Austen's first two novels. While Bradbrook only lists a few different examples of the similarity between *Mary De-Clifford* and *Pride and Prejudice*, part of my argument is that the sheer number of similarities in both *Pride*

*and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* should convince readers that Austen had Egerton's novel specifically in her mind when writing these first novels.

Austen's intentions in satirizing parts of *Mary De-Clifford* in her first successful novels are much akin to her motivations for writing her juvenilia. Austen's ridicule of Egerton's personality and especially his novel writing seems to have been shared by her family, and one can imagine references to *Mary De-Clifford* becoming a running family joke. There is indeed evidence of this kind of inside joking coming from even George Austen. His inscription inside Jane's "Volume the Third" (whose table of contents is dated 1792), "Effusions of Fancy by a very Young Lady consisting of Tales in a Style entirely new" (*Juvenilia* xxvi), could be a sly reference to Egerton's preface to *Mary De-Clifford*, in which Egerton writes "I have uniformly written the rapid and unstudied effusions of my own fancy" (Brydges iv).

Even in this short preface, one can see each of the major parts of Egerton's writing that Austen found objectionable, and which she attacked systematically in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Most importantly among these elements, Austen's work reverses the attitude Egerton seems to take towards women and their place in society. Her heroines, though they are derived from aspects of Egerton's female characters, reflect her sense that his views towards women are overwhelmingly condescending. Closely connected with his views on the female mind and body are Egerton's views about class and society. Austen is certainly not an advocate for revolution and the redistribution of wealth and social power she takes a far more nuanced stance towards the gentry in her novels. Finally, Egerton ridicules just the type of writing that would later make Austen a unique and celebrated novelist: the kind of writing that prizes attention to detail and depicting life as it really is. Both Egerton's style and his aims are completely opposed to Austen's.

Jane Austen would certainly have reacted strongly to many statements about writing in Egerton's preface. Early on, he writes, "To attain excellence in such a work [a novel], requires powers of a very high kind" (Brydges iii), and calls the novel in general "a species of composition, which has not only become numerous to an uncommon degree of satiety, but so ineffably contemptible, so much beneath all criticism, that the very Title is almost sufficient to damn a performance that uses it, among all people of literature and taste" (iii). He is merely repeating a common opinion on novels, one to which Jane Austen objected (as we know from her extensive novel reading and her comments in *Northanger Abbey*). Egerton also denigrates what would become Austen's hallmark quality of writing. A fan of Charlotte Smith's novels, he defends his preferred novelistic style: "Yet the generality of readers consider writings of this class [Smith's] high-flown (as they term them), while they commend and peruse with avidity tales descriptive of more ordinary and daily life, which they call natural, as if nothing was natural that was not vulgar, or at least familiar" (iv). Austen was to achieve lasting praise as a novelist from describing the "familiar" and the "vulgar," and perhaps this jibe from Egerton inspired her to begin re-writing his "high-flown" work in her own way. (One should note that Austen, too, objected to the "vulgar," though she did not shy away from describing it. Characters like Mrs. Jennings, Miss Steele, and even Mrs. Bennet are all deemed "vulgar" by Austen's narrators. Vulgarity is a quality Austen puts to use for the sake of humor and in order to further her story, not something she shies away from as Egerton does.) Reading Egerton's work could have been the impetus for Austen to move away from simply burlesquing other novelists (as she did in her juvenilia) and start developing her own voice.

Jane Austen may have responded generally to certain views expressed in *Mary De-Clifford* in addition to responding to characters and scenes specifically. Egerton's treatment of

women, especially women readers and female lovers, seems to have been antithetical to Austen's. Of his heroine, Mary, Egerton writes, "No books but the most elegant and refined had fallen in her way... [they were] kept constantly locked up in the cases of the fine old library, and placed on the shelves of her little dressing room, by the hands of her brother" (Brydges 5). Jane Austen clearly had free access to books from the family library (even novels like *Tom Jones* and *Gulliver's Travels*) and if she took advice from her brothers about books, it is unlikely she was treated as condescendingly as Egerton would wish. Certainly her male family members did not take care to preserve Jane from the influence of books considered too indelicate for the female mind. Egerton's attitude towards female readers and access to books parrots the common conservative opinion of the time, an opinion to be found in many other novels and conduct books. Austen did not specifically respond to this viewpoint of Egerton's in her novels, but his thoughts on the subject may have incited her to voice her own opinion through the medium of her own novels.

Egerton also describes Mary as "a silent listener" (5), and this certainly does not fit Austen's view of a heroine's personality (except perhaps in the case of Fanny Price<sup>8</sup>). Neither Marianne nor Elinor shrinks from public conversation or from voicing her opinion when it is called for. Readers admire Marianne and Elizabeth Bennet for speaking their minds in public. Egerton paints his heroine as someone who needs to be protected and taught, someone whose only thoughts should be beautiful ones. When Mary first realizes she is in love with the story's hero, Woodvile, Egerton emphasizes the distinction between Mary's pure, female adoration and Woodvile's decidedly masculine "torments" of love (86):

[Mary's] attachment on the other hand was exquisitely tender and luxurious; and though it was now and then mixed with some doubts and fears, altogether tinged

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<sup>8</sup> Fanny is somewhat of a conundrum; she will be discussed at length in chapter four.

her imagination with new colours, threw a sort of fairy light over all the scenery around her, and gave such a general thrill through her delicate frame as caused sensations, which language has no power to describe. (86)

This gender distinction—the idea that when women love it is beautiful, while when men love, they are tormented—is a construct of contemporary societal norms as well as literary conventions. Woodvile’s “torment” is a safe way to allude to the sexual component of his love, as well as to his position as a wooer. The standards of eighteenth-century English society made it impossible to acknowledge a woman as being “tormented” by love not only because the term could be sexually connoted, but because the patriarchy held onto an outdated model of courtly love. Under this model, women must be simultaneously perfect and unattainable, thus tormenting men who attempt to gain their (pure) affections. Egerton plays into this medieval schema of courtly love, copying its spirit perfectly.

In *Sense and Sensibility* especially, Austen’s female characters are more “tormented” by love than her male heroes. Austen depicts a woman’s role in her own romantic life as that of an anxious observer whose only option is to wait and hope, rather than romanticizing marriage and courtship as many of her contemporaries do. In showing her heroines suffering, Austen is drawing attention to the plight of the women of her class and to the gender inequities of her time. It is male privilege, not female perfection, which causes torment in Austen’s novels. Elinor and Marianne each suffer from love, and for both of them it seems as if the happiness love does bring them is barely a recompense for the torture that comes with it. Their male lovers avoid the bulk of the torment they have caused—even Willoughby, though he is upset at losing Marianne, goes on with his life fairly easily.

Austen also seems to object to Egerton's moral coding: he uses ancestry as a sign of character in *Mary De-Clifford*, rather as Austen uses reading. For Egerton, reading and discussing illustrious works of literature is really just a good pretext for revealing impressive familial connections. (While one can make an argument that this is also true in Austen's works—for example in *Pride and Prejudice*, where the conversation about Darcy's library reveals his character and his role as a patriarch—it is Austen's *characters*, in this example Miss Bingley, who motivate this treatment of literature. Austen herself does not systematically use literature in the transparent manner that Egerton does ancestry.) Anthony Fitzherbert, a friend of De-Clifford's, is impressed by the family's long history of nobility, writing in a letter of his friend's "perfect acquaintance with all the spirit and essence of English History and Biography, with every part of which his family seems more or less connected..." (Brydges 138). Egerton seems to insert his own views on class and worth throughout the novel; at one point he writes a poetic lament about the horrors of the nouveau-riche:

Vain of their present splendor, while the past  
    'Neath a dark veil of feigned contempt is cast!  
Ah! See the puny upstarts of a day,  
Rise to insult, and flatter to betray, (154)

These sentiments seem like an exaggeration of something Fanny Dashwood, Lady Catherine de Bough, or Sir Walter (*Persuasion*) might think. While Egerton casts characters that have made their money in trade as villains, Austen inserts characters like the Gardiners and Mr. Bingley alongside Lucy Steele, Mrs. Elton (*Emma*) and Miss Bingley to make the argument that birth is not a determiner of character. To Austen, birth is not a direct, infallible source for character. While class and birth are central to the identity of certain characters—Mr. Darcy and Mr.

Knightley especially—these characters are defined by the way they do good with their wealth and position. Austen always provides her readers with examples of characters like Lady Catherine and Mrs. Ferrars, as well as those like the Gardiners and Mrs. Jennings.

One example of the way Austen subtly mocks Egerton stems from his preface. We know that Austen wrote rather slowly; in a letter to her niece Anna, she notes facetiously, “I wish other people of my acquaintance could compose as rapidly” (*Letters* #113: 296-7. 1814). Yet she seems to regard those authors who boast about the speed of their composition, or worse, equate rapidity with quality of writing, as suspect: she tells Cassandra of a book she is reading, “[it] must be very clever, because it was written as the Authoress says, in three months” (*Letters* #65: 173, 408. 1809). In the preface to *Mary De-Clifford*, Egerton proclaims:

Possibly I may be told, as I once was on an occasion of a different kind, that though my ‘my [sic] imagination may be brilliant,’ and I ‘do not want poetical powers,’ I am ‘egregiously deficient in judgment.’ It may be so: I have taken very little time for that slow faculty to operate, for I have written these sheets with a degree of rapidity, which the public would not think the better of me for telling them. (vi)

Egerton is giving himself a back-handed compliment—here, he seems to cast his own rapidity of writing as an authorial fault, apologizing for it, though in a distinctly self-aggrandizing manner. Later in the story, however, the character Fitzherbert, an educated and refined gentleman, opines, “For tho’ all who write hastily may not write well, few write well who do not” (Brydges153). One can imagine the Austen family, especially Jane, pouncing on such transparent prating in a novelist. Austen may have been so struck with Egerton’s rather transparent self-promotion that she wrote a similar scene into *Pride and Prejudice*. The good-natured Bingley makes a

lighthearted remark about the rapidity of his letter-writing, and Darcy, perhaps playing the part of a skeptical Jane Austen, reveals his (and Egerton's) trick:

“Nothing is more deceitful,” said Darcy, “than the appearance of humility. It is often only carelessness of opinion, and sometimes an indirect boast.”

“And which of the two do you call *my* little recent piece of modesty?”

“The indirect boast;—for you are really proud of your defects in writing, because you consider them as proceeding from a rapidity of thought and carelessness of execution, which, if not estimable, you think at least highly interesting. The power of doing anything with quickness is always prized much by the possessor, and often without any attention to the imperfection of the performance.” (*P&P* 53; vol. I, ch. 10)

This example shows one of Austen's minor grievances with Egerton—one that might not have been the final impetus pushing her to strike back with her own writing, but that she still wanted to address. While this passage in *Pride and Prejudice* could be seen to be responding to something in Austen's own life—to a family member, perhaps, who employs Bingley's false modesty—Austen's proven engagement with texts makes it seem likely that she is responding to Egerton.

*Sense and Sensibility*, begun as *Elinor and Marianne* (probably written in 1795), and *Pride and Prejudice*, begun as *First Impressions* (written between October 1796 and August 1797), are much more similar to her early burlesques than most readers imagine. While they still represent Austen's first essay into developing her future style (the style perfected in her finished novels) there are moments of pure parody hidden throughout the texts, and these two novels are much more of a global reaction to Austen's reading than is usually acknowledged. Perhaps the

early versions of each novel were even more similar to the juvenilia, and contained more overt references to *Mary De-Clifford*'s absurdities. In any case the published versions of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* do contain subtle responses to and re-workings of Egerton's first novel.

### *Pride and Prejudice and Mary De-Clifford: A Source Universally Unacknowledged*

Frank Bradbrook identifies several similarities between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mary De-Clifford*. However, he does so rather formulaically, and neglects to analyze *Sense and Sensibility* in terms of Egerton's work. Jane Austen essentially pulled apart *Mary De-Clifford*, harvesting scenes and aspects of characters for use in both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, inverting Egerton's opinions and turning his plot upside down. Austen seems to have used her annoyance with Egerton's *Mary De-Clifford* as a jumping-off point to begin expressing her own views on the world. In correcting his stylistic offences and his patriarchal prejudices, Austen is not only responding negatively to Egerton, but to an entire set of social beliefs.

Frank Bradbrook highlights several scenes in *Pride and Prejudice* which seem to stem from incidents in *Mary De-Clifford*. He points out similarities between Sir Peter Lumm's marriage proposal to Mary and Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth, uncovers a scene in which Mary gets her petticoats wet (reminiscent of Elizabeth's scandalously muddy ankles after her walk to Netherfield), and speculates that the plotline in *Mary De-Clifford* involving Sir Peter's steward could have been an inspiration for *Pride and Prejudice*'s famous entail. Bradbrook uses these few comparisons insightfully, ultimately concluding that each shows Austen's authorial superiority to Brydges. However, he misses many smaller similarities between the two novels—

pieces of dialogue, even words of description—that provide surprising insight not only into *Pride and Prejudice*, but into the way Austen was inspired to write as a reaction to her reading.

The character of Elizabeth Bennet is generally thought to be one of Jane Austen’s best creations—Austen herself described this heroine, saying, “I must confess that I think her as delightful a character as ever appeared in print” (*Letters* #79: 210. 1813). Elizabeth, with her “lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous” (*P&P* 12; vol. I, ch. 3), is a perfect example of a character who is completely Austen’s own creation but who may have been inspired by Austen’s negative reaction to Brydges. There are two women in *Mary De-Clifford* who are vaguely reminiscent of Elizabeth: the hero’s sister, Elinor Woodvile, and her friend, Emily Barnard. Both women have an Elizabeth-like air. Elinor is described as having an “airy vivacity” (Brydges 70), a description with which Jane Austen seems to have taken issue. Elizabeth’s playfulness is described as “vivacity” only by Mr. Collins—once when he asks her to be his partner at the Netherfield ball (*P&P* 98; vol. I, ch. 17), and again when he proposes to her (*P&P* 119; vol. I, ch. 19). He seems to be using the word as a sort of polite excuse for Elizabeth’s unconventional behavior; he cannot understand a woman like Elizabeth—one who knows her mind and can hold her own among men—without a quaint (and condescending) label like “vivacious.”<sup>9</sup> Egerton, like Mr. Collins, seems uncomfortable with the idea of an assertive woman. He portrays Elinor’s “vivacity” as a drawback of her character, aligning this quality with silliness and impoliteness.

Elinor’s friend, Emily Barnard, is a more direct example of a strong woman. Egerton’s description of her is negative from the start:

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<sup>9</sup> From the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for “vivacious”:  
1752 Johnson *Rambler* No. 204: The young, the fair, the vivacious, and the witty.  
1785 E. Burke *Speech Nabob Arcot's Debts* in *Wks.* IV. 266: With all the reachings and graspings of a vivacious mind.

Emily Barnard, the daughter of a rich merchant, had a commanding person, and a liveliness of eye, that it was difficult to escape. Her affectation was to be a woman of fashion; of this, though she had some understanding, she was continually talking; and under the ease and indifference affected on this account, endeavoured to hide the strong natural sensibilities of her heart. There was now a playfulness in [her] manner... (74-5)

Emily is the villainess of the novel and tries to win Woodvile's affections away from Mary throughout. In this way, and in many other similarities of plot and character, Emily is strongly reminiscent of Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen did not, however, simply transfer over Emily's character into her novel as Miss Bingley—she refined and focused the character in order to make a larger point about women. Austen seems to have taken issue with Egerton's representation of “strong” women. He seems to imply that any kind of “playfulness” or “vivacity” in a woman—what he really means by these words is intelligence and willpower—makes her conniving, manipulative, and unnatural. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen has essentially taken the character of Emily Barnard and split her in half. Most of Emily's character is used in the guise of Miss Bingley, a truly manipulative woman. But Austen also gives Elizabeth some of Emily's characteristics—her intelligence, her playfulness, and her lively eyes. She shows that, while intelligent women can be manipulative, so can men, and a woman can be intelligent and also morally responsible.

Austen implicitly contrasts Elizabeth's playfulness with Miss Bingley's (and Emily's) in certain scenes in *Pride and Prejudice*. Miss Bingley seems to think Elizabeth's playful manner is her way of being flirtatious—but the “easy playfulness” (*P&P* 26; vol. I, ch. 6) of Elizabeth's manners, though it does catch Darcy's attention, is not meant to be attractive to men. Miss

Bingley, when she tries to imitate this playfulness at Netherfield, fails completely. Darcy can tell when he is being played with intentionally, and he ignores Miss Bingley's attempts to distract him from his letter. Miss Bingley's playful manner is artificial, as opposed to Elizabeth's: as Austen describes, "there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody" (*P&P* 56-57; vol. I, ch. 10). This is Elizabeth's natural response to the world of manners around her. She projects this playful manner naturally, but it is also a defense against a judgmental world—she uses her playfulness at Netherfield especially, where she feels out of place and under attack.

Austen is not just attacking Egerton's condescending depiction of women in *Mary De-Clifford*, but responding to a literary stereotype of her time. In novels, manipulative women like Emily (or Miss Bingley) use their sense of fashion and their "new" money to seduce worthy, helpless (and aristocratic) men who cannot resist or see through them. But by viewing *Mary De-Clifford's* Emily as a direct antecedent of both Miss Bingley and Elizabeth, we are able to examine just what Austen thought was wrong with Egerton's conception of women, and what exactly she changed about it.

The first thing any reader notices when comparing Austen's description of Miss Bingley with Egerton's of Emily is the subtlety and skill of Austen's writing. Egerton bluntly says that Emily is "the daughter of a merchant"—this is his first description of her, and he seems to believe it will give his readers an idea of her character, without any explanation or interpretation from him. For Austen, this is an important piece of information about Miss Bingley, and she leaves it until the end of her evaluation in order to build dramatic power and to indicate that it tells us something about Miss Bingley's character. The first thing Austen says about the Bingley sisters is telling, and is aligned with Egerton's description of Emily: "His sisters were fine

women, with an air of decided fashion” (*P&P* 10; vol. I, ch. 3). Austen does not immediately reveal the sisters’ faults, or even tell her readers what they are directly, as Egerton does. She lets readers assume, at this point, that an “air of decided fashion” is an automatic recommendation in favor of any lady. It is not until her later description that readers begin to understand the sisters’ characters:

They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of making themselves agreeable when they chose it, but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank, and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others. They were of a respectable family in the north of England; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade. (*P&P* 16; vol. I, ch. 4)

This revealing introduction, leaving the mention of “trade” to the end of the pronouncement and couching it in terms of the sisters’ own conception of it, not only tells readers what to think of the latter, but also tells them, subtly, *why* they should do so. Austen builds up dramatically through this paragraph, adding praises of the sisters until the sudden deflation of “and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves and meanly of others.” Egerton, in contrast, thinks his readers will know Emily’s true character after he tells them outright that she is the daughter of a merchant, and that she has pretensions to fashion. He does not leave it to his readers to decide whether Emily’s fashionableness is just “affected”—he tells us that it is so.

Austen's point, on the other hand, is that the Bingley sisters are unwilling to admit that their money comes from trade. This is what tells us about their personalities—not the mere fact that their money is “new.” Readers are supposed to judge them not for having that “air of fashion” (which indicates they are wealthy) but for their misuse of their money and privilege. They “were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank,” which is perhaps unwise and a bit snobbish, but not, in Austen's eyes, their most egregious flaw. The narrator subtly shifts closer to the sisters' own point of view when she tells readers that they “were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others.” This is the true problem with the Bingley sisters—it is their opinions (and their hypocrisy) that matter to Austen, not their fashionableness or the quality of their money. Of course, it does matter to Austen that the Bingleys are not truly genteel—Mr. Bingley is no Darcy, and is never considered as a love interest for Elizabeth—but, because of his good nature, he is a worthy match for Jane. It is his sisters' snobbishness and cold-heartedness that receives Austen's true disapprobation. The difference between Austen and Egerton—other than the blatant discrepancy in style and linguistic skill—is that Egerton assumes his readers will automatically judge Emily to be a lesser character—less intelligent, less sentimental, and less moral—because he tells us that she is the daughter of a “rich merchant.” Austen guides her readers, subtly and comically, in their judgment of the Bingley family, making the distinction between Mr. Bingley and his sisters clear and important.

Austen makes other changes to the plotline involving Emily, enforcing similarities between Emily and Miss Bingley, but also changing each situation so that it reflects the nuances of Miss Bingley's manipulations of others. Austen re-writes a situation in which Emily tries to get Woodvile's attention by a performance on the pianoforte, changing Egerton's clumsy and

direct narration into a wonderfully written few lines that express the dynamic between Miss Bingley and Elizabeth. Egerton merely writes, “Miss Barnard, who excelled in music, determined to make amends for the neglect she had received; and on the harpsichord...played a lively air or two...” (75), telling his readers directly what Emily’s motives are. Austen artfully re-creates the same situation, but instead lets readers infer Miss Bingley’s inner thoughts:

Miss Bingley moved with some alacrity to the pianoforte; and, after a polite request that Elizabeth would lead the way which the other as politely and more earnestly negatived, she seated herself.

After playing some Italian songs, Miss Bingley varied the charm by a lively Scotch air... (*P&P* 55-6; vol. I, ch. 10)

Egerton seems to believe that no one observing Emily’s move to the pianoforte could understand her inner motives without a narrator with access to her mind who interprets her behavior. Austen writes this scene from the perspective of Elizabeth, demonstrating her heroine’s observational skills and showing how casual drawing-room conversation is filled with double meanings, easily uncovered by an intelligent observer.

Austen similarly takes possession of other facets of Emily’s character and other scenes in which Emily tries to captivate Woodville. Egerton’s Emily seems to be a template that Austen improved upon, taking pieces of Emily’s character and motivations and turning them into small but interesting plot points in *Pride and Prejudice*. For example, Egerton writes that “She [Emily] had penetration enough to find out the tone of his mind, and contrived continually to throw out sentiments, in which he was at this time particularly delighted to find a sympathy [sic] with himself...” (78-9), though he does not describe how exactly Emily accomplishes this. In the letter-writing scene at Netherfield, Austen demonstrates one way in which Miss Bingley, like

Emily, connives to show Darcy that their opinions are the same. Darcy, responding to Miss Bingley's inquiry about his letters, replies, "They are generally long; but whether always charming it is not for me to determine." Miss Bingley rather transparently counters with, "It is a rule with me, that a person who can write a long letter with ease, cannot write ill" (*P&P* 52; vol. I, ch. 10). She slyly couches her flattery as a general "rule" of her life—trying to make it seem as if she has just discovered a wonderful similarity in principles between herself and Darcy.

Darcy, of course, is neither flattered nor fooled. Austen has turned Emily's sly manipulations (which do catch Woodvile's attention) into Miss Bingley's rather clumsy attempts. Instead of having to imagine how Emily "threw out sentiments" to catch Woodvile, knowing only that she ultimately succeeds but not hearing these sentiments themselves, readers of *Pride and Prejudice* witness at first hand Miss Bingley's type of flattering manipulation, and do not wonder that it never "catches" Darcy. Here, Austen casts a new light on the "manipulative woman" stereotype, showing that only a foolish man could be taken in by such a woman. She casts feminine attractions in a new light—they are not implicitly dangerous and opaque, as Emily's wiles are in *Mary De-Clifford*, but are transparent to a practiced observer.

Austen makes only small changes to Emily's character and her methods of entrapping Woodvile. These changes are largely a matter of Austen's attention to detail and the ironic language she uses to describe Miss Bingley. The largest change Austen made to the Emily Barnard sub-plot in *Pride and Prejudice* is the simple fact that Miss Bingley's attentions to Darcy utterly fail, that she is never seen as attractive in the eyes of readers, and that never once in the novel do her manipulations seem to have won her the upper hand.

Miss Bingley's tactics against Elizabeth are taken straight from Emily's behavior in *Mary De-Clifford*. Once Emily finds out that Woodvile is attached to Mary, she drops hints in her

conversation with Woodvile that Mary is ridiculous, just as Miss Bingley does with Darcy. Both women mention the name of their rival, trying to gauge the man's response to their raillery and trying to discredit her in his eyes. In *Mary De-Clifford*, "sometime as if by accident she [Emily] dropped the name of Mary De-Clifford, and sometimes did she launch out in raillery at the accomplishments of an insipid girl of sixteen, who had been immured all her life in the old family mansion in the country" (Brydges 79). This kind of hint is different from those Miss Bingley makes about Elizabeth in that Miss Bingley does not take issue with her rival's innocence or lack of worldliness, but with her inferior place in society and her embarrassing connections. Emily's description of Mary seems more like Miss Bingley's praise of Georgiana than her condemnation of Elizabeth. Austen has deftly revealed the transparency of Egerton's authorial maneuvering—he has Emily Barnard condemn Mary for qualities that, in his opinion, are completely good ones. This reveals Emily as an unsympathetic character. On the other hand, Austen shows readers what to think about Miss Bingley by revealing that her objections to Elizabeth are those of class and connections rather than character.

Egerton depicts Woodvile as being disturbed by Emily's references to Mary, but Austen's Darcy shows no outward signs of distress at Miss Bingley's attempts to make him blush. Many times, after Emily makes a comment about Mary, "it was with difficulty that she could conceal from herself the colour that one while flushed his [Woodvile's] cheeks, and at another the indignation, that darted from his eyes" (Brydges 79). Darcy, of course, takes Miss Bingley's pointed remarks calmly, and sometimes contrives to embarrass her by obliquely telling her he knows what she is doing. During a conversation at Netherfield he makes an unusually cutting retort: 'Undoubtedly,' replied Darcy, to whom this remark was chiefly addressed, 'there

is a meanness in all the arts which ladies sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears affinity to cunning is despicable” (*P&P* 44; vol. I, ch. 8).

Though Emily does, at one point, succeed in making Woodvile stray from Mary, it is not her manipulative language that captures him. Though Egerton depicts her spoken manipulations as far more successful than Miss Bingley’s, they tend to make Woodvile angry rather than make him want Emily. At one point, Egerton narrates, “Miss Barnard, among other arts by which she now strove to undermine Mary De-Clifford, attempted to raise his dislike of her by awakening his jealousy. But she was caught in her own trap” (80). Egerton does not sufficiently explain how Emily is “caught in her own trap,” but Austen elaborates upon this idea with Miss Bingley. She is indeed caught in her own trap when she brings up Wickham at Pemberly, in a desperate attempt to discredit Elizabeth, and instead mortifies Georgiana (*P&P* 297; vol. III, ch. 3).

Emily finally succeeds in tempting Woodvile through her body. While her manipulative words affect Woodvile far more than Miss Bingley’s do Darcy, it is Emily’s body that renders Woodvile completely helpless. Egerton describes, in a tone that casts Woodvile’s seduction as an inevitability, how “Emily meanwhile...was displaying every female art to engage the notice of the object, by whom she was attracted....a beautiful bosom half displayed while it beat with tenderness, and a luxurious figure, were all aimed at the engaged heart of Woodvile” (82). Emily’s use of her body sends the message that women and their bodies are dangerous and irresistible, even to the best of men. In contrast, Miss Bingley is utterly unable even to make Darcy admire her figure as she walks about the room: “Darcy, at whom it was all aimed, was still inflexibly studious” (*P&P* 61; vol. I, ch. 11).

Emily, “stooping down to pick up something on the carpet, and displaying, just as a flame catching in the fire shone distinctly upon it, a most beautiful bosom” (Brydges 103-4), does

tempt Woodvile. When “she dropped on his knee, and while, as she leant against him to support herself, he felt her bosom beat as if it would burst its confines” (105), he seems to need to force himself to think of Mary. Woodvile even declares his passion for Emily, “overcome with her tender voice, and the extreme luxury of her person, which the accidental ebullition of another flame in the fire again displayed to his full sight” (105), telling her, “ ‘Is it possible ‘the [sic] beauty of my lovely Emily ‘should [sic] not be dear to me!’” (105).

Woodvile, though expressing regret that he cannot love Emily, does, in the end, resist temptation and return to Mary.<sup>10</sup> Her purity is what, for him, sets her above Emily (though in truth he seems to value Emily for her experience and flirtatiousness). Mary has been carefully kept “pure” by her watchful brother, who not only protects her from the coarseness of their nouveau-riche neighbor Sir Peter, but censors her reading (something which Jane Austen would surely object to in a brother). Egerton, in the guise of the visitor Fitzherbert, tells readers about Mary’s access to books: “This selection I presume was made by her brother, who thought there were some indelicacies scattered among the two volumes of published poems, improper to the chaste eyes of his sister” (Brydges 160). Emily Barnard seems not to have been kept so carefully innocent. She is completely unlike the sheltered and “pure” Mary—and this seems to be what Woodvile likes about her, though in the end he knows Mary must be his choice. Woodvile is captivated by the very playfulness and assertiveness that he implicitly condemns by choosing Mary and explicitly condemns at several points in the novel. Egerton explains, “the assiduity of her attentions might for a moment be endured...but then the simple form of Mary De-Clifford in all her angelic purity of mind and person recurred to his fancy, and at the sight of Emily Barnard it was difficult to repress his disgust” (82-3). What is it about Emily that is “disgusting”?

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<sup>10</sup> When the two lovers reconcile, Egerton does not seem to regard Woodvile’s above declarations to Emily as material. Mary thinks that Woodvile has been unfaithful to her, but only because she has received a letter to that effect from Emily. Egerton presents the contents of this letter as completely disingenuous.

Certainly not her forwardness and readiness to display her body before Woodvile—this is what drives him to his strongest declaration of affection for her (“Is it possible the beauty of my lovely Emily should not be dear to me”). When Woodvile calls Emily disgusting, he compares her to Mary’s “angelic purity of mind and person”—but it seems to be Emily’s lack of “purity of person” that later attracts Woodvile. The idea of Mary’s purity—especially this vague idea of her “purity of mind”—is entangled with her brother’s intellectual “protection” and her own “simple” manner.

Austen completely rejects this sense of simple purity for her own heroine, borrowing aspects of Emily’s playfulness and assertiveness for Elizabeth. However, Austen rejects Emily’s other characteristics, relegating them to the character of Miss Bingley. Austen seems to show readers what is wrong with Woodvile’s rather confused conception of Emily when she depicts Darcy’s reactions to Elizabeth and to Miss Bingley. Darcy is not at all interested in leering at Miss Bingley’s figure—but what he likes in Elizabeth is not a Mary-like “purity” of either mind or person. He is attracted to Elizabeth’s honest and refreshing manner and to her self-assurance. Elizabeth has clearly been in charge of her own education, never, like Mary, being “protected” from certain aspects of literature or life. Darcy unambiguously rejects Miss Bingley’s falseness because it is false—he does not run away from her because she is a strong woman, or is impure—she is simply not intelligent, sensitive, or honest enough for him.

Egerton, on the other hand, presents Woodvile’s rejection of Emily confusedly—readers are meant, of course, to see Mary as the “right” choice because she is “pure”—but in the end, Woodvile rejects her because he has made a prior commitment to Mary, and he is very sorry he cannot be with Emily. This sends an ambiguous message to readers about how women should behave and what men should want from women. Egerton seems to present Mary as the clear

choice, especially when Emily is trying to verbally manipulate Woodvile. But Emily's verbal manipulations *are* at least partially effective, and her physical ones completely so. Egerton is continuing the novelistic stereotype of the "manipulative woman" but doing so confusedly, creating an inconsistent message about these women. He plays into the standard stereotype by making his hero vulnerable to Emily's manipulations. But by having Woodvile ultimately reject Emily, he is showing that Mary's purity should always win. Yet the scene in which Woodvile rejects Emily is not convincing; he rejects her not on the strength of Mary's purity or even his true love for Mary, and he even says that if he were not committed to Mary, he would want to indulge his "love" for Emily. Egerton cannot have it both ways—either women are dangerous and their powers can sway even the most honorable of men, or truly honorable men know which women are pure and only want these women. Readers' confusion about Woodvile is understandable, since Egerton is trying to do two things at once. This confusion reveals the flaw in his paternalistic thinking, and the flaw in the novelistic stereotype as well.

Austen's depiction of Miss Bingley clarifies the matter for readers and reveals Austen's own opinions about the "manipulative woman" (or rather the "strong woman") stereotype. Austen believes that if a man is intelligent and moral, he can easily see through a conniving woman's machinations. Austen, in her portrait of Miss Bingley, explains that what is "disgusting" about women like her (though it is doubtful Austen would approve of this word) is her artfulness, not her strength, "vivacity" and assertiveness. Elizabeth, in her frank playfulness, has power over men, especially a worthy man like Darcy, because she is not artful yet not sheltered like Mary. Austen depicts Miss Bingley as someone who tries to imitate Elizabeth's manner in the hope of achieving her power over men (as in the library scene at Netherfield)—yet Miss Bingley's forced playfulness never rings true. Austen has recognized that characters like

Emily in *Mary De-Clifford* are more complex than novel writers think—they can be like Elizabeth, or they can be like Miss Bingley. Strong women, women who can assert power over men, are not necessarily manipulative. And women who use art to be manipulative are not dangerous to men—at least not to intelligent, observant men.

Austen's own intelligent, observant man, Darcy, could have been partially inspired by the seemingly-intelligent but contradictory Woodvile. At least the dynamic between Emily and Woodvile seems similar to that between Elizabeth and Darcy. Egerton describes how Emily begins to fall in love with Woodvile, rather because of than despite his moodiness, saying, "...and indeed there was something in the expression and manners of Woodvile, so irresistible, that, whenever he did not raise hatred by silent and unmixed contempt, (to which perhaps he was a little too much addicted,) he was almost certain in an uncommon degree to interest" (Brydges 80). This description of Woodvile is distinctly reminiscent of Darcy, with his "silent indignation" (*P&P* 27; vol. I, ch. 6), and his "forbidding, disagreeable countenance" (*P&P* 11; vol. I, ch. 3), though Austen's heroine has enough self-respect and sense to object to rudeness, not be attracted to it. Elizabeth is intrigued by Darcy's odd manners, but she does not begin to like him until she realizes that his silence and pride are not intentionally directed at her personally (as Woodvile's rudeness *is* to Emily).

There is also a hint of Darcy, and his relationship with Wickham, in the relationship between De-Clifford's friend Hungerford and Hungerford's brother Lord Molyns. Hungerford, an admirable and pleasant man, hides his brother's faults from the world though he disapproves of them. Even when Lord Molyns seems to be trying to take advantage of Mary, Hungerford refrains from exposing his brother, reasoning, "Yet as few knew his character, he thought himself bound not to divulge the secret" (Brydges 55-6). Just like Elizabeth with Wickham,

“Mary felt a prejudice in favor of the brother of Hungerford, and listened not without pleasure to his conversation” (56). While Mary thinks Lord Molynes is agreeable and accepts his attentions, he never tricks her or deceives her, as Wickham does Elizabeth, and he never makes her fall in love with him. Mary, like the consummate perfect heroine, declares to herself, “still compared with Woodvile she thought him a being of an inferior order...” (90). The only trouble Lord Molynes causes is at a ball where Woodvile sees him talking to Mary and assumes she is accepting his attentions.

This ball scene is again obliquely connected with Mr. Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*, though Wickham here is aligned with Woodvile, not Lord Molynes. When Mary first arrives at the ball, she “...possessed herself sufficiently to examine the figures around the room; but her spirits sunk, when the ball began, and she could not perceive any where among the crowd the person of her favourite Woodvile” (90). This is an event, and a description, that is surely seen in many novels of the time. Yet it does remind readers of *Pride and Prejudice* of the Netherfield ball, where Austen describes how “Till Elizabeth entered the drawing-room at Netherfield, and looked in vain for Mr. Wickham among the cluster of red coats there assembled, a doubt of his being present had never occurred to her” (*P&P* 100; vol. I, ch. 18). This slight similarity is emphasized when readers remember the way the term “favourite” is used in *Pride and Prejudice*: Wickham is Elizabeth’s favourite, never Darcy. Miss Bingley mockingly refers to Wickham as Elizabeth’s “favourite” when speaking to her (*P&P* 106; vol. I, ch. 18), and after Elizabeth discovers his deception, she herself uses this expression—“her former favourite” (*P&P* 202; vol. II, ch. 9). Miss Bingley uses the term mockingly to belittle Darcy’s feelings for Elizabeth: “How long has she been such a favourite?—and pray, when am I to wish you joy?” (*P&P* 30; vol. I, ch. 6). Austen clearly disapproves of the term’s use as an appellation for a true lover. Thus,

Wickham, Elizabeth's apparent "favourite," for whom she vainly searches at the ball is juxtaposed with Mary's "favourite," the hero Woodvile. Clearly, neither Lord Molyne's nor Woodvile are direct antecedents of Wickham, but Austen can be seen as having carefully created Wickham in reaction to the deceptive yet effectually harmless Lord Molyne's and the too-good-to-be true hero Woodvile, or to novelistic tropes like them. Certainly Wickham as a character is a reaction to both the type of villain who is hobbled by a kind author and the type of flawless hero whose charms are benignly irresistible.

Mrs. Bennet is another such character, Austen's reaction to the solely evil or impossibly perfect mother figures that abound in sentimental novels. Mrs. Bennet, "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper," whose business is "to get her daughters married" and whose "solace [is] visiting and news" (*P&P* 5; vol. I, ch. 1), is one of Austen's masterpiece characters. While Austen's approach to this misguided mother is completely unique, the idea of an unsympathetic fictional mother was not a new one in Austen's time. Mrs. De-Clifford is an example of one of these mothers who seem to hold opinions completely opposed to those of her children, and who uses her maternal power to force them into uncomfortable situations. At one point in *Mary De-Clifford*, Egerton sympathizes with Mary, explaining, "But the conversation of her mother, with whose sentiments she had never felt a perfect sympathy, seemed now in its whole tendency to give her pain, and she found relief alone (except when she could enjoy the unrestrained conversation of her brother)" (Brydges 111). This is very like Jane's lamentation to Elizabeth, "Oh, that my dear mother had more command over herself! She can have no idea of the pain she gives me by her continual reflections on him" (*P&P* 152; vol. II, ch. 1), illustrating why the sisters prefer solitude or the company of each other, just as Mary does with her sibling. They understand each other, as Jane explains: "...between herself and

Elizabeth, therefore, the subject was never alluded to. But... no such delicacy restrained her mother..." (*P&P* 145; vol. I, ch. 23) she (and Elizabeth too) cannot feel comfortable in their mother's presence, especially when marriage is the topic of conversation.

Mrs. De-Clifford, while she shares with Mrs. Bennet this quality of making her children uncomfortable, is a completely different creature from Lizzie and Jane's mother. Her children are ashamed of her because she looks down on poor people with family titles, preferring riches to noble tradition. She tries to manipulate Mary into marrying the crude Sir Peter (whose father, Egerton's narrator reveals in disgust, was a rich woolen-draper [8]), and is even cruel enough to make her daughter faint in distress and then leave her alone (though she is unaware Mary had fainted) (209). Egerton is again slightly confused in his depiction of Mrs. De-Clifford—he seems to think it indecorous for a woman to be truly villainous, but wants to make it clear that this woman, who comes from a wealthy but not aristocratic family, is an inferior sort in both her opinions and her depth of feeling.

