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*JANE AUSTEN AND THE WORLD OF MEN:
A STUDY OF MALE AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY
IN THE SIX NOVELS*

by

Patrick Joseph Donahoe

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August, 1990

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned hereby certify that they have read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance a thesis entitled "Jane Austen and the World of Men: A Study of Male Authority and Responsibility in the Six Novels"

by Patrick Joseph Donahoe

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

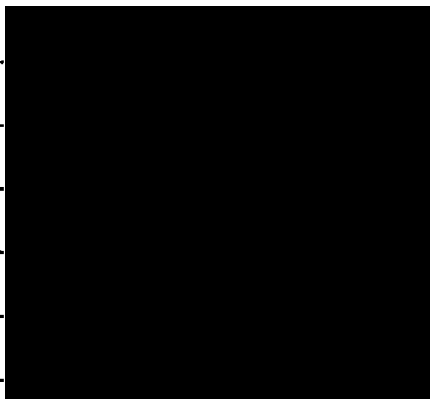
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For Susan

Table of Contents

Table of Contents		v
Abstract		vi
Abbreviations used		vii
Acknowledgements		viii
Chapter I	Introduction - Jane Austen and Context: The World of Men	1
Chapter II	The Portrayal of Clergymen and Other Professionals	31
Chapter III	Men in Their Roles as Brothers and Friends	68
Chapter IV