Mrs. Bennet tries to force Elizabeth to marry Mr. Collins, making similar threats to Mrs. De-Clifford's when trying to make Mary marry Sir Peter, but she is just desperate that a good opportunity for marriage not be lost. Behind all Mrs. Bennet's manipulations and unkindnesses is a practical fear for her family—it is actually necessary for her daughters to marry. Mrs. De-Clifford, however, is presented with two offers of marriage for her daughter and objects to Woodvile, wanting her daughter to choose the richer man. Even Woodvile as a prospective suitor would have made Mrs. Bennet ecstatic. Another important difference between the two mothers is that Mrs. De-Clifford *can* successfully intimidate her daughter, even bringing her to tears and leaving her begging and swooning. Elizabeth, of course, calmly refuses to marry Mr. Collins, whatever her mother says, and is also assured of an ally in her father. Mrs. Bennet is a ridiculous

character, Mrs. De-Clifford a threatening one. The comic nature of Mrs. Bennet's character is actually a quite important change: Austen depicts someone who worries about the wealth and status of their acquaintances as silly, not mercenary. And Mrs. Bennet is not a snob, nor a character like Mrs. De-Clifford (a kind of anti-snob who ludicrously looks down her nose at titled families and prizes wealth above everything). Readers cannot forget, through all Mrs. Bennet's comic worries and embarrassing misbehavior, that the business of her life is not a trivial one—she truly has her daughters' interest at heart, and *needs* to get them married off before they are all left destitute. The comedy Mrs. Bennet provides, her underlying practicality in the face of a harsh world, and the tricky message she conveys about society make her a multi-layered, complex character. Mrs. De-Clifford, on the other hand, is one-dimensional: she is there to provide a central drama for the plot—an obstacle for the lovers to overcome—and to showcase Egerton's opinions about wealth versus aristocratic heritage. She opposes the pure love of the noble Woodvile, advocating for the horrible Sir Peter (for no particular reason other than ideology), and she receives her comeuppance by the end of the novel.

A key difference between Austen's portrait of Mrs. Bennet and Egerton's of Mrs. De-Clifford is their respective reactions to the announcement of their daughters' engagements. Mary first announces her engagement to her brother, who wholeheartedly approves of Woodvile. But "they both knew a less easy reception awaited him within" (Brydges 183) and when "...he [Woodvile] bowed to Mrs. De-Clifford," she "very formally asked him how he did" (184), a clear indication of disapproval. Mrs. Bennet's displeasure is similarly evinced in "the cold and ceremonious politeness of her curtsey and address to [Darcy]" (*P&P* 371; vol. III, ch. 11). Elizabeth, like Mary, expects a "less easy reception" from her mother than from Jane (*P&P* 419; vol. III, ch. 17). However, after the engagement is announced, Mrs. Bennet reveals her true

priorities and is delighted with the prospect of a rich and influential son-in-law. Even Elizabeth does not expect her mother's dislike of Darcy to vanish so completely on hearing that he actually wants to marry one of her daughters.

Comparing Mrs. Bennet's complete reversal and ecstatic acceptance of Darcy's proposal with Mrs. De-Clifford's steady dislike for Woodvile not only emphasizes Austen's message about the practicality behind Mrs. Bennet's motives but also highlights how mortifying such behavior is for Elizabeth. This seemingly lucky change of mind is not welcome to Elizabeth; rather, it shows how shallow—or really how desperate—her mother is. Readers would have had much more respect for Mrs. Bennet—and taken her much more seriously—had she been the kind of woman whose dislike rests on more than self-interest and imagined hurt feelings. But is Mrs. Bennet's underlying practicality actually worse than Mrs. De-Clifford's intractability? Jane Austen, if she is subtly connecting the two women, seems to think that although Mrs. Bennet's actions are more embarrassing, they are almost justified by her situation in life as a mother of five daughters.

Frank Bradbrook sees another character in *Pride and Prejudice* with a possible counterpoint in *Mary De-Clifford*. Anthony Fitzherbert is a visitor to the De-Clifford household, and is a sympathetic observer of Mary's troubles. Bradbrook speculates that Fitzherbert “may have suggested to Jane Austen Colonel Fitzwilliam, nephew of Lady Catherine de Bough: it is not only their names that are similar; each of them is a man of ancient family” (Bradbrook 131). In addition, both of these men may be in love with the heroines, but they never declare themselves: in Fitzherbert's case because it is clear Mary's love for Woodvile is insurmountable; in Fitzwilliam's case, because he is too poor to marry someone as portionless as Elizabeth. Even in this difference there is evidence of Austen's subversive re-writing: again she acknowledges

the practicality necessary to live in the real world—even such a genial man as Fitzwilliam must consider money. She rejects Egerton’s aristocratic ideals, countering his fictional examples of the horrors of the nouveau-riche with sensible, complex accounts of the realities of life for the lower gentry. Just as Mrs. Bennet is not wrong to worry over her daughters’ prospects, so Colonel Fitzwilliam, as a younger son, would be imprudent to marry for love without money.

Though this is the only character similarity that Bradbrook mentions—he misses Emily Barnard’s striking similarity to Miss Bingley—he makes insightful points about certain scenes that connect *Mary De-Clifford* to *Pride and Prejudice*. Some of the most important scenes in each novel are proposal scenes, and both novels have more than one. Mary receives her first proposal from Sir Peter Lumm, whom she rejects in a way that is strikingly similar to Elizabeth’s rejection of Darcy’s first proposal. Bradbrook qualifies his analysis of these two scenes, commenting “it would be interesting to know if it [*First Impressions*] contained the scene of Darcy’s proposal, and if this was the same as in its final form in *Pride and Prejudice*” (Bradbrook 127-8). However, it seems safe to assume that this integral scene must have stayed much the same through Austen’s revisions, which most scholars assume were minimal and mostly confined to cutting *First Impressions* down in length (*P&P Introduction* xxvii).

Bradbrook calls Mary’s proposal scene “melodramatic, banal and slightly vulgar,” an evaluation with which it is hard to argue. He traces several parallels with Darcy’s proposal, and finds similarities even on the sentence level. He cites Mary’s ejaculation, “Sir...do you mean to add fresh insults to those you have already given me by this unmeaning nonsense!” (Brydges 117), reminiscent of Elizabeth’s (far more articulate) riposte, “I might as well enquire...why with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character?” (*P&P* 213; vol. II, ch.

11). Bradbrook points out another of Mary's responses: she tells Sir Peter, "had you a thousand times your fortune, and ten thousand times the qualities upon which you most pride yourself, I would sooner work for my daily bread than be your wife!" (117), a response which suggests Elizabeth's famous lines, "You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner," later concluding with "I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry" (*P&P* 215; vol. II, ch. 11).

However, Bradbrook also points out, there is a severe difference between the two women's responses to an unwelcome marriage proposal. He states, "The moral drawn from the interview by Brydges's aristocratic heroine is the opposite of that pointed out by the encounter between Elizabeth and Darcy" (Bradbrook 129). Mary upbraids Sir Peter in a scathing and snobbish appraisal of his worth: "I have not...inherited the blood of the de Cliffords without long knowing, that there is more pride and insolence in one house of new-got wealth, than in all the ancient families of England together!"—a pronouncement worthy of Catherine de Bough. This is an important difference, and it is not a stretch to imagine a young Jane Austen coming across this scene as she read—perhaps admiring the dramatic fodder such a situation provides as well as the opportunity for the heroine to scream her mind to a hated male—and think about how she could re-write it, not only changing its moral conclusion, but by the end of the novel, revealing the heroine's presumption as well as the hero's.

Bradbrook notes that Mary bursts into tears during her encounter with Sir Peter, while Elizabeth has the self-command to wait until Darcy has gone to cry (Bradbrook 130). Mary, who had encountered Sir Peter while on a walk, immediately returns home, getting her petticoats and

ankles wet with dew “which reminds one again of a parallel scene in *Pride and Prejudice*,” as Bradbrook says (130), meaning the scene in which Elizabeth walks to Netherfield, getting her petticoats not only wet but muddy (*P&P* 36; vol. I, ch. 7).

Bradbrook sees this as another re-writing, saying “Jane Austen uses the incident described in *Mary de Clifford*, but transforms it by a slight exaggeration, adding to it in a way that makes the final result seem fresh and original” (Bradbrook 131). Fresh and original it certainly is, but this re-written scene means more than that. While Mary’s “petticoats that swept the grass seemed wet almost as if dipped in water, while her thin silk stockings but ill protected her most slender and beautiful ancles [sic] from the damp” (Brydges 121), Elizabeth gets ankle-deep in mud. Much of the importance of these events is the worry that the heroine will be judged by her bedraggled appearance—Mary worries about it, but makes it home in time to change before anyone sees her (121). Elizabeth doesn’t care about whatever censure she might receive, and she is harshly mocked by the Bingley sisters (*P&P* 39; vol. I, ch. 8). Their censure is pointed; it is meant to condemn not the carelessness of her appearance, but her social status—they point out how her hem has been let down, a sign that she could not afford a new dress, and they see her muddy ankles as a sign of coarse, low-class, behavior.

Elizabeth is unconcerned with anything the Bingleys might think, not just because she knows better than to depend on their good opinion of her, but because she felt her walk was a worthy errand—she is going to see her sick sister. Mary simply walks home, upset after her encounter with Sir Peter. While Mary is described as delicate, with the dew being a threat to her vulnerable femininity, Elizabeth is “crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and find[s] herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise”

(*P&P* 36; vol. I, ch. 7). This is an unmistakably healthy and active picture of femininity; Elizabeth does not worry about her clothes or the way they might reflect her respectability—she just does the right thing in going to comfort Jane, and is not ashamed of enjoying the exercise her duty entails. On the other hand, Egerton seems to describe Mary as if her wet petticoats are a symptom of her distress. Those petticoats are shameful to her and to Egerton—neither of them wants her to get caught with them wet, and neither wants her to have to admit to her family that she met Sir Peter on her walk. Egerton uses the dew as a sign that the pressures of the world are oppressing his delicate heroine—and Jane Austen turns this melodramatic scene into an episode that shows Elizabeth’s strong affections (in the midst of mud)—making readers consider the practical things that happen to everyone, including heroines.

While Bradbrook analyzes Sir Peter’s proposal in terms of Egerton’s and Austen’s serious moral themes, he misses an important comic connection. Austen has picked apart Egerton’s rather absurd proposal scene, using certain ideas from it in Darcy’s first proposal, and others for Mr. Collins’s proposal to Elizabeth. If Mr. Collins is indeed a character based in part on Egerton’s own pomposity and absurd notions, this move on Austen’s part is even more comic. Sir Peter, after an initial refusal, takes a moment and uses Mr. Collins’s infamous line of reasoning to regroup. Sir Peter, “recollecting his own consequence, remembering what he had seen and heard of the coquetry of women, and not able to distinguish between real and affected anger...pursued, and overtook her” (Brydges 116). Mr. Collins’s ludicrous notion “that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second, or even a third time,” prolongs his proposal and provokes Elizabeth’s temper. His ego, too, allows him to think that Elizabeth will eventually accept him. As he says, recollecting his own consequence just as

Sir Peter does, “It does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy your acceptance, or that the establishment I can offer would be any other than highly desirable” (*P&P* 120-1; vol. I, ch. 19). The episode with Mr. Collins is ridiculous—Elizabeth has to struggle to get him to realize she is serious in refusing him, and her later argument with her mother is more comic than a real threat to Elizabeth’s independence. Sir Peter, however, is intimidating, and frightens Mary. This comparison of proposals seems to cast Elizabeth’s situation as risk-free not serious. However, considering Mr. Collins’s proposal against Sir Peter’s reveals what Austen thought was a real risk to a woman like Elizabeth—not an angry, threatening, would-be lover who might collude with a heroine’s mother to force her into marriage (a Richardsonian-sounding plot)—but the less melodramatic, but perhaps more hopeless, fate of Charlotte Lucas. For Elizabeth, the world’s perils are not the physical vulnerabilities unique to females because of their sex (and dramatized in so many novels), but socially constructed dangers, like the danger of having to marry an objectionable man in order to live a comfortable life.

Bradbrook voices one more insight about *Mary De-Clifford*, which meshes well with this reading of Mr. Collins’s proposal:

The incident in *Mary de Clifford* where Sir Peter’s steward, John Higgins, writes to Woodvile, the hero, informing him that there is a mortgage to his property, may have suggested to Jane Austen the possibility of satirical treatment and produced the famous entail which causes such trouble in *Pride and Prejudice*. (131)

It may seem far-fetched that this steward and his letter challenging the Woodvile estate (which Egerton suggests is a false claim, just a way to take advantage of Woodvile) is related to the Bennets’ entail, but there may be a larger connection. It would be just like Jane Austen to take Egerton’s melodramatic and possibly illegal letter of demand, which effectively bankrupts the

hero in one stroke, and replace it with a socially-sanctioned and ordinary entail that emphasizes women's lack of rights. Mrs. Bennet simply cannot understand why the entail is legal—and it does seem, to modern readers at least, that this legal system is unfair.

There is another, more important, connection between the steward's letter and the Bennet entail. In *Mary De-Clifford*, this legal document is the impetus for a final duel between Sir Peter and Woodvile. The duel is ostensibly about this legal battle, as Woodvile cannot pay and therefore must fight Sir Peter instead, but Sir Peter's true motive for sending the letter and challenging Woodvile is that he has lost Mary to his rival. The two meet for their duel, and Sir Peter shoots Woodvile through the heart, killing him. This end of the quarrel, and the novel, may be the source of Mrs. Bennet's inexplicable insistence that Mr. Bennet "will fight Wickham, wherever he meets him, and then he will be killed, and what is to become of us all?" (*P&P* 317; vol. III, ch. 5). Mrs. Bennet's idea that any marriage dispute or legal battle should be solved in a duel (which will result in a dramatic death), may have come from a novel. Jane Austen may certainly have drawn this parallel, mocking the implausibility of *Mary De-Clifford's* ending—Mrs. Bennet's query "what is to become of us all?", if indeed she is thinking of a *Mary De-Clifford*-like situation, is a dire question indeed. At the death of Woodvile, every character in the novel is struck with inconsolable grief, and—literally—no one is ever happy again.

### *Mary and Marianne: Mary De-Clifford as an Antecedent of Sense and Sensibility*

Bradbrook draws insightful connections between *Mary De-Clifford* and *Pride and Prejudice* (or rather, *First Impressions*). However, all he says about *Sense and Sensibility* is that Austen seems to have been responding to "the sensibility and false, sentimental romanticism of *Mary De-Clifford*" in *Elinor and Marianne* (Bradbrook 126). This could be true of many novels

of Austen's time—Austen could just be parodying the general trend of sentimentalism in novels, if this was the only evidence of connection. Bradbrook sees Austen simply turning Mary into Marianne, meaning that Marianne is only a parody of a lesser heroine, only Austen's example of how not to write a heroine. However, *Sense and Sensibility* is far more complex: Austen splits Mary's personality and experiences into those of both Elinor and Marianne, much as she split Emily Barnard into Elizabeth and Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*. *Sense and Sensibility* is not a simple burlesque of the oversentimental aspects of *Mary De-Clifford*, but a painstaking examination of the cultural assumptions that lie behind Egerton's novel, especially those about femininity and a woman's place in the world (and in novels).

Marianne is, at first glance, a carefully exaggerated and refined version of Mary De-Clifford. There are several details in *Sense and Sensibility* which might suggest a reference to *Mary De-Clifford*, and Marianne is, in general, a parody of Mary's overblown sensibility and love of nature—though she could, at this point, be a parody of many sentimental heroines. Mary and Marianne both bond with their lovers over their mutual adoration of the picturesque. Mary takes frequent and long walks in the grounds of her estate, worshipping the natural world in an exaggerated manner. At one point Egerton describes her, saying, “she was almost in extacy [sic] with the scenery” (17). Mary's extraordinary sensibility, especially her sensibility for scenery, is taken to almost absurd lengths. Her fondest memories are of enjoying nature with her brother; she tells him, “with what rapture, I have walked with you along this grove” (30), linking this memory with a sort of melancholy nostalgia, as if now that they have grown up, they have lost these memories (though they take many long walks together during the story).

An aspect of Marianne's character is devoted to exposing the absurdity of such an excess of feeling. Many of Marianne's most exaggerated displays of sensibility are caused by her grief

over leaving her home. She shares Mary's sense of nostalgia, but she has a real reason to feel nostalgic. Marianne also has Elinor to check her more ridiculous sentiments. One possible reference to *Mary De-Clifford* in *Sense and Sensibility* is the infamous discussion of dead leaves. Mary, in her walks, often dwells on the beauty of fallen leaves: "Along these unfrequented paths she loved to see the fallen leaves whirled by the wind about her" (Brydges 17). Marianne, too, remembers the joy of a whirlwind of leaves at Norland:

"Oh," cried Marianne, "with what transporting sensation have I formerly seen them fall! How have I delighted, as I walked, to see them driven in showers about me by the wind! What feelings have they, the season, the air altogether inspired! Now there is no one to regard them. They are seen only as a nuisance, swept hastily off, and driven as much as possible from the sight." (*S&S* 101; vol. I, ch. 16)

Marianne's excess of sensibility is soon quashed by Elinor, who caustically responds, "It is not every one... who has your passion for dead leaves" (*S&S* 101; vol. I, ch. 16). This characterization of Marianne as the kind of person who understands the passion involved in contemplating dead leaves sets her alongside not just Mary, but also Woodvile, who, in his lovesick passion for Mary, "envied the scattered leaves on which she trod" (Brydges 39).

Mary and Woodvile, like Marianne and Willoughby, have built their love on the basis of their mutual appreciation of the picturesque, and their courtship activities include long walks as well as joint reading. However, in *Mary De-Clifford*, it is Woodvile who teaches the young Mary, in a brotherly fashion, about the picturesque and about literature. Egerton's first description of Woodvile, indeed, focuses on "his brilliant fancy, his talents for polite literature, his heart filled with the sublimest principles" (Brydges 13); Mary, "though she loved to listen to

the enthusiasm and loftiness of his conversation, felt an awe in his company” (21). Egerton relates how Mary “considered him [Woodvile]...as the former of her taste” (21). In *Sense and Sensibility*, by contrast, Marianne seems to teach Willoughby the proper way to engage with the world—she is his mentor in sensibility. Marianne interrogates his tastes, and finds that

Their taste was strikingly alike. The same books, the same passages were idolized by each—or if any difference appeared, any objection arose, it lasted no longer than till the force of her arguments and the brightness of her eyes could be displayed. He acquiesced in all her decisions, caught all her enthusiasm. (*S&S* 56; vol. I, ch. 10)

Marianne overlooks the way she is forming Willoughby’s taste—the narrator slyly inserts her own commentary, saying “her favourite authors were brought forward and dwelt upon with so rapturous a delight, that any young man of five and twenty must have been insensible indeed, not to become an immediate convert to the excellence of such works, however disregarded before” (*S&S* 56; vol. I, ch. 10). Austen is mocking the hackneyed literary role of the all-knowing male mentor who informs a young heroine’s taste by reversing gender roles and also by pointing out that this idea of a learned man teaching a woman he is romantically interested in is absurd. One cannot learn taste from a lover—when heroines make it seem as if they are learning taste from a hero, they are really just agreeing with his opinions in order to woo him.

There are several small incidents that link the two couples’ early courtships. Marianne’s infamous fall echoes a scene where Mary watches a mysterious horseman who seems to be watching her, and then “so precipitately galloped down the hill, that they every moment expected he would break his neck” (*Brydges* 56-7)—this rider turns out to be Woodvile. This event parallels the scene where Marianne and Margaret foolishly decide to “ru[n] with all possible

speed down the steep side of the hill which led immediately to their garden gate,” leading to Marianne’s allegorical “false step” (*S&S* 50; vol. I, ch. 9). In *Mary De-Clifford*, it is Woodvile who commits a false social step by spying on Mary and then making a spectacle of himself by leaving so precipitately. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen is pointing out that any slight eccentricity of behavior really is a “false step” to a woman—the consequences for any extraordinary behavior are far harsher for a woman than for a man. Some critics read Marianne’s “false step” on the hill as Austen’s skillful foreshadowing of her later “fall” in society—a fall which Willoughby escapes, though he is its cause, and which almost dooms Marianne to death.

Another parallel scene is when Mary and Woodvile are contemplating the view of his estate from Mary’s grounds. A sudden gust of wind blows Mary over and Woodvile catches her in his arms. He covers his awkwardness by continuing to talk about his estate (Brydges 40). The instance of two lovers contemplating the estate which they one day hope to possess jointly is repeated in *Sense and Sensibility*. Marianne and Willoughby actually visit Mrs. Smith’s estate, as if they are prematurely taking stock of the place where they will live after her death. The scandal in this incident (on the surface) is how presumptuous the visit makes Marianne seem; what is scandalous in Mary’s situation is her bodily contact with Woodvile. Marianne, in going to Willoughby’s estate with him, unchaperoned, has left herself open to the kind of scandal Mary worries about—but no one in *Sense and Sensibility* (not even Elinor) openly mentions this reason why the visit to Allenham is inappropriate. In Austen’s world, again, heroines must be as aware—perhaps more aware—of social consequences as physical ones.

While these serious plot points may be linked to *Mary De-Clifford*, there is also a running joke in *Sense and Sensibility* that may stem from Egerton’s novel. Egerton paints Mary as innocently idealistic, a person who distains wealth and everyone who values it. During one of her

walks, she thinks to herself, “A neat cottage such as she saw before her would, she thought, be Elisium [sic] with him...” (Brydges 113). She also tells Sir Peter that she would rather work for her living than marry him (117). It is unintentionally ironic, on Egerton’s part, that Mary voices this ultimatum within hearing of one of her family’s laborers. She makes his grueling work into a part of her picturesque scenery, and “enjoyed the fragrance of the soil that the plough was turning up” (113) without considering what it would actually be like to have to work in order to survive. Austen, using Elinor, questions Marianne’s similarly hypocritical notions; Egerton, however, is completely aligned with Mary. When Elinor makes Marianne describe her notion of “a competency” with numbers, she finds it matches her own idea of wealth (*S&S* 105; vol. I, ch. 17). Marianne is imagining she could be happy with Willoughby even if she only has the “necessities” of life—but, like Mary, her conception of a life like this is really a life of relative luxury. Austen is revealing Mary’s (and Egerton’s) hypocrisy—they can scorn the wealthy, but they avoid discussing the practical repercussions of Woodvile’s aristocratic poverty. Woodvile, if he married Mary, would not be free to make a cozy life for the two of them in a cottage—he also has a mother and sister to take care of. Mary’s idyllic cottage life would soon be interrupted by destitute houseguests.

In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen reveals Mary’s idea of an idyllic cottage to be absurd. The Dashwood women do in fact have to live in such a picturesque cottage, and they find it less than ideal. The kind of people who idealize this cottage life are wealthy men. Robert Ferrars is a prime example. “For my own part,” he says to Elinor, “I am excessively fond of a cottage,” and goes on to describe his idea of a simple cottage, complete with dining-parlour, drawing-room, library, and saloon (*S&S* 285-6; vol. II, ch. 14). Austen returns to this farce at the end of the

novel, describing Robert, after he is briefly disinherited, “dr[awing] several plans for magnificent cottages” (S&S 427; vol. III, ch. 14).

Willoughby, too, is unrealistically attached to the idea of the cottage. While his insistence that “were I rich enough I would instantly pull Combe down, and build it up again in the exact plan of this cottage” (S&S 85; vol. I, ch. 14) is more excusable than Robert Ferrars’s false cottage notions because Willoughby has actually seen how the Dashwoods live in their cottage, smoking fireplace and all, he is still being hypocritical. In the end, of course, he chooses wealth over Marianne and her “faultless” cottage.

Even Mrs. Jennings, optimistic as she is, knows the reality of a picturesque cottage life. Though she is depicted as often silly and sometimes shallow, Austen depicts her as an admirable character in the end. She is always in touch with the practicalities of the world, and when she believes Lucy and Edward are to be married, she exclaims hopefully, Lord! how snug they might live in such another cottage as yours—or a little bigger” (S&S 294; vol. III, ch.1). That “or a little bigger” is an important indicator: while Mrs. Jennings likes to put a good face on things, she knows that for members of the lower gentry, a cottage the size of the Dashwoods is not sufficient for a family. Her opinion about cottages is a real determiner of her overall character, just as important as her kindness to the heartbroken Marianne. Literacy is, as previously mentioned, a kind of character measure in all Jane Austen’s novels. In *Sense and Sensibility*, opinion about “cottage life” becomes another such indicator.

Mrs. Dashwood is one character whose “cottage opinions” are ambiguous. She has Marianne’s sensibility and optimism, but as the head of a household is forced into some measure of recognition of her family’s practical situation. While her cheerful optimism—she plans all sorts of improvements to be made to the cottage, which Elinor thinks are beyond their means—

could be seen as negligent, it is also a sign of her warm heart (S&S 34; vol. I, ch. 6). She does, in the end, succeed in making the family's cottage home livable, and though she is rarely as practical as Elinor wishes she would be, she is not stupid. Austen takes care to distance Mrs. Dashwood from mercenary mothers like Mrs. De-Clifford, who Egerton describes as “continually launching out in raillery at the uselessness of imagination and brilliant talents without the sense that shines in the common intercourse of society, and of the Folly of the pride of blood without an estate sufficient to support its pretensions...” (87). Mrs. Dashwood certainly has just cause to express similar opinions, or to lash out against the unfairness of her lot, but she does not. She does not reprimand her stepson for leaving her in relative poverty, and more remarkably (as Austen says directly), she does not push her daughters towards marriage with rich men. As Austen's narrator explains,

Some mothers might have encouraged the intimacy from motives of interest, for Edward Ferrars was the eldest son of a man who had died very rich; and some might have repressed it from motives of prudence, for, except a trifling sum, the whole of his fortune depended on the will of his mother. But Mrs. Dashwood was alike uninfluenced by either consideration. (S&S 17; vol. I, ch. 3)

Mrs. Dashwood, as opposed to Mrs. Bennet, can be seen as a direct reversal of the character of Mrs. De-Clifford. This makes sense, as Austen wrote *Elinor and Marianne* before she started *First Impressions*. Perhaps Austen first wanted to experiment with a maternal figure who is completely the opposite of one like Mrs. De-Clifford, showing that while an insistence on wealth as the most important quality of a suitor is easily shown to be a bad motherly quality, high-mindedness and impracticality in a mother is not too much better. Once Austen completed this maternal experiment, she felt free to move on to depicting Mrs. Bennet—a far more complex re-

presentation of Mrs. De-Clifford. Neither Mrs. Dashwood nor Mrs. Bennet are perfect mothers—they represent the complexities involved in being a woman, and a mother, in Austen’s time.

Austen subtly links Woodvile, Egerton’s hero, to another aristocratic man—one who is more admirable and more sympathetic to the plight of women. The family name of Brandon is mentioned in *Mary De-Clifford* as illustrious—their coat of arms is linked to the De-Clifford estate (Brydges 72). Earlier in the story, Woodvile had behaved in a manner strikingly similar to Colonel Brandon’s when he abandons the party at the Middletons’. Woodvile decides to leave the De-Clifford house suddenly, “Then making a hurried apology, he told Mrs. De-Clifford sudden business called him to Grafton” (44). This urgent business seems as if it must be to do with the running of his estate (which is indeed in dire straits), but in truth, he just wants to leave because of his developing feelings for Mary. Brandon gives a similarly vague excuse for his sudden departure: “‘I am particularly sorry, ma’am,’ said he, addressing Lady Middleton, ‘that I should receive this letter today, for it is on business which requires my immediate attendance in town’” (S&S 75; vol. I, ch. 13), but readers later learn that his errand is impeccably honorable and exigent. He has gone to rescue Eliza, and of course, his vagueness is to protect her secret.

De-Clifford does not question his friend’s reasons for taking his leave, “...but only asked him, if he could be of any service in by accompanying him. To which he answered, “No,” [sic] in a firm, yet mournful tone” (44). Compared to Brandon’s stanch replies, Woodvile’s secrecy seems dishonorable and unmanly. Brandon, in a very distressing hour, has to put up with Mrs. Jennings’s much more thorough scrutiny. “If you would but let us know what your business is,” she says to him, “we might see whether it could be put off or not” (S&S 76; vol. I, ch. 13) This impertinent commentary, especially when compared to De-Clifford’s polite and disinterested inquiry, may seem to be just another example of Mrs. Jennings’s blunt manners. However, it is

an example of the genius of Austen's true-to-life characterization—it is absurd that no one is curious about such an abrupt departure. The characters in *Mary De-Clifford* are acting unnaturally—they are being deceptive in concealing their curiosity. Compared to Egerton's stiff characters, Mrs. Jennings is refreshing. In a world where women are not supposed to ask intrusive questions, or even seem to be interested in such things, Mrs. Jennings has the power to try to get what she wants. Part of the complexity Austen is pointing out is that readers see this impertinence—the only straight-forward method left to Mrs. Jennings—as negative. Austen clearly views it as pragmatic and, of course, comic.

Austen further demonstrates the complexities of an eighteenth-century woman's life through her characterization of Elinor and of Marianne. While it does seem, on the surface, that Marianne is the only one aligned with Mary De-Clifford—and there certainly is more evidence to connect Marianne with Mary—Austen also uses aspects of Mary's life for Elinor. Mary, as Egerton created her, is a perfect heroine, with sensibility and sense in perfect balance with each other. Austen, in splitting this unachievably perfect heroine into two flawed but complex characters, is not only demonstrating the inherent problems with depicting such perfect heroines in novels, but is also taking the opportunity to comment on how society perceives women.

Austen shows Mary to be overwrought and emotional for no reason. Mary and Marianne display similar signs of grief when they doubt their lovers—however, Mary does this when Woodvile leaves her estate for a few days, and Marianne shows these morose signs only after it is clear that Willoughby has abandoned her for another woman. Both women relate everything in their lives to their “lost” lovers: Mary says that “Every bench on which she had sat with him; every view she had contemplated with him; and every walk, in which she had listened to his conversation was now become sacred to her” (Brydges 87) and at times she “hated the scenes,

that till now had filled her with such admiration” (62). Marianne’s grief also causes her to associate everything with Willoughby:

The slightest mention of anything relative to Willoughby overpowered her in an instant; and though her family were most anxiously attentive to her comfort, it was impossible for them, if they spoke at all, to keep clear of every subject which her feelings connected with him. (*S&S* 95; vol. I, ch. 15)

Austen implies that Marianne (at least in the eyes of society) should learn to get over her sensibility, but Mary, as Egerton describes her, is perfect—at one moment she indulges in this feminine sensibility, but the next she is prudent. She seems at times to have Elinor’s self-control and reasoning skills—but only repeats trite moralisms that might have come straight out of the pages of conduct books.

The most striking instance in which we see Mary as akin to Elinor is in her belief that though Woodvile has abandoned and betrayed her (as she thinks he has done at one point in the novel), she can still love him. Egerton brings forth the question of whether it would be better or worse for a woman to be truly betrayed by her lover—to discover he is in love with someone else—as opposed to being separated from him by circumstance. Egerton’s discussion of this idea is clumsy. However, he does show Mary contemplating this point in terms similar to Elinor’s in *Sense and Sensibility*. Egerton admits, “Nothing would have added less to the peace of Mary, diffident as she was, than the conviction that she had no charms to please Woodvile, and that his heart was devoted to another” (66). Elinor seems to think similarly (though Austen does not make such a point of her angelic diffidence) when she reflects to herself,

Her resentment of such behaviour, her indignation at having been its dupe, for a short time made her feel only for herself; but other ideas, other considerations,

soon arose. Had Edward been intentionally deceiving her? Had he feigned a regard for her which he did not feel? (*S&S* 159; vol. II, ch. 1)

Elinor is soon able to consider the situation more objectively, and quickly begins to pity Edward more than she does herself. She concludes that he does not love Lucy Steele, and has therefore doomed himself to a marriage without affection:

...His affection was all her own. She could not be deceived in that.

As these considerations occurred to her in painful succession, she wept for him, more than for herself. Supported by the conviction of having done nothing to merit her present unhappiness, and consoled by the belief that Edward had done nothing to forfeit her esteem...(*S&S* 160; vol. II, ch. 1)

she is able to console herself. Mary goes through a similar conflict, but does not conclude it with Elinor's strength. She seems more like Marianne when she essentially disregards her own happiness in favor of Woodville's:

“But in the unaffected desire for his happiness, and the confused and almost opposite wishes of her own bosom, she felt an anarchy, which rendered her completely ignorant of the requisites to her own comfort” (Brydges 66).

This quote almost evokes Elinor's mindset, expressing her sense of the difficulty of wanting Edward to be happy when she knows that his marriage to Lucy will forestall any hope of his happiness (and Elinor's own). However, Mary's contemplation ends with her complete disregard of her own “comfort”—much as Marianne disregards her health and wellbeing when she learns that Willoughby has abandoned her.

Austen returns to this question—whether it is better for a woman to believe her lover has no true feelings for her, or just that he has made some mistake that keeps them apart—when

Marianne discovers Willoughby's falseness. Mary and Marianne are briefly put into the same situation—that of believing their lover has chosen another woman. Marianne eventually decides that she wants to know Willoughby's true motives, and even Elinor decides that she should be told. Marianne says, "Yes. My peace of mind is doubly involved in it;—for not only is it horrible to suspect a person, who has been what *he* has been to *me*, of such designs,—but what must it make me appear to myself?" (S&S 390; vol. III, ch. 10). She is comforted, at the end of the novel, by the thought that Willoughby really did love her, and only chose Miss Grey for her money. What is ironic is that Mary, whose concerns about her lover are similar (she wonders whether his "heart [i]s devoted to another" [Brydges 66]) has real cause for concern. Woodvile has briefly fallen under the power of another woman. He does not, of course, consider marrying Emily Barnard for her money—a vulgar offense Egerton would never allow his hero to commit—but he does have a moment of weakness in which he wants her romantically (or maybe just sexually). Austen changes her heroine's circumstances when she writes *Sense and Sensibility*: Marianne is not abandoned because some other woman has seduced her helpless lover, but because he decides to marry for money. Even Elinor is not betrayed by Edward's love for someone else, but by an imprudent decision he once made.

Austen makes another important change in a *Mary De-Clifford* plot point she uses in *Sense and Sensibility*. She borrows, once again, from the (fertile) character of Emily Barnard in creating Lucy Steele. After Woodvile finally rejects Emily, she sends Mary a letter, kindly warning her rival that Woodvile is deceitful and is in fact engaged. This reminds readers of *Sense and Sensibility* of Miss Grey's letter to Marianne, but also of Lucy's face-to-face attack on Elinor. In both cases, Austen's quasi-villainesses are much more subtle than Emily. Their ruses actually achieve the desired effect, while Emily's is ludicrously ineffectual: Woodvile has only

to return and tell Mary that he is not engaged for Emily to be exposed. In Egerton's novel, this letter is only a plot device to make the lovers' final rencontre more dramatic. Austen, however, uses Egerton's plot point to explore the ways females can hold power in eighteenth-century life. Lucy Steele, a remarkably resourceful woman, takes Emily Barnard's weak ploy to an entirely different level. Lucy and Emily are both calculating women (though Lucy is perhaps more calculating as there is no indication she actually loves Edward), but Lucy is far more efficacious. She not only succeeds in her plans to torment Elinor with the information of her secret engagement, but wins a life of wealth and status by the end of the novel.

The main change Austen makes to this part of Egerton's plot is that her villainess, Lucy, has the first claim on Edward's affections while Elinor is the second comer with no rights but those of a superior mind. Egerton, on the other hand, has Emily attempt, shoddily, to seduce Woodvile away from his first attachment, Mary. When Emily sends her letter telling Mary that Woodvile is engaged, she is lying. But the genius of Lucy's revelation is that it is the truth—and this is the only reason why Lucy's information hurts Elinor. Mary, foolishly, despairs after receiving her false letter, crying and swooning. Mary's despair, overblown as it is, does not even last long, as Egerton sends Woodvile in to reassure her in the very next scene.

Egerton makes a pattern of getting his delicate heroine out of difficult situations. Marianne truly suffers when she learns Willoughby has deserted her—and the scene at the ball where she realizes Willoughby has decided to forsake her is a truly emotional one. This scene, however, is similar to one in *Mary De-Clifford* in which Woodvile mistakenly thinks he sees Mary accepting the attentions of another man. Just as "Elinor perceived Willoughby, standing within a few yards of them, in earnest conversation with a very fashionable looking young woman" (*S&S* 200; vol. II, ch. 6), Woodvile sees Lord Molyne's talking to Mary at the ball.

However, he immediately assumes what Marianne needs convincing to believe—that Mary has dropped him in favor of Molyne. Though it is Woodvile who is upset that Mary has allowed another man to speak to her, it is she who, “almost in tears, “determined [sic] again if possible to search him out, and enquire for an explanation of this strange conduct” (Brydges 94), much like Marianne does. Marianne, however, believes that she is mistaken—just as Woodvile actually is—until she is forced to see the truth: “Here is some mistake I am sure—some dreadful mistake. What can be the meaning of it? Tell me, Willoughby; for heaven's sake tell me, what is the matter?” (*S&S* 201; vol. II, ch. 6), she says. She is upset enough to draw the attention of people at the ball; Elinor has to beg her to “Pray, pray be composed...and do not betray what you feel to every body present” (*S&S* 200; vol. II, ch. 6). Mary, on the other hand, while faint and distressed, somehow escapes public notice—no one notices she is upset, and she is even oppressed by “insipid nothings” from “numerous suitors, attracted by her uncommon beauty” (Brydges 94). Unlike Marianne, Mary is not left in suspense long. She soon sees Woodvile and resolves the misunderstanding.

Not only is Egerton too traditional to allow his hero to publicly humiliate the heroine, he also seems to think that, even in her strangely extreme distress at the ball, she is still beautiful. Marianne, however, feels the effects of her shock and her health suffers. John Dashwood takes an Egerton-like stance on Marianne’s lost beauty, saying, “She was as handsome a girl last September, as I ever saw; and as likely to attract the men. There was something in her style of beauty, to please them particularly” (*S&S* 258; vol. II, ch. 11). Marianne is no longer valuable to men like John Dashwood, or seen as a valid heroine by authors like Egerton, if she is not beautiful even under extreme distress.

Marianne comes dangerously near fulfilling the accepted fate for a wronged, fallen heroine: a quiet, feverish death. Mary's is exactly such a death: she faints, has fits, and is feverish. Fitzherbert even says outright, "I am certain the grave will be Mary's lot, rather than the altar with Sir Peter" (Brydges 166), casting her death as a choice, and as a fitting one. Once she hears of Woodvile's dramatic death, she falls ill and goes insane; she "never sufficiently recover[s] to possess her intellects" (229) before dying. Egerton takes care to describe the complete destruction Woodvile's death wreaks on every character in the novel—Mary's brother and mother are inconsolable, never to be cheerful again.

Elinor's sense intrudes upon Marianne's near-recreation of Mary's self-destruction: "Exert yourself, dear Marianne," she cried, "if you would not kill yourself and all who love you. Think of your mother; think of her misery while *you* suffer: for her sake you must exert yourself" (S&S 211; vol. II, ch. 7). Austen does not allow Marianne to become a Mary-like heroine, who, once disappointed in love, has no other use than to die decorously. As Elinor has counseled throughout the novel, and as Woodvile says (though he does not take his own advice in the end), "flights of fancy [are] not always to be indulged; duty and affection deman[d] other exertions" (Brydges 77). Perhaps, in addition to reversing the novelistic and misogynistic trope of heroine death, Austen has also taken Woodvile's flat words and put them to good use. Elinor, ever the advocator for the "exertions" of duty and affection rather than the indulgence of sensibility, is an example of how difficult such exertions can be. She also shows how necessary they are for women. While powerful males like Woodvile can afford to make these broad pronouncements but ignore them in their own lives, the women in eighteenth-century novels—and in Jane Austen's life—could not afford this luxury. Both Elinor and Marianne show how difficult a woman's life is—how important it is for women to display a balance between sense and

sensibility in their conduct. Even if it may be admirable and honest to freely express one's emotions, as Marianne does at the start of the novel, in Austen's world, this freedom is relegated to men.

The men in *Sense and Sensibility* go noticeably unpunished for their parts in the heroines' sufferings. Willoughby, in his last scene in the novel, demonstrates that he, at least, suffers no repercussions from indulging in the sensibility that Marianne taught him. Just as Woodville, after he sees Mary talking to Lord Molyneux at the ball, freely pronounces, "A thousand daggers through his heart could not have given him a greater agony than this" (Brydges 92), Willoughby makes his exit from the story showing that, though he has apparently ruined Marianne's life—in fact, he hopes she will die like a good heroine—he still has the power to act as he likes. He can indulge in sensibility, in dramatics over Marianne's illness, where Elinor cannot: he is leaving soon, never to see Marianne again, and Elinor must face the repercussions from whatever feelings he voices to her. He tells Elinor, as if he is the only one in the world capable of feeling for Marianne,

what I felt is—in the common phrase, not to be expressed; in a more simple one—perhaps too simple to raise any emotion—my feelings were very, very painful.—Every line, every word was—in the hackneyed metaphor which their dear writer, were she here, would forbid—a dagger to my heart. (*S&S* 368; vol. III, ch. 8)

This hackneyed metaphor, which fits so well in Egerton's novel, is a signal to Jane Austen's readers. While it is hard not to feel sympathetic to Willoughby in this scene, he reveals the key difference between Austen's writing and that of Egerton and others in his tradition: In *Mary De-Clifford*, and in many "sentimental" novels of the time, there is a sense that the lovers are kept apart because of the interference of a cruel world out to destroy anything pure. In Egerton's case,

this “cruel world” takes the form of his favorite scapegoat, the anti-patriarchal nouveau riche. *Sense and Sensibility*, instead, builds a world in which the heroines’ distresses are based on the follies and inconsistencies of human beings. In this world, happiness is a matter of chance and of the whims of those individual people who have power—and women, especially, are at a disadvantage.

“*Telling her Mournful Story*”<sup>11</sup>: *Austen’s Endings as Feminist Responses*

This reading of *Mary De-Clifford* sheds new light on one of the central debates in Austen criticism: whether Austen’s endings are traditional or subversive. Many readers have been bothered by the marriages at the end of each novel, which they see as undercutting Austen’s feminist messages. Some believe that Austen wrote her happy endings to please her traditional consumers, knowing her novels would never be published if they ended with heroines embarking on independent spinster lives. If we see the endings of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* as responses not to general culture and patriarchalism, but as specific responses to certain works—like *Mary De-Clifford*—Austen’s intentions become clear. Especially in *Sense and Sensibility*, we can see that the marriages at the end of the novel are not Austen’s attempt to quickly and acceptably wrap up the story, shoving her subversive and feminist goals under the rug, but are a refutation of Egerton’s ultra-sentimental and patriarchal ending to *Mary De-Clifford*. Austen is providing a happy ending for Marianne, subverting the dangerous novelistic and social idea that a woman, once disappointed or betrayed in love, should sicken and die.

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<sup>11</sup> This quote refers to the last line of Egerton’s novel, in which he speaks directly to the reader, saying he aims to soothe his own grief by telling [Mary’s] mournful story.

Austen's alternative to this fate—the fate of Mary in Egerton's ending—is Marianne's second love and useful, productive marriage.<sup>12</sup>

The “marriage” debate in Austen criticism stems from the idea that Austen's novels “unequivocally endorse patriarchal ideology” (Kaplan, 204) and that they often do this by the perfunctoriness and happily-ever-after quality of their endings. Deborah Kaplan, in her chapter “*Pride and Prejudice*: Cultural Duality and Feminism,” concludes that *Pride and Prejudice* is “conventional,” arguing that “For that audience [the patriarchy], we can assume, [Jane Austen] muted the most subversive signs of her women's culture” (200). Kaplan thinks that while parts of *Pride and Prejudice* (especially the character of Elizabeth) expose Austen's feminist leanings, Austen contrived her endings to make sure that her novels would sell, effectively taking back any subversive notes in the rest of the novel. Kaplan sees Elizabeth as a lone progressive voice, not a leader of societal change, and characterizes her marriage as a final acceptance of her place in patriarchal society.

Kaplan does have a point. It is difficult for Austen's feminist readers to feel comfortable with parts of the ending of *Pride and Prejudice*, especially the final proposal scene where Elizabeth, acting very unlike herself, is unable “to encounter [Darcy's] eye” (*P&P* 407; vol. III, ch. 16). Readers may also see as suspect the way in which Elizabeth finally changed her opinion of Darcy—that, as she admits to Jane, “I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley” (*P&P* 414; vol. III, ch. 17). Austen's phrasing here allows contemporary readers to see Elizabeth's change of mind as a final acquiescence to the power of the patriarchy—she has finally seen the error in her playful ways and decided to marry for money and power.

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<sup>12</sup> The controversy over second attachments is one rooted in the works of Richardson (notably *Sir Charles Grandison*), at least for Austen if not for Egerton.

*Sense and Sensibility* can also be seen in this anti-feminist light: the happy ending, with another double wedding, and with Marianne wedding the man she swore at the start of the novel was too old and boring for her, can be interpreted as Austen's punishment for Marianne's "vivacity." Those who read the novel as an allegory on "sense" and "sensibility" as personified in the characters of Elinor and Marianne read this "happy ending" as a return to the values of the patriarchy: Marianne needs a husband (preferably a rich one) to take care of her, and Austen gives her one. Austen's choice of Brandon for Marianne can also be seen as a reproof of all Marianne's ideals about marrying only for passionate love.

Austen fans and critics alike find this conception of Jane Austen uncomfortable. They find it hard to imagine Austen as an author too afraid of public opinion to end her novels how she thought they should end, as a woman who, while willing to subtly experiment with feminist ideas in her novels, made sure to end them with a conventional patriarchal role for her heroines firmly in place. Karen Newman characterizes the problem in her essay "Can this Marriage be Saved: Jane Austen Makes Sense of an Ending," explaining:

Marriage, almost inevitably the narrative event that constitutes a happy ending, represents in [many feminists] view submission to a masculine narrative imperative that has traditionally allotted women love and men the world...they complain that Austen's endings, her happily-ever-after marriages, represent a decline in her protagonists (193)

and quotes critic Judith Lowder Newton, who remarks, "as in much women's fiction, the end, the reward, of women's apprentice-ship to life is marriage...marriage which requires [Elizabeth Bennet] to dwindle by degrees into a wife" (Newman 193). Newman, however, does not see Austen's endings in this light: she directs Austen's readers, "As critics and feminists, we must

refuse the effect of her endings; instead of simply accepting the text as it presents itself, we must investigate the contradictory, disparate elements from which it is made” (194-5). Newman rejects a simple teleological reading of Austen (194), arguing

Austen’s comic conclusions neither undermine her heroines by making them dwindle into wives nor institute what has been called a virtual ‘ideological paradise’; they reveal the gap between sentimental ideals and novelistic conventions on the one hand, and the social realities of sexist prejudice, hypocrisy, and avarice on the other. (205)

This reading of Austen’s endings seems to implicitly beg for an examination of Austen’s literary antecedents and of her motives in writing the endings in the way she does. Though Newman does not bring up Austen’s reaction to the novelistic canon in her idea of exploring “the contradictory, disparate elements” which make up Austen’s texts, other critics do turn to Austen’s literary contemporaries in their defense of her endings. Lloyd Brown, in “The Comic Conclusion in Jane Austen’s Novels,” defends Austen’s endings, arguing that

the conclusions of Jane Austen’s novels usually embody unvarying techniques and values that accentuate her own comic form and meaning through explicit or implied contrasts with inferior fiction. Her comic conclusion is therefore basically parodic in structure and theme, and is constantly used throughout her fiction as the final summary of themes. (1582)

He sees Austen as attacking, not the patriarchy per se, but the traditional ending of a novel and its stilted portrayal of poetic justice as well as the ubiquitous happily-ever-after. In Brown’s words, “The attack on the creaking machinery of the ‘happy ending’ is related to the second major feature of Jane Austen’s comic conclusions—a realistic reappraisal of the rigid insistence

on rewarding virtue and punishing evil. This usually results in the rejection of sententious moralizing” (1583). Brown does not, however, confine the importance of Austen’s endings merely to her reaction to “inferior fiction”—he mentions the endings’ social as well as literary meaning, commenting, “Jane Austen uses her comic conclusions to expose the prevailing norms that frequently undermine and replace traditional ideals” (1584). This reading of the endings suggests that Austen can be seen as a feminist despite (or rather because of) her comic endings, offering a convincing alternative to Kaplan and other arguments against a feminist Austen.

While critics like Brown, Newman, and especially Claudia Johnson have successfully argued against an anti-feminist reading of Austen and her endings, examining *Sense and Sensibility*’s and *Pride and Prejudice*’s endings as direct and negative reactions to traditional contemporary novels—and to *Mary De-Clifford* in particular—gives arguments such as these new and considerable supporting evidence. When one considers that Austen’s main motive in writing fiction may have been to expose and correct the errors in style, morality, and treatment of women that appear in contemporary novels, one can see her comic, “happy” endings as assertions of feminine power rather than conformities to patriarchalism. Austen’s endings become emblems of her ideals, demonstrations of what a good novel can do, not only within the realm of literature, but in society as well.

Brown has made gestures towards this mode of defending Austen’s endings, arguing not only that Austen is parodying conventions of the “poetic justice” novel ending, but also that she insists on an element of realism in her endings and on plots that naturally reflect her characters. He concludes, “Finally, whatever elements of rewards and punishment do arise in Jane Austen’s conclusions are presented as the logical outcome of the temperament as well as values, of the characters themselves, rather than as the externally applied artifices of poetic justice” (1584). It

is this point that is exemplified in the comparison between Austen's first two novels and *Mary De-Clifford*. Austen responds to *Mary De-Clifford* most explicitly in the ending of *Sense and Sensibility*. Brown points out that, of course, "Lucy and Willoughby—the "villains" of the plot—experience comparative happiness in their realistically conceived world" (1584), a point that may seem trivial but is in actuality a sign of Austen's subversive approach to ending her novel. In fact, Austen takes pains to emphasize this unconventional allocation of happiness, especially in Willoughby's case, actually saying to her readers, "that he was for ever inconsolable, that he fled from society, or contracted an habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart, must not be depended on—for he did neither" (*S&S* 430; vol. III, ch. 14).

This is, in fact, a list of things that happens to characters at the end of *Mary De-Clifford*: "George De-Clifford...sunk into a melancholy, from whence it is not expected he will ever recover" (Brydges 228), the narrator "knows not" whether Elinor Woodvile "will ever recover her health or spirits" (227), "grief in six months brought to the grave his excellent mother" (227); even De-Clifford's friends have been left with "such unmingled sadness upon their imagination, as their lives will probably not wear out" (230) and Egerton tells us, again, that George has been sent abroad, but "with little hope I fear of recovering cheerfulness" (231). Mary, of course, dies of a broken heart, and the villain, Sir Peter Lumm, "fled for the Continent, where he still remains an unhappy exile" (227).

Clearly Austen disapproves of any of these fates for Willoughby—or for any of her other characters. Willoughby is not punished for his crimes—and neither are any of the other characters stricken down with disproportionate grief by what happens in the novel. One can imagine that Austen would have allowed even Elinor to feel cheerful again at some point, even if Marianne had died. But, of course, Marianne does not die. Marianne's recovery, and the

supposed perfunctoriness of her subsequent marriage to Colonel Brandon, is what some feminist critics object to when they criticize Austen's endings. They see Marianne's marriage, and Elinor's marriage, too, as a cop-out. Marianne's marriage in particular is just the opposite: it is Austen's rejection of not only the literary mores that dictate death to a wronged heroine, but the social mores that make these novelistic tropes acceptable.

Claudia Johnson, in her chapter "*Sense and Sensibility: Opinions Too Common and Too Dangerous*" sees *Sense and Sensibility* as a systematic criticism of the patriarchy, and argues that the ending of the novel and Marianne's recovery is a key part of this criticism. She sees Marianne as a feminist character, but one that Austen has made subtly so: "Clearly, Austen can, in a sense, get away with a character like Marianne because she suppresses her antecedents—Marianne reads Scott and Cowper, not Hays or Wollstonecraft—(61)" but this idea that Austen is "getting away with" the feminism she voices in *Sense and Sensibility*'s ending is again problematic. However, if one reconsiders Austen's motives and Marianne's supposed antecedents—if one places characters like Mary De-Clifford in the role of such an antecedent—one can see Marianne's reading not as Austen's cover, but as an allusion to other sentimental heroines. Marianne reads Scott and Cowper, and delights in the picturesque, not because Austen wants to soften her feminist connotations, but because she wants to bring out connections to overly sentimental heroines of inferior novels. Austen's feminist purpose in *Sense and Sensibility* was not to engage with such writers as Hays and Wollstonecraft—if this was her purpose, one must surely admit her failure—but to counter depictions of women in novels similar to her own.

Johnson sees these connections between Marianne and the conventional sentimental heroine—but she focuses more on Marianne's almost-descent into a traditional heroine's fate rather than her escape from it. Johnson points out, "If Marianne has resisted the codes which not

only require but reward calculation and coldheartedness, she has submitted without resistance to those which dictate desolation and very nearly death as the price of feeling” (50). This may be true of Marianne during her illness, and throughout the entire first part of the book, but Austen’s ending—Marianne’s happy marriage—overturms this sentiment; Marianne does resist. Johnson does make an important point when she concludes:

*Sense and Sensibility*, then, criticizes, not the unseemliness or the rebelliousness of Marianne’s emotionality, but rather its horrifying conformity to the social context she lives within. Her unconventionality turns out to be too conventional after all, and instead of defying dangerously common expectations, she comes close to capitulating to them. (69)

This is a worthy point: while Marianne thinks of herself as above social traditions, holding herself apart from those who conform in order to survive, it is her conformity to literary (and social) expectations that almost kills her. However, it is important to note that this conformity does not kill her—in fact, she refuses to conform when she recovers. Marianne realizes that she does not want to become the sentimental heroine she has always idealized, that she can, indeed must, be happy without Willoughby.

Readers who are uncomfortable with Marianne’s marriage to Colonel Brandon might be comforted when they compare her active, useful life of quiet happiness to Mary’s fate. As Johnson says, “Marianne is dangled over the brink of death only to be yanked back into a second and happy attachment which flies in the face of cultural ideals about women’s sentimentally self-monitored loyalty to the men who first love them” (69); she mentions as well that this “dangling” of Marianne serves to call attention to the absurdity of these literary and cultural ideals. Marianne’s steady recovery in the last chapters of *Sense and Sensibility*, and her later

acquiescence to a life of duty and fulfillment, as the “patroness of a village” is a direct attack on novels like *Mary De-Clifford* and their authors’ misogynistic morals. It is important to Austen that Marianne lives, not just to become a spinster in her mother’s cottage, reading books, but as a part of the community—as a beloved wife and a patroness. Johnson articulates the traditional novelistic role open to a heroine like Marianne: “Once injured, a woman outlives her usefulness: even if she preserves her chastity, she loses her complexion” (65). We even see characters within Austen’s novel expecting this outcome for Marianne: John Dashwood seems to evince the opinion Johnson paraphrases for him: “For a dependent stepsister of only seventeen, wasting away is almost a matter of good grace” (65). This sentiment sees Austen as revealing the hypocrisy behind such novels as *Mary De-Clifford*: these novels show heroines dying after they are used up, as if the story wants to show the importance of sentiment. But the story is really endorsing the practical and horrific view held in society—it is “almost a matter of good grace” for a defiled woman to die, not because it shows her sensibility, but because it is practical for her family members, who do not want an unmarried, invalid woman on their hands.

Johnson gets to the heart of the matter when she says:

Like *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* challenges fictional conventions, not to show they are false, that is, to debunk and dismiss them out of a commitment to common sense or reality, but rather to expose how they are true, that is, to determine their logic as myths that function within a larger ideological framework. (65)

This analysis goes beyond Brown’s idea that Austen was simply avoiding making the same unrealistic mistakes of inferior authors in their use of poetic justice and the “creaking machinery of the ‘happy ending’”(1583) and broadens the idea of re-writing literature, linking this action to

effecting social change. Austen was aware that the literary trope of the Mary-like heroine did not exist on its own: it was based on society's collective vision of women and their use in society. So while she does, as Brown argues, poke fun at and avoid the "creaking machinery" of the happy ending—Elinor and Edward's magical denouement seems to be a parody of this kind of ending—she is at the same time pointing out a serious problem in society. She makes sure Marianne can have a happy ending—a logical, natural happy ending, though it is not the one she expected. This is an expression of Marianne's final freedom from the shadow of heroines like Mary.

In Elinor's case, though Edward's abrupt freedom is in part a parody of the familiar *deus ex machina* workings of other novelistic happy endings, it is also a natural consequence of Lucy's character. Lucy's character makes her actions reasonable, and turns this reversal into a comic opportunity for Austen. It also allows Austen to show Lucy's own happy ending—in direct violation of novelistic rules. As Brown concludes, "In *Sense and Sensibility* the parody is effected through contrast rather than imitation. Thus, unlike their literary counterparts, neither Elinor nor Edward Ferrars" can believe they will be blissfully happy in every part of their life. Brown continues, "Instead of the ecstatic joys of the sentimental novel, their happiness is tempered by a few mundane considerations—such as the hope for 'rather better pasturage for their cows' (*S&S* 425; vol. III, ch. 14)" (1583).

These ironies do not undercut the value of Elinor and Marianne's happy endings. When we consider *Mary De-Clifford* as a direct influence on the early drafts of *Elinor and Marianne*, and accept that Austen was responding explicitly to its characters and its plot, we must regard *Sense and Sensibility*'s happy ending as a strong feminist message and a strong moral message. The marriages are not Austen's final submission to patriarchal values—her acknowledgement

that women only have a place in the world if they are wives. They represent just rewards for her heroines, ways to stay sane and have a small bit of happiness. They are marriages to men the heroines respect, who see them as partners for doing good in the community. By letting her heroines marry well at the end of her novel, Austen is giving the women of her time hope, and rejecting Egerton's dismal and overwrought ending—an ending that essentially perpetuates a sense of self-fulfilling weakness in the women of Austen's time.

Critics have accused *Pride and Prejudice's* ending of being too conventional, as well. They are mostly concerned with the fact of Elizabeth's marriage; as Kaplan puts it, "Austen need not have so enthusiastically celebrated the relationship of hero and heroine" (201). Critics also object to Darcy's wealth—Mary Poovey, among others, characterizes *Pride and Prejudice's* ending as functioning to "disguise the inescapable system of economic and political domination" (Kaplan 197). Darcy's wealth, and, of course, his possession of Pemberly, are important aspects of his character. It is, indeed, when Elizabeth sees Pemberly, hears about Darcy from his house and grounds-keeper, and stays among his tenants, that she realizes she loves him.

But it is Darcy's careful attention to his responsibility as a wealthy landowner that makes her see him in a new light, not his wealth itself. Elizabeth sees Mrs. Reynolds and realizes the power that Darcy has over her life and over the lives of countless others. She hears him praised by people who depend on him, and begins to think that she must have misjudged him. It is this part of the patriarchy that Jane Austen values—the sacred responsibility of a powerful landowner to his people, the power his position gives him to do good. In contrast, Egerton depicts the aristocrats in his novel as privileged but irresponsible. Egerton emphasizes the storied lineage of the Woodvile family, the noble blood, the titles, the coats of arms—and does not even seem to realize his hero is completely irresponsible. Woodvile is aware that his estate is in debt—though

he does not seem to have kept track very carefully of which of his debts are paid off. He ostensibly goes home several times in the novel to conduct business, and look after his mother and sister, but Egerton never alludes to his role in his community. Woodvile distains money, and sorely regrets the indignity of having to sell off a portion of his woods in order to cover some debts. His impecunity is mentioned as a gross unfairness because it keeps him apart from Mary—not because it must be hard on his tenants and servants.

Another part of *Pride and Prejudice* that feminist critics may object to, or see as a subversive hint from Austen that marriage is bad, is the scene in which Elizabeth accepts Darcy's proposal. Critics may see this scene as a gap or a silence, and as a sign of Elizabeth's final submission to Darcy. They compare it to what a traditional proposal, with a meek female, should be like: she should be modest and act too embarrassed to meet her lover's eyes. However, we should be comparing this final proposal to other proposals in novels—like that of Mary and Woodvile in *Mary De-Clifford*. At one point, towards the end of the very long proposal scene, Mary “sighed and wept, and blessed him with her beaming eyes, yet dared not trust herself to speak,” then “almost ventured to sigh consent” (Brydges 182). However, before this, there is much description of the ecstasy of Woodvile's happiness, which “can only be conceived by the few people, who are born with the same sensibility, the same fancy, and genius as himself” (179); “Her very touch was extacy to him...and he envied and yet blessed the bold winds that by their pressure made her dress fit closer, and shewed the exquisite gracefulness of her make, and now and then displayed the slenderness of her ancles, and a glance of her little firm and milk-white bosom” (179). The lovers “wept on each others bosoms” after Woodvile “for the first time ventur[ed] to fix his lips on hers, from which it seemed they would never separate again” (178).

Austen, in her final proposal scene, seems to want to leave all these details to the reader's imagination. Elizabeth of course does not weep on Darcy's bosom, and Austen does not think to recite lines by Milton as a tribute to her lovers. She gives Elizabeth her privacy, and lets her expediently put Darcy out of his misery, assuring him of her love even though it is hard for her to say. Austen steps back from this declaration as a sign that it is important to Elizabeth. Elizabeth prefers to couch even the most serious of her thoughts playfully—just as she later jokes to Jane that she loves Darcy because of Pemberly. Her final acceptance of his proposal is the one moment in the novel where she is vulnerable, and is telling the complete truth with no attempt to make it seem casual using her playful manner. Austen is not only reacting to Mary's overflowing sentiment and to Egerton's minute and lengthy description of Woodvile's proposal, but is showing how the patriarchal and judgmental society Elizabeth lives in has made her filter her speech throughout the entire novel.

Some skeptics may still argue that the mere act of marrying Darcy is a submission to the patriarchy on Elizabeth's part. But this marriage is a triumph for Elizabeth. As Karen Newman puts it,

In *Pride and Prejudice*, everything about Elizabeth—her poverty, her inferior social position, the behaviour of her family, her initial preference for Wickham, and her refusal of Darcy's first offer of marriage—all these things ideologically should lead if not to death, at best to genteel poverty and spinsterhood. (205)

Austen's happy ending here is not just acceptable—it is subversive. Newman sees Elizabeth's happy ending as the ability to “live powerfully within the limits imposed by ideology” (205). It would not be especially feminist—and would certainly not be satisfying—for Elizabeth to decide, in the end, that she does not want Darcy and does not want to fall in love, instead

becoming a poor spinster. Elizabeth Bennet should be able to become a wife, to indulge in the love and respect she has learned for Darcy, without being anti-feminist. Wifehood is seemingly the only respectable option for a woman of Elizabeth's position—but Elizabeth is willing to turn down proposals and wait until she can make a marriage of love. She is willing to risk being a spinster—but the fact that Austen did not allow her to become one does not mean she took the easy way out.

Austen is showing her readers what is necessary for a marriage of equals. She is demonstrating the ideal, demonstrating how the patriarchal system can be used to empower women. As Karen Newman puts it, Austen's heroines "redefine what we think of as power, helping us to avoid the trap that traditional male definitions of power present, arguing that a woman's freedom is not simply a freedom to parody male models of action" (205). Austen "enthusiastically celebrated the relationship of hero and heroine" because, in this case, it is unique, a relationship that stands out from all the other novelistic relationships of Austen's time. Austen is celebrating, not the relationship between hero and heroine, but the way her heroines use the patriarchal society around them, live within it, but do not allow it to control their happiness.

### CHAPTER THREE: The Feminist Quixote: Austen's Defense of the Novel in *Northanger Abbey*

*Northanger Abbey* is Jane Austen's most overtly literary work. Yet critics struggle to interpret the political and literary messages of the text, coming to diverse conclusions not just about Austen's agenda, but about the story itself. The novel is saturated with Austen's infamously ambiguous irony, allowing the widely varied critical interpretations we see in *Northanger* literature—from "traditional Janeite conservatism" (Schaub 1) to modern feminist interpretations which are nevertheless incompatible with each other. Some critics have gone so far as to conclude that no reader can successfully navigate the subtleties of Austen's most allusive novel, "not[ing] both the possible conservative and subversive meanings of the novel, but contend[ing] that the ironies of the text are too numerous and too reversible to allow a reader to find any stable position" (Schaub 2).

The key to *Northanger Abbey*, to a greater extent than with any of the other Austen novels, is Jane Austen's reading. Interpreting the politics of the novel depends on interpreting its estimation of the texts it uses. Traditional interpretations of *Northanger Abbey* rely on a shallow reading of the text which takes Austen's "parody" of Gothic fiction at face value; they "[see] Austen as resisting the Romantic artistic impulses of her time, inventing realism as a means of inculcating good middle-class morality into land-owning gentry" (Schaub 1). Neither Austen's moral nor her literary motivations can be thus simply characterized, but this quote makes clear the necessary connection between the two aspects of the novel. Any critic must support his moral-political reading of Austen's story with a literary interpretation of Austen's use of the Gothic. In fact, the disparate critical interpretations of the novel stem from the ambiguity of Austen's approach to the texts she references—not just the Gothic genre, but the sentimental

novel genre and “female Quixote” fiction. Critics who miss the complexities of Austen’s literary appropriation in *Northanger Abbey* inevitably misread the text or get lost in its ambiguities.

The difficulties in integrating Austen’s literary references into a reading of *Northanger Abbey* cause what Waldo Glock calls a “sense of discomfort, even of dismay” (34) in many readers. He attributes this sense to a perceived imbalance in the novel’s structure and to readerly surprise at Catherine’s “excessive credulity” in the Northanger section of the novel (33). As Glock explains, some readers see Catherine’s behavior at the abbey as inexplicable and also incompatible with her behavior in Bath. Neglecting the literary aims of the Bath section of the novel and Austen’s many allusions to literature other than the Gothic can create this sense of imbalance between the two sections of the novel. Readers who do so also fail to note early hints of Catherine’s Gothic delusions, as well as the help she receives in furthering them (help from Henry Tilney). *Northanger Abbey* is not just a cautionary tale about one girl’s misreading of Gothic novels—it contains a host of characters who read and mis-read not just Gothic fiction, but literature of several genres, and who all collude to allow Catherine’s mis-reading of the situation at the abbey. A complex analysis of Austen’s literary allusions in *Northanger Abbey* indicates not just her affection for novels and her support for female novel-reading, but a social commentary which can be seen as anti-patriarchal, and which advocates for reading as a means of female empowerment and self-discovery.

The text that ostensibly prompts Catherine’s blunders at the abbey, and which traditional critics see as the target for Austen’s parody, is *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. On the surface, *Northanger Abbey* is a burlesque of the overblown Gothic style and makes use of *Udolpho* as one example of this tradition. Yet Austen’s explicit commentary on the novel as well as her more oblique references to other genres belie the idea that the novel is a straightforward parody. A

crucial element of Austen's novel is its reliance on and commentary concerning the "female Quixote" trope—some critics claim that *Northanger Abbey* is as much a parody of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* as it is of *Udolpho*. Additionally, any intertextual analysis must consider the seven "Northanger novels" Isabella suggests to Catherine. Readers must consider as well the sentimental novels alluded to in the Bath section of the novel (Glock), the didactic fiction Mrs. Morland refers to at Fullerton, and the snippets of proper heroine reading Catherine does in her teen years (extracts from Shakespeare, Thomson, and others).

Among modern critics, there is a wave of *Northanger Abbey* criticism that attempts to reconsider the traditional, surface level interpretations of Austen's allusions. According to Debra Malina, "some now view as celebratory intertextual relationships that had long been painted as parodic and scornful" (272). These "some" tend to take a feminist approach to Jane Austen, following the eighteenth-century convention of aligning novels, especially Gothic novels, with female readers. This perception of the novel as a largely female genre is one of the factors that colors Austen's use of the Gothic novel, and the novel in general, in *Northanger Abbey*, and one reason why feminist critics seek to articulate Austen's views on the literature she "parodies."

*"Questionless:" The Female Quixote as Northanger Abbey's Feminist Forerunner*

*The Female Quixote* by Charlotte Lennox has similarly undergone a shift in critical reception, and is now considered as more than a simple censure of French Romance reading. It was Lennox's most popular novel, and was praised by Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson, both of whom also gave the authoress advice on its content. The story follows a young Romance addict, Arabella, through her "adventures"—blunders caused by her belief that the tropes found in out-of-date Romances apply in real life. She believes every stranger she meets is a disguised

nobleman in love with her, ready to steal or ravish her, and calls “questionless” events such as these which are, of course, highly questionable. She is convinced that she can condemn a prospective lover to die by withholding her love, and bring him back from death by a simple command. Arabella, unlike Catherine, is completely unable to recognize that her Romances are fictional and contain actual impossibilities (such as one man defeating an entire army). Catherine’s reading leads her to believe in the improbable, but not the impossible, and she fully realizes that *Udolpho* is fictional and even that it is absurd to see the Gothic in the abbey. Arabella’s Romantic delusions, however, are absurd and cause her to be mocked by everyone she meets.

Yet, as Amanda Gilroy points out, Arabella’s Romantic ideas can be seen as empowering. Though her notions seem ridiculous, they turn out to be more valid than we expect at first. Her antics actually cause Romantic tropes to come true in her life—the power she exerts through her belief in literature affects the men around her, causing them to begin acting as she expects them to, despite their mockery of her beliefs. Her lover, Glanville, becomes afraid of being “banished” by her though he at first scoffs at her belief that she has the power to do so. He fights with another man over Arabella, though he is defending her honor against accusations of insanity rather than defending her from being ravished. He eventually finds himself powerless, following Arabella’s whims in order to keep her happy, because he has no way to convince her that her beliefs are absurd. Every other character in the story must do the same—and though Arabella is at first ridiculed in public, her natural dignity and her confidence in herself gain her the admiration of strangers who see her at Bath and of faux-intellectuals who are taken in by her knowledge of “history.”

This interpretation of the female Quixote figure has bearing upon our interpretation of Catherine's quixotic behavior. If we see *The Female Quixote* as a model for *Northanger Abbey*, then we can resolve some of the confusing aspects of the novel's structure: what troubles many readers is the complexity of Austen's portrayal of novel-reading, especially female reading. It is simpler to conclude that Austen merely wanted to parody Gothic novels, rather than simultaneously parody and reclaim them. Yet there is a precedent for this kind of complexity in *The Female Quixote*: as Gilroy claims, "Arabella's investment in romances is an escape from reality, but also a comment on it" (NA xxxiv). Austen approaches Catherine's novel-reading with even more nuance, but her approach has its roots in Lennox's careful undermining of her own narrator's assertions.

From the start of the novel, Arabella is presented as a wonderful girl who is perfectly capable of reasonable thought but who has been ruined by her addiction to romances. Apart from her "foible" she is perfect—beautiful, intelligent, talented, and polite. The story centers on her journey towards a cure for her delusions, and towards a marriage with her utterly respectable cousin Glanville, who loves her despite the many humiliations her romantic ideas cause him. He begins by thinking her romantic ideas are absurd, but fails to recognize that, throughout the novel, he acts the part of the romantic hero she thinks him. In fact, in many cases, it is Arabella who is in the right, while the other characters, the "reasonable" observers of her quixotic behavior, are revealed to be victims of the norms of eighteenth-century society, just as Arabella is a victim of fictional stereotypes.

For example, when Arabella is contrasted with her cousin Miss Charlotte Glanville, Lennox shows readers that some of Arabella's outmoded literary ideas about the world are more honest and honorable than Charlotte's contemporary views. As Gilroy notes, "The most damning

indictment of Charlotte is that she epitomizes Arabella's disappointment with the self-interested female society" of eighteenth-century England (*NA* xxv). Charlotte is constantly jealous of Arabella, and tries to exploit her foible in order to humiliate her—behavior which Arabella cannot understand, as the heroines of romances are always kind to other women, never manipulative or petty. While Charlotte seems to be the reasonable female, an example of what Arabella should be, Lennox undermines her as a model of feminine intelligence. Gilroy points out that "In the encounters between them, the reader is often first encouraged to find Arabella ridiculous but then prompted to revise this opinion as she displays her superior intelligence and generosity" (xxiv). Arabella is always careful to hide Charlotte's faults—her ignorance, selfishness, and vanity—while Charlotte is ever ready to exploit the faults of other women (much like Isabella in *Northanger Abbey*). In a revealing statement, Charlotte displays both her stupidity and her selfishness when she comments on another woman, saying "She is very particular in a great many Things, and knows too much for a Lady, as I heard my Lord Trifle Say one Day" (Lennox 373). Charlotte is under the power of the men around her, and takes her opinions from them, while Arabella, though she is deluded about the realities of the world, finds a way to empower herself and other females.

At one point in the novel, Arabella mistakes a prostitute for a disguised noblewoman kidnapped by ravishers and attempts to help her. On the surface, her actions are misguided and embarrassing—but Lennox subtly reveals that it is the people around her who are truly wrong. Even Glanville, the hero of *The Female Quixote*, reveals his defects: "Are you mad, Madam, said he in a Whisper, to make all this Rout about a Prostitute?" to which Arabella replies, "Are you base enough to leave this admirable Creature in the Power of that Man, who is questionless her Ravisher; and will you not draw your Sword in her Defence?" (Lennox 377). Though Arabella is

ridiculous, in the eyes of the people around her, for trying to help the prostitute and for insisting she is a victim of ravishing men, her ideas seem more morally right than those of the “rational” men around her. Arabella’s description of the prostitute as an innocent victim and of the men who solicit her as ravishers is not far from the truth. Through this juxtaposition of romantic ideals with contemporary social mores, Lennox suggests that people who collude in the exploitation of prostitutes are really no better than the ravishers of old romances. Glanville reveals himself as selfish and uncaring when he tells Arabella “she [the prostitute] was not worth the Consideration you seem’d to have for her” (Lennox 379). Arabella’s delusions allow her to expose the hypocrisy of eighteenth-century society—a society that is, in fact, filled with the “ravishers” Arabella imagines, but which puts the blame on the women who are exploited by men rather than on the men who exploit powerless women.

In a speech that reveals the social commentary inherent in comparing romantic fiction with eighteenth-century England, Arabella explains the hypocrisy of gentlemen’s notions of honor: “For instance, pursued she, you are not permitted by the Laws of the Land to take away the Life of any Person whatever; yet the Laws of Honour oblige you to hunt your Enemy thro’ the World, in order to sacrifice him to your Vengeance” (Lennox 360). At first, this statement seems absurd—Arabella is thinking of the heroes of romance who avenge themselves through duels—but dueling is still an accepted gentleman’s practice in the eighteenth-century. In fact, near the end of the novel, Glanville stabs his rival Sir George in just such a pursuit of revenge, though he does not have to hunt him through the world. This is a subtle jab at the double standard allowed to rich gentlemen through the custom of dueling.

Yet, at the end of *The Female Quixote*, Arabella’s clearsightedness must be quelled and her “foible” cured in order for her to marry Glanville and live a normal life. What is interesting,

though, is that Lennox suggests two different ways for Arabella's cure to come about. The final cure is through religion and moralizing, and comes in the penultimate chapter, which scholars agree was heavily influenced by, if not written by, Samuel Johnson. In this chapter, Arabella, after recovering from a serious illness brought about by jumping into the Thames in order to escape an imagined ravisher, is visited by a "Pious and Learned Doctor" (Lennox 408) who undertakes to "cure" her of her romantic delusions. The religious man refers to Arabella's romances as akin to fairy tales, "those contemptible Volumes, with which Children are sometimes injudiciously suffer'd to amuse their Imaginations," expressing his surprise that someone as intelligent and rich as Arabella would believe them (417). Arabella defends her beloved volumes, countering, "I should hope rather that if Wealth and Knowledge can give nothing else, they at least confer Judgment to foresee Danger, and Power to oppose it" (414). Yet the Doctor wins the day, finally convincing Arabella not only that her romances are not histories, but that they are harmful to her, saying "what Falshood [sic] is more hateful than the Falshood of History" (meaning, apparently fiction which disguises itself as history) (419). He accuses Arabella of letting the romances make her forget humanity and kindness, saying that the function of books is to "supply an Antidote to [bad] Example" (424) and asking "who can forebear to throw away the Story that...represents every Thing in a Form different from that which Experience has shewn" (422). He thinks books should not fictively imitate life—they should rather depict what life should be. Yet at the same time, he is denouncing Arabella's romances as representing everything in a way not based on experience. His argument is contradictory; he seems to be saying literature should both be "realistic" and still present only good examples of life—an impossibility.

The Doctor's "cure" is for Arabella to embrace realism in fiction—as Gilroy says, Arabella "must reject romances and embrace novel reading" (xxxix) though this must be the "realist, masculine, morally respectable English novel" (xxi). However, Lennox subtly suggests another cure for Arabella. Earlier in the novel, Arabella meets a respectable Countess who is also familiar with romances. The Countess begins to gently show Arabella that the rules of romance do not apply in contemporary society. However, before she convinces Arabella, the Countess is abruptly called away and does not reappear in the story. Gilroy explains that perhaps Lennox, on Johnson's or Richardson's advice, decided to replace the Countess's cure with the Doctor's—though if this were the case, it is unclear why Lennox would leave the Countess in the story at all. Gilroy hypothesizes that Lennox wanted to hint at another possibility for Arabella, though she needed to end her novel conventionally in order for it to sell. The Countess's cure, according to Gilroy, involves a recognition that romance reading "clearly does help to create generous and virtuous subjects like Arabella" but that "an unhistoricized reading of romance... leads to the delusion that mid-eighteenth-century English society is governed according to romance conventions" and is therefore problematic (xxxviii). It is the *unhistoricized* reading that is the problem—the Countess believes that Arabella can enjoy romances, but that she must read history as well, and recognize the difference. Arabella's only problem, according to the Countess, is that she applies romantic ideals to everyday life.

One of the major issues in *The Female Quixote* is the notion of "history" and of what makes a history. Arabella uses the word in a few different ways. She believes that her romances *are* histories—that they are non-fictional accounts of real people. She defends the merits of romance as if the books she reads are didactic works, reprimanding Granville for his neglect of these important lessons:

For Heaven's sake, Cousin, resumed Arabella, laughing, how have you spent your Time; and to what Studies have you devoted all your Hours, that you could find none to spare for the Perusal of Books from which all useful Knowledge may be drawn; *which give us the most shining Examples of Generosity, Courage, Virtue, and Love* [emphasis mine]; which regulate our Actions, form our Manners, and inspire us with a noble Desire of emulating those great, heroic, and virtuous Actions, which made those Persons so glorious in their Age, and so worthy Imitation in ours? (Lennox 64)

These words—even the structure of this sentence—are strikingly similar to Austen's own defense of the novel as the genre “in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language” (31; vol. I, ch. 5). Lennox's passage is perhaps a model for Austen's, just as her novel is an inspiration for Austen's discourse in general, and just as Arabella's plural usage of the word “history” may influence Catherine's view of the term.

Arabella also uses the word “history” the same way she uses the word “adventure”: to signify one's personal history, or the principal events of one's life. She gets herself into trouble by asking the ladies she meets to give her an account of their “Adventures” or to tell her their history, not knowing that the word “adventure” holds a sexual connotation in the eighteenth-century. Additionally, Arabella believes that every woman's life is filled with her version of “adventure:” events that prove her to be sought after and valuable, such as being kidnapped and fought over. When she asks her maid Lucy to retell Arabella's own history, Lucy voices the problem inherent in Arabella's view of life: “Why, Madam, said Lucy, sobbing, I can't make a

History of nothing” (Lennox 343). Lucy also says “I know it is not such simple girls as I can tell Histories: It is only fit for Clerks, and such Sort of People, that are very learned” (143). This puts Arabella’s insistence that romance is history in a different light: it is the only way for her, as a woman, to participate in history. Lucy unwittingly points out that women have no place in real histories. Arabella’s only way to have power over her life—over the men in her life, and over her own history—is to become a female Quixote.

*Catherine’s “Quixotism”: Northanger Abbey and Novels*

Gilroy explicitly connects the aims of *The Female Quixote* with those of *Northanger Abbey*, positing that both novels contain rather radical social (feminist) messages: she states,

Arabella offers the type of “protection and regard” [for “women writers, women readers and female characters”] that Jane Austen, in her famous defense of the novel genre in *Northanger Abbey*, thinks “the heroine of one novel” might expect from “the heroine of another”; like Austen, Lennox links women writers, women readers and female characters, implying that these groups should not desert each other. (xxviii)

Gilroy refers here to one of the most important parts of Austen’s novel, in which Austen breaks her careful third person narrative to speak directly to the reader. It is worth repeating the bulk of the passage here, for any reading of *Northanger Abbey* rests on the interpretation of this passage:

I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel-writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding—joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting

them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas! If the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. (30; vol. I, ch. 5)

Later in the same passage, Austen lauds novels as the works “in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language” (31; vol. I, ch. 5). It is difficult to interpret this passage as anything but a frank message from Austen, conveying her personal views about novels and novel-reading, even if the tone of the passage is somewhat hyperbolic.

Gilroy takes this statement at face value, assuming that Austen’s defense of the novel is heartfelt, and that “Just as Lennox reclaimed romance, Austen reclaims gothic conventions to make a political comment on paternal power” (xlili)—meaning that both authors took a disreputable genre and reexamined it and its feminist themes. Gilroy does not discuss how Austen’s novel was affected by Lennox’s, simply using *Northanger Abbey* as an example of a kind of female Quixote novel that has subversive, feminist leanings and which, in the end, supports the kind of novel reading that it seems to mock. But Jane Austen’s novel is surely a response to Lennox’s—we know that Austen read *The Female Quixote* more than once, and enjoyed it—she references the work in a letter to Cassandra, mentioning, “the ‘Female Quixote,’ which now makes our evening amusement, to me a very high one, as I find the work quite equal to what I remembered it” (*Letters*, #49: 120. 1807).

The most important factor to consider when reading *Northanger Abbey* is Jane Austen’s personal opinion of novels. Her reading habits show that she was far from ashamed to be called a

novel-reader; she even re-read novels she *disliked*. For example, in an 1807 letter to Cassandra, Jane writes, “We are reading Clarentine, & are surprised to find how foolish it is. I remember liking it much less on a 2d reading than at the 1st & it does not bear a 3d at all. It is full of unnatural conduct and forced difficulties, without striking merit of any kind” (*Letters*, #50: 125-126. 1807). In a circulating library culture that encouraged fast reading of new titles, the Austens were unusual in their propensity to read novels three or more times (Erickson 574). Even Mr. Austen read Gothic novels—in a letter in 1798 Jane mentions him reading *The Midnight Bell*, one of the “horrid” Northanger novels (*Letters*, #9: 15. 1798). Another letter contains an unequivocal statement from Austen aligning herself and her family with, not just novels, but circulating library novels at that: “as an inducement to subscribe Mrs. Martin tells us that her Collection is not to consist only of Novels, but of every kind of Literature &c &c—She might have spared this pretension to *our* family, who are great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so” (*Letters*, #14: 27. 1798). Significantly, this statement comes in the year 1798, the same year in which Austen was writing *Susan*, later to become *Northanger Abbey*. Jane Austen had no scruples about the questionable respectability of novels.

Austen’s defense of novels is far more overt than Lennox’s of romance. Austen’s supposedly conflicting messages about the worth of the novel, when compared with Lennox’s almost hidden support for female reading, seems like a clear vote in favor of Catherine and her Gothic novels over John Thorpe and his snobbish disdain for this “female” genre. Debra Malina makes clear the difference between Lennox’s equivocation and Austen’s more subtle but definite support of the novel: it is not just that Austen explicitly defends the novel in the passage quoted above, and that she includes characters like John Thorpe and impugns his distaste for novels, but her narrative style itself supports Catherine’s reading. Malina argues that Lennox, “having given

us no invitation to suspend our disbelief and no incentive to identify with the heroine,” provides her readers with no means to sympathize with the female Quixote (283). Malina sees that “we [readers] are represented in the world of the novel less by Arabella than by those other characters” who are humiliated or amused by Arabella’s antics (282). By contrast, in *Northanger Abbey*, readers are “both beside and above Catherine” (Malina 284) and must sympathize with her. Therefore, Catherine can “collaborate with Austen in laying bare the workings of patriarchal society” (Malina 273), i.e. we can discover the empowering nature of the novel alongside Catherine. Critics who read *Northanger Abbey* as a simple critique of Gothic conventions (and of female novel readers) miss both Austen’s sympathy with Catherine and Austen’s clear affection for the novels she parodies.

Yet many critics insist on seeing Austen’s treatment of the novel as a critique. In doing so, they base their views of *Northanger Abbey* on flawed readings of *The Female Quixote*. In the literature that does identify Lennox’s novel as a source for Austen’s, the prevailing conclusion is one which reads *The Female Quixote* as straight anti-romance didactic fiction and thus concludes that Austen’s use of the novel makes her stance irretrievably anti-Gothic. For instance, Natalie Neill characterizes *Northanger Abbey* as Austen’s attempt to “interrogate the logic of female improvement and reform that undergirds much female Quixote fiction” and continues, “Her critique of imaginative fiction—and by extension, her critique of the female imagination—is deeply ambivalent” (164). Neill sees *Northanger Abbey* as a parody of not just *Udolpho*, but of *The Female Quixote*. She misses the complexities in Lennox’s novel which suggest that it aims to interrogate the logic of female didactic fiction—and therefore concludes that the supposed “ambivalence” in Austen’s text is due to her disapproval of both *The Female Quixote* and the Gothic novels. Neill’s argument that Austen is critiquing Catherine for her “female imagination”

is tied up in the logic of her idea that Austen rejected Lennox's novel as a model. Austen's awareness of *The Female Quixote* as an antecedent is what allows her to successfully navigate the ironies of Catherine's situation. Austen would not have missed Lennox's hints in support of her own female Quixote; rather than parodying the earlier work, Austen is expanding on it. Neill is right in saying that Austen "draws attention to the inconsistencies and ironies of novels like *The Female Quixote*, in which the charming delusions of the 'thoughtless' heroine actually go further in attracting the hero than her compulsory reformation at the end of the narrative" (Neill184)—but Austen draws attention to these inconsistencies just as Charlotte Lennox did before her.

A more helpful characterization of *Northanger Abbey*'s relationship with *The Female Quixote* is that Austen revises and improves, rather than parodies, Lennox's novel. Neill is right that the ending of *Northanger Abbey*

not only mocks the formal didacticism of the conventional endings of feminocentric Gothic fiction, but it also parodies the typical endings of female Quixote novels...in which the reformed romance reader is persuaded to change her course of reading and is subsequently rewarded with marriage to the rational anti-romantic hero. (Neill183)

But Neill's idea is that readers are supposed to feel uncomfortable with the story's ending, and this alone is Austen's rebellion. In other words, *Northanger Abbey* is a mere burlesque, criticizing the works of others for their submission to the patriarchy without creating its own solution. If we accept, as we must after closely reading *The Female Quixote*, that many of Lennox's aims were akin to Austen's—that both authors "allo[w] for interpretive possibilities within [their] work[s]" (Neill 185) and both "challenge the premise that romance reading is

harmful” (Neill 184), two rebellions that Neill allows Austen alone—we must ask why Austen chose to revise Lennox’s novel in the first place. If many of their aims were the same, and Lennox was only more reluctant in her criticism of the patriarchy, what did Austen change? If we consider Austen’s changes as serious revisions, bold improvements upon Lennox’s original hints rather than parody, the ways in which she strays from the traditional female Quixote plot become important.

Most importantly, Austen specifies the works that she affectionately mocks. She not only names them but shows she knows them intimately—she has not only read them but is familiar with their places in society. She strategically chooses the novels she mentions and strategically places them in the hands of certain characters. The most prominent example of this is the aforementioned scene with John Thorpe, a self-professed novel hater who thinks they “are all so full of nonsense and stuff; there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since Tom Jones, except *The Monk*; I read that t’other day”( 43; vol. I, ch. 7). John goes on to reveal his ignorance by telling Catherine, after she has suggested he read *Udolpho*, “Not I, faith! No, if I read any, it shall be Mrs. Radcliffe’s” (43; vol. I, ch. 7), not knowing that Mrs. Radcliffe is the author of *Udolpho*. He ends his tirade by insulting Fanny Burney, the author of one of Austen’s own favorite novels, *Camilla*, admitting he could not even finish the first volume. If readers are not tipped off by Thorpe’s obnoxious pronouncement, which typifies the contemporary male reaction to novels (“I never read novels; I have something else to do” [43; vol. I, ch. 7]), Austen gives them a not-so-subtle hint in her narrator’s reaction to his comments. In one of the brilliant moments when readers are allowed to be beside and also above Catherine, the narrator first allows us to view Thorpe’s comments through Catherine’s eyes and then tells us what to think of Thorpe. The narrator follows his opinion of *Camilla* with an affirmation both that it is an unjust

one and that Catherine does not quite agree with his taste, referring ironically to “this critique, the justness of which was unfortunately lost on poor Catherine” (44; vol. I, ch. 7). Austen is simultaneously mocking people like John Thorpe and subtly giving her heroine the support she deserves.

As Barbara Benedict points out, Thorpe exemplifies a kind of “fashionable” reader, one who chooses his reading based on what will make him sound good in conversation, and who skims what he does read. Benedict remarks, “[Burney’s book] demands a kind of reading Thorpe cannot manage: an act of steady concentration that seeks not for sensation but for meaning” (5). Catherine’s steady involvement with the world of *Udolpho*<sup>13</sup> is an admirable quality according to Austen. The idea that the men who scoff at female readers are themselves incapable of performing the feat of attentiveness required for the deep reading of a novel is not unique to Austen. The men (the hero Glanville and the villain Sir George) who ridicule Arabella for her reading cannot in fact catch up with her. Lennox hides this telling fault with humor, describing Glanville as “he began to tremble at the Apprehension of his Cousin laying her Commands upon him to read [the romances]” (Lennox 65). Sir George, who has actually read romances, still exhibits the weakness of his sex when it comes to undertaking long projects: Lennox writes, “the prodigious Length of the Task he had undertaken, terrified him so much, that he gave it over” (153). These passages highlight one of the important realities about eighteenth-century life and novel reading: women were seen to have nothing better to do than to read long-winded novels; men, as John Thorpe says, had better things to do. So it is a striking reversal of the traditional stereotype when male characters are seen to be literally fearful of (as in Lennox) or intellectually incapable of (as in Austen) sustained reading. Though the jibe is lost in Lennox’s comedy,

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<sup>13</sup> Just after this encounter with Thorpe, “Catherine was then left to the luxury of a raised, restless, and frightened imagination over the pages of *Udolpho*, lost from all worldly concerns of dressing and dinner...and having only one minute in sixty to bestow even on the reflection of her own felicity (46; vol. I, ch. 7).

Austen's readers are meant to see the hypocrisy of the traditional view. Austen is asking whether there is something that male readers miss when they avoid novel-reading.

One of the other prominent references to specific works of literature is, of course, the list of heroine-appropriate extracts that Catherine studies in her teen years. Not only does Austen name the authors, but she quotes them, just as extract books designed for female education would. Barbara Benedict again points out Austen's criticism of the new trend in the literary marketplace emphasizing turnaround time and extracts over comprehension and enjoyment. She states, "Catherine's preference for fiction exposes the gender bias of a literary culture that packages male sentiments—by Pope, Gray, Thompson, Shakespeare—for female consumption" (Benedict 3). This is exactly Austen's point. It is another way in which Catherine proves her worthiness: she loves stories, not quotes and moral maxims, and is only driven to read extracts once she realizes it is the proper thing for a young woman to do.

Similarly, Austen disparages the respectable (male) periodical the *Spectator* in the same passage as her famous defense of the novel. She accuses this periodical of "so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation which no longer concern anyone living; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it" (31; vol. I, ch. 5). It is not just the outdated, elitist pages of the *Spectator* that Austen censures; she insists that it is absurd that "the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the *Spectator*, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens" (31; vol. I, ch. 5), while the stories told in novels are looked down on.

What is puzzling for some readers is the fact that just after this impassioned defense of the novel and of female reading, Austen turns to a scene which exposes Isabella and Catherine as rather silly in their obsessive reading of the Gothic. It is in this scene that Isabella lists the Northanger novels, assuring Catherine that they are “all horrid” (33; vol. I, ch. 6). Some critics view this juxtaposition as contradictory—but others recognize it as an articulation of Austen’s view of novels. John Mathison sees Austen’s inclusion of the horrid novels as neither an indictment of them, nor as a complete defense of Gothic novels. He expresses his view by announcing, “Jane Austen, with her liking for doing difficult things, has chosen to argue that even bad novels may be valuable” (Mathison 146). This expresses the aims of *Northanger Abbey* perfectly: certainly Austen sees (and mocks) the stylistic and general faults of the Gothic tradition—but she does not feel that these faults invalidate the genre. As Neill notes, though Austen undertakes to rewrite the Gothic, especially the plot of *Udolpho*, she “does not really critique it in a fundamental way” (168). Even the seven Northanger novels are, in the end, not a target of Austen’s disapproval. Austen is able to admit the vacuity with which Isabella treats these novels—she, like her brother, views reading as a mere social decoration, and it is important that this list of horrid novels comes not from Isabella but from the unknown Miss Andrews—but Austen does not intimate that the novels themselves are what create Isabella’s superficiality.

In fact, the Northanger novels that Isabella proposes reading are carefully chosen as positive representations of the Gothic genre, as Natalie Neill discusses. She argues that Austen chose these seven novels because of their popularity as well as their financial and critical success. She also suggests that the seven novels showcase several different types of Gothic fiction, with *Clermont* representing sensibility and romance, while *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, *The Mysterious Warning*, and *The Midnight Bell* are classed as terror-novels, and are all

examples of the type of Gothic fiction which pretends to be a German translation, though it is actually written by an English author (Neill 170). *The Necromancer* and *Horrid Mysteries* are true German translations (170). All seven novels were best-sellers, and the list comprises, as Neill notes, examples from both the “so-called ‘male’ and ‘female’ Gothic” genres (171). Most surprising is that many of these titles have been praised, not just by contemporary critics, but by modern ones. Neill herself calls *The Children of the Abbey* “a well-constructed and engrossing romance,” while she cites another critic who calls *The Necromancer* “a long-neglected literary achievement” (171). Austen did not choose these novels as examples to prove Gothic fiction is ultimately valueless: she chose a representative sample of novels her readers would be expected to recognize, and recognize as—if not admirable—at least popular.

That Isabella is the one to mention these paragons of Gothic tradition calls attention to her role as what can be described only as a false female Quixote. Many readers identify Isabella with the Gothic literature she seems to admire: Natalie Neill herself proclaims, “[Isabella’s] character... can be read as a figure for the popular fictions which Austen parodies” (166). Mathison makes a similar statement, though he qualifies, “Catherine comes rightly to connect Isabella’s shallowness with her interest in Gothic novels *only*” [emphasis mine] (147). Yet neither of these conclusions hit the mark. Isabella is clearly meant to be seen as vapid and mercenary and she is a reader of the Gothic—these two attributes are clearly connected. However, it is not Isabella’s interest in the Gothic that makes her selfish and vacuous—it is not even her exclusive reading of Gothic novels. While it is true that part of the reason we are able to separate Catherine’s reading from Isabella’s is that Catherine has made an effort to interest herself in other types of literature (she “do[es] not dislike travels” and “can read poetry and plays”[109; vol. I, ch. 14]), it is because Catherine’s love of *Udolpho* is genuine. What truly

differentiates Catherine from Isabella is that Isabella is one of the kind of readers who, like her brother, reads only for the social status reading can bring her. When Isabella gives Catherine the list of the next seven novels they should read together, she is just trying to reel Catherine in, making sure they will continue to be friends, which will guarantee Isabella access to James and his supposed fortune. Isabella has chosen her bait well: as Benedict remarks, “Catherine, already preferring story to sentiment, is a willing victim” of Isabella’s feigned Gothic obsession.

The true target of Austen’s ire is not Gothic novels, but those who use them (or any literature) for nefarious purposes. Isabella is not a figure for the Gothic, but a twisted representation of the female Quixote. Isabella and Catherine are two sides of Arabella; they represent two ways to be a female reader, two ways to use literature as female empowerment. Isabella’s method is clever—it almost works. Yet it is revealed to be ultimately faulty, not to mention shameful. Perhaps Isabella has read more than we give her credit for—she certainly seems familiar with the formulas common to female Quixote fiction. Like Arabella, she espouses views found in sentimental fiction: she says of her relationship with James, “the very first moment I beheld him—my heart was irrecoverably gone” (120; vol. I, ch. 15), she declares, “where people are really attached, poverty itself is wealth” (122; vol. I, ch. 15) and “Of all things in the world inconstancy is my aversion” (132; vol. II, ch. 1) and even “The men think us incapable of real friendship...I am determined to show them the difference” (34; vol. I, ch. 6). Isabella is playing the role of a female Quixote perfectly, pretending to believe herself the heroine of a sentimental novel just as Arabella sees the world as if it is a romance. But Isabella, unlike Arabella, is just playing a part. She does not believe the sentiments she repeats, but knows that the people she meets will see her in a certain way if she repeats them. She has learned the lesson Charlotte Lennox was trying to convey with Arabella’s story—namely that female

Quixotes are often able to manipulate those around them, especially the men around them. By manipulating the tropes of fiction, Isabella attempts to empower herself and control the way people around her perceive her.

Austen offers us an alternative female Quixote in Catherine. Though she is, in a sense, a victim of Isabella's false quixotism, Catherine, a true admirer of the stories Isabella uses as fodder for social climbing, is able to do what Isabella cannot—turn her quixotism into a tool for surviving in a patriarchal world. Catherine is not quite like Arabella—she can check her imagination, and clearly sees the difference between history and the novels she loves. She just does not see why history, as a category of literature, is elevated above the novel—in particular regarding its role in female education.

### *The Gothic and the Quixotic: Fiction as Female Empowerment*

*Northanger Abbey*, like *The Female Quixote*, is centered on the (eighteenth-century) conception of history as a “male” genre and the novel as inherently “female.” April Alliston addresses this idea on several levels. She argues that verisimilitude is “the feature that distinguished the novel from the rival narrative forms of history and romance” and that this quality is “fundamentally defined in terms of character conventions” (Alliston 251). Her point is that the defining characteristic of the emerging genre of the novel is that it is probable. The novel is therefore a female genre—and is problematic—because the eighteenth-century fascination with female honor similarly relies on probability. Alliston claims that the novel relies upon “the empirical unknowability of the interiorized self,” just as notions of female honor do (257). Issues of probability and realism are intrinsically tied up in gender, which explains the importance Austen and her contemporaries place on the difference between history and novels (and the

importance Lennox places on history vs. romance). As Alliston explains, “whereas historiography pretends to pure, or nearly pure, representation of the actual, romance replaces the actual with the ideal—and the novel replaces the actual with the probable” (263).

Novels, then, allow women a place in literature not previously open to them: Catherine tells Eleanor that she dislikes reading history because in it there are “hardly any women at all” and also because “a great deal of it must be invention” though it is very dull (110; vol. I, ch. 14). History *pretends* to be true, as Catherine and Eleanor acknowledge. Yet it is written, not found—written by men. If Catherine is a kind of female Quixote, then Austen is telling us that her brand of novel-reading is preferable to the irreproachable Eleanor’s love of history. Though Eleanor is presented as if she should be a model for Catherine’s recovery, Austen does not allow her to fulfill this role. Catherine naively argues against the sanctity of history—and does so convincingly. This is more than a debate about literature or even education—it is a debate about how to survive as a woman in the midst of a patriarchal society. Eleanor’s choice, as Susan Zlotnick argues, is to accept her fate as a subordinate. Zlotnick’s essay, “From Involuntary object to Voluntary Spy: Female Agency, Novels, and the Marketplace in *Northanger Abbey*” argues that *Northanger Abbey* depicts the “marketplace” and the novel as two options for women in acquiring agency over their lives. Zlotnick points out that Eleanor’s submission to reading history tells us just as much as her behavior towards Henry and her father. Zlotnick sees Gothic novels as texts which “initiat[e] the innocent heroine into the buried secrets of the patriarchy” (285) and continues, “it is likely that Catherine’s prescient critique of women’s absence from history arises from her reading of Radcliffe” (286). Eleanor, though she is respectable and well-read, is limited in a way that Catherine is not—she has allowed her reading to teach her that women have no place in the real world and have no say in the direction of their own lives.

Henry Tilney, too, falls into the trap of thinking that history is true, and that this kind of “truth” has more value than the probability of novels. Much of *Northanger Abbey*’s political message depends on Henry and how readers interpret his character and his actions. Like Isabella, he has ties to *The Female Quixote*, representing a strangely ambivalent mixture of Granville (the hero) and Sir George (the villain). Like Sir George, he is familiar with the literature that fascinates his love interest. But his place in the story is that of Granville—the reasonable young man who must cure Catherine’s Gothic delusions in order to marry her at the end of the book. This dichotomy puzzles many readers; Henry’s purpose is clearer when one sees his character’s antecedents. Henry does not exploit Catherine’s Gothic leanings in order to deceive her, as Sir George does Arabella. Neither does he mock Catherine when she is absent, or act humiliated by her love of the Gothic, as Granville does. So far, Austen seems to have taken the good aspects of Lennox’s male characters and left the bad. But Henry is not faultless. Though he does not mastermind an intricate plot to manipulate Catherine using his knowledge of Gothic novels, he does (rather carelessly) talk her into believing the abbey is akin to the castles of Gothic fiction (161-164; vol. II, ch. 5). And unlike Arabella, Catherine does not really believe that fictional patterns will hold in real life—she keeps questioning her own credulity (162-164; vol. II, ch. 5). It is Henry’s story that pushes her to imagine the Gothic at Northanger.

By combining two standard character types in female Quixote fiction—what Neill calls “the trickster figure” and “the adviser”—into one character, Austen makes Henry a hypocrite. While many readers still take his rebuke to Catherine as a rebuke to female readers, coming directly from Austen, this reading cannot be supported. Most modern critics—those who see Austen as supportive of more than critical of Gothic fiction—agree that Henry does make what Melissa Schaub calls “one major slip” (4). This “slip” refers to Henry’s terrible reprimand to

Catherine, reminding her that such things as happen in Gothic fiction could never exist in civilized England (203; vol. II, ch. 9). This is a slip, indeed—Austen is not speaking through Henry here, as traditional scholarship insists. After he discovers Catherine’s investigations into his mother’s death, Henry tells her, “Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you” (203; vol. II, ch. 9). Henry is making the fundamental assumption that respectable readers of the Gothic must believe in: that these kinds of tales *cannot* happen in England. *Udolpho* is set in France and Italy; many of the Northanger novels even pretend to be written abroad. As Schaub remarks, “The ideal reader of the Gothic is one who understands these assumptions so as to be attracted but not drawn in” (4).

One of the signs that Austen disagrees with Henry’s statement is that he tells Catherine to use her powers of observation and her judgment of the probable. But Catherine *has* been observing the world around her—she senses that there is something underhanded about General Tilney, and she is right. While her conjecture that General Tilney has killed his wife is perhaps not quite as probable as are his real “crimes,” it is perfectly probable from Catherine’s point of view. Both Henry and Eleanor have made vague hints about the General’s unkindness. The only kind of unkindness Catherine can imagine is the Gothic kind. And in the end, Catherine sees what Henry cannot. Henry is blinded by his belief in the sanctity of English society and refuses to admit his father’s “villainy” until it is too late. Henry, in this case, does not stand in for Austen—he is a figure for the audience. As John Mathison declares, “Catherine’s belief that life is violent and unpredictable is truer than the reader’s belief that it is sane and orderly” (149).

Catherine's intuition about the General is allowed by her Gothic reading, which lets her imagine the patriarchy as a force which means to subjugate women. Many critics read the climax of *Northanger Abbey* as Austen's final condemnation of Gothic novels and a celebration of conventional English society. Waldo Glock claims that "the treacherous conduct of General Tilney, significantly instigated by Thorpe's exaggeration of the Morland fortune, represents Jane Austen's indictment of a society that regards the Gothic novel as serious literature" (37). But these are two of the very few characters in *Northanger Abbey* who do not read Gothic literature! These men represent the people in society that Gothic fiction exposes; they prove the Gothic to be founded on real tyrannies, though these tyrannies may be more economic and social than physical and depraved. Schaub concludes that "General Tilney's behavior after he learns that Catherine is not wealthy is reprehensible, but not Gothic" (3). To the contrary, the General, when he throws Catherine out of his house, is behaving just like a Gothic tyrant. The General is not much better than Montoni himself, though he is not the leader of a troupe of banditti. What is terrifying about *Udolpho* is not what Montoni does to Emily—actually no worse than ignoring her and thus allowing her to be put in danger (just what General Tilney does in sending Catherine away alone)—it is the simple fact that he has the power to do anything he likes with her, and does not seem to regard her as a person equal to himself.

Natalie Neill writes, "Austen seems to suggest, as in Radcliffe's novel, that there are real as well as imaginary terrors" (168) involved in being a woman constrained to live under patriarchal rules. As Emily finds out at the end of *Udolpho*, Montoni, just like General Tilney, has not actually killed Signora Laurentini, just as he did not actually kill Madame Montoni (though he is culpable in this second death at least—he deprived his wife of necessary care). Gothic fiction, at least *Udolpho*, is not as far-fetched as Henry seems to think. But it teaches

women to consider their position in society. As Schaub notes, “Both Henry and Catherine must learn...that ‘real’ English characters can be worse than romanticized Gothic ones” (3). At the end of *Northanger Abbey*, Henry has learned more than Catherine has, in reality. The climax of the novel with its faux female Quixote moment—when Catherine reproves herself for ever believing the Gothic has any basis in real life—is Austen’s red-herring. In the real conclusion, Henry is the one who must apologize, and Catherine is the one who has handled the situation with the most grace. As John Mathison points out, “with her experience of Gothic fiction, Catherine was better able to accept the possibility of such behavior as General Tilney’s throwing her out of his house...than so intelligent a man as Henry Tilney himself, or even some critics of the novel” (149).

Henry is even more culpable than his “one slip” about Englishness shows him to be. In fact, he may be as much of a Quixote as Catherine is. In Bath, it is Henry who advocates (though ironically) for novelistic stereotypes and Catherine who insists on practicality and reality. Merrett notes, “when Henry goads her, [Catherine] sensibly resists the literary modes she cultivates, as when she declares that she keeps no journal and rejects his extended analogy between dancing and matrimony” (232). When Catherine and Eleanor misinterpret each other on the subject of the “expected horrors in London” (113; vol. I, ch. 14), Jung-hwa Oh explains that “the ironies of this episode are directed at Henry’s complacency as well as at Catherine’s and Eleanor’s imaginary horrors” (667). Oh argues that Henry’s description of the horrors Eleanor imagines is actually based on the events of the Gordon riots of 1780. He concludes that “Henry is mistaken in his confident interpretation of Gothic fiction, that it scarcely reflects the realities of ordinary life” (Oh 667).

These examples, however, are relatively insignificant compared to Henry's real quixotic fault. Oh makes a more serious accusation about Henry's misuse of literature, saying "this specialist in 'young ladies' ways' believes in the images of women in 'hundreds and hundreds' of novels he has read in spite of his supposed critical ability" (669). Not only does Henry have no ability to imagine Isabella as anything other than a callous seductress (Oh says he has "no sympathetic imagination about female powerlessness and vulnerability in courting rituals" [669]), but he even misreads Catherine. He teases her by lecturing, "a taste for flowers is always desirable in your sex, as a means of getting you out of doors" (178; vol. II, ch. 7)—but Catherine, as we know, is a fan of cricket and baseball. A more troubling bit of Tilney mockery is when he tells Catherine and Eleanor, "no one can think more highly of the understanding of women than I do. In my opinion, nature has given them so much that they never find it necessary to use more than half" (115; vol. I, ch. 14). Though he always keeps up an ironic tone, Henry's insistence on applying novelistic stereotypes to all the women in his life is truly a flaw. At least part, if not most, of the function of *Northanger Abbey's* ending must be to make Henry "overcome his complacent reading" of novels and of the women and men around him (Oh 672).

Eleanor, too, is a complacent—or perhaps just a demoralized—reader. She has options as a female reader, Austen suggests, for improving her outlook on life, but she does not or cannot make use of them. Susan Zlotnick suggests that *Northanger Abbey* offers the novel as a model for women of "more assertive forms of agency than the mere right of refusal" (278). For Zlotnick, another model as important as the novel is the marketplace. It is an economic oppression that Catherine and the women around her face, rather than a physical one. And, in fact, the Gothic—as Austen seems to have realized—is just as concerned with the economic exploitation of women as with the physical. (Emily St. Aubert and Madame Montoni know that

they will be powerless without their estates—and it is for the sake of these estates that the women are locked up. And Emily’s fate, once the estates are signed over, is to be auctioned off to one of Montoni’s compeers for the highest price.) Zlotnick argues that in *Northanger Abbey* “wise and judicious female reading emerges as a possible antidote to female victimization” (278). Wise and judicious, however, does not mean reading confined to histories; as Zlotnick points out, Eleanor’s “striking lack of curiosity” and “defeated sense of the inflexibility of family circumstances” are the by-products of what cannot be a wise reading habit. Zlotnick argues that “in addition to developing Catherine’s protofeminist and critical capacities, reading produces more tangible results: it spurs Catherine to action” (288), allowing her to solve the mystery of *Northanger Abbey* on her own when no one will explain it to her properly.

If Catherine’s reading lets her take more risks than Eleanor, it is also proven to be a “better prospect for increasing her self-determination than Isabella’s turn to the market” (Zlotnick 288). But the reason for this does not lie in the marketplace, but in how the marketplace affects reading. Eleanor and Isabella are two extremes in terms of how they approach reading: Eleanor approaches reading like everyone did before books became such an available commodity: she holds her father’s library in far higher esteem than the circulating library, and reads novels for amusement only. Isabella, on the other hand, has taken the circulating-library culture of reading too far: she uses literary knowledge to put on airs and to succeed socially; she skims and prefers “horror” to story. Austen is censuring both of these reading extremes, and though she does poke fun at Catherine along the way, she uses this unlikely heroine to exemplify the type of reading that neither rejects the social implications of novels as Eleanor does nor uses them merely for fashion as Isabella does.

Of *Northanger Abbey*'s many complications, John Mathison remarks, "most likely to be overlooked is that the Gothic tales hold an element of truth" (149). The truth of fiction is what Catherine can see that Henry cannot—that there are dangers and disadvantages in conventional English society, especially for a woman. Robert Merrett believes Austen, with her novel's ending, is trying to "show that aristocrats are not sexually dangerous in ways upheld by literary tradition, but become powerful by the deference paid them by middle-ranking materialists" like General Tilney (224). This class message is certainly a part of Austen's aim, but another part must also be, as Malina says about *The Female Quixote*, to teach that applying literary principles to life "has been labeled as 'mad' by a male power structure that fears, along with the moralists, the power of female sexuality" (289). What Catherine really learns from her Gothic novels is that "man can treat woman barbarously with impunity" (Oh 667) as Montoni does Emily in *Udolpho*, and as General Tilney does Catherine. Both of these powerful men treat women as commodities.

It is clear that *Northanger Abbey* teaches the value of female reading, especially of novels, at the same time that it affectionately mocks some of these novels. Though mis-reading is always a risk, Austen seems certain that attentive, involved reading is always preferable to dismissive skimming or extracting. Through the example of heroines before her (even Gothic ones), Catherine learns not just to see the world critically, but also to create agency for herself. Some readers may still see the ending of the novel as a bleak one for Catherine; Debra Malina thinks Catherine has given up her reading, remarking, "if, rather than submitting to accusations of delusion, treachery, or impurity, [Catherine] chooses to play the gender role Henry writes for her, at least she may have some idea that she is playing it" (292). This conclusion assumes not just that Catherine has renounced her reading as a good female Quixote is expected to, but that Henry has not learned his own lesson about complacent reading. Benedict's more optimistic

characterization of the story's end focuses on the last pages of the novel, rather than Catherine's previous female Quixote epiphany:

Austen prods her reader to manufacture her or his own ending in accordance with probability. In place of scenes of melodramatic confession or ironic epiphany Austen outlines the complex methods by which her heroine learns the truth...Austen underscores here that in realistic fiction, as in life, right reading requires concentration over time and the judicious weighing of many sources and kinds of information, not a quick fix. (Benedict 6)

This statement only needs to be revised to include not just realistic fiction, but all fiction. Though Austen's writing—and certainly her endings—insist on probability, and she does parody novels that are melodramatic or overblown, in *Northanger Abbey* she is arguing that it is the reader, not the novel, which matters. A “right reading” of any book—not just fiction, but history too—must involve an informed, critical reader willing to evaluate a book in its entirety and unafraid to find valuable lessons in even the most plebian works.

## CHAPTER FOUR: “A Shadow has Fallen”: *Mansfield Park* and the Evangelical Novel

*Mansfield Park*, as countless critics and readers have noted, is distinctly set apart from Austen’s other novels. It is the first novel written after Austen had become a published author—the first piece she wrote with an audience other than her family in mind—and her first attempt to write following what critics call her “years of silence” or “the lost years” (referring to her presumed productive hiatus between 1805 and 1809). More strikingly, the novel is different from Austen’s other works—those written before the lost years, and those written after—in both tone and content. Many readers come away from *Mansfield Park* dissatisfied with its story, its ending, and especially its heroine. The novel’s message is often seen as moralizing and its heroine as an unrealistic image of perfection, unlikable in her primness and moral superiority. Indeed, it is hard to understand Fanny—and hard to feel satisfied with her story, especially with the way it ends.

Sheila Kaye-Smith expresses this sense of dissatisfaction in an essay entitled “Perfectly Compatible with the Profession of a Clergyman.” Her voice is an interesting one to consider since she is strongly displeased with *Mansfield Park* and since she is one of the first to cite the explanation for her displeasure as a product of Austen’s involvement with contemporary literature. She attributes her discomfort with *Mansfield Park* to a failure in Austen’s ability to create a satisfying story and an admirable heroine, saying “I cannot think she [Austen] has been altogether successful in her design,” and continuing, “I fear that the unregenerate reader often finds the anti-clerical Mary Crawford scoring more heavily than the pompous Edmund and his yes-woman Fanny” (Kaye-Smith 142). As Kaye-Smith suggests, any discussion of *Mansfield Park*’s flaws inevitably includes the novel’s treatment of religion and the clergy—ostensibly one

of the novel's central themes. In fact, some critics cite the novel's overt and covert religious discourse as the reason for modern readers' discomfort: Michael Giffin, in arguing that the novel contains many more religious references than at first appear, explains "It is this allegorical dimension that sets *Mansfield Park* apart and makes it starkly different (and highly unsatisfactory) to many secularized twentieth-century readers" (Giffin 18). It is this aspect of the novel, too, which sets it apart from Austen's others; as Giffin says, "religion and theology appear as real absences" in the five other novels (19). The disputes between Edmund and Mary over the duties of a clergyman comprise a substantial portion of the novel and are strategically located, and Fanny's central dilemmas are couched in terms of her obedience to religious values, especially duty.

It is scenes like the one which takes place in the chapel at Sotherton that create both the sense that Fanny is a moralist, and that she is Edmund's "yes-man," as Kaye-Smith (rather harshly) puts it. Just after the party has been shown the chapel, and after Mary learns that Edmund means to be a clergyman, we hear Edmund's defense of the church and his decision to join it:

"The *manners* I speak of might rather be called *conduct*, perhaps, the result of good principles; the effect, in short, of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend; and it will, I believe, be everywhere found, that as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation."

"Certainly," said Fanny, with gentle earnestness.

"There," cried Miss Crawford, "you have quite convinced Miss Price already."

(101; vol. I, ch. 9)

It is not Fanny's moral rectitude that irks some readers, but her willingness to merely parrot Edmund's beliefs and allow him to argue them, while she stands by, ready to agree with a "Certainly" now and then. It is hard to see anything wrong with either Edmund's or Fanny's beliefs, but they do express them priggishly—or so some readers feel.

Kaye-Smith seems justified in pointing out that Edmund and Fanny are not only unappealing, but unsuccessful, in their moral debates. She gives us examples of what can be seen as a calamitous problem with the novel's integrity: "Edmund Bertram is not only a prig but a prig without the courage of his convictions, and as all the clergy in the novel are prosperous, well-connected people, we have no opportunity of seeing the office stand up away from its social supports" (Kaye-Smith 142). Edmund's fallibility is, however, not what, in the end, leaves readers dissatisfied with *Mansfield Park*—it is Fanny's. She allows Edmund to be hypocritical. The emphasis she places on strict morals and on duty makes it harder for readers to sympathize with her when she fails in morals or duty. But the crucial conundrum about Fanny is that her character is so unlike that of any other Austenian heroine, and her actions are so frustratingly inadequate, that many readers fail to identify with her. This is the crux of *Mansfield Park's* troubling deviance from Austen's other novels: "It is only in *Mansfield Park* that Jane Austen seems to find something ominous in a lively, playful manner and something admirable in heavy seriousness," writes Kaye-Smith (143).

### *The Evangelical Argument and the Critics: Is Mansfield Park Evangelical?*

This reading of *Mansfield Park*—that it advocates female meekness and condemns the kind of womanly confidence celebrated in the character of Elizabeth Bennet—demands explanation. Critics have been attempting to find such an explanation even before Kaye Smith's

1944 essay, and have continued to discuss the flaws of *Mansfield Park* into the twenty-first century, discounting information which allows us to read the novel not as a failure or a low point in a six-novel career, but as a triumph exemplifying the ideals expressed in the other novels—particularly Austen’s feminist ideals—rather than contradicting them. Kaye-Smith was one of the first to note the literary connection which explains *Mansfield Park*’s apparent deviance, though she failed to use this connection to defend the novel. She simply observes what she sees as a source for the novel’s problems, writing, “No, a shadow has fallen over *Mansfield Park* which does not lie over the three earlier novels and has passed away before the next appears,” and continues, self-deprecatingly: “I wonder if I am guessing very wildly when I suggest that that shadow is the Evangelical Revival” (145).

In fact, this view—that Evangelicalism had some influence on *Mansfield Park*—has been expressed by certain critics both in Kaye-Smith’s time, when it was briefly in vogue, and in recent literature. The idea has never received sustained or widespread critical attention; there are as many interpretations of the manner in which Evangelicalism appears in Austen’s novel as there are critics who have discussed it. It is certainly true that “the popularity of the Evangelical novel was at its zenith” at the time of *Mansfield Park*’s writing and publication (Mandal 94). Most of the critics who see the Evangelical connection agree that examining Austen’s response to the movement can help account for *Mansfield Park*’s divergence from Austen’s usual style and subject. Many argue that during the “lost years,” or even more specifically, during the year 1810, Austen “underwent a religious crisis” and herself became an Evangelical (Monaghan 215). This view is rather prevalent in the earlier literature, especially in essays that attempt to characterize Austen as traditional—or rather, conservative. None of these readings succeed in resolving the problems of *Mansfield Park*: they may explain why Austen suddenly became

interested in religion as a subject for her fiction, but they do not account for her reversal after *Mansfield Park*, or for the dissatisfaction readers find in the novel.

Before evaluating the various arguments which seek to integrate Evangelicalism into the doctrine of *Mansfield Park*, we should review what is meant by “Evangelicalism” and “the Evangelical Revival.” The term refers to a movement within the Anglican Church in the later part of the eighteenth century. The group of Anglican Evangelicals, later called the Clapham Sect, were abolitionists and church reformers who wanted to rectify what they saw as laxness in church policy and in general morals (Monaghan 215). Some of the movement’s goals included “the abandonment of plurality (clergymen holding more than one living at the same time), a return to Scripture as the basis of Anglican practice, and, more topically, the abolition of the slave trade,” (issues which are all mentioned in *Mansfield Park*, as Anthony Mandal remarks) (92). Many contemporaries confused the Evangelicals with the Methodists, who similarly advocated for a renewal of faith and the idea of “conversion” (Garside and McDonald 35), though Evangelicalism was a movement more associated with the upper classes.

The movement sought to reach the middle class through pamphlets and the overtly didactic “Evangelical novels” such as Mary Brunton’s *Self-Control* and Hannah More’s *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, which was immensely popular, running to eleven editions in nine months of its first printing (Nardin 15). The Evangelical movement, however, did not condone social change; it aimed rather “to alter the tone (though not the hierarchical structure) of society” (Garside and McDonald 35). The movement actually served as a means for protecting the status quo—even for returning to more traditional values. The goals of the movement were to restore morality to the daily life of the average Anglican parishioner, which, to some, included strengthening class boundaries. Under Evangelicalism, “religious affirmation...is put to the

service of maintaining the political strength of the gentry, bolstering its self-assurance, and correcting its lapses, in the face of the threats of a revolutionary age” (Fleishman 6).

Surprisingly, much of the reform the Evangelicals advocated was secular rather than religious, though clerical reform was one of the movement’s goals (Garside and McDonald 35).

One can start to see how Fanny and Edmund’s ideals are somewhat Evangelical. To them, duty is sacred and religious matters are not to be taken lightly. Avrom Fleishman uses the link with Evangelicalism to read *Mansfield Park* as Austen’s critique of the gentry and its corruptibility. He casts Fanny as the savior of the Park, a sort of missionary figure who shows Sir Thomas his aristocratic errors and brings the world of the Park back to its rightful moral state. For Fleishman, a central scene exposing the moral problems of the gentry is the Mansfield party’s trip to Sotherton and their examination of Mr. Rushworth’s chapel. He explains, “the current religious condition of the Rushworths—and, by extension, of their class—is revealed when the party comes to the domestic chapel” (5), though he asserts, “it should be clear that [Fanny’s] values are only tangentially religious: domestic worship is to be revived not for the saving of souls, but for the fulfillment of a social ideal” (6). The passage he is discussing is one of Fanny’s sole independent remarks while visiting the chapel:

“It is a pity,” cried Fanny, “that the custom should have been discontinued. It was a valuable part of former times. There is something in a chapel and chaplain so much in character with a great house, with one's ideas of what such a household should be! A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer is fine!”

Austen does not make it clear whether Fanny means the household would be admirable because genuinely religious, or because it would look proper and traditional—because it would, in Fleishman’s words, fulfill her social ideal.

Fleishman and those who insist that Austen’s views align with Evangelicalism argue that Fanny’s advocacy for the family chapel (which would mean a renewal of strict hierarchy, exemplified in the image of an entire household attending service together, seated in their proper places in the estate’s chapel) is evidence of Austen’s Evangelicalism. Fleishman sees the chapel scene as evidence that “[Fanny’s] Evangelicalism expresses itself not by moralizing but by suggesting the need for clerical reform” (2), since she is not really talking about religion and belief, but about family practices. But this scene can be read as an instance where Austen undermines the integrity of the Evangelical movement, revealing it as ultimately class-oriented and thus hypocritical.

We must remember that Fanny’s ideal of a family chapel is not based on the religious good such practices encourage, but on a literary ideal—that of Scott’s *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Fanny’s quote from the poem, juxtaposed with her opinion of the value of family worship, suggests that her real focus is on the romantic image of the chapel rather than its practical use: she says, “This is not my idea of a chapel. There is nothing awful here, nothing melancholy, nothing grand...No banners, cousin, to be ‘blown by the night wind of Heaven.’ No signs that a ‘Scottish monarch sleeps below.’” (100, 662; vol. I, ch. 9) When we take the chapel scene in its context—remembering that the above quote is the first thought Fanny has on seeing it, it might seem that Fanny is anything but a fervent Evangelical—that she agrees with Edmund because he is her only friend, and embracing his Evangelicalism is her only way to belong and to

acknowledge his kindness. If we read the passage this way, Fanny is not any kind of crusader, but Austen's portrait of a girl being pushed and pulled by the politics of her social superiors.

Fleishman's argument casts Fanny (and Austen) as followers of the conservative Evangelical movement, ready to use religious reform to enforce and extend the gentry's traditional influence in society. David Monaghan, however, argues that the Evangelical movement was too liberal for Austen. He interprets the Evangelicals differently, assuming their aims are liberal because their methods speak to the middle class: they distributed pamphlets and called for abolition of the slave trade. Monaghan writes, "*Mansfield Park* is a novel written in defense of a beleaguered society and its religion; the Evangelicals were part of the forces of change. As such, they can have had no appeal for Jane Austen" (230). Monaghan misinterprets Evangelicalism—every other critic agrees that though the Evangelicals supported abolitionism, they also aimed to enforce class boundaries—but his argument that Austen did not identify with the movement is still helpful in that it notes some of the possible points of similarity between *Mansfield Park* and Evangelicalism. His argument that the novel has Evangelical tendencies is convincing, even if his premise that the movement's goal was to reduce class boundaries is not.

Monaghan argues that "similarities between Jane Austen and the Evangelicals...are much more likely to be the result of their common reading of Cowper, Johnson, and Burke than of any direct influence" (218). Both the Evangelical movement and Austen's novel are associated with works like these—but more complexly associated than Monaghan acknowledges. In addition to being possible sources of inspiration or rhetoric for the Evangelicals, these works—Monaghan calls them "moral works"—constitute the kind of approved female reading that Evangelicalism supports. Fanny reads Cowper and Johnson in *Mansfield Park*—is this therefore a manifestation of her common ideals with Evangelicalism? Or is it designed to show

Fanny as an example of the Evangelical “ideal woman”? Or, does Austen include the very Evangelical habit of reading morally upright works in her novel in order to expose the Evangelical system as lacking in some way? These are the questions one must continually ask about *Mansfield Park*, especially as it relates to Evangelical ideals.

Monaghan sees few connections between *Mansfield Park* and Evangelicalism, and discounts most of these, though he again interprets the novel without subtlety. He cites “Mary Crawford’s references to Methodism and conversion” (219) as possible links to the movement, but says “Edmund’s conception of his parochial function makes nonsense of attempts to take seriously claims made by Mary Crawford that...he might become a Methodist or a missionary” (221). He must be speaking of Mary and Edmund’s last conversation, in which she retorts to him, after he speaks of Maria and Henry’s wrongdoing:

“‘A pretty good lecture, upon my word. Was it part of your last sermon? At this rate you will soon reform everybody at Mansfield and Thornton Lacey; and when I hear of you next, it may be as a celebrated preacher in some great society of Methodists, or as a missionary into foreign parts.’ She tried to speak carelessly, but she was not so careless as she wanted to appear” [says Edmund]. (530; vol. III, ch. 16)

But Monaghan is making the same mistake as Mary in assuming that Evangelicals are Methodists and that they must always be missionaries. In fact, this is not even a true mistake on Mary’s part—she knows Edmund is neither a Methodist nor a missionary, but in her anger she exaggerates her characterization of his life.

Monaghan cites Edmund’s desire to live in “privacy and retirement” when ordained and to influence his flock by good example as evidence of his rejection of Evangelical doctrine. He

continues, “In actual fact... Edmund acts and speaks consistently in a manner befitting a serious, traditional Church of England clergyman” (220). This description, however, is precisely what makes Mary accuse him of “Methodism” (or rather Evangelicalism). “serious” is an appellation at that time associated with the Evangelicals (Garside and McDonald 46), and a return to the traditional practices of Anglicanism is one of the general aims of Evangelicalism. Indeed, Hannah More’s characters practice their Evangelicalism not by calling for conversions, but by living quietly and privately and setting a good example to the lower classes.

Monaghan’s final reading of *Mansfield Park* is ironically similar to the readings of those who believe Austen was herself an Evangelical. In the end, he says, it is through a return to manners and social charm, not the triumph of Evangelicalism, that “Fanny achieves the salvation of Mansfield Park” (229). Similarly, Peter Garside and Elizabeth McDonald announce that, through her devotion to Evangelical ideals, “Fanny revitalizes a tired social institution which is in danger of total collapse because it has lost its original sense of purpose” (38). They interpret Austen’s use of Evangelicalism entirely differently from Monaghan, yet they come to the same general conclusion about *Mansfield Park* and Fanny’s role in it. Yet neither reading seems to quite capture Austen’s stance on the movement. Apart from the references to Methodism and the religious discussions in *Mansfield Park* that Monaghan references, Garside and McDonald list several more details that seem to align Austen with Evangelicalism. They cite the importance placed on timekeeping in the novel, as well as the way characters use words, as distinctly Evangelical.

Strict timekeeping is “one area where the virtues of Mansfield corresponds [sic] with the individual virtues of Evangelicalism” (43). Timekeeping is one of the social Evangelical precepts—it is part of a whole system of living that emphasizes orderliness and regularity.

Garside and McDonald see Mary's disregard of time and even distance (evidenced in her dispute with Edmund at Sotherton about the length of their absence from Fanny) as a sign of her anti-Evangelicalism. Henry, too, is similarly inexact in his timekeeping—he cannot bring himself to write regularly to Mary. On the other hand, Fanny and Sir Thomas are paragons of timekeeping: Garside and McDonald refer to Fanny's time at Portsmouth in evidence of this. She thinks to herself, "in her uncle's house there would have been a consideration of times and seasons" and can tell Henry exactly how long her visit has been, telling him, "No. Not quite a month—It is only four weeks tomorrow" (475; vol. III, ch. 11). This example, however, is not quite a clear support of Fanny as a whole-hearted Evangelical. She is precise in her timekeeping because she knows she has been sent away as punishment; she does not want one day of this punishment discounted. Even her pining for the order of Mansfield is less a compliment to Sir Thomas than an expression of her misery at Portsmouth. This exclamation makes us think Fanny a little petty, and reminds us that a proper consideration of time is one of the few attractions Mansfield possesses. But in Garside and McDonald's opinion, Mansfield's Evangelical leanings (including its timekeeping) are what saves it. They proclaim, "It is not just the humble, but the punctual who will inherit Mansfield Park" (44).

The vocabulary of various characters in *Mansfield Park* can be seen as associated with their Evangelical allegiances. Fanny has a penchant for the Evangelically-associated word "serious" while Mary's freely uses words like "pleasant" and "pleasure"—a clear sign that her attitude towards life is unEvangelical—or rather, not "serious" (Garside and McDonald). Mrs. Norris's modes of communication can also be classified as un-Evangelical: "Like Hannah More, Jane Austen points to the moral laxness which lies behind hyperbolic praise," write Garside and McDonald, citing Mrs. Norris' dialogue. When she speaks of Mr. Rushworth's "thousand good

qualities” (222; vol. II, ch. 2), Mrs. Norris is not just telling a white lie or misperceiving the situation, but more dangerously (according to Evangelical principles), participating in a discourse of self-deception. This linguistic analysis is useful in positioning the characters of *Mansfield Park*, if it does not help to identify Austen’s motives in so portraying them. Fanny certainly uses the cant of the Evangelicals, and Mary does at first seem to think only of pleasure. These observations are a solid baseline from which to begin an analysis of Austen’s intricate involvement with Evangelical discourse in *Mansfield Park*.

### *The Evangelical novel: Austen, Evangelicalism and Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*

So much for a general introduction to the critical views on *Mansfield Park* and the influence of the Evangelical movement. It is far more productive is to analyze the novel in the context of the Evangelical *novel*, perhaps the most popular genre of the immediate time period. I will argue that *Mansfield Park* is Austen’s response not just to Evangelicalism, but to the expression of Evangelical ideals in novel form—or rather, the form of didactic fiction. *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* exemplifies the Evangelical viewpoint, and is thus quite useful as a reference for the various goals and opinions of the movement. But it is also an influential piece of fiction, one that Austen read and commented on, and one which professes to dictate to women the exact manner in which they should act, and the way in which they should be educated, in order to become good wives and mothers. If Austen’s position on Evangelicalism in general is ambiguous, her position on *Cœlebs* is clearer, and investigating this position will allow us to finally elucidate Evangelicalism’s role in *Mansfield Park*.

Austen's letters, when taken together, are ambiguous on the subject of Evangelicalism. Critics who attempt to understand her several references to the movement are inevitably confounded by the fundamental obscurity of the form—Austen changes topic abruptly, and is of course participating in an ongoing conversation, half of which we must guess at. Perhaps Austen's various sentiments concerning Evangelicalism cannot definitively make clear her attitude towards the movement, but certainly one must consider them all (and their context within the letters).

Presumably, it was Cassandra who read *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* first, and who recommended it to her sister. In an 1809 letter, Jane replies,

You have by no means raised my curiosity after Caleb;—My disinclination for it before was affected, but now it is real; I do not like the Evangelicals.—Of course I *shall* be delighted when I read it, like other people—but till I do, I dislike it.

(*Letters* #66: 177. 1809)

This remark has of course been debated by Austen critics; some see it as a proof that Austen truly does *not* like the Evangelicals—others, of course, treat the statement as a passing joke, a hyperbole, balancing the exaggeration of delight Austen will feel when she finally reads the novel. The tone of the passage seems to me to disqualify it from any real usefulness in interpreting *Mansfield Park*—though Mary Waldron is astute in observing that “clearly [Austen] would not react ‘like other people’” (263). Waldron's reading also emphasizes the fact that Austen is reluctant to read *Cælebs* in any case, continuing, “Her comments are typically oblique and sardonic, but leave one in little doubt as to the reasons for her reluctance” (263), those reasons being her wariness of Evangelicalism. Critics such as Jane Nardin, however, put forward the possibility that Austen's reasons could have been stylistic rather than religious—she could

have been reluctant to put herself through the trial of reading More's stiltedly didactic prose, rather than objecting to Evangelicalism itself.

Cassandra seems to have corrected Jane on her misapprehension of the novel's title, and perhaps teased her about it. Jane's answer is similarly light in tone:

I am not at all ashamed about the name of the Novel, having been guilty of no insult towards your handwriting; the Diphthong I always saw, but knowing how fond you were of adding a vowel wherever you could, I attributed it to that alone—& the knowledge of the truth does the book no service;—the only merit it could have, was in the name of Caleb, which has an honest, unpretending sound, but in *Coelebs* there is pedantry and affectation. Is it written only to classical scholars? (*Letters* #66: 179. 1809)

Though the bulk of this excerpt seems playful enough that it too must be disregarded as a serious proof of Austen's opinion on the novel, the comment about classical scholars rings true. It echoes Austen's letter to the Prince Regent's librarian, protesting that she is too unfamiliar with the classics, with Greek and Latin, to write the novel he has requested. This protest is, of course, ironic in tone, but it is true that Austen did not read Greek or Latin, and preferred recent fiction to the classics. Austen's comment also shows us that she noted the boastful quality of the novel's title; in using the name More is appealing to a certain audience and trying to portray herself as an intellectual (and is therefore hypocritical; in *Cælebs* she teaches that only certain women can safely learn Latin, and if they do, they should keep it a secret).

Austen makes one more reference to *Cælebs*: it is in *Catherine; or, the Bower*, the beginning of a novel written in 1792 and included in Austen's *Juvenilia*. The reference must have been added at a later date, as *Cælebs* was published in 1809. It seems to have been added in

an attempt to bring the story up to date—it replaces another title in a list of didactic works. The speech is made to Catherine, the protagonist, by her overbearing maiden aunt, Mrs. Percival:

I had hoped to see you respectable and good; to see you able and willing to give an example of Modesty and Virtue to all the Young people hereabouts. I bought you Blair's Sermons, and Coelebs in Search of a Wife, I gave you the key to my own Library, and borrowed a great many good books of my Neighbours for you, all to this purpose. [(*Juvenilia* 287)]

With this passage, Austen seems to be mocking the idea that the education of a young lady may be simply accomplished by letting her read moral books, and that any deviation from the practices of these books (the passage is spoken as a reprimand to Catherine for sitting alone in her bower with a man) is the sign of a failed education or a bad character. While this mention does not imply Austen's general opinion of the work in question, it is an indication as to the way in which she regarded it—as a conduct novel, useful in upbraiding young ladies unnecessarily.

To the inflammatory quote “I do not like the Evangelicals” we may now add another on that subject. In November of 1814 (the year of *Mansfield Park*'s publication), Jane received a request for romantic advice from her niece Fanny. In her reply, she admits her ambivalence on the subject—Fanny seems to have asked whether she should accept a marriage proposal from a man whom she seemed to regard with lukewarm affection, and Aunt Jane debates both sides of the issue. At one point, she declares, seemingly in response to a worry of Fanny's:

And, as to there being any objection from his *Goodness*, from the danger of his becoming even Evangelical, I cannot admit *that*. I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals, & am at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason and Feeling, must be happiest & safest.—Do not be frightened from

the connection by your brothers having most wit. Wisdom is better than Wit, & in the long run will certainly have the laugh on her side; & don't be frightened by the idea of his acting more strictly up to the precepts of the New Testament than others. (*Letters* #109: 292. 1814 [to Fanny Knight])

This statement we must take as a serious reflection of Austen's views on the subject—though we must bear in mind that the subject is the worthiness of a specific man and Fanny Knight's chance of happiness in marriage with him. Importantly, the remark presupposes an understanding between aunt and niece that a tendency towards Evangelicalism can be unappealing. And Austen makes an important distinction—she thinks that “goodness” and an approbation of Evangelical principles due to “reason and feeling” are positive traits. But it is clear that she, herself, is *not* an Evangelical: she will not make the generalization that people who are “good” and who follow the New Testament are Evangelicals, and in saying she “is by no means convinced that *we* ought not all to be Evangelicals” she clarifies that she is not one. This is measured, considerate advice to a niece, and she ends the passage with:

And now, my dear Fanny, having written so much on one side of the question, I shall turn round & entreat you not to commit yourself farther, & not to think of accepting him unless you really do like him. Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection...(*Letters* #109: 292. 1814 [to Fanny Knight])

This, too, has some bearing on the ideology of *Mansfield Park*, and will be helpful in our later analysis of the novel.

The next letter to Fanny reiterates this point, apparently a crucial one for Austen, before returning to the subject of Evangelicalism at the close of the letter:

...nothing can be compared to the misery of being bound *without* Love, bound to one, & preferring another. *That* is a Punishment which you do *not* deserve...

Thank you—but it is not settled yet whether I *do* hazard a 2<sup>d</sup> edition. We are to see Egerton today, when it will probably be determined.—People are more ready to borrow & praise, than to buy—which I cannot wonder at; but tho' I like praise as well as anybody, I like what Edward calls *Pewter* too.—I hope he continues careful of his Eyes and finds the good effect of it.

[*Continued below address panel*] I cannot suppose we differ in our ideas of the Christian Religion. You have given an excellent description of it. We only affix a different meaning to the Word *Evangelical*. (*Letters* #114: 299-300. 1814 [to Fanny Knight])

Some critics (those who wish to paint Austen as a convert to Evangelicalism) allege that we cannot make anything of this comment since we do not know what Fanny's conceptions of the Christian religion are, or what her description of it was. And indeed this passage can be used to support both arguments about Austen's stance on Evangelicalism. But if we consider the last two sentences as a continuation of the discussion in Jane's previous letter, we should interpret them as a clarification of her argument that a tendency to strictly follow the New Testament or to be "good" does not necessarily mean one is an Evangelical. And this passage (since Austen is so eager to convince Fanny that her admirer is admirable and *not* an Evangelical) implies that Evangelicalism is something to be avoided, while of course the precepts of the Christian religion are not.

The above passage directly links *Mansfield Park* to Austen's Evangelical debate. Critics have, I think, misinterpreted the content of this last paragraph of Austen's letter. They separate

the first two sentences, referring to the possibility of a second edition of *Mansfield Park*, from the last three, which return to the Evangelicalism discussion. They treat these last three sentences as if they are tacked on almost like a post-script, perhaps because of the obscurity of the sentence that connects the first and last parts of the paragraph. The discussion of Evangelicalism is held below the address panel but it could well be connected with the previous paragraph. At least, we can follow Austen's train of thought through the mention of *Mansfield Park's* second edition, to her reflections on the usefulness of money, and then perhaps back to *Mansfield Park*—and perhaps to one of the reasons why this novel, compared to Austen's others, is selling rather slowly. Of course the content of the three lines refers to Fanny's previous worry about her prospective fiancé and his apparently Evangelical tendencies—but it is not hard to reason that Austen was prompted to revive the topic by its relation to the previous discussion of her novel, a novel which presents a dilemma very similar to Fanny's.

If we accept that *Mansfield Park* is indeed Austen's response to the Evangelical movement, and more specifically, to Evangelical fiction like *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, there is one more argument we must consider. Some critics, among them Jane Nardin, argue that *Mansfield Park* is a re-writing—a correction—of the Evangelical novel (*Cælebs* in particular), but that Austen's only point of difference with the novels is in form; Austen only objected to the clumsy and overtly didactic way in which the precepts of Evangelicalism were written into fiction, not to any of the central messages or representations of the novels. Nardin characterizes *Mansfield Park* as a better, more realistically and skillfully written, adaptation of Evangelical ideals into the form of a novel. If this is the case, then the novel certainly was a failure for Austen—the public did not seem to mind the flawed and didactic style of *Cælebs*, as it made £30,000 for its author (Nardin 15). Re-writing More's novel with only stylistic changes would

seem a waste of Austen's considerable talents. But perhaps Austen just wanted to jump on the bandwagon of Evangelical fiction—*Mansfield Park* was, of course, Austen's first novel written with the full expectation that it would be published, and published in the immediate literary context of the time. Maybe Austen was making a concession to fashion and expediency, and composed what she thought would be a popular work that would make her a lot of "pewter" à la Hannah More.

Garside and McDonald share Nardin's view that what troubled Austen about Evangelicalism was just the way it was presented in fiction, and the poor quality of Hannah More's writing in particular. They insist that "[Austen's] negative remark to Cassandra—'I do not like Evangelicals'—must be seen in the context of her humorous condescension towards Hannah More's awkwardly didactic *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*" (36). Like Nardin, they apply the attitude they take towards this quote—that Austen's dislike of Evangelicalism must be taken in the context of her distaste for More et. al.'s "awkward didacticism"—to Austen's general opinions, essentially arguing that *in general*, Austen disliked Evangelicalism only because of its proponents' failure to artistically translate its precepts into good, readable fiction. Garside and McDonald imply this kind of argument in their essay, but Nardin makes it explicit and argues well, invoking similarities not just between the ideals of *Mansfield Park* and *Cælebs*, but between Austen's novel and More's tract *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799). She concludes, "Though she shared many of More's views about education, Austen dissented violently from the theory of fiction that *Cælebs* exemplifies. Her goals as a writer were artistic, rather than religious. And she trusted her readers" (20). Nardin quotes one of Austen's letters in which she comically rhymes "I do not write for such dull elves / as have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves" (*Letters* #79: 210. 1813), explaining that Austen, unlike More, trusted

her readers enough to let them infer religious principles from relatively subtle (well-written) fiction, rather than inserting those principles, well-explained, in a pseudo-fictional work.

Nardin's premise is that "Like *Mansfield Park*, *Cælebs* fictionalizes the *Strictures*" but that "the two novels do this in very different ways" (16). However, she points out, quite convincingly, that "Fanny's education conforms closely to the model advocated in the *Strictures*" (16). Fanny reads serious books, and this reading is her main means of education. She shows little interest in learning accomplishments in order to become socially attractive. She also, as Nardin notes, fails to show skill in the kind of early learning Maria and Julia excel in, such as "put[ting] the map of Europe together" or "repeat[ing] the chronological order of the kings of England, with the dates of their accession, and most of the principal events of their reign" (20-21; vol. I, ch. 2). Along with criticizing the goal of acquiring attractive accomplishments, the *Strictures* frowns on what Nardin calls "the equally showy rote learning in which girls are drilled" (More 17). Fanny's education (apparently) shows the benefits of More's approach to female education, especially in contrast with that of the Bertram sisters, who seem to exemplify More's idea of badly-educated girls.

According to Evangelical principles, Nardin explains, "girls must not be flattered or indulged" (17), since the *Scriptures* says "an early habitual restraint is peculiarly important to the future character and happiness of women" (More vol. I p. 64), though "parental austerity," as Sir Thomas demonstrates, "drives the gentle spirit to artifice and the ragged to despair" and "generates deceit and cunning" (More vol. I p. 62). Clearly, it is the otherwise "gentle" Bertram sisters who are driven to artifice, deceit, and cunning, and the "ragged" Fanny to unhappiness by Sir Thomas's well-meaning reserve. As Austen's narrator observes, Sir Thomas does not see the defect in his daughters "because, though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly

affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him” (22; vol. I, ch. 2). Though Maria and Julia may have been “gentle” in their early childhood, by the time Fanny arrives at Mansfield, their faults have become fixed—and by the time Sir Thomas leaves for Antigua, they are not only selfish and unkind, but deceitful as well. It is Fanny’s example which Nardin thinks is meant to show how “habitual restraint” and lack of indulgence create the best woman.

Nardin thinks Austen has chosen to re-write *Cælebs* more realistically. The main difference this causes, according to Nardin, is in the characters and their morals. “Because she does not trust readers to draw correct inferences from morally complex fictions, More both eschews and attacks the common novelistic practice of mixing good and bad qualities in characters occupying positions of social or moral authority,” she points out (19). Nardin is thinking of the passage in *Cælebs* condemning the commonly depicted character of the “comical parson” in works of fiction. But there is a more important consequence of Austen’s decision to create realistic, and therefore flawed, characters. Sir Thomas’s character comes out of this apparently aesthetic decision. He is clearly a counterpart to the impeccably moral Mr. Stanley of *Cælebs*, whom Nardin describes as a “skilled pedagogue,” the kind of parent who can “script [his] children’s development so thoroughly that the choice of a particular marriage partner is a foregone conclusion” (19). Sir Thomas on the other hand is so blind to what is going on at Mansfield that he insists on Fanny marrying Henry Crawford, allows Maria to marry Mr. Rushworth, and even causes Julia run off with Mr. Yates. As Nardin asserts, “if Sir Thomas’s failures as an educator and a matchmaker drive the plot of *Mansfield Park*, the ideal fathers of *Cælebs* ensure an almost plotless work—a sort of anti-novel” (19-20). But is it for the sake of a good plot that Austen gives Sir Thomas such important flaws? And is he the only important

character to suffer from this artistic amalgamation of good and bad? These are the questions the answers to which undercut Nardin's argument and Garside and McDonald's, and even Kaye-Smith's. For when we investigate the extent to which this mixing of good and bad is present in the characters of *Mansfield Park*, Nardin's argument seems unlikely: Austen must be doing something more in her novel than giving plot and realism to More's. And when we accept that many characters are "realistic" in this way, it gets harder and harder to argue that the views Austen expresses in *Mansfield Park* are those of a converted Evangelical.

*Mary Waldron, "The Frailties of Fanny," and Mansfield Park as an Anti-Cœlebs*

Mary Waldron, in her book *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, includes a chapter on "The Frailties of Fanny: *Mansfield Park* and the Evangelical Movement." In a revolutionary new take on the novel and its relationship with Evangelicalism, Waldron argues that *Mansfield Park* is a subversive transposition of the values of Evangelicalism and the plots of Evangelical novels. In her view, each mention of Evangelical-like views or practices in *Mansfield Park* only serves the purpose of showing Evangelicalism to be wrong-headed. Waldron believes that we have all been reading *Mansfield Park* wrong for years—not just because we missed its Evangelical undertones, but because we misinterpreted Fanny. Waldron states:

Even Claudia Johnson, who otherwise seriously questions the more common estimates of the novel, sees Fanny as ultimately triumphing over the errors of the deluded males, remaining innocent herself. I believe this represents an inadequate reading of a prismatic and complex work. (260)

It is not just the ending that Waldon argues we have traditionally misinterpreted, though this is a significant part of her argument. She is prompted by just such readerly sentiments as Kaye-

Smith's—by the feeling of many, if not most, readers that Fanny is too prim and that *Mansfield Park* in general is dissatisfying. Waldron characterizes the abrupt turn Austen seems to have taken in this novel in terms of her attitude towards literature: “From poking fun at Fordyce in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen seems almost to have joined forces with him,” she says (261). She observes, “Fanny, in contrast [to Austen’s other heroines], is passive and submissive, fond of silence and anonymity—everything the conduct-books recommend” (261). This, indeed, does not sound like the Austenian heroine (modern) readers hope for. Only Anne Eliot comes close—but as Waldron points out, though Anne is “good” and patient “she has already discovered, at the beginning of [*Persuasion*], that submission is not an adequate response in life” (261).

Waldron brings up a well-known passage from one of Austen’s letters to her niece Fanny: she says, “Pictures of perfection, as you know, make me sick and wicked” (Letters #155: 350. 1817 [to Fanny Knight]). Though she is speaking of *Emma*, this comment makes it clear that a “perfect” heroine (such as many readers think Austen intended Fanny to be) is not Austenian. For further evidence against a straight reading of Fanny’s goodness, Waldron turns to a letter to another niece of Austen’s, Anna, in which Jane gives Anna advice on novel-writing. The letter is written in 1814, the same year in which *Mansfield Park* was published, and in it Austen criticizes one of Anna’s characters for being “too solemn & good” (Letters #107: 287. 1814 [to Anna Austen]).

Waldron opens up a new way to look at Fanny: she thinks that Fanny seems unlikable because she is *not* perfect—because she is trying to be a good Evangelical. Waldron calls *Mansfield Park* “an exploration of [Austen’s] dissatisfaction in a story which deals with the application of some of [Evangelicalism’s] ideals in everyday life” (266), and that “[*Cælebs*]’ failure to take into account so much about human relationships would have worried Austen”

(265). Austen therefore decided to re-write *Coelebs*, exhibiting all its flaws and impracticalities. In particular, Waldron sees Austen as attacking the Evangelical “doctrine that individual submission to duty would, by example, act as a corrective to what was seen as contemporary moral corruption” (263). We see Fanny exemplifying this individual submission to duty—she keeps her own council and knows her place in society and in her family. Even Sir Thomas follows this Evangelical principle—he does his duty, and seems to think his good example is all that is needed to make him a good leader and a good father. Waldron implies that this kind of behavior is the natural result of Evangelical thinking; she tells us “populist Evangelical propaganda paid little attention to actualities,” and characterizes the movement as “set[ting] up a totally unreal model for the lowly and weak to follow” (264). It is hard to contest these statements after having read *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*. The novel’s main characters are all paragons of virtue who protest that they are sinners, while never doing or even thinking anything even remotely questionable.

*Cælebs*, naturally, centers around a young man (whose name is Charles) and his search for the perfect (Evangelical) wife after the death of his parents. Waldron takes her description of the ideal Evangelical woman from *Cælebs* and its heroine Lucilla “who is innocent and deferential and silent, but confident enough to engage in abstruse moral discussions when required and to speak up for her beliefs when they are attacked” (265). Indeed, this is a model which it seems impractical to even try to live up to. In *Mansfield Park*, we see Fanny trying. Austen shows us just how impossible it is to act the perfect Evangelical lady—at once completely submissive, yet powerfully certain in her beliefs and actions. Throughout the novel, starting with her education at Mansfield, Fanny tries to strictly follow Evangelical ideals. Sir Thomas, who “has imbibed some Evangelical ideas” (Waldron 268), tries to bring up his

children with these ideals in mind, but it is only Fanny who is submissive enough to take his example to heart. Though Sir Thomas believes in the submissiveness of women, residence for the clergy, and the importance of punctuality, he fails as an Evangelical educator—he tries to lead by duty and example, but his children (all except Edmund) see this as standoffishness and excessive gravity. Sir Thomas advocates for “moral health (that is, stasis)” as Waldron puts it (268). He does not actually oversee the inculcation of his charges’ morals; he just assumes they will learn them because he is their leader.

Fanny, Edmund, and Sir Thomas, then, are the Evangelicals of *Mansfield Park*. If we see Fanny’s “goodness” in this light, we reveal not just her faults but the flaws in the Evangelical plan. Throughout the first half of the novel, Austen is showing us that Fanny’s kind of goodness “leads to a loss of energy, negativism, failure of generosity, and ultimately a concentration on self” (Waldron 268). Waldron is able to find evidence of this in the text—Austen provides us example after example of Fanny’s principles failing her. Waldron gives us the crux of the issue: “[Fanny and Edmund’s] ideals necessarily imply criticism of what they observe around them; and yet the very code by which they mean to live excludes the possibility of its expression, especially to their elders” (269). In other words, both Fanny and Edward, as the narrator admits, are caught in a world where their good principles cannot serve them because others do not adhere to them. Evangelicalism preaches duty and respect to elders and people in positions of authority—but how can morally upright young people follow this rule when their elders and betters are corrupt and selfish? *Mansfield Park* therefore asks its readers what happens, under Evangelicalism, when the leaders of society (or family) are less than perfect. What happens when the blind and ultimately selfish Sir Thomas gets to make all the important decisions, and all the

lesser ones are left to the willfully partial, downright mean, and extremely selfish Mrs. Norris? If you are an Edmund or a Fanny trying to live by Evangelical principles, you have no options.

Waldron shows us a small instance of this complete dysfunction of the Evangelical ideal: when Fanny thinks she has to go live with Mrs. Norris, she can do nothing about it—and when she goes to Edmund for help, he will not let himself do anything about it either. Neither of them can express, even to each other, the reasons why living with Mrs. Norris would be unbearable to Fanny; Edmund only responds with what Waldron characterizes as “mouthing some pious untruths” (269) (he says “I think she is behaving better already; and when you are her only companion, you *must* be important to her” [29; vol. I, ch. 3]). This behavior, especially from one who could have told his father what harm would come from leaving Fanny to her aunt’s sole guardianship, is not just spineless but harmful: Waldron sees it as “piety, obedience, and respect for elders leading to a distortion of the truth and a deliberate dilution of any realities which conflict with their code” (269). Edmund’s response to Fanny’s dilemma is Evangelical: because the prospect of Fanny living with Mrs. Norris is, theoretically, a good idea—because, in an ideal, Evangelical world, they should find comfort in each other—Edmund suggests that this will really happen. He has no other recourse; standing up for Fanny would require denouncing his aunt, and the principles of Evangelicalism forbid this.

Fanny is not even able to adhere to the principles she holds: even when she is solidly against participating in the play, she only refuses to *appear* to approve of it—to be seen as taking part in it. In truth, she manages to learn most of it by heart, better than some of the actors, and does the prompting and much of the costume work. Though Austen may not see adult playacting as inappropriate—Fanny’s scandalized response to the prospect of the play is “surprising when one realizes that for years theatricals of some kind had been an annual institution at Steventon

Parsonage” (Kaye-Smith, 144)—Fanny views *Lovers’ Vows*, “rightly in terms of the novel, as an iniquitous proceeding” [emphasis mine] (Waldron 273). As Waldron says, in terms of the novel and its Evangelistic main characters, theatricals of any kind are suspect, and such a play as *Lovers’ Vows* would be scandalous. But while Fanny is embarrassed to speak the lines in front of people, she knows the story better than any of the rest, and rather than truly conscientiously objecting and boycotting the play, as she pretends to, she just refrains from actually acting in it—until, of course, in the end, she decides to act as well and is saved from hypocrisy only by the timely arrival of Sir Thomas. Fanny’s thought process in finally deciding to acquiesce to acting is at first Evangelical, and then her duty gives way to her feelings for Edmund. She is reluctant: “She could not endure the idea of it...She had known it would irritate and distress her—she had known it her duty to keep away. She was properly punished.” Then, in the final moments of her decision, it is love and not duty that guides her: “as they all persevered—as Edmund repeated his wish, and with a look of even fond dependence on her good nature, she must yield. She would do her best.” In truth, Fanny’s aversion to acting is not moral compunction—it is her knowledge that it will hurt her to participate in such a play with Edmund and Mary. Yet, though she at first abstains from actually acting, she is watching just as much of the lovers’ interactions as she would had she not been in the play. She tries to separate herself from the wrongdoing she sees during the play—not the wrongdoing of putting on private theatricals, but Henry, Maria, and Julia’s wrong behavior (and Edmund and Mary’s painful behavior). But since she cannot fix what is wrong around her, or even talk about it, Fanny is just as complicit in what is happening around her as she would be in actually participating in it (and therefore seeming to endorse it).

Another good example of Fanny’s failure as an Evangelical is the incident with Fanny’s horse. She resents it when Edmund lets Mary ride the horse, and even more when he forgets to

return in time for Fanny's ride. Yet she must not say this, since she must be submissive and self-sacrificing, and she must seem to like Mary. Her thoughts, though they admit to being resentful, show that Fanny will not admit, even to herself, the deeper reason behind her resentment. She takes care, even in her thoughts, to (painfully) force herself into the Evangelical paradigm. This is shown in the construction of the thought "she began to think it rather hard upon the mare to have such double duty; if she were forgotten, the poor mare should be remembered" (79; vol. I, ch. 7)—Fanny is careful, even in her own mind, to be modest and self-sacrificing. She must not (honestly) express her sense of hurt feelings because Edmund has disregarded her in favor of Mary; she cannot even admit that it is rude of them both to keep her waiting—she must always be thinking considerately of others and not of herself—so she turns to concern for the horse. This kind of gymnastic mental manipulation is common to Fanny. She often deceives even herself in her attempts to conform to Evangelical principles—because these principles take as their purview not just the rectitude of a person's actions, but of their thoughts.

But in thoughts, and even in actions, Fanny is continually falling short of the Evangelical ideal. After Mary apologizes for keeping the horse too long, "Fanny's answer was extremely civil, and Edmund added his conviction that she could be in no hurry" (80; vol. I, ch. 7). If Fanny's answer is so civil, why does Edmund need to add anything? Clearly, Fanny's civility did not provide what was needed to convince her hearers that she was truly not resentful of the horse's absence. More's ideal woman would not only have recognized the source of her feelings—her jealousy over Edmund—but she would have endeavored to appear completely unresentful and amiable instead of simply polite, and in addition, would have tried to quell both the resentment and the jealousy, not for the sake of appearances, but of goodness. Fanny, as Waldron points out, may think she is being stoic in bearing with Edmund's neglect, but she in

fact reveals her suffering and makes him feel guilty. The narrator tells us that “she had been feeling neglected, and been struggling against discontent and envy for some days past” (87; vol. I, ch. 7) and then lets us see how Fanny subtly, and perhaps even unconsciously, blames Edmund for his neglect. After not being able to ride for several days, and being ordered out into the sun by both her aunts, Fanny succumbs to a headache and lies on the sofa, conspicuously absent to Edmund when he returns and inquires after her. She does not protest that her aunts have caused her no trouble. She does not minimize the suffering of her headache in order to reassure Edmund. She refrains from complaining or accusing, but that is all. Waldron points out that this is not ideal-woman behavior: “Lucilla Stanley would not have used her silence to cloak resentment, for she never experiences any” (272).

It is this last qualification—“for she never experiences any”—that is the crux for Waldron. She would agree with my earlier characterization of the perfect Evangelical woman as one who would not just make it seem as if she never experiences resentment, but actively try to combat such feelings within herself when they appear. This is what More teaches in *Cælebs*, with Lucilla as an example. But Waldron’s argument is that it is easy for Lucilla to be an ideal Evangelical woman because she is so good she would never experience such unworthy sentiments as resentment or jealousy. In this case, Austen is giving the lie to More’s perfect heroine—depicting a normal, well-meaning, very human girl who *is* subject to unpleasant feelings, applies More’s principles to her situation, and fails to get the expected results. The bulk of Waldron’s argument here seems justified, but it may not be fair to characterize *Cælebs* and Lucilla as she does. Hannah More would certainly counter this kind of argument by saying that Lucilla *does* struggle with her sins, and her success is in behaving well despite them and in continually battling with herself to subdue them. Charles, the protagonist, actually thinks like

Waldron—he tells Lucilla how remarkable it is that she is so good. She protests that no one is without sin, and that she continually struggles with her worse impulses and feelings (vol. II, p. 104-6). The reason Lucilla is an unreasonable model—the reason Austen found the need to write a character like Fanny—is not that she never feels emotions like resentment, is never tempted to act badly, but that she consistently and completely succeeds in putting aside these temptations and emotions. This is far more insidious: More presents us, not with a flat, perfect character who has no need of Evangelical principles because she is such an exemplary model of them, but with a heroine who is able unerringly to execute More's strictures. It makes it seem as if anyone who understands what is moral, who has been told (by More and the Evangelicals) the right way to live, and who cannot live up to this ideal, is just not trying. Lucilla's insistence on her own fallibility is what makes her perfection dangerous in Austen's eyes.

Fanny, as a character, comes from Austen's understanding of the nature of human emotions and reactions. Fanny exposes the impracticality—or impossibility—of behaving like Lucilla. In *Cælebs*, readers don't see into Lucilla's mind, but she never seems powerfully affected by emotion or frustrated by any unfairness in her life—largely because there is nothing to be frustrated with in her life. Her parents are perfect, moral Evangelicals, and she has always been raised by and around good, considerate people. She has been taught to see those around her who do not live up to the Evangelical ideal as unfortunate people she needs to help, and as examples of what not to do, but none of these people ever so much as inconvenience her.

Waldron explicitly casts Fanny as the epitome of failure in the Evangelical struggle—not because Fanny is weak and cannot implement Evangelical principles but because the world has arrayed itself so completely against her. “Fanny is not strong in her principles—she only thinks she is, because she has learned a set of rules which she supposes will guide her in any crisis,”

Waldron concludes. This is indeed a biting counterargument to More: Evangelical principles do nothing but cause Fanny misery, and would do so in any case where the situation is substantially less than perfect. Austen does not just change the situation she puts her heroine into, but also changes that of Edmund, her other “Evangelical,” as well. As Waldron notes, “significantly, Edmund does just what More’s Cœlebs does not do; he falls for a girl who is the complete opposite of the conduct-book model” (270). Charles (or Cœlebs, as he is known only in the title) *decides* not to fall in love before completely satisfying himself that his prospective wife is morally fit and would be approved by both his father and mother, and—miraculously, as Austen seems to think—he succeeds and allows himself to love only the exemplary Lucilla. Additionally, Charles seems to think that at any point, had he discovered some flaw in Lucilla, he would have been able to withdraw his affections, however regretfully, and move on. Even had he begun to love a woman, he is sure that any problem with her morals would weigh more than his love and make it impossible for him to consider marrying her, whatever other good qualities she might possess.

Edmund, of course, is a character drawn more realistically—and so is the object of his love. Waldron returns to the puzzling feelings of many readers: feelings of admiration for Mary, despite her faults. She is, in fact, more immediately interesting than Fanny, and Waldron argues that she is never knowingly unkind to anyone (this statement may hold true if we disregard the end of the novel and Mary’s responses to Henry’s elopement and Tom’s illness, perhaps classifying them as Austen’s *deus ex machina* way of ending the story with conviction instead of an expression of Mary’s true character). For most of the story, Mary is an almost Elizabeth Bennet-like figure, more cynical because she has been worse treated, and because she has had no sympathetic Jane, no practical Mrs. Gardiner, not even a wise though sarcastic Mr. Bennet to

confide in and take direction from. Mary even has Austen's confidence: when she defends Fanny from Mrs. Norris, the narrator breaks in to assure us that she is "almost purely governed" by "really good feelings" (173; vol. I, ch. 15) (Waldron 274). Of course, the "almost" reminds us that sometimes Mary has bad feelings—though these, it can be argued, are remnants of her bad upbringing, rather than mercenary intentions.

Fanny's interactions with Mary reveal her own faults: it is clear that Fanny does not like Mary because of her superior charm and influence over Edmund and everyone at Mansfield, not, as she pretends, principally because of Mary's faulty principles. In fact, Fanny seizes on every afforded instance of Mary's bad upbringing and wrong opinions, not to try to correct her or befriend her, simply to point out her failings. And in most instances, it is not really Mary's morals that Fanny cares about, as Waldron notes. She points out, "Fanny is not concerned about generalized right and wrong; it is Mary who is the enemy" (275) and quotes Fanny's thoughts after Edmund tells her he will act in the play: "Alas! it was all Miss Crawford's doing" and "no matter—it was all misery *now*" [emphasis Waldron's]. "It was all misery now" implies that Fanny no longer cares—and in fact, never really cared—about the morality of putting on the play, just about how it would affect her. She is miserable because Edmund has abandoned her, not because he has abandoned his principles. And Waldron shows us how quick she is to blame Mary for Edmund's weakness; there is no Christian allowance for Mary's human selfishness and thoughtlessness, but every excuse is made for Edmund betraying his stated principles. Waldron, rightly, cites this passage as an example of "the ease with which unacceptable human feelings can be camouflaged in a system like Evangelicalism" (275). Austen is showing her readers that Evangelical rules do worse than nothing for Fanny in this situation—they allow her cover for her

selfish feelings. She can pretend to disapprove of Mary for her morals, even to herself, and is relieved from the duty of reproving her own jealousy.

Waldron shows us that “the kind of religion that Edmund and Fanny have tried to practice serves no moral purpose—it produces at best confusion (Edmund) and at worse a chill intolerance aggravated by intellectual dishonesty (Fanny). It is counterproductive to the ostensible purposes and duties of religion: “Fanny does not want Mary to reconcile herself to the life of a country parson” (276), though this is exactly what Anglicanism would say is the best outcome for her. Edmund’s marrying Mary would be an instance of the very goals of religion being accomplished—he would save her from a life of dissipation, and gradually correct her faults (as she would correct his). With Fanny’s help, the match would be even more morally advantageous. And the ostensible precepts of Evangelicalism would dictate that everyone who is in possession of virtue and right morals should try to spread them to those who are less fortunate. Yet Austen is revealing More’s hypocrisy—because of course Charles could never marry a woman whose virtues and values were not already perfect. He only observes faults in women and rejects them, never tries to help them. Waldron writes, “the kind of selfless love which would enable [Fanny] to devote herself to Mary’s improvement for Edmund’s sake—surely more in line with the ideals of *Cælebs*—is quite alien to Fanny” (278). But Waldron fails to point out that it is certainly Fanny’s attempt to adhere to Evangelicalism that forces her to reject such a selfless course of action. The rhetoric and the mindset of Evangelicalism teach one to always be on the lookout for the slightest moral fault and to repress it; they do not really teach one how to deal with these faults. Evangelicalism, Austen seems to be saying, does not advocate true “improvement” of mind and feelings—it is more about the kind of shallow “improvements” that one might make to an estate, such as tearing up an avenue and rearranging the approach, though

one cannot do anything about the position of the house. Austen does not believe that selflessness of the kind described above is impossible to achieve—Anne Eliot offers to care for her rival in *Persuasion*—she just thinks Evangelicalism does not promote or even allow it.

Waldron lists several points in the novel in which we see Mary ready, even eager, to be reformed. When Mary and Edmund fight and Edmund goes away to stay with friends, we see Mary repentant for her harsh words about the clergy, ready to discuss her repentance with Fanny. Waldron says, “here is a soul to be saved, but Fanny once more fails to overcome her own desires and take the opportunity, confining herself to the shortest possible answers” (278). With the episode of the gold chain, we see Fanny not only failing to act as a friend to Mary, but showing “real insensitivity to other people’s feelings” when she tries to return Mary’s gift (Waldron 276). Waldron says this “suggestion shows the extent of her moral muddle; Edmund himself is shocked and immediately straightens her out; it almost seems as if he has kept a greater hold on charity and loving-kindness than Fanny for the very reason that his Evangelical principles are weaker” (276). It is rude to return a gift like this—but it seems less so in context: Fanny wants to return the gift because it comes from Miss Crawford, but she has another reason as well. Mary manipulated her in giving the gift, making her choose a chain that was originally a gift from Henry. Fanny both wants to give the necklace back so she will not be seen as indebted to or intimate with Mary, but also because she sees it as improper that Mary gave her the gift in the first place.

Waldron further reprovcs Fanny for feeling “positively glad” that Edmund and Mary have had a fight (277), which is hard to deny. Waldron even turns Fanny’s own words against her: Fanny describes Mary’s mind as “darkened, yet fancying itself light”<sup>14</sup> because she does not

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<sup>14</sup>This description is distinctly biblical (*MP* 718).

even realize the extent to which she is morally compromised (423; vol. III, ch. 6). Waldron accuses Fanny of the same thing: she fancies her own mind pure, though all the while she is hiding feelings and actions that are just as selfish as Mary's. Waldron insists on Mary's (and even Henry's) redeemability, and argues that the narrator thinks the same. She cites the narrator's comment:

Experience might have hoped more for any young people so circumstanced, and impartiality would not have denied to Miss Crawford's nature that participation of the general nature of women which would lead her to adopt the opinions of the man she loved and respected as her own. But as such were Fanny's persuasions, she suffered very much from them, and could never speak of Miss Crawford without pain. (424; vol. III, ch. 6)

Austen, as opposed to More, seems to think that a faulty education is an opportunity for understanding, rather than a cause for censure and avoidance. Yet on another level, this comment seems ironic: the idea that "the general nature of women" leads them to "adopt the opinions of the man [they love]" might be a fitting Evangelical opinion, but it does not seem like Austen's. Rather, Austen could be inserting this opinion facetiously—and is therefore less sanguine about Mary's redemption than Waldron asserts.

### *Mansfield Park as a Social and Feminist Critique of Evangelicalism*

To Waldron, Austen's entire aim in writing *Mansfield Park* is to show readers that "the easy solutions of *Cælebs* are mere chimeras" and that "[Fanny's] moral standards are ineffective even to herself because they are too simple to deal with real-life crisis (273). Whether it is their simplicity that is the ultimate problem is unclear—Waldron is more on target when she explains

that “almost every spontaneous feeling that [Fanny] has conflicts with some duty which is part of her code” (271). A doctrine which disregards human nature so entirely as Evangelicalism has done is bound to fail—and not only to fail, but to be harmful to those who, with the best intent, try to enact it. But more than that, Austen may be suggesting that it is futile—and harmful—to try to impose such strict and specific moral rules on even the most intelligent and well-meaning of people. Fanny would do much better to follow the general guidelines of her Anglican religion and consult her intuition about how to behave secularly, rather than referring to a complicated and rigid set of moral dictates. Austen also wants to make clear just how nonsensical Evangelicalism’s views on women are: they ask Fanny to be a stalwart proponent of her beliefs, but at the same time, to act as if her thoughts—and her entire self—were worthless. As Waldron puts it, “the inability of Fanny’s moral principles to do anything to help others out of their confusion and moral dilemmas” is shocking, continuing, “her habits of submission, respect and obedience make this impossible” (272). Fanny is trapped, the victim of “an inflexible system which has little room for generosity and which gives her every opportunity for self-deception” (280). One of the prime components of goodness, under the Anglican church, and supposedly under Evangelicalism, is charity and generosity. But we hear about charity only once in *Mansfield Park*; the description of Fanny’s East room mentions that it has space for “her works of charity and ingenuity” (178; vol. I, ch. 16). While Lucilla Stanley’s feats of charity take up at least half of all the passages devoted to her description, Austen says no more about Fanny and her charitable “works”. Fanny never ventures out into the community, nor does she ever mention charity in conversation. Her sojourn at Portsmouth may be said to include charity—but it really just causes her to “learn how dependent upon ease, refinement, and money is the kind of morality she wants to practise” (Waldron 279).

In the end Waldron concludes: “[Fanny’s] principles, though rigid, are not strong; her code of good conduct will not bear the pressure of circumstances; but none of this is her fault; she is a victim, not a villain” (281). It is Fanny’s mistakes, Waldron argues, that cause what she calls “the almost unmitigated disaster of the ending” of *Mansfield Park*. This is the climax of Waldron’s argument, and her most bold assertion: that the ending of the novel is entirely unsatisfactory and is meant to be so. She says that none of the characters get what they wanted out of life, not even Fanny, who wanted Edmund to truly love and want her, rather than being satisfied with her after being disappointed in his first choice (280). Perhaps she is somewhat happy—and Edmund, of course, can be seen as happy too—he has been provided with a wife whose every thought he has helped to form. As Charles says in *Cælebs*, “shall we not rejoice in a companion who has drawn, though less copiously, perhaps, from the same rich sources with ourselves; who can relish the beauty we quote, and trace the allusion at which we hint?” (vol. II 233-234). In other words, who would not be happy with a woman educated by one’s self, who will appreciate, perhaps with awe, one’s wit but certainly not exceed it? Edmund, however, is not as condescending, nor as self-centered, as Charles—he had once hoped to marry Mary, a woman with whom he enjoyed disagreeing. So he, too, is faced with a disappointing life at the end of the novel—just as is everyone else. Crucially, Waldron thinks that readers “are reminded of the ideal, alternative ending” in a not-too-subtle authorial insertion:

Would [Henry] have deserved more, there can be no doubt that more would have been obtained; especially when that marriage had taken place, which would have given him the assistance of her conscience in subduing her first inclination, and brought them very often together. Would he have persevered, and uprightly,

Fanny must have been his reward, and a reward very voluntarily bestowed, within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary.

Waldron sees this passage as Austen's message to readers intimating what should have happened, had Fanny not misapplied her Evangelicalism. Waldron insists that "[Austen's] aim was to give the lie to Evangelical certainties, which would have allowed a conventionally happy ending" (281). In other words, Austen refuses to let Fanny end up happily married to Edmund and happy, as well, in her rejection and banishment of the Crawfords. The above "what if" passage is therefore expressly inserted to cast doubt into readers' minds. But the passage emphasizes that Henry did *not* deserve more, that he did not act honorably. Waldron's "what if" ending does not seem to be at all likely. This "what if" statement seems, to the contrast, to emphasize the ending that did happen—the conventionally Evangelical ending. In this case (as opposed to in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*) Austen is undermining her source novel by enacting the ending it would prescribe. We are left with the typical Evangelical solution to all Fanny's problems—but we see how much Austen had to manipulate the story in order for us to get there. Yet again, Austen's ending is a reaction against a faulty source text—a reaction that aims to undermine readerly expectations based on other novels.

Waldron sees the ending of *Mansfield Park* as its final blow to Evangelicalism: "the message," she says, "is that the brand of 'goodness' embodied in Fanny, Edmund, and, to some extent, Sir Thomas has not prevailed. It exists, but has been impotent. The power of example, as proffered in the work of Hannah More, has, in this realist novel, failed, because it has largely rescued those who were never really in danger" (267). This is a serious, and a telling, accusation. In fact, *Mansfield Park's* ending does seem to imply that those whose morals are faulty are simply irretrievable, and those who know better should just abandon them as soon as possible so

as not to become tainted by association. Taken as Austen's depiction of what must happen under Evangelical rule, this interpretation of events casts Austen as a fervent objector to Evangelicalism, especially in its approach to marriage.

Though Waldron's argument is tempting, especially for those attempting to read Austen as liberal and feminist, her reading of *Cælebs*—and therefore her reading of *Mansfield Park*—neglects certain nuances as well as several larger aspects of the authors' arguments. Waldron's idea that every part of *Mansfield Park* is designed to invert the argument of *Cælebs* and show Evangelicalism to be completely wrong-headed is compelling. But when we examine *Cælebs* closely we see that Austen's view of it must be considerably more complex. A more nuanced reading of *Cælebs* can actually serve to make a stronger argument about Austen's political and feminist intentions in writing *Mansfield Park* as she did. Waldron's argument paints *Mansfield Park* as the ruination of and the antithesis to *Cælebs* in every possible way; she implies that Austen's argument is a simple, yet forceful, rejection of everything Evangelical. But Waldron does not extend her analysis to include any larger argument on Austen's part, and she ignores the complicated relationship between certain parts of *Cælebs* and corresponding parts of *Mansfield Park* which illuminates this larger argument. She focuses too much on Evangelicalism, to the exclusion of other aspects of Austen's argument—aspects which relate to Evangelicalism but do not necessarily center on it.

Let us start with a small nuance. One of the relatively minor but carefully emphasized tenets of female education in *Cælebs* is the limitation of so-called "accomplishments" in favor of modesty and apprenticeship in the ways of wifedom. Lucilla, for example, "neither sings nor plays" "though she has a correct ear" (vol. 1, 187) and this is a sign of her father's good judgment and her good (Evangelical) breeding. So when we are told that Fanny "does not want

to learn either music or drawing” (21; vol. I, ch. 2), it is tempting to attribute this choice to her Evangelical ideas—to say that Austen is signaling that Fanny is an Evangelical by emphasizing her lack of interest in “accomplishments.” But her decision not to be taught art or music is a social one rather than one of principle. Fanny chooses to refrain from developing accomplishments because she knows she is a poor relation and *must* appear inferior to the Miss Bertrams. Sir Thomas takes her in with the intention to make it clear that she is below his children, and even without Mrs. Norris’s bluntness, Fanny is quite aware that she must not strive to equal her cousins’ charms. Her refusal to learn such accomplishments is a tactful admission of her position.

Other correspondences between the two novels show Austen offering a social message, but more subtly. The multiple discussions of the duty of the clergy, which seem to serve no other purpose in the text than to expose the difference in belief between Mary and Edmund, are actually jabs at the interminable clerical debates in *Cælebs*. But even this is at its heart an issue of class. The inimitable Mr. Stanley of *Cælebs*, and Charles himself, believe that a preacher should compose his own sermons in order to speak on the level of the people (vol. II, 15-16), but he should “never thro[w] the liturgical service into the background by a long elaborate composition of his own, delivered with superior force and emphasis” (vol. I, 202). More’s position is further confused by an additional example—Charles encounters a man named Mr. Ranby, neither very intelligent nor forceful, who reads his family’s morning prayer from “a printed form” rather than from his own compositions. After he is reprimanded by his wife for this behavior,

the poor man, who was really well disposed, very properly defended himself by saying, that he hoped his own heart went along with every word he read; and as to

his family, he thought it much more beneficial for them to join in an excellent composition of a judicious divine, than to attend to any such crude rhapsody as he should be able to produce...(vol. I, 56)

The rather confused treatment of the issue of sermons in *Cælebs* is, in *Mansfield Park*, turned explicitly into a social issue. Henry Crawford, trying to please Fanny, announces

“The preacher who can touch and affect such an heterogeneous mass of hearers, on subjects limited, and long worn threadbare in all common hands; who can say anything new or striking, anything that rouses the attention without offending the taste, or wearing out the feelings of his hearers, is a man whom one could not, in his public capacity, honour enough. I should like to be such a man.” (394; vol. III, ch. 3)

But he continues, “I could not preach but to the educated; to those who were capable of estimating my composition” (395; vol. III, ch. 3). This is clearly a slight on Henry’s character in Fanny’s eyes—yet ironically it can be seen as a somewhat distorted reflection of the Evangelical stance on sermons. Putting it this way shows the classism that underlies Evangelicalism: the reason More’s position seems to be so fluid is that the (unspoken) principle behind it comes from a strict awareness of class difference. Mr. Stanley, who lives among uneducated people but has secured himself a wise (and adequately genteel) clergyman, advocates for the dumbing down of sermons. He wants his people to be able to understand and be interested in sermons, and he thinks a sermon too well-written will not only be distracting and possibly confusing to its listeners, but could give them educational pretensions. As he demonstrates when speaking of his daughters, Mr. Stanley believes that too much learning can be dangerous—not for himself, of course, but for women and those of the lower classes.

These examples are peripheral but important: they show that Austen was not just single-mindedly refuting Evangelicalism in *Mansfield Park*, but refuting it after considering its social assumptions and implications. There are three more examples from *Cælebs* which are integral to understanding *Mansfield Park*. Waldron does not mention these plot points, though they are strikingly similar to some of Austen's—perhaps because she felt this similarity would weaken her argument that Austen meant to defy Evangelicalism in writing *Mansfield Park*. Though these examples certainly complicate Waldron's reading, and necessitate its re-statement in different terms, they do not nullify it.

The first example is that of Mr. Stanhope, an Edmund-like figure who is ruled by his wife. Mr. Stanley tells us about him, saying “though poor Stanhope's conduct is so correct, and his attachment to his wife so notorious” (vol. I, 128), his marital life is a misery. Stanley continues, “the gentleness of his temper leads him not only to sacrifice his peace, but to infringe on his veracity in order to keep her quiet” (vol. I, 126). While nothing similar to these descriptions appears in *Mansfield Park*, Stanley's account of how poor Mr. Stanhope got himself into this predicament sounds familiar: as Stanley explains, it was by

fancying himself preferred by a woman, who had no one recommendation but beauty. He was overcome with her marked attentions so far as to declare himself, without knowing her real disposition. What she wanted in understanding, she made up in spirit. The more she exacted, the more he submitted, and her demands grew in proportion to his sacrifices. (vol. I, 125)

This sounds like an exaggerated account of Mary's courtship of Edmund: he is encouraged by her “marked attentions,” she has spirit *and* understanding, but is sometimes ignorant (or so Edmund thinks). And at least in Fanny's eyes, she causes Edmund to sacrifice his better

judgment. Austen has taken this account from *Cælebs* and softened it into a probable real-world situation involving human characters. She has made the seductress more likable and less conniving and the dupe less “gentle,” firmer. The difference—put plainly—is in the use of gender stereotypes. More’s woman is stupid, for allowing women both power and intelligence would upset the accepted conventions which give power to men, unless the men are especially weak and the women are unnatural. The danger of Mary is not that she might coerce Edmund into marrying her and then rule him like a despot—this is absurd, considering Edmund’s character. What is dangerous in Mary’s presence in *Mansfield Park*—dangerous to the norm—is the very real possibility that she might *convince* Edmund just as he proposes to convince and reform *her*. And what is especially radical is Austen’s hint, in the passage Waldron highlights, that it might have been better if Edmund and Mary had married and embarked on a life of mutual convincing and mellowing. This advocacy of an equal relationship points out just how unbalanced the marriages in *Cælebs* are, even the ideal ones. In this case, Austen’s reaction against Evangelicalism is a feminist one.

One can argue that the crucial way Fanny fails to properly implement Evangelical ideals is in her lack of self-awareness. As Waldron argues, it is the contradictory nature of Evangelical doctrines that allows Fanny to remain oblivious—or oblivious enough—to her failures in kindness and morality. But there is another factor here that Austen wants to emphasize: she does not think that humans are simply incapable of seeing their own jealousy or unkindness and acting to remove it, though she does think Evangelicalism fails to take into account the complexity of human nature. The underlying reason why Fanny cannot examine her mind as a true Evangelical would is that the natural and good sentiments in her mind are as unacceptable to those around her as are her jealousy and resentment. She has practice repressing all her emotions, since she has

grown up knowing that they matter to no one, and that most of her thoughts about her world would be unpleasant to those who run it. She has more to contend with than Lucilla Stanley (or Charles, for that matter) does. In *Cælebs*, Charles is the one who feels jealousy, but he is aware of it, and decides that “a wrong feeling at which one has virtue enough left to blush, is seldom lasting, and shame soon expel[s] it” (vol. I, 235). But Charles does not conquer his jealousy; it fades only because he learns it was completely unfounded. In his ideal world, a woman could never prefer the inferior Lord Staunton to him. In Fanny’s world, however, Edmund’s love for Mary is real and Fanny has no reason to hope. Additionally, she has no power to act to persuade Edmund to love her—unlike Charles, she must be content to wait to be noticed.

In other cases, Austen’s reaction is one which rescues women from being relegated to the position of slaves to their parents and which again emphasizes the awful impact social hierarchy has on women’s lives (and not on men’s). *Cælebs* presents two examples of situations similar to Fanny’s when she attempts to refuse Henry’s offer of marriage. One describes a married couple, explaining why they are both so miserable in the marriage:

They married not only without any inclination on either side, but on her part with something more than indifference, with a preference for another person. She married through an implicit obedience to her mother’s will, which she had never in any instance opposed...She had long entertained a partiality for a most deserving young clergyman; much her inferior in rank and fortune. ...she resolved never to see him again, and had even prevailed on him to quit the country, and settle in a distant place...(vol. I, 248)

This sounds eerily like Fanny’s situation with regard to Edmund, though with certain key differences. Importantly, Fanny is the inferior in fortune and rank in *Mansfield Park*, and

therefore could never—or would never—ask Edmund to avoid her. And indeed, the reason she cannot tell Sir Thomas why she cannot marry Henry is that he would have been offended at her presumption in admiring Edmund. She cannot even admit this to herself—her very wishes and feelings are limited by society in general and by her immediate society at Mansfield.

The other difference in these two cases is that Fanny dares to disobey Sir Thomas though she, like the woman in *Cælebs*, had never done so before. In *Cælebs*, the woman is portrayed as doing the right thing in obeying her parent and committing herself to a miserable marriage with a man who scorns her and religion, with little hope of any improvement. She is, after years of misery, rewarded for her filial obedience and wifely submission by finally, gradually, reforming her husband into a religious man and a considerate husband. However, the other example is a marriage proposal Lucilla Stanley receives. She immediately refuses because she does not like the man's principles, and he retorts that if this is her only objection to the marriage, she can reform him once they are married. Lucilla responds, “No, my Lord, I will never add to the number of those rash women who have risked their eternal happiness on this vain hope” (vol. II, 81). In this case, More presents the rejection as the right thing because it is supported by Lucilla's parents. The lesson seems to be that if one cannot avoid entering into a marriage with an irreligious man (and one *cannot* avoid it if doing so would mean contradicting a parent), then there is still the hope that with scrupulous submission, humility, and a lot of prayer, one might be able to reform the otherwise unbearable husband after ten or so years. But if one is not forced by one's parents, agreeing to such a marriage would be ill-advised and even immoral.

In light of these two examples, we must reconsider the possible hint from Austen of the ideal alternative ending in which Edmund and Fanny would, through marriage, reform Mary and Henry. Is Austen making light of the idea that such reform is possible or desirable? Or is she

being ironic about Lucilla's scruples? Certainly she is contradicting Lucilla's opinion that "to conquer a well founded affection, a justifiable attachment, I should imagine, requires the powerful principle of Christian piety; and what cannot that effect?" (vol. I, 246-7). Fanny could not simply will herself to forget Edmund through Christianity—and the reason for this is her situation. Fanny is in the position of being a poor relation, disregarded by everyone except Edmund. Because of her awareness of her place in the miniature society of Mansfield, she cannot tell Sir Thomas that Henry's principles are bad—she cannot report bad things about Maria and Julia. Fanny's position traps her; her only option is to defy Sir Thomas, though this hurts her Evangelical sensibilities. By the end of the novel, though, when she sees Edmund close to marrying Mary, her outlook has changed and she is ready to try reforming Henry and overcoming her love for Edmund. It is, again, Fanny's awareness of her social position that prompts this change—her options have narrowed even further since being sent to Portsmouth. She is presented with no hope of gaining Edmund, and with the prospect of living in poverty should she not marry Henry. Though her Evangelical scruples hold out a little longer—just long enough for Austen to save Fanny through the *deus ex machina* of the elopement—Fanny would have given in and married Henry and enacted Waldron's "ideal" ending, if given the option. Austen saves Fanny from having to make a marriage of convenience—and shows us that Evangelicalism has no place for such a marriage, while it simultaneously bars Fanny from pursuing any other option.

In portraying Fanny's decision-making as she does, Austen shows the absurdity of expecting women to act according to a complicated Evangelical code when they must struggle with the realities of being marginalized in society. Neither of the possible endings to *Mansfield Park* is ideal. But the second ending—the marriage with Henry—is not as horrible as the

Evangelical viewpoint insists. It is, in fact, the more real of the two endings—the one that many women must settle for, especially if doctrines like Evangelicalism give them no way to counter their social status on their own terms. Austen is saying that, in an unideal world, sometimes women have to make the practical choice because their ideal choice (in Fanny's case marrying Edmund) would never happen outside a novel, and if it did, it might not be as ideal as it seemed.

In general, Austen is doing what Waldron argues she does: she is using *Mansfield Park* as a kind of anti-*Cælebs*, to show just what is wrong with Evangelicalism. But, as we can see from Austen's letters, she is not as completely opposed to Evangelicalism as Waldron thinks. After reading *Cælebs*, in fact, one can see that many of its sentiments are good ones—ones with which Austen would agree. She thinks that people who are Evangelicals because they want to be good are worthy. What she objects to are the assumptions inherent in More's Evangelical discourse. Evangelicalism might work in an ideal world—one without such glaring class and gender prejudices. More's condescending, didactic advice to the middle classes is irksome to Austen, who takes care to point out not just its impracticality and its hypocrisy, but its willful disregard of the plight of an unwealthy woman in a wealthy man's world.

## CHAPTER FIVE: An “Imaginist” and a Quotationist: Reading and Writing in *Emma* and *Persuasion*

*Emma* and *Persuasion* might seem to be the two novels of Austen’s six which differ the most from each other. *Emma* ostensibly embraces the traditional hierarchy of the class system, while *Persuasion* advocates, sweepingly, for meritocracy as the new rule of English society. The heroines themselves cannot be more different: Emma, loved and respected by almost everyone she has ever encountered, is outgoing but a little selfish. Anne, though she should (if she were in *Emma*) be even more respected than Emma herself, due to her position in society as a baronet’s daughter, has no influence over her family and is in fact overlooked by virtually everyone. She seems far more sensitive than Emma, always considerate, and often aware of others’ feelings and motives.

Yet these two novels, the last Austen completed, distinguish themselves from the rest of Austen’s work in the same way: in their approach to, and integration of, literature. The way reading (and writing) is regarded in the two novels shows a maturation of Austen’s views on the subject; her methods of using allusion have also evolved. From enthusiastically advocating for the importance of literature in life in *Northanger Abbey*, from writing novels centering around the criticism of one faulty source, as in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Mansfield Park*, Austen has changed her view of literature to one of more marked skepticism. Though she has, of course, questioned literature’s supremacy as a recourse to which her characters can turn in any situation and has investigated the dangers of over-relying on its wisdom, she has never depicted the written word as so unreliable as it proves to be in *Emma*, and so ineffectual as it appears in *Persuasion*.

*Emma Woodhouse: Writer and Re-writer*

Emma is not the first of Austen's heroines to express the absurdity of the common expectation that women should prefer "educational" reading to novels or to experience. Like Catherine, Emma finds it difficult to commit herself to a dedicated course of serious reading. Mr. Knightley's characterization of her attitude towards improving herself by reading is revealing: he says

Emma has been meaning to read more since she was twelve years old. I have seen a great many lists of her drawing up at various times of books that she meant to read regularly through—and very good lists they were—very well chosen, and very neatly arranged...She will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding. (*E* 37; vol. I, ch. 5)

On one level, this comment tells us about Emma—about her good intentions, and her tendency to get her own way, about her intelligence and her limited work ethic—but it is also a self-reflexive comment on heroines and on didactic fiction. As Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan point out, there are several references to a popular didactic novel, *Adelaide and Theodore*, in *Emma*. Emma jokingly compares herself to Adelaide when speaking of Mrs. Weston's transition from governess to mother: "like the Baronne d'Almane [and] La Comtesse d'Ostalis, in Madame de Genlis' *Adelaide and Theodore*...we shall now see her own little Adelaide educated on a more perfect plan" (503; vol. III, ch. 17). Austen also alludes to this novel in Emma's misunderstanding of Mr. Elton: just as in *Emma*, there is confusion in *Adelaide and Theodore* regarding romance and portrait-painting, as "Charles de Valmont's response to a portrait is supposed to reveal his love for the subject when in fact he is in love with the painter" (*E* 560 [notes]). But perhaps the most interesting connection between *Emma* and *Adelaide and Theodore*

is that of Emma's proposed reading lists, which she draws up at various ages. This is perhaps an oblique jab at de Genlis, because, as Cronin and McMillan note, the appendix of *Adelaide and Theodore* contains a prescribed course of reading for any young girl, modeled on that of the heroine, from the age of six to twenty-two (E xl). Emma must have followed a similar plan of reading, as she has been educated by Miss Taylor. But she has been too smart and too willful for Miss Taylor, and her reading has presumably fallen short of the ideal evinced in de Genlis' novel. When Emma draws up ambitious reading lists, she is showing an affinity for novels and their traditions, but ultimately belies their tropes and defies the expectations created by novelistic tradition.

Throughout the novel, we can clearly see that Emma is familiar with novelistic tropes and pattern stories. In fact, *Emma* is remarkable for the plethora of allusions it makes to other works and the way it treats these allusions. With the help of editor's notes, one can see traces of many novels—and of the general teachings of conduct books—in almost every point of intrigue the novel produces. However, unlike in Austen's previous novels, many of the connections made between Austen's plot and other works are made by characters, not the text itself—made by Emma, most of all. *Emma* is constantly self-aware: the narrator often draws attention to it *as a novel*, and it is Emma herself who most promotes this self-reflexiveness.

Emma may be the heroine who seems to be most removed from Austen's own character and situation in life. She is rich, well-respected, and wants for nothing; she rules her little town of Highbury. Austen, meanwhile, had just moved to Chawton and settled in the little cottage provided for her by her wealthy brother Edward. Her situation was more akin to that of Miss Bates than someone like Miss Woodhouse. Yet Emma bears striking similarities to Jane Austen, more so than any other Austen character. Emma is a writer.

This is what distinguishes *Emma* from the other novels in a unique and important way: rather than misusing her reading as Marianne Dashwood and Fanny Price do, or using it, as Catherine Morland does, to expand her own horizons, Emma uses her scant literary experience to become a writer of her own story. Like Austen, Emma is influenced by her reading experience—but it is this influence which often leads her astray. The way Emma “writes” the world around her exposes the disjunction between the ideal world of literature and the real world. Sometimes, Emma’s “literary” instincts and her experience with traditional plots and literary wisdom help her in understanding the people around her—but more often she finds that applying novelistic or even conduct-book tropes to life is not as simple as the authors of these works make it appear. Yet Emma bravely forges forward, as “writing” is the only way of life that appeals to her. She refuses to act like the heroines of the books she has read, to always improve herself, demurely cultivate talents and accomplishments, and play a passive role in her own life. Emma, more than any other Austenian heroine, shows us the limited nature of women’s existence in Austen’s time—even a rich, independent, confident young woman like Emma has few options. She has little to do but stay home and look after her father, visit her neighbors, and walk with Miss Taylor. Even with her privileged position in society, she has little agency in her life. She “writes” to remedy this, rejecting the role of passive, idealized heroine for that of insightful, active author.

Cronin and McMillan sense something like this, though they do not see Emma as a writer: they point out, “it is Emma after all, alone amongst the characters, who herself possesses something of the narrator’s gift” (*E* lxi). The narrator, too, acknowledges something of Emma’s talent: “a mind lively and at ease, can do with seeing nothing, and can see nothing that does not answer” (*E* 251; vol. II, ch. 9). This comment comes after a description of Highbury, as seen through Emma’s eyes. Many descriptions, written in Austen’s characteristic free indirect style as

Cronin and McMillan point out, are subtly marked as belonging to Emma's focalization rather than the narrator's. One example that Cronin and McMillan cite is in a description of Frank that is clearly colored by Emma's viewpoint: "his son, too well bred to hear the hint, rose immediately also" (208; vol. II, ch. 5). We know, after finishing the novel, that this must be from Emma's point of view, because she does not realize that Frank actually is eager to leave her in order to see Jane, and that is why he does not take his father's hint to stay. At the same time that Emma "writes" overtly in certain moments of the novel, there is also this continuous subtle "writing" as her voice, rather than the narrator's, is used to describe the world. Much of this type of writing on Emma's part can only be discovered on a re-reading of the text, since her voice is often just as authorial and ironic as the narrator's, and the two can be difficult to distinguish.

Countless examples show Emma, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, writing the world around her. At times, her writing is overt, as when "her fancy was very active. Half a dozen natural children, perhaps—and poor Frank cut off!" (429; vol. III, ch. 10) or as when she tells Harriet, "at this moment, perhaps, Mr. Elton is shewing your picture to his mother and sisters...and after being asked five or six times, allowing them to hear your name" (59; vol. I, ch. 7). These instances are clearly based on traditional novel intrigues and devices. Sometimes Emma "writes" with less self-awareness, as when she exclaims "Oh! no, no...I cannot at all consent to Mr. Knightley's marrying, I am sure it is not at all likely" (242; vol. II, ch. 8) or recounts the popular opinion that "Oh, no! Mr. Weston certainly would not marry again" (10-11; vol. I, ch. 1). In these instances she slips into an authorial style; it is as if she is discussing the plot of a novel with a friend and thinks she can predict the ending. The narrator makes it seem as if Emma is unable to resist writing her wishes and taste into certain situations (as when Frank rescues Harriet from the gypsies): "Such an adventure as this—a fine young man and a lovely

young woman thrown together in such a way...how much must an imaginalist, like herself, be on fire with speculation and foresight!” (362; vol. III, ch. 3).

Sometimes, however, Emma’s imaginings are more specific: she actually seems to write out a scene, or even a piece of dialogue, in her head. At one point Emma even makes up an imaginary conversation for Miss Bates, mimicking her speech for the benefit of Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley:

‘So very kind and obliging!—But he had always been such a very kind neighbor!’ And then to fly off, through half a sentence, to her mother’s old petticoat. ‘Not that it was such a very old petticoat either—for still it would last a great while—and, indeed, she must thankfully say that their petticoats were all very strong.’ (243; vol. II, ch. 8)

This is quite a convincing pastiche on the Bates style—Austen does not make Emma’s narration any less apt than her own narrator’s. Even when Emma does not write actual lines, she plays out scenes as if they are in a book, as when she spends time “forming a thousand amusing schemes for the progress and close of their [hers and Frank’s] attachment, fancying interesting dialogues, and inventing elegant letters” (284; vol. II, ch. 13) and “guessing how soon it might be necessary for her to throw coldness into her air; and of fancying what the observations of all those might be, who were now seeing them together” (230; vol. II, ch. 8). She has good instincts as well as literary imagination: she decides, “the conclusion of every imaginary declaration on his side was that she *refused him*. Their affection was always to subside into friendship” (284; vol. II, ch. 13). And yet “she felt as if the spring would not pass without bringing a crisis, an event, a something to alter her present composed and tranquil state” (341; vol. III, ch. 1). This, too, is true—though,

like Frank subsiding into a friend, not in the way Emma thought. Emma learns over and over that her life cannot be captured in traditional plotlines. She is a biased character in her own book rather than an all-knowing narrator, and therefore her good instincts are often foiled by her personal wishes and blindnesses.

But it is not just in Emma's mind that she is a writer—other people see it too. Mr. Elton's comments on Emma's improvement of Harriet's picture seems to apply more to writing than to watercolors: “Exactly so; that is what principally strikes me. So much superadded decision of character! Skilful [sic] has been the hand” (44; vol. I, ch. 6). Frank, too, flatters Emma by seeming to point out her powers of description: “I agree with you exactly. A crowd in a little room—Miss Woodhouse, you have the art of giving pictures in a few words” (269; vol. II, ch. 11). Emma takes pride in her status as an acknowledged observer and describer of the world, correcting others when she thinks they go wrong, as when she tells Mr. Knightley “I am delighted to find that you can vouchsafe to let your imagination wander—but it will not do—very sorry to check you in your first essay—but indeed it will not do” (380; vol. III, ch. 5).

Mr. Knightley—indeed the Mr. Knightleys—are observers and story-conjecturers themselves. Mr. John Knightley, in fact, is the most accurate surmiser of anyone in *Emma*. In general, he disdains such pastimes—but when he does make a guess at an intrigue, he is right. He knows that Mr. Elton is in love with Emma (120; vol. I, ch. 13)—he knows that his brother will soon become engaged (507; vol. III, ch. 17). He refrains from trying to influence the plots he observes; he would never descend to matchmaking. John Knightley shows us what is admirable and brave in Emma's blunders and mis-writings (through his opposite example): he represents all that is exclusively male, sensible, and aware of practicalities rather than emotions and ideals. He does not need to be a writer, because he runs the world—though he could be if he wanted to.

Emma needs to write—she embraces the idealistic and feminist paths offered by the novels she sometimes imitates. It is this idealism that lets her miss the obvious in the plot of her life—she does not imagine Mr. Elton’s materialism and falseness; she refuses to see her engagement with Mr. Knightley as the obvious, practical outcome for each of them. Mr. Knightley is in between Emma and his brother—he is emotional enough to worry over Frank Churchill, and he wants to know what the end of Emma’s story will be (“I wonder what will become of her! I should like to see Emma in love...it would do her good [41; vol. I, ch. 5]). He even does a bit of covert matchmaking in sending Mr. Martin to London while Harriet is there (515; vol. III, ch. 18).

We must ask, then, if Emma abandons her “writing” at the end of the novel after she has presumably learned her lesson about blundering around in other people’s lives. She has not just learned lessons from her forays into writing, but gained experiences and opportunities that she could have gotten in no other way. She has Harriet and Mr. Martin for friends, she has truly accepted Jane Fairfax, and she appreciates Mr. Knightley as she would not have had she never been in doubt of his affection. Even when all Emma’s mistakes prove trifling, when she realizes that Mr. Knightley does love her, the narrator embraces the conventions of storytelling again: “What did she say? Just what she ought, of course” (470; vol. III, ch. 13). In this same scene, Emma comes to the realization—that which every wise author must at some point embrace—that not every story is meant to be told. She is grateful that she did not tell Harriet’s story to Mr. Knightley. And the narrator reflects, “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” (470; vol. III, ch. 13). This does not, Austen says, make fiction less than truth: it makes it more. It allows for the kind of idealism that Emma needs—it allows her to re-write her

own life along lines different from those which men like John Knightley might plan out for her. It gives her agency in a life almost completely lacking it.

### Emma: *Sources and Anti-Sources*

Thus, *Emma* is aware both of the power of literature and of its limitations. It is, over all, a rejection of the staid morals and clichéd traditions of the novels and didactic fiction meant to be read by women like Emma—but at the same time, it reminds us that storytelling holds power. Emma’s often faulty application of traditional plotlines to her life has real consequences; her role as a writer not only changes her own life, but the lives of those around her. Her writing, rather than her reading, is what broadens her horizons—she learns through living and making mistakes, in learning to apply literature and its precepts to real situations. In *Emma*, we find that many of the trite morals of various kinds of literature are based on kernels of truth, and quite true in some instances, but that they can often be used falsely.

There is no one work or source that *Emma* seems to critique—unlike Austen’s previous novels, *Emma* seems a showcase of the way literature can be applied to life. In most cases, *Emma* seems to say, people use literature in a trite, hackneyed, and therefore unserviceable way. As Cronin and McMillan comment, “*Emma*, like all [Austen’s] novels, is remarkable for its refusal of improbability and for its avoidance of novel slang, but it repeatedly invokes the conventionalities that it resists” (*E* 1). They observe an “apparently perverse preference” in *Emma* “that on the rare occasion when poetry is quoted the quotation should be as hackneyed as possible” (xliii). This hackneyed quality applies to all the quotations in *Emma*, and to every reference to literature or “literary” wisdom. Cronin and McMillan cite general examples of stereotypical novelistic diction and plot points used in *Emma* to mock these conventions: the

phrase “eternal friendship” and the standard sentiments behind it are rejected by the narrator as a possible path for Emma and Jane Fairfax, and the traditional staples of novel plots—a journey the heroine takes, and a “chariot adventure”—are carefully undermined when they appear in *Emma*.

Emma herself resists the idea that she must become intimate with Jane. Yet this example represents far more than an instance of novel diction cleverly undermined: Emma’s aversion to a friendship with Jane is an example of how she uses her power as a “writer” to influence her life. The expectation that Emma and Jane must declare their “eternal friendship”—should, in fact, have been intimate friends since childhood—is a trite novelistic convention. As Emma says, “it had been always imagined that they were to be so intimate—because their ages were the same, every body had supposed they must be so fond of each other” (178; vol. II, ch. 2). Emma rejects this expectation, ostensibly because she finds it too blindly conventional. Though Emma really refuses to become friends with Jane because she dislikes her reserve and is jealous of her superior talents, her additional excuse is that of a writer, refusing to conform to readerly expectations. Austen and Emma both refuse to give readers what they expect, withholding the traditional plotline that would align as “eternal friends” two girls of the same age, living in the country together. Emma refuses to do as she is expected, simply because it is traditional. She knows more about character than the authors of conventional novels, asserting that it is not natural for her and someone like Jane to be friends simply because they are the same age.

The other novelistic conventions that Cronin and McMillan mention are similarly twisted and undermined, this time by Austen, without Emma’s participation. The heroine’s traditional journey (often to London or Bath) is, in *Emma*, merely to Box Hill and is only a chance for Emma to behave badly. And the “chariot adventure” in which, traditionally, the heroine is

endangered by a man who declares his love for her and perhaps attempts to kidnap her, is only Emma's uncomfortable (and slow) ride home with Mr. Elton. Emma helps readers see the connection, in this case, remarking to herself that Mr. Elton is "actually making violent love to her" and that drunkenness has impaired his judgment (140; vol. I, ch. 15). In fact, however, he is only tipsy, and his declarations are hardly violent—they are not even sincere. Emma is not only in no danger, but she is the object of a rather calculated proposal based on wealth and position. The worst part of this carriage encounter is the uncomfortable silence of the end of the ride, after the proposal has been made and rejected, as the carriage drives at the unduly slow pace prescribed by the anxious Mr. Woodhouse.

As Cronin and McMillan say, "in *Emma* the kinds of stories of which novels are made are not so much avoided as pointedly refused" (*E* lii). Yet Emma's relationship with literary tradition is more complicated than that. For example, Emma does end up befriending Jane Fairfax—but it is only with time, strife, and shared experiences that they grow to like each other. And while every quote in *Emma* is intentionally clichéd, there are moments which belie Austen's apparent disdain for collective literary wisdom. During the scene in which Harriet destroys her "most precious treasures" (souvenirs of Mr. Elton) (366; vol. III, ch. 4), the parody of this novelistic cliché is tempered by the more subtle inclusion of another. Ironically, as Harriet, with her silliness, undermines the novelistic trope of romantic keepsakes and their ceremonial burning, Emma joins her in another novel-like trope. Harriet recounts one of her interactions with Mr. Elton, and can remember exactly what he said and where he was sitting. Emma recollects the scene, but instead remembers where Mr. Knightley was standing. For observant readers, this is a hint of Emma's feelings. She aligns herself with Harriet and her sentimentalism, surprisingly and unconsciously. Though in Harriet's case, this sentimental literary sign of love is

a way to mock the traditional novel, the same sign is, in Emma's case, a hint, a symptom of her true feelings.

In *Emma*, though literary stereotypes are continually revealed to be hackneyed and too generalized, assumptive, and idealistic to describe real life, on a few occasions they are shown to contain a grain of truth, to be based on valid observations of human nature. *Emma* continually calls attention, ironically, to cases in which literary tropes appear true or when they help explain real life. Emma evaluates herself in terms of literary tropes when she thinks herself in love with Frank Churchill—and comes to the correct conclusion: “she could not admit herself to be unhappy, nor, after the first morning, to be less disposed for employment than usual; she was still busy and cheerful; and, pleasing as he was, she could yet imagine him to have faults” (284; vol. II, ch. 13). In this case, Emma, in comparing her feelings to the symptoms of love felt by heroines of novels, realizes, truthfully as we later discover, that she is not in love. Yet it is her literary tastes, her writer's instinct, which has suggested to her that she *should* be in love with Frank Churchill and that he must be in love with her. Emma, in all her actions in the novel, is caught between her instinct to follow the novelistic tradition and her instinct against it. When it suits her, Emma can reject clichéd stories as unrealistic (as with her relationship with Jane). But at the same time, she allows just such an expected story to be perfectly natural when it is what she already wants. Yet she is still able, in the end, to recognize that her situation does not fit into the story she has created.

Most of the time, Emma tries to follow the conventions of popular literature. There is no single source that *Emma* examines; rather, it takes care to include a wide range of allusions to novels, most of which it casts in a critical light and uses to reveal the follies of certain characters. Emma herself uses these various novels and their conventional plots like tools; she does not

invest herself in any one of them, but blends pieces of different novels together to create her own story. She rejects her place as heroine, however, in the stories she writes—she chooses Harriet instead, a character she has to mold and guide into being a proper heroine, but one who is easy to control and who, at the outset, already possesses admirable heroine-like qualities. Emma, at least, is aware of how unfit she is to be a traditional heroine: she is not beautiful in the right way, she is happy and rich, and therefore there is nothing “interesting” about her. Harriet, on the other hand, seems (to Emma) to need an intrigue to complete her life.

Emma’s suggestions to Harriet about herself are not only based on novels, but on novels Harriet has herself read. As Cronin and McMillan point out,

Harriet’s admiration of *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Children of the Abbey* is revealing. Both novels tell the story of young women of doubtful birth...revealed to be heirs to noble titles and estates...Emma’s irresponsible assumption that Harriet must be ‘a gentleman’s daughter’ is the more dangerous because it gives substance to a fantasy which, Harriet’s favourite novels reveal, she may herself indulge. (E liii)

But it is not truly Emma who is being irresponsible here. It is the society that celebrates novels with plots like these, yet prohibits their plausibility, even their respectability, in life. This dilemma neatly expresses the conflict between the logic of novels and the logic of conduct books, a conflict that plays out in *Emma*. Emma herself reflects, “But, with common sense...I am afraid I have had little to do” (439; vol. III, ch. 11). In fact, what she has been using is a sort of “novel sense.” What she would call “common sense,” however, is not the logic of the conduct

books either. This conduct-book logic is expressed in Mr. Knightley's reprimand to Emma about what she is doing in encouraging Harriet: he says,

You will puff her up with such ideas of her own beauty, and of what she has a claim to, that, in a little while, nobody within her reach will be good enough for her...*Nothing so easy as for a young lady to raise her expectations too high.*

[emphasis mine] (68; vol. I, ch. 8)

It is easy to understand that Emma, and Austen, might prefer the opportunity for empowerment that novels supply as opposed to this kind of discourse. What Knightley says is the conventional wisdom of his age, repeated in conduct books and didactic novels for every young lady to hear. It is the discourse of the British class system and of the patriarchy. It teaches that only the rich—only rich, genteel men—can be heroes of real-life stories, can “raise their expectations” to what is high.

In direct opposition to this limiting, narrowing worldview is that represented in the kind of novels Harriet (and Emma) read. Cronin and McMillan explain just how direct is the link Austen makes between Harriet and the plots of novels: In *Children of the Abbey*,

Compressed into a couple of pages in chapter eight...is the story of Ellen, the daughter of Adeline's nurse. Adeline is loved by Lord Mortimer, the man she will marry, and also by the curate, Mr. Howel. But Ellen takes it into her head that he is an admirer of hers, and when her faithful suitor, Tim Chip, the village carpenter, arrives to take her to a dance she scornfully rejects him... Luckily, some months later Ellen meets him again, and by the end of the novel they are happily married.” (E liv)

For Austen's contemporary readers, then, Harriet's mention of this title acts as a subtle hint about her own future. Though the similarity is striking, Austen does not let her story play out like the story of Ellen—or more accurately, the story of Adeline. In *Emma*, Harriet is allowed to actually occupy the position of ostensible heroine of her own story (she is only relegated to the status of non-leading lady once Emma finally discovers her own romantic plot). She is not an interruption in Emma's romantic saga, but the focus of all of Emma's romantic plans. Austen also refuses to depict Harriet as vulgar and reaching merely because she is low-born, as Roche does—it is Emma, not Harriet, who “scornfully rejects” Mr. Martin.

Though Emma is tempted by the general plotlines of popular novels—like the idea of an illegitimate girl secretly being an heiress—she cannot enact them as they are written. She recognizes in them certain wrongs that must be righted: characterizations that do not correspond to human nature, assumptions that are classist, misogynistic, or simply unrealistic. *The Children of the Abbey* is not the only novel that *Emma* would have brought to mind for contemporary readers—there is a similar Emma/Harriet dynamic in *Cecilia*<sup>15</sup> by Fanny Burney, between Cecilia and Henrietta Belfield (*E* xlvi), the daughter of one of Cecilia's acquaintances (whose origins are those of a tradesman). Henrietta, a “gentle, amiable girl,” becomes intimate with the heroine through “a conversation which the sweetness of Cecilia, and the gratitude of Miss Belfield, soon rendered interesting, friendly and; unreserved” (Burney 47; vol. I). It is Harriet's sweetness and gratitude for the attentions of someone like Miss Woodhouse (though not Emma's own sweetness) that allows the girls to become intimate. Cecilia and Henrietta likewise become intimate friends—and their friendship is disrupted only when Cecilia worries that the man she loves, Delvile, might return Henrietta's love:

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<sup>15</sup> Harriet's pencil stub and court plaister keepsakes (365-368; vol. III, ch.4) may be modeled on Henrietta and a note of Delvile's that she keeps (xlvi).

The reflections that followed her thither were by no means the most soothing; she began now to apprehend that the pity she had bestowed upon Miss Belfield, Miss Belfield in a short time might bestow upon her: at any other time, his recommendation would merely have served to confirm her opinion of his benevolence, but in her present state of anxiety and uncertainty, every thing gave birth to conjecture, and had power to alarm her. He had behaved to her of late with the strangest coldness and distance,—his praise of Henrietta had been ready and animated.—Henrietta, she knew, adored him, and she knew not with what reason,—but an involuntary suspicion arose in her mind, that the partiality she had herself once excited was now transferred to that little dreaded, but not less dangerous rival. (Burney 301; vol. I)

This passage is strikingly similar to Emma's reflections on Mr. Knightley and her own "little dreaded" rival, Harriet. Similarly, Emma worries about Mr. Knightley's cold attitude towards herself in recent days, as well as his praise of Harriet's improvement (under Emma's tutelage) (453, 446; vol. III, ch. 11-12). Emma, however, is less understanding than Cecilia, wondering to herself, "how Harriet could ever have had the presumption to raise her thoughts to Mr. Knightley!" (450; vol. III, ch. 11). She is honest in her own reflections, rather than exhibiting the kind forbearance characteristic of a heroine. It is at this point, with typical Austenian irony, that Emma fiercely wishes she had heeded Mr. Knightley's advice on the subject of Harriet. It seems that, in the same moment, both trite novel plot and clichéd conduct-book logic are holding true: Emma is made to realize her love by way of a romantic red herring and at the same time is being chastened for her false step in encouraging the pretensions of a low-bred girl. And yet, in truth, both these types of book logic are being undermined by their use in Emma's situation, and a

major means of this undermining is the opposition of the two kinds of logic in the same circumstance. Emma gives the lie to the idealistic novel version of the story when she refuses to think Harriet an equal match for Mr. Knightley and allows her jealousy to make itself known. But she equally disproves the conduct-book logic employed by Mr. Knightley in his warning to her, as she admits that it was only herself who ever gave Harriet the ability to fall in love with Mr. Knightley, and as she considers it possible that their match could take place.

*Cecilia's* influence on *Emma* is even more complex. *Cecilia* is also among a number of sources for the one novel plot that is conspicuously absent in Emma's writing: Jane Fairfax's "secret engagement" plot. This is a common feature of many novels, including *Cecilia* and *The Old Manor House* (which may be alluded to elsewhere in *Emma*<sup>16</sup>). Like Jane, Cecilia acquiesces to a secret engagement and then regrets lying about it, explain Cronin and McMillan (lv). They point out, in addition, that it is most common for the secret engagement plot to involve a governess (lv). It is this story—that of the governess with a secret romance—that seems like the obvious target for Emma's re-writing. But she never considers it; "the whole of *Emma* is overshadowed by this missing novel," as Cronin and McMillan say (lv). This is the most blatant example of Emma's selective writing, an example (again involving Jane Fairfax, the classic heroine) of her ability to reject the obvious story.

Multiple critics have seized on Mr. Knightley's words to Emma relating the story of Harriet's final engagement to Mr. Martin ("It is a very simple story" [515; vol. III, ch. 18]) as an allusion, a hint of another of Austen's sources. Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* is a novel whose characters seem to influence those of *Emma*. Frank Bradbrook aligns the novels,

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<sup>16</sup> In Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* (1793), the hero has three sisters: Emma, Isabella, and Selina (the name of Mrs. Elton's sister in *Emma*).

explaining “the heroine of the first part... is a Miss Milner, unstable like Harriet Smith but also intelligent like Emma herself” (Bradbrook 109). Bradbrook sees in Miss Milner “many resemblances to Isabella, the heroine of Charlotte Smith’s *The Old Manor House*, and to JA’s Emma” (110): she has a similar expectation that she should be admired continually, though she connects this admiration with her beauty as Emma does not (Bradbrook 111). Dorriforth, Miss Milner’s guardian, could be a source for Mr. Knightley, as Lord Frederick Lawnly might be for Frank Churchill, and Miss Fenton for Miss Fairfax. Cronin and McMillan even see Inchbald’s Miss Woodley as a possible influence for Miss Bates (*E* xlvi). This link adds another layer of complexity to Austen’s relationship with the contemporary novel in *Emma*; at the least it makes readers contemplate what might be the value of a repeated, and re-repeated, plot, or in Austen’s case, a hybrid, strategically revised one.

A few more instances of novel-like plotting—in which difficult situations are resolved in ways almost too miraculous to be believed—further illuminate Austen’s attitude towards “the novel.” Cronin and McMillan astutely observe that “Austen was distinguished from her contemporaries not only by a clearer perception of what the world was like, but by a heightened sensitivity to novelistic conventions, and in her the two qualities are inseparable” (xlix). In *Emma*, Austen expressly calls attention to her story as a story, to her plot points as necessary resolutions. When Knightley describes Harriet’s seemingly miraculous happy ending, he notes, “[Mr. Martin] did mention, without its being much to the purpose, that on quitting the box at Astley’s...at one time they were in such a crowd, as to make Miss Smith rather uneasy” (515; vol. III, ch. 18). This is the device of a novel indeed—as Mr. Martin seems to have noted; to him this description serves as all the explanation needed, though Mr. Knightley misses its importance. Similarly, Knightley describes, this time with a consciousness of the novelistic

significance of events, Frank Churchill's passage through the novel: "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" (467; vol. III, ch. 13). The happy endings of these two couples do seem to strain even novelistic plausibility—as Austen makes clear. Emma herself exclaims inwardly, "She must laugh at such a close!...Such a heart—such a Harriet!" (519; vol. III, ch. 18). This is a direct commentary on Harriet's place as "*a* Harriet," a character type, like a Henrietta. But it is Harriet, in her individuality and her deviance from the type Emma prescribes for her, which surprises Emma and makes the happy ending possible. Austen is at once exposing the endings' implausibility and suggesting that these outcomes are completely natural in their originality. The personalities of her characters ensure Austen's chosen endings: though the outline of each story is trite, Austen has imbued them, not exactly with "common sense," but with her own unique sense of human nature. The effect is of a story at once traditional and completely fresh in its naturalness.

At the same time that Austen makes oblique references to the plots of other novels (and to the conventions of "the novel" in general) just by the arrangement of her characters and their intrigues, she is constantly quoting literary lines, often through various characters who speak with varying degrees of irony. Cronin and McMillan seem fascinated by this choice, repeating, "It is as if Austen takes a perverse pride in the tediousness of her quotations" (xlii). Mr. Knightley is somewhat of an exception; he only quotes once and does so seriously and aptly, referring to a line of Cowper ("myself creating what I saw") (373; vol. III, ch. 5). Only Emma and the narrator seem to intentionally create irony with their quotations, capitalizing on the hackneyed status of what they repeat. It is Emma who says "The course of love never did run

smooth—A Hartfield edition of Shakespeare would have a long note on that passage” (80; vol. I, ch. 9)<sup>17</sup>. The narrator indulges in ironic quotation as well: “Goldsmith tells us, that when lovely woman stoops to folly, she has nothing to do but to die” (422; vol. III, ch. 9)<sup>18</sup>. Mrs. Elton, however, is portrayed as constantly giving voice to hackneyed phrases: she refers to pieces of the accepted canon of female didactic reading (see Catherine’s “ladylike” reading list in *Northanger Abbey* [8; vol. I, ch. 1]), and to lines which are famous enough to be reproduced in more than one text or compilation.<sup>19</sup> The irony here is intentional not on the character’s part, but on the author’s. Mrs. Elton’s choice of and frequent recourse to clichés is a perfect expression of her personality: she loves attention, lacks originality, and places a great deal of worth on the opinions and mores of “society” rather than on those of people she respects.

Mrs. Elton seems to use the logic of literature in general and that of conduct books (especially those aimed at females) in exactly the same manner. She understands neither, but gives high credence to both. Her repetition of different pieces of conduct-book logic reveals her thoughtlessness and hypocrisy; every time she refers to such a piece of common wisdom, she contradicts it with her next comment, or with her general conduct. Just like a proper lady, one who has learned “accomplishments” for their own sake rather than to catch a husband, Mrs. Elton declares “to be quite honest, I do not think I can live without something of a musical society...without music, life would be a blank to me” (298; vol. II, ch. 14). Just a page later, however, “Emma [finds] her so determined upon neglecting her music” as other married ladies

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<sup>17</sup> *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

<sup>18</sup> The first line of a song in *The Vicar of Wakefield*—the vicar wishes his ruined daughter had died.

<sup>19</sup> p. 305: “Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, / And waste its fragrance on the desert air.” From Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard* (*E*, notes).

p. 72: “a lady in the case...” Reference to “The Hare and Many Friends,” a fable by John Gay: “For when a lady’s in the case, / You know all other things give place.” Proverbial, used also in *Sir Charles Grandison* and *Patronage* (*E*, notes).

p. 334: “Hymen’s saffron robe...” Originally Milton, used also in *Patronage* (*E*, notes).

do (299; vol. II, ch. 14). Similarly, Mrs. Elton wisely declares, “when people shut themselves up entirely from society, it is a very bad thing...it is much more advisable to mix in the world in a proper degree, without living in it either too much or too little” (296; vol. II, ch. 14). Though she says, “nobody can be more devoted to home than I am,” she proceeds to advocate for visiting Bath (297; vol. II, ch. 14) and going on exploring parties (306; vol. II, ch. 15). Though she speaks of the “resources” that make her independent of society and its pleasures, we learn later that “Mrs. Elton's resources were inadequate” to withstand a disappointment about Box Hill (384; vol. III, ch. 6). Finally, and most comically, Mrs. Elton contradicts one of the most commonplace rules of the conduct book in the space of a breath: she attests, “my natural taste is all for simplicity...few people seem to value simplicity of dress,—shew and finery are every thing,” and then asks Jane, “I have some notion of putting such a trimming to my white and silver poplin. Do you think it will look well?” (327; vol. II, ch. 17).

### *Conduct Books, Didactic Discourse, and “Gratitude” in Emma*

It is Mrs. Elton’s hypocrisy, rather than her reliance on the collective wisdom of books, that is derided here. Emma, too, sometimes refers to conduct-book logic, but employs it far more flexibly and sensibly, tempering the general strictures of conduct-book authors like Thomas Gisbourne. Cronin and McMillan note, “Emma seems not only kinder than Gisbourne but much wiser, when she responds with good-humoured tolerance to Harriet’s demonstration at Mrs. Ford’s” that she is one of those females who takes care over the selection of clothes and trimmings (xlv). Austen’s letters attest to the time and energy it is necessary to devote to shopping and dress-making, especially if one is on a budget. Emma, therefore, bears with Harriet’s dithering instead of indicting her for violating one of the precepts of the conduct-book. Yet, sometimes Emma advises just what Gisbourne would: she tells Harriet, “at any rate do not

let [your feelings] carry you far, unless you are persuaded of his liking you” (370; vol. III, ch. 4) and earlier “you will betray your feelings improperly, if you are too conscious and too quick, and appear to affix more meaning, or even quite all the meaning which may be affixed to it” (83; vol. I, ch. 9). Ironically, this is good advice in each instance—but in a manner that Emma does not yet realize. In both the case of Mr. Elton and Mr. Knightley, it is she and not Harriet who should be more cautious and more observant. The use of these wise and common cautions serves not to praise conduct books but to show just how inefficacious this type of advice is. It is experience rather than advice from a book that builds wisdom (or so Austen seems to say).

*Emma* involves itself more deeply with conduct book discourse in a different, more subtle way. It is, surprisingly, a novel largely about the concept of gratitude and its social implications. This concept, an important one in the discourse of didactic fiction and conduct books alike, has already been a subject of Austen’s interrogation. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen brings up the idea of love as stemming simply from gratitude. Speaking directly to readers, the narrator informs them:

I confess that [Henry’s] affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of [Catherine’s] partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine’s dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own.

A new circumstance in romance, perhaps, but not in the genre of the conduct book. John Gregory, another conduct book author, claims in *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1774) that: “What is commonly called love among you, is rather gratitude, and a partiality to the man

who prefers you to the rest of your sex, and such a man you often marry, with little either of personal esteem or affection” (47). By “you” he means women. He continues, describing the common course of a courtship and elaborating on his notion that while men marry for love, women marry only because of gratitude:

As, therefore, Nature has not given that unlimited range in your choice, which we enjoy, she has wisely and benevolently assigned to you a greater flexibility of taste on this subject. Some agreeable qualities recommend a gentleman to your common good liking and friendship. In the course of his acquaintance, he contracts an attachment to you. When you perceive it, it excites your gratitude; this gratitude rises into a preference, and this preference, perhaps at last advances to some degree of attachment. (48)

Gregory’s approach in advising women seems different from that of Gisbourne in *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), which Austen read in 1805 and liked, telling Cassandra “I am glad you recommended ‘Gisbourne,’ for having begun, I am pleased with it, and I had quite determined not to read it” (*Letters*, #47: 117, 396. 1805). It seems that Austen was automatically somewhat leery of conduct books—she at first decided not to even read *An Enquiry*—but was not incapable of being “pleased” with this type of writing. Whether she had read Gregory’s work as well is therefore doubtful, but she certainly knew enough of his ideas about gratitude to play with them in her novels.

*Northanger Abbey* cleverly reverses Gregory’s paradigm of gratitude in courtship; it is the man who acquiesces to a marriage because of gratitude—or rather, falls in love through gratitude—his affection *originated* in it. In *Persuasion*, too, we see an inverted instance of this

function of gratitude. When Captain Wentworth speaks of Louisa and Benwick's courtship, he says "I confess that I do consider his attaching himself to her, with some surprise. Had it been the effect of gratitude, had he learnt to love her, because he believed her to be preferring him, it would have been another thing" (199; vol. II, ch. 8). Frederick is at once commenting on Benwick's relationship and covertly trying to explain his own relationship with Louisa to Anne. He intimates that though he would think it more probable for Benwick to love Louisa out of gratitude, this sort of love—that which stems from the gratification of being admired—is inferior to the love he felt for Anne. In fact, for Frederick, gratification did not in fact create love, though he might have thought so at one time and might even have married Louisa.

Austen's view on this issue seems to be closer to Gisbourne's. He speaks of love in *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* and takes an almost opposite stance to Gregory's:

A young woman, unbiassed [sic] by interested motives, is sometimes led to contract a matrimonial engagement without suspecting that she perhaps does not entertain for her intended husband the warm and rooted affection necessary for the conservation of connubial happiness. She beholds him with general approbation: she is conscious that there is no other person whom she prefers to him: she receives lively pleasure from his attentions: and she imagines that she loves him with tenderness and ardour. Yet it is very possible that she may be unacquainted with the real state of her heart. Thoughtless inexperience, gentleness of disposition, the quick susceptibility of early youth, and chiefly perhaps the complacency which all persons, whose affections are not preoccupied, feel towards those who distinguish them by particular proofs of regard, may have

excited an indistinct partiality which she mistakes for rivetted [sic] attachment.

Many an unhappy wife has discovered the mistake too late. (244-245)

Gisbourne describes the same phenomenon—the way that a sense of gratitude for being admired can be taken for love, and used as grounds for marriage—but he sees this as a profound mistake. He, like Austen, privileges love in any instance of courtship. Austen, however, seems fascinated not only by the place gratitude may hold in courtship and romantic negotiations, but in every kind of social interaction. *Emma* is, under the surface, an examination of “gratitude” as a concept from dozens of different perspectives. Gratitude is a loaded term, much used in conduct book discourse. *Emma* seems to end up concluding that, just like other kinds of conduct book logic, gratitude is worse than useless when not meant sincerely. But, just as both conduct book logic and novel logic stem from true observations about human nature, the notion of gratitude is at its core a true and good one. When it is not self-consciously put on or used for nefarious ends, conduct book’s prizing of gratitude as one of the prime virtues is not misplaced.

*Emma* evaluates good and bad kinds of gratitude. The first chapter is full of it; from the “large debt of gratitude” owed to Miss Taylor, although “the equal footing and perfect unreserve... was yet a dearer, tenderer recollection” (4; vol. I, ch. 1), to Mr. Weston’s experience “of its being a great deal better to choose than to be chosen [in marriage], to excite gratitude than to feel it” (15; vol. I, ch. 2), to the description of Miss Bates’ almost miraculous happiness, “her contented and grateful spirit... a mine of felicity to herself” (20; vol. I, ch. 3). Emma is immediately attracted to Harriet because she displays “so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield” (22; vol. I, ch. 3). Harriet’s defining characteristic is her gratitude: to Emma, to Mr. Martin, to everyone. Emma fears Harriet’s gratitude to Mr. Martin will ruin all her plans if she is left to speak with him alone (58;

vol. I, ch. 7)—she does not want to admit that, in Harriet, it might be love and not simply gratitude that would prompt her to accept Mr. Martin. Miss Bates is constantly gratified by other people’s small polite attentions to her. Mr. Knightley is gratified when Emma says a nice thing about Jane Fairfax—he is proud of her for doing the right thing (184; vol. II, ch. 3). A rare moment when Emma and Jane seem to understand each other is when Jane gives Emma a “grateful” look (394; vol. III, ch.6). Emma is “warmly gratified” when Mr. Knightley approves of her actions, and even more when he takes her hand (420; vol. III, ch. 9). *Emma* seems to count up debts of gratitude, not only when “gratitude” is itself mentioned, but in the numerous accounts of rescuing in the novel. Mr. Dixon saves Jane at Weymouth, Mr. Churchill saves Harriet from the gypsies, Mr. Knightley saves Harriet from Mr. Elton’s rudeness, and he also continually attempts to save Emma from her own blunders.

By contrast, Mr. Elton “ingratiate[es] himself” with Emma and Harriet (34; vol. I, ch. 4)—he offers to take Harriet’s portrait to London, saying “it was impossible to say how much he should be gratified by being employed on such an errand” (50; vol. I, ch.6). This is a clear example of how easily gratitude can be employed with insincerity, for manipulation. Emma assumes Mr. Elton is being nice to her because of “his gratitude on Harriet’s account” (51; vol. I, ch.6)—but she is assuming that a mutual, honorable kind of gratitude exists between him and Harriet. Only later does she realize that Mr. Elton is never truly grateful. Frank Churchill, too, is only politely grateful. He “know[s] how to please” (206; vol. II, ch.5), his letters are “gratifying” to Emma, but do not inspire “any lasting warmth” (286; vol. II, ch.13). Mrs. Elton’s attentions, Emma thinks, “would rather disgust than gratify” even Jane Fairfax (308; vol. II, ch.15). Here we come close to an important truth about gratitude: it is often an unequal thing, it creates and is created by social debts. Jane cannot afford to be ungratified by Mrs. Elton’s attentions—Harriet

is so grateful, in part, because she feels her social inferiority—and Emma is ungrateful towards Miss Bates in snubbing her. Gratitude is a complex and polyvalent social power—it is invoked by Emma, by Mr. Knightley, by the narrator, to explain people’s actions and even to cause them. Gratitude can be very easily twisted into a mere social tool. When it is one-sided or unequal, gratitude is more an evil than a good emotion. But between Emma and Mr. Knightley, Emma and Miss Taylor, and even (at the end), Emma and Jane (502; vol. III, ch.16), mutual gratitude is a sign of the best relationships. A good marriage, just like any good relationship, may involve gratitude—but this gratitude must not be used as a tool to undermine one partner; it must be a source of equality and respect.

#### Persuasion, *Conduct Books*, and *Literature’s Efficacy*

*Persuasion* is perhaps even more radical—though subtly so—than *Emma* in the way it addresses conduct book logic, especially with regard to romance. We have already seen how Austen distances Anne and Frederick’s romance from the kind of courtship built on gratitude or mere respect. Laurence Lerner, in fact, calls *Persuasion* “Jane Austen’s one romantic novel: the one book in which love is not the product of gratitude and esteem” (166). It is true that every other novel depicts a courtship characterized by the cultivation of esteem first and foremost—there is no whirlwind romance, no long-suffering, consuming passion even in *Pride and Prejudice* or *Sense and Sensibility* (we must discount Marianne’s affair with Willoughby since it is a failed romance). *Persuasion* offers us a broader range of emotional possibilities than any of Austen’s other writing: it is more romantic, more passionate, more aware of the possibilities for joy—but it is also darker. Its villains are more insidious and the despair its heroine faces more real and more dangerous than in any other novel. Indeed, if we compare the opening of *Persuasion* (even with all its comic genius) to *Emma*, the novel’s outlook seems dire. We have a

similar family situation: a widower with daughters, one of whom has taken the place of her mother in the isolated society she presides over. But Mr. Woodhouse's gentle absurdities are replaced with Sir Walter's far more damaging delusions. The somewhat selfish but well-intentioned heiress, Emma, is replaced by Elizabeth, who is not only cold-hearted and truly snobbish, but is desperate for a husband of baronet blood. Her situation reveals the realities of the aristocracy of which she is a part: realities that Emma as a wealthy member of the gentry, unburdened by an entail, need not consider. While Emma's confidante is a governess, Anne's is the status-loving Lady Russell. Instead of the sweet Harriet, we are given Mrs. Clay, conniving and false. Though Emma is often bored with her existence in a small country town, Anne is truly oppressed by her isolation and by her family's shocking neglect.

Set against this dismal backdrop, Austen carries on a debate about the efficacy of literature as a guide and solace in life. Anne is a heroine who has little else but books to turn to; she is certainly the most traditionally bookish of Austen's heroines: she can recite poetry by heart during long walks (90; vol. I, ch. 10), she recommends titles to Benwick (108-109; vol. I, ch. 11), and she explains Italian verses to her cousin (203; vol. II, ch.8). The central (subtextual) conflict in *Persuasion* is that of Anne's relationship to literature. From the beginning of the novel, rather than using her knowledge of literature to "write" and gain agency over her life as Emma does, she approaches literature as an escape from the bleak realities of her life. It is unclear, however, whether even at the novel's beginning, Anne's literature truly helps her at all. Even from the start, Austen at least, if not Anne herself, is profoundly skeptical about the power literature (at least traditional literature) has to positively affect the daily lives of its readers.

The novel begins, of course, with a truly discouraging account of reading: Sir Walter's obsession with the Baronetage is not just unhelpful to him, but it encourages his original conceits

and self-deceptions. Interestingly, Robert Morrison, in his annotated edition of *Persuasion*, draws a link between *Persuasion*'s opening and a scene in Scott's *Waverley*; he sees Austen as mocking an early scene in which Sir Everard pours over his genealogy (*P*: annot. 35). Thus, the opening of *Persuasion* announces more or less overtly its intention of analyzing the function of literature in affecting the lives of its character-readers. In the following chapters, however, this analysis focuses almost exclusively on Anne and her relationship with books. We soon find out that Anne's situation is beyond the purview of literary aid. Her feelings are so passionate and consuming, her position so hopeless, that literature cannot offer her anything more than trite advice, distraction, or dangerous indulgence.

All around Anne, we see characters attempting to live up to the ideas expressed in conduct books: Mr. Shephard's advice to the Elliots to relocate until their debt is paid is straight out of Gisbourne's *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society* (*P*: annot. 47). At Uppercross, especially, we see the trial of all sorts of conduct-book ideas. We are told that the right thing for Frederick to do would be to show a clear preference for one of the Musgrove sisters rather than lead both of them on as he does. Henrietta, too, should either commit to her previous preference for Charles Hayter or make his jilting official. This advice is so natural as to be more in the realm of common sense than conduct book. Anne "long[s] for the power of representing to them all what they were about, and of pointing out some of the evils they were exposing themselves to" (88; vol. I, ch. 10) but she knows she must refrain from doing so, just as she cannot forcefully right the other wrongs at Uppercross but can only "listen patiently, soften every grievance, and excuse each to the other; give them all hints of the forbearance necessary between such near neighbors" (49; vol. I, ch.6). In these instances, and in her opinions about her father's debts and associations, Anne is almost like the mouthpiece of

the traditional conduct book—not such a radical one as Gregory’s, but perhaps one like Gisbourne’s.

But Anne’s entire existence is proof against the efficacy of conduct books in the conduct of any but those who already have taken their precepts to heart. Anne always knows the right thing to do, the best way to behave—and she knows this not just theoretically, from having the dictates of Gisbourne et. al. always in mind, but because she has an instinct for consideration and fairness. But she is just as continually unable to effect change in her life—she is completely unable to influence others. We know by Anne’s behavior (the way she refrains from doing more to force others to act prudently) that she has already discovered the limits of conduct-book advice. This discovery is certainly linked to her former engagement and her decision to follow Lady Russell’s advice against her own inclinations. This decision was one completely accordant with conduct-book discourse. But years later, Anne has learned that such conduct book logic does not apply to every situation, to her love for Frederick in particular. When she sees Frederick again, she is unable to make herself conform to conduct book propriety: as Mary Waldron points out,

by all contemporary fictional standards Anne ought to disapprove [of his flirtations] enough to resolve to have nothing more to do with him. But it never crosses her mind. What we are seeing here is not the anxious internal debate about what is right which so often dominates the proceedings in Burney and Edgeworth, for instance, but the unstructured reactions of strong emotion. (142-143)

Anne lives in a world in which, even if she knows what is prudent, she simply cannot be so. Conduct book logic, even if it is applicable and practical, often cannot be applied without causing further trouble.

### *The Literature of Persuasion*

*Persuasion* is the first novel in which Austen alludes so specifically to Scott, Byron, and other poets, and devotes so much time to their consideration. Morrison even sees a link between Austen's style of description in *Persuasion* (especially in the Lyme chapters) and the Romantic poets. Austen's emphasis on the landscape, as well as the nostalgic theme of the novel, can be seen to evoke Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge (*P*: annot. 6). Morrison cites this style as part of Austen's renovation of the eighteenth-century novel, one way in which she looks forward, pioneering a new prose style:

when Austen describes the 'thousand feelings' (64; vol. I, ch.7) that rush on Anne, she is testing a style that breaks decisively from the kind of prose she has written in the past, a style that looks forward to the twentieth century novels...rather than backward to the elaborate cadences and balanced precision of Johnson. (*P*: annot. 98)

Morrison here hits upon a very important element of *Persuasion*'s literary attitude. There is certainly a tension in *Persuasion* between the poets and prose moralists like Johnson, but this tension is less a matter of style than of the way these different texts apply to Anne's life. Anne herself sees this tension, expressing it when she recommends prose for Benwick's broken heart instead of more poetry. Poetry like that of Scott and especially Byron is an indulgence for people like Benwick and Anne, and Anne intimates that it is an indulgence that should be regarded as

dangerous. She knows from experience what Benwick is feeling, and understands his love of poetry: as Morrison says, “her own fate is powerfully evoked in some of Benwick’s favorite Byron poems, including *The Giaour* (1813) and *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), where Byron engages in penetrating analyses of anguish and loss, female agency, and the constancy of both men and women” (*P*: annot. 6). *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos* are explicitly mentioned in Anne and Benwick’s first conversation about poetry, as are Scott’s *Marmion* and *Lady of the Lake*, and Austen refers to *The Corsair* in their later conversation: the narrator observes “Lord Byron’s ‘dark blue seas’<sup>20</sup> could not fail of being brought forward by their present view” (117; vol. I, ch.12).

Though Scott’s works are mentioned as well, it is Byron’s heroic poems that Benwick and Anne seem to have an affinity for and that parallel, strangely, their own stories. *The Giaour* is a romantic, heroic tale in which the hero mourns the death of his lover with constancy, even to his grave. The tale asserts the supremacy of first love; the Giaour says “Earth holds no other like to thee, / Or, if it doth, in vain for me” (Byron 180-181). He wishes “neither name nor emblem spread” on his grave, leaving only “this broken tale” behind him, dying a monk (184). The links between this tale and the plot of *Persuasion* are ironic: in Byron’s idealized, romantic world, lovers (even male lovers) are constant even after death, not inconstant after mere disappointment, as is Frederick. At the very moment *The Giaour* is mentioned in *Persuasion*, Captain Wentworth is in the midst of a flirtation with Louisa and Captain Benwick is about to abandon his mourning for Fanny Harville in favor of the same girl. *The Corsair*, too, seems to be brought up in order to underline the inconstancy of *Persuasion*’s men: Conrad, a pirate, remains constant to his wife even though he leaves her against her wishes and returns to find her dead of grief. He is tempted

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<sup>20</sup> This phrase appears both in the first line of *The Corsair*, and in Byron’s 1812 poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*.

by another woman, but stays true to his wife and lives out the rest of his life grieving for her. *The Bride of Abydos* parallels the plot of *Persuasion* as well: it tells the story of a couple forbidden to marry by the woman's father, though unlike Anne and Frederick, the lovers persevere and disobey him, then die at the end of the poem.

Austen's inclusion of these heroic, almost idealistic poems—with their passion, action, and romantic descriptions of seaside landscapes—both celebrates their grandeur and belies their “heroic” worldview. In real life, Austen shows us, lost love is not always so grandly tragic: often enough, it concludes with a second match and a life of ordinary domesticity (as in Benwick's case). Even in Anne's case—which, in the end, almost fulfills Byron's ideal of fidelity in love—Austen shows us that constancy is not so sure, nor so romantically tragic, as the poems suggest. Though at this point in the novel, Anne's situation is that of a tragically abandoned heroine—and by the end of the novel, her story is one of fidelity against all odds—her story has none of the heroic grandeur of the Byronic poems. This is largely because it is told from her, female, point of view: from this point of view, that of the passive, waiting, abandoned woman, constancy is uncertain.

*Persuasion's* focus on Scott and Byron has another interesting element. These are works of action, in which men (often sailors, or rather, pirates) make their own fortunes through action. The inclusion of such works is an important component of *Persuasion's* discourse on meritocracy. Frederick, in his rejection of Sir Walter and of the traditional social hierarchy, is somewhat akin to a Byronic hero, an active man who decides his own fate and creates his own place in society (though he is a respectable sailor, not a pirate). One of *Persuasion's* subtexts is England's transition from one set of men to another: those like Sir Walter, the aristocrats, who prize blood and status, and those like Frederick, Admiral Croft, Captains Harville and Benwick,

and even to some extent Mr. Elliot (though he only rejects the aristocracy in his youth, and instead of creating his own fortune, marries for it). The sailors of *Persuasion* recall Scott and Byron's heroes but also re-write them to fit into the domestic world: Austen does not write of battles, but of their implications for the everyday fabric of English society.

One can see how Byron's poems may have attracted Anne while she was grieving over the loss of Frederick, in the years before the novel's opening. Yet by the time she meets Benwick, and sees in him the same literary impulses that she must have felt years before, she has learned to temper her indulgence in poetry, instead applying to prose for comfort and forbearance. The dose of prose she recommends for Benwick must certainly include Johnson—his moral essays in *The Rambler* often included advice on how best to bear hardship. Yet Anne's refusal to specify, to enumerate the essays she finds most useful in keeping her suffering in check, is revealing. She cannot expound on the efficacy of such prose because it has, in fact, not succeeded with her. We never hear of Anne reading prose. Though she keeps the discourse of the moral essay in mind, just as she does that of the conduct book—she tells herself what she *should* do to keep her grief from overpowering her life—she can do no more than pay lip service to it. Internally, Anne has not been able to overcome her disappointed love, even though she observes, outwardly, and repeats to herself, the accepted methods for doing so.

When we meet Anne, she has turned away from the self-indulgence of Byronic poetry and also from the empty advice of prose moralists and conduct-books. The only literature we see her refer to for herself (not from Benwick's prompting) is the poetry she recites to herself as she walks with the other inhabitants of Uppercross. It seems like a familiar circumstance for Anne when the narrator describes how, for her,

the only pleasure in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn...she occupied her mind as much as possible in such like musings and quotations... (90; vol. I, ch.10)

Anne is used to making the best of uncomfortable situations—of her uncomfortable life—by resorting to such consolatory quotation. One can imagine that this is how Anne gets through much of her life with her father and sister, distracting herself with poetry. The only other literature directly linked to Anne is the Navy lists: the narrator tells us, “she had only navy lists and newspapers for her authority” on Frederick’s naval successes (32; vol. I, ch.4). So we know she has been following him, perhaps monthly, in the lists, has become familiar with Byron’s poetry, has tried the consolation of prose, and has landed on poetry describing nature<sup>21</sup> as a safe distraction and one of the few pleasures of her life.

Yet the distraction of the poetry is not enough: when she hears Frederick praise Louisa, “Anne [can] not immediately fall into a quotation again” (91; vol. I, ch.10). Austen, rather devastatingly, is showing us just what literature’s limits are: the empty life Anne has been left to, augmented by reading and quoting to herself, cannot stand up against the sight of Frederick and Louisa. Anne has been trying to use literature as an escape, and, when finally forced to compare her power of quotation to the power of her feelings for Frederick and the appeal of the real story unfolding in front of her, Anne recognizes the failure of her literary efforts.

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<sup>21</sup> It is probably Thomson’s *Seasons* that Anne is thinking of during her walk, or perhaps Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*.

Ironically, in the same scene, Frederick too uses a literary paradigm that will later be shown as unsound. Parodying the moralist or conduct-book writer, he playfully tells Louisa, “to exemplify,—a beautiful glossy nut, which, blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn...still in possession of all the happiness that a hazel-nut can be supposed capable of” (94; vol. I, ch.10). This example is supposed to illustrate the “firm mind” Frederick’s supposed ideal woman must have. The plot of the novel later returns to this moment, showing us how such a broad statement—a conduct-book type statement—can be dangerous when misapplied to life. Frederick realizes that he has been harmfully irresponsible in encouraging Louisa to behave so single-mindedly when she takes her “precipitate” leap on the Cobb.

It is this moment on the Cobb that, for once in *Persuasion*, takes us back to familiar ground in terms of Austen’s use of literature. Morrison notes that the scene following Louisa’s accident is strikingly similar to scenes in Charlotte Smith’s *Emmeline* (1788) and Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801). In both stories, characters frantically announce that the unconscious woman is “dead”—in *Emmeline*, the heroine herself says “She is certainly dead!” (96) and in *Belinda*, Mrs. Ormond screams ““She’s dead!—she’s dead!”” (470). In *Persuasion*, it is Mary who screams ““She is dead! she is dead!””—in a response that is clearly an overreaction and immensely unhelpful, a parody of the source novels (118; vol. I, ch.12). When others suggest going for a surgeon, it is Anne who reasons, ““Captain Benwick, would not it be better for Captain Benwick? He knows where a surgeon is to be found”” (119; vol. I, ch.12) just as Emmeline, “whose admirable presence of mind this sudden scene of terror had not conquered,” says ““Stay, Sir...You know not wither to go. I will instantly send those who do”” (97). *Belinda*, too, is the calmest character in her crisis: another observer says, ““Let us leave her to Miss Portman; she has more presence of mind than any of us”” (470). Thus, Austen is at once using

the convention of a level-headed heroine in the midst of a crisis, and is at the same time interrogating and parodying this familiar scene.

In the aftermath of the Cobb scene, the narrator connects Anne with one more piece of literature. Anne would have been glad to stay and nurse Louisa, though “without emulating the feelings of an Emma towards her Henry” (125; vol. I, ch.12). This is a reference to Matthew Prior’s poem, “Henry and Emma” (1709), in which Henry tests Emma by telling her he is in love with someone else and Emma offers to act as a slave to his new love (passing the test). Anne is certainly *not* an Emma, Austen stresses, though she is not jealous and petty enough to refuse to nurse Louisa. This last allusion sheds some light upon Austen’s interrogation of the scenes from *Emmeline* and *Belinda*. In *Emmeline*, the fainting woman is merely surprised by her brother; she is not the rival of the heroine. But in *Belinda*, it is Virginia who faints—the ward of Belinda’s eventual lover, whom everyone expects him to marry. He feels himself obliged to marry Virginia because he thinks she expects it, but he is really in love with Belinda. In the pertinent scene, Virginia faints because she is shown a picture of the man she really loves—and after she is brought to, she reveals that she does not in fact want to marry Clarence Hervey (Belinda’s lover), leaving him free to pursue the heroine.

Austen’s scene is (typically, for her) a complex reversal of Edgeworth’s; Frederick truly thinks he loves Louisa and not Anne, and this event is a revelation for him on that count as opposed to Hervey’s revelation in *Belinda* which is the opposite. Austen makes it the man, not the woman, who is the most emotionally affected by her “accident.” Additionally, Frederick is much more culpable in Louisa’s accident than are either of the men who cause feminine fainting in the other novels—and the accident is far more serious. Edgeworth’s and Smith’s characters simply faint because they are surprised by a man’s appearance or by what he shows them. Thus,

in the only traditionally Austenian novel allusion we find in *Persuasion*, it is the hero, not the heroine, who bears all the brunt of the reference. Anne is no novel-heroine, though Frederick may be as akin to a novel hero as he is to a Byronic hero. And in the end, the allusion serves mostly to underline the original scenes' inapplicability to the kind of life Anne and Frederick lead: one in which it takes a real accident (and a real injustice) to render a young lady unconscious, and in which it is men who must be shocked into realizing the truth.

*"I will not allow books to prove anything": Anne's Attitude(s) Towards Literature*

By the time we reach the novel's penultimate chapter, we have seen Anne (and Austen) test, again and again, the applicability of different types of literature to her life. We have started with Sir Walter and *The Baronetage* as proof of books' paralyzing, damaging possibilities. We have seen the Navy lists and newspapers as insufficient for Anne and conduct books as repositories of sensible but inapplicable advice. Romantic poetry should be sampled sparingly; prose is recommended as a salve—but never taken up. Benwick and Anne both find a second (or a returning) love as the only cure for their heartbreak, and neither is actually depicted reading prose. Finally, all that is left for traditional literature is to be a mere escape, a safe distraction and small pleasure in life. For Anne, literature can neither teach her to forget her situation in life, nor help her to change it. Each of the texts that is brought up is considered in terms of negatives—Anne is not properly included (as married) in *The Baronetage*, she is not the heroine of a Byronic poem, she is not an Emma to some Henry, nor is she a properly unbiased Emmeline or a romantically confused Belinda.

Whether Anne is aware of the bleak inefficacy of all the literature she tries on her life, as she tries it, is unclear. But by the end of the novel, when she speaks with Captain Harville in

what is Austen's most dramatic—and certainly most romantic—declaration scene, she is certain that literature cannot “prove anything” (255; vol. II, ch.11). She argues this, moreover, because authoring has been a strictly male privilege. Captain Harville tells her:

“All histories are against you—all stories, prose and verse. If I had such a memory as Benwick, I could bring you fifty quotations in a moment on my side the argument, and I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men.”

(254; vol. II, ch.11)

And Anne replies, “Perhaps I shall. Yes, yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything” (255; vol. II, ch.11). She hits upon just what Emma seems to have discovered, and put to her own advantage, in *Emma*. But Anne is a reader, not a writer—not, at least, a writer of her own life, able to make the mistakes Emma is able to. Anne cannot make blunders—her sense of the proper story is too keen. Emma, buoyed by the optimism of idealistic, though clichéd, novels, writes them into her life by way of giving herself agency. But Anne knows that her Byronic stories cannot be true—and she realizes, as Austen does, that the heroic tales of Byron and Scott hold no place for her. Neither does she want to be a silly, trite, idealized heroine in the style of Richardson and his followers. She is caught in a transition in literature—just as Austen is—and seems to have no literary voice to turn to. Her solution, for the first half of the novel, seems to be to turn to moralistic prose and conduct-book reminders, and live with these as her emblematic “stories”—a dreary life indeed.

But Anne's declaration to Captain Harville (overheard by Wentworth, and thus perhaps constituting Anne's first essay into writing) reveals her disillusionment with the literature that she has been looking to for support for years. Anne's outburst echoes back to *Northanger Abbey*, but it holds infinitely more anguish and desolation than did Catherine's comment that history has "hardly any women" (NA 110; vol. I, ch. 14). For Anne, and for Austen, literature is intrinsically lacking: it has been largely written by men. Anne can see no solution for literature, but Austen can. Austen has written Anne's story—against the literary backdrop of Scott's novels and Byron's poetry, and during a time of literary transition that Austen herself could not have foreseen. For Austen was not just one of the first successful female novelists, but a progenitress of the novel itself—of the kind of novel that would, in the nineteenth century, bring novels to the very forefront of literary experience.

## AFTERWARD

Examining Jane Austen's works alongside their literary context—viewing Austen herself in terms of her deep involvement with the literature of her time and with the idea of literature itself—reveals a side of the novels and the author that is contrary to their public, and even critical, perception. There is no doubt of Jane Austen's genius and of the unique place she holds in the history of the novel. But realizing just how invested her novels are in the conventions, the paradigms, and even the plots of the works that came before them gives us a glimpse into what it took to enact this genius—and perhaps even why it took the form that it did. For Austen, writing was one of the only means of “free” expression she could access, and it was a radical one. She was breaking into a largely male sphere and daring to rewrite what men had written before her.

Most people see Austen's work as strictly limited: she worked not on the grand events of the world but within a small domestic space. She described the life of courtship, after adulthood and before marriage. She mentioned war but left its description to the pens of others. But Austen's success in concisely and naturally describing what others thought unworthy of description is her triumph, not her flaw. She has brought the novel into the domestic sphere, allowing it to take its place not as a sentimental recounting of an idealized woman's life but as the foremost genre for getting at the truths of daily life, for men and women. Austen, then, is more of a revolutionary than most think: not a prim old maid touting her conservative views, but a woman who made a life, and a whole kind of literature, for herself and for the women around her.

When first thinking about what Jane Austen would have read during her lifetime, one might imagine that though she valued her reading—it was, of course, one of the only pastimes

allowed to her—it would not substantially “influence” her own work. It is on the surface difficult to see how finding such links between Austen’s novels and the novels she read might be advantageous when considering her legacy. It might even seem dangerous to search for similarities between Austen and her contemporaries, as if identifying Austen’s influences might somehow damage her “originality.” But these possibilities, rather than damaging old readings of Austen, provide solid evidence for them and also prompt whole new interpretations of her novels.

For instance, it is difficult, after sifting through the many ways Austen used her predecessors in her writing, to deny that her novels were deeply engaged with the politics of the patriarchy. It is not the simple fact of her rewriting of male (and female) authors, but the details of her revision that make her engagement with the problems of the patriarchy clear. As we have seen, Austen is constantly undermining the straight reading of a situation, complicating her messages by referring to how stories have been previously told. And throughout her career, she seems to have progressed in her interrogation of literature and of the patriarchy. Her first three novels are optimistic about the power literature can have to change the world, especially for women. But her last three novels are increasingly ambivalent about the practical efficacy of literature—ironic, since the time of their writing has seen her first success as a writer. Perhaps she was disappointed at the results of her moderate success—it did not, in fact, provide her much more freedom or agency in her life.

Perhaps this is the realization that prompted her to let Anne Elliot announce, “I will not allow books to prove anything” (255; vol. II, ch.11). This statement seems to express a loss of confidence in the power of literature—at least, of the canon—to say anything about women’s lives. Yet at the same time, this announcement is Austen’s own self-conscious declaration that

literature *may* be allowed to prove something, if she can have her way. Anne's own story is, of course, Austen's successful attempt to begin fixing just this problem in the literary canon.

Anne's almost feverish opinion on women in literature, left, as it is, as Austen's last finished pronouncement on the subject, can be seen not as an admission of defeat, but as a premonition of the effect Austen was to have on literature for centuries to come.

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<sup>22</sup> The letters are cited as follows: (*Letters* # of letter: page numbers. Year written). Letters are to Cassandra Austen unless otherwise specified.

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## APPENDIX I: Lists of Notable References and Allusions

(compiled from the notes of the Cambridge editions)

### JUVENILIA

#### “EDGAR AND EMMA”

Matthew Prior's ‘Henry and Emma’ (1709)

Book one of Cowper's *The Task* is named ‘The Sofa’ (1785). Poem was a “favorite of JA's.”

#### “AMELIA WEBSTER”

*Clarissa*

#### “FREDERIC AND ELFRIDA”

Goldsmith's poem ‘The Deserted Village’ (1770)

*Tom Thumb* (1730)

Wycherley in ‘To my Friend, Mr. Pope, on his Pastorals’ (1709)

*The Female Quixote*

*Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (1789)

*Tristram Shandy*

*The Rape of the Lock*

*The Vicar of Wakefield*

Smollett's *Roderick Random*

Goethe's *The Sorrow of Young Werther* (1774)

*Sir Charles Grandison*

Addison's *Rosamond an Opera* (1707)

#### “THE MYSTERY”

*The Rehearsal* (1672)

*Cecelia*

#### “THE BEAUTIFULL CASSANDRA”

*Cecelia*

#### “HENRY AND ELIZA”

Sarah Fielding's *Ophelia* (1760)

Susanna Centlivre's comedy *The Wonder—A Woman Keeps a Secret!* (1714)

Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*

*Evelina*

#### “THE VISIT”

Antonio Salieri's *La Scola de' Gelosi*, or alluding to *The School for Scandal* (1777)

(Sheridan) and *The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768) (Goldsmith)

Arnaud Bequin's “Le Petit Joueur de violon,” part of a twelve-volume collection, *L'ami des enfans* (1782-3), of which JA owned a copy. (413)

Townley's *High Life Below Stairs*

*The Vicar of Wakefield*

#### “JACK AND ALICE”

*The Rape of the Lock*

*Sir Charles Grandison*

Lennox's *The Female Quixote*

James Merrick's poem “The Camelion: A Fable After Monsieur De La Motte,” included in Robert Dodsley's *A Collection of Poems* (1758), which JA owned

*Paradise Lost*  
*Emmeline* by Charlotte Smith  
 Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744)  
 "THE ADVENTURES OF MR. HARLEY"  
 Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*  
 "LOVE AND FREINDSHIP"  
*Bon Ton or High Life above Stairs* (1775)  
*Laura and Augustus, An Authentic Story, in a Series of Letters, by a Young Lady* (1784)  
*Clarissa*  
*Emmeline* by Charlotte Smith  
 Pope's *Essay on Man*  
*Cecelia*  
 Sarah Fielding's *The History of Ophelia* (1760), reprinted in *Novelist's Magazine* in 1785  
*Tristram Shandy*  
*The Rivals*  
*Clarissa and Tom Jones*  
*The Critic*  
*The Clandestine Marriage* (1766)  
*Evelina*  
*The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774)  
*A Journey to the Western Isles*  
*Essays on Men and Manners* by William Shenstone  
 Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII*  
*Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783)  
 Richard Steele's *The Tender Husband* (1705)  
*Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1766, On Several Parts of Great Britain; Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland* (1789)  
*Macbeth*  
 "THE HISTORY OF ENGLAND"  
 Goldsmith's *History*  
 Shakespeare  
 Nicholas Rowe's *The Tragedy of Jane Shore: Written in Imitation of Shakespeare's Style* (1714)  
 Sophia Lee's historical novel *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times* (1785)  
*Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty*  
 John Whitaker, *Mary Queen of Scots Vindicated* (1787)  
 "EVELYN"  
*Sir Charles Grandison*  
 Gilpin's *Observations*  
 "THE THREE SISTERS"  
*The Country Wife* (1675)  
*The Adventures of David Simple*  
*The Rivals*  
 "The Story of Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp," part of the *Arabian Nights Entertainments* (~1706)  
*Which is the Man?* (1783) by Hannah Cowley

“LESLEY CASTLE”

*A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775)

*Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785)

*The History of Goody Two-Shoes*; JA’s signed copy of the book survives

Pope’s *Eloisa and Abelard* (1717)

*Sir Charles Grandison*

“CATHARINE”

*The Faerie Queene*

Thomas Percival’s *A Father’s Instructions to his children: consisting of Tales, Fables, and Reflections* (1775-1800)

*Cecelia*

*Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (1789), *Celestina* (1791) and *Desmond* (1792) Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)

*Lady’s Magazine* (1770-1819)

Pope’s *Essay on Man*

*Blair’s Sermons*

*Lectures on the Catechism of the Church of England* (1769) by Archbishop Thomas Secker

*Hamlet*

late revision in ‘Catharine’ is a reference to Hannah More’s didactic novel of 1809, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*

“A COLLECTION OF LETTERS”

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

*Clarissa*

Pope’s *Essay on Man*

Richardson’s *Letters Written to and From Particular Friends on the Most Important Occasions* (1741)

Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* (1598)

“The je ne sçai Quoi” by William Whitehead

“THE FIRST ACT OF A COMEDY”

*Rosina* (1783)

“A TOUR THROUGH WALES”

Gilpin’s *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales* (1782)

“A TALE”

the *Reading Mercury*

“A FRAGMENT”

James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1744) and two treatises owned by JA: Ann Murry’s *Memoria: or, The Young Ladies Instructor*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1780) and Thomas Percival’s *A Father’s Instructions to his Children* (1775)

“ODE TO PITY”

‘Ode to Pity’ (1746) by William Collins, which JA could have read in her copy of Robert Dodsley’s poems

LADY SUSAN

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787)  
 Catherine Macaulay, *Letters on Education, with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (1790)  
 Mrs. Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady*, 2 vols. (1773)  
 Jane West, *A Tale of the Times*, 3 vols. (1799)  
 Elizabeth Blower, *Maria: A Novel in Two Volumes* (1785)  
 associated with Maria Edgeworth's *Leonora* (1806) or 'Manoeuvring' (1809)  
*Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1784 tr.)  
 unscrupulous widows: novels of Eliza Heywood, Delarivier Manley, Aphra Behn. *The New Atlantis*, and Lady Bellaston in *Tom Jones*.  
*Jonathan Wild* (Fielding) like LS in sustained ironic narration of amoral protagonist  
 Mrs. Gerarde in Frances Sheridan's *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761),  
 Susannah Gunning, *The Histories of Lady Frances S—, and Lady Caroline S—* (1763),  
*Combe Wood: a Novel in a Series of Letters* (1783),  
*Memoirs of Mary: A Novel* (1794),  
*Emily Herbert: or Perfidy Punished* (1786), possibly an early novel by Elizabeth Inchbald,  
 adapter of Kotzebue's *Lover's Vows*.  
 parody of John Gregory, Jane West, and Hannah More

#### NORTHANGER ABBEY

*Camilla*

Radcliffe's works, esp. *Udolpho*

Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752)

Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine, or, Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader* (1813)

*Emmeline*

'The Beggar' by the Revd Thomas Moss in his *Poems on Several Occasions* (1769)

The Hare and many Friends: a popular narrative poem in *Fables* (1727) by John Gay.

*Elegant Extracts* (1785)

*Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* (1717), Pope

*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751), Gray

'Spring' in *The Seasons* (1728), Thompson

*Othello, Measure for Measure, Twelfth Night (Elegant Extracts)*

*Clermont*

*A Guide to the English Tongue* (1707)

Revd Thomas Gisborne

*Rambler* (No. 97, vol 2)

Rachel Hunter's *Lady Maclairn, the Victim of Villany* (1806), which JA read together with her niece Anna (October 1812)...

Cecelia, or Camilla, or Belinda

The Spectator

Castle of Wolfenbach, Clermont, Mysterious Warnings, Necromancer of the Black Forest,

Midnight Bell, Orphan of the Rhine, and Horrid Mysteries. [Isabella's list]

*Sir Charles Grandison*

*Tom Jones*

*The Monk*

*Evelina*

The Spectator no. 80, 1 June 1711

"Johnson and Blair"

"Mr. Hume or Mr. Robertson"

John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774)

Gilpin

*Romance of the Forest*

*Tristram Shandy*

Rambler no. 4, 31 March 1750

### THE WATSONS

*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*

Robert Bage, *Hermesprong; or, Things as They Are Not*, 3 vols. (1796)

Fanny Burney, *Cecelia*, also *Evelina* (and see Caroline Austen, *My Aunt Jane Austen: A Memoir* (1867) on *Evelina*)

*Sir Charles Grandison*

*The Rivals*

Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and of his Friend Mr.*

*Abraham Adams*, 2 vols. (1742)

Watsons similar to Burney—"burdened with mortifyingly vulgar relatives"

### SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

*Lady's Monthly Museum*, 2 (1798-99), 21-4

Cowper

*The Children of the Abbey*, 4 vols. (1796)

Walter Scott, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), opening lines of Canto 4

*Trewman's Exeter Flying Post, or, Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser* and *Woolmer's Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*

*Sir Charles Grandison*

*Evelina*

names: Willoughby and Brandon occur together in the *Lady's Magazine* in 1794

Jane West, *A Gossip's Story*

"Cowper and Scott; you are certain of his estimating their beauties as he ought, and you have received every assurance of his admiring Pope no more than is proper"

Gilpin: as in *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (1792). Uvedale Price: *Essays on the Picturesque* (1794-8).

*A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774)

Rambler, 97

*Romeo and Juliet*

*The Rape of the Lock*

*Clarissa*

*Hamlet*

Thomson

*Observations on the Western Parts of England*

*Columella, or the Distressed Anchoress* (1779)

Maria Edgeworth's children's stories, "The Birthday Present," in *The Parent's Assistant*, (1800)

*The Sorrows of Young Werther*

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

*Twelfth Night*

James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766)

*The Vicar of Wakefield*

Pope

Wollstonecraft

*Thraliana*, by Hester Thrale Piozzi, is one published example of the genre [*ana*, or extracts]

*Evelina*

*Belinda* (1801)

*Clarissa* (1748)

*Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4)

*Cecelia* (1782)

Frances Brooke's *History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763)

Robert Bage's *Hermesprong* (1796)

*Pamela*

*Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1784)

Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773)

Gilpin

*Tom Jones*

*Joseph Andrews* (1742)

Sarah Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters, in a Letter to Miss Pennington, The Young Lady's Pocket Library, or Parental Monitor*.

*The Wanderer* (1802)

Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1810)

David Hume and Adam Smith

Gilpin's *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty...*

Wordsworth and Coleridge

Wordsworth in 1810 published his own *Guide to the Lakes*

In 1778, Father Thomas West had published *A Guide to the Lakes*

*The Female Quixote* (1752)

*An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters*, first published in 1761

*Essays on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful...* (1810)

*Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757)

marchioness de Lambert's *Advice of a Mother to Her Daughter, The Young Lady's Pocket Library, or Parental Monitor*

Dr. Gregory

Aesop's fable "The Jackdaw and his Borrowed Feathers,"

MANSFIELD PARK

*Lovers Vows*, Elizabeth Inchbald's adaptation of August von Kotzebue's *Das Kind der Liebe* [The Child of Love] (1790)

"Neither *Hamlet*, nor *Macbeth*, nor *Othello*, nor Douglas, nor the Gamester, presented anything that could satisfy even the tragedians; and the Rivals, the School for Scandal, Wheel of Fortune, Heir at Law..."

Lord Macartney  
 Crabbe's Tales  
 the Idler  
 'Address to Tobacco,' in imitation of Pope  
 the famous Doge at the court of Lewis XIV  
*Pamela*  
 Shakespeare  
 Goldsmith  
 Cowper's Tirocinium  
 not unlike the heroine of Hannah More's *Coelebs*  
 Burney's play *Edwy and Elgiva* (performed 1795)  
 Mark, 12:42-4  
 Goldsmith's *History of England* (London, 1764)  
 Maria Edgeworth (*Practical Education* (London, 1798))  
 Cowper's *The Task*, 'The Sofa.'  
 Goldsmith's *History of England in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son* (2 vols.,  
 London, 1764) or his expanded *History of England, from Earliest Times to the Death of George*  
*II* (4 vols., London, 1771).  
*The World Displayed*, in Johnson, *Works* (12 vols., London, 1820)  
 JA had very probably read Clarkson  
 Maria Edgeworth's *Manoeuvring* (1812)  
 book 5 of *Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Lost with the life of the author, to which is prefaced*  
*the celebrated critique by Sam. Johnson* (London, 1799)  
 Humphrey Repton: *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1816).  
 Samuel Johnson, *Adventurer*, 67 (26 June 1753)  
 Scott's *Marmion* (1808)  
 Walter Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805),  
 More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (London, 1799)  
 SCG  
*Self-Control* (1810)  
 Hugh Blair's *Sermons* (5 vols. 1777-1801)...Addison, in *The Spectator*, 107 (1711)  
*The Man of the World* (1777), comedy of the same name by Charles Macklin (1785)  
 Mary Hays' *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799)  
*A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768)  
*Elegant Extracts*  
*Quarterly Review*  
*The Merchant of Venice*  
 Milton's 'L' Allegro,'  
*The Romance of the Forest* (1791)  
*My Grandmother* was by Prince Hoare (1793-4)  
*The Merchant of Venice, Richard III*  
 Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)  
 'Two Dialogues by Joshua Reynolds,' in Johnsonian Miscellanies, ed. G. B. Hill (1897)  
 Thomas Gisbourne, 'The Subject of Amusements Continued,' in his *An Enquiry into the Duties*  
*of the Female Sex*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1797), and biook entire as well  
*Julius Caesar, Hamlet*

*Douglas* by John Home (1757)  
*The Gamester* (1753)  
*The Rivals* (1775)  
*Wheel of Fortune* (1791), *Heir at Law*  
 Thomas Campbell's 1799 poem *The Pleasures of Hope*  
 The 'Journal of an Embassy to the Emperor of China' was published in John Barrow, *Some Account of the Public Life and a Selection from the Unpublished Writings of the Earl of Macartney* (1807), in two large volumes ('your great book')  
 George Crabbe's *Tales in Verse* was published in 1812, though his earlier volumes, such as *The Borough* (1810), include tales  
 Samuel Johnson's 103 *Idler* essays, originally contributed to a weekly journal, the *Universal Chronicle*, in 1758-9  
 Isaac Hawkins Browne, *A Pipe of Tobacco: in Imitation of Six Several Authors* (1736). The poem appears in Robert Dodsley's *Collection of Poems. By Several Hands* (3 vols., 1748)  
 Johnson's essays on memory in the *Rambler* and the *Idler* (nos. 44, 72, and 74)  
 Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, in *Works* (1820)  
 Voltaire, from whom Johnson, who would be JA's immediate source, took it  
 Matthew, ch. 19, v. 30  
 Proverbs 31:26-7  
 Robert Burns' *The Scots Musical Museum*  
 the *Morning Post*, or the weekly *London Gazette*  
*Life of Johnson*  
*Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)  
 Hannah More published a pamphlet on 'The White Slave Trade, hints towards forming a bill for the Abolition of the White Female Slave Trade, in the Cities of London and Westminster,' in 1805  
*The Weekly Entertainer or Agreeable and Instructive Repository*, 45 (12 August 1805)  
 2 Peter, ch. 2, vs. 12-15  
*The Old Manor House* (1793)  
 'The Je ne sçai Quoi, A Song' by William Whitehead (1715-85), in Dodsley's *Collection of Poems*  
*Lockean ideas*  
 multi-volume edition of Shakespeare, possibly that by George Steevens, in ten volumes (1773)  
*Henry VIII* (c. 1613)  
 Hugh Blair's chapter on 'Eloquence of the Pulpit' in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*  
*Morning Post*  
*Romeo and Juliet*  
 Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796)  
 Johnson's final *Idler* (April 5, 1760)  
 2 Peter, 2:12-15  
 John Dryden's (1678) version of *Antony and Cleopatra, All for Love, or The World Well Lost*  
 Steel's *Original and Correct List of the Royal Navy*  
 'moral essays,' possibly Johnson's  
 Mackenzie's *The Mirror* (1779-80)  
 William Cowper's 'Tirocinium: or, A Review of Schools' (1785)  
 Johnson, *Rambler* 47

Gilpin, *Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex and Kent in 1774* (1804)  
Luke, ch. 15, v. 20  
Psalm 32, v. 2

### EMMA

*Elegant Extracts*  
*The Vicar of Wakefield*  
*Romance of the Forest*  
*Children of the Abbey*  
Shakespeare  
Gray's Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard  
Cowper, *The Task*, Book IV, "The Winter Evening"  
John Gay's fables, "The Hare and Many Friends."  
*Adelaide and Theodore*

### PERSUASION

*The Times*  
*Twelfth Night* (c.1601)  
*The Winter's Tale* (c. 1609)  
*The Rambler* (1750-1752)  
Wordsworth, Shelly, Keats, Coleridge  
Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (1816)  
Walter Scott and Lord Byron  
*The Giaour* (1813) and *The Bride of Abydos* (1813)  
Wentworth based on both Nelson and Byron (?)  
Sir William Dugdale and his *Ancient Usage in Bearing of such Ensigns of Honour as are commonly call'd ARMS. With a Catalogue of the present NOBILITY of England* (1682)  
*The Wealth of Nations*  
*Waverly* (1814)  
Sir Egerton Brydges is a possible source for Sir Walter  
in 1795 [Edmund Burke] also published his "Letter to William Elliot, Esq."  
Thomas Gisbourne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society*  
*Walsingham* (1797)  
*Patronage* (1814)  
*The Old Manor House* (1793)  
*Advice to Young Ladies, on the Improvement of the Mind* (1808)  
*A Vindication...* (1792)  
*Madame de Fleury* (1809)  
.....as far from the Johnsonian model as it could well be."  
Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication*  
James Thomson  
Shakespeare's "Sonnet Seventy-Three"  
Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*  
"Oh say not, my love," "The Resolve," "The Maid of Neidpath," "The Maid of Toro," and the  
"Song" from Canto Three of *The Lady of the Lake*.

*The Rambler* number 32, number 47  
*Camilla* (1796)  
*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812)  
*Corsair*  
*Emmeline* (1788) and *Belinda* (1801)  
"Henry and Emma" (1709), by Matthew Prior  
SCG

*Humphry Clinker*

*Rape of the Lock* (1714)

*An Essay on Criticism* (1711)

*Guy Mannering* (1815)

*A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774)

*Cecelia* (1782)

Thomas Clarkson, whose works include *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1786) and *History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliaments* (1808).

*The Dunciad* (1728)

*The Arabian Nights' Entertainment*

from Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare to Richard Steele and Mary Wollstonecraft

*The Rambler*, Number 85

Anna Letitia Barbauld in her 1810 essay titled "The Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing."

Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*

### SANDITON

*Morning Post* and the *Kentish Gazette*

Cowper's poem 'Truth' (1782)

*Tristram Shandy*

*Camilla*

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* and Jane Marcet's *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816)

Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1757).

Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy, by Mr. Yorick*, 2 vols. (1768).

John Hassell, *Tour of the Isle of White*, 2 vols. (1790), vol. 1, p. 168.

George Keate, *Sketches from Nature, Taken and Coloured in a Journey to Margate* (1779), extracted from a review of the book in the *London Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* (August 1779),

Anonymous, *East-bourne; being a Descriptive Account of that Village, in the County of Sussex* (1787), pp. 10-11.

*The Man of Feeling* (1771) by Henry Mackenzie

Sarah Fielding's *The Countess of Dellwyn* (1759) was criticized for its heavy dependence on quotation.

assassin: word much loved by Gothic novelists

*Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*

Burns's poetry

James Montgomery's poetry: *The Wanderer of Switzerland* (1806), *The West Indies* (1807), *The World before the Flood* (1812).

Wordsworth

Thomas Campbell, 'The Pleasures of Hope'

Biographies of Burns

*The Rivals* (Lydia Languish)

*Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (domestic)

*Patronage* (domestic)

remembering Sir Sedley Clarendel in *Camilla* speaking in clichés?

*Camilla*

*The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, and *Gentleman's Magazine*

*Clarissa*

*Self-Control*? Possibly familiar with *The Narrative of Robert Adams* (1816)

things such as: *The Natural History of the Tea-Tree, with Observations on the Medical Qualities of Tea, and Effects of Tea-Drinking* (1772).

"Seaside resorts had provoked a good deal of satiric and sardonic comment": Cowper, 'The Retirement,' *Poems by William Cowper, Of the Inner Temple, Esq.* (1782), p. 284., William Cobbett in *Rural Rides* (1823), Peter Pindar in 'The Praise of Margate' (1816), and Walter Scott in *Saint Ronan's Well* (1824).

Perhaps *S* influenced by *The Magic of Wealth* (1815) by T.S. Surr (the town of Flimflamton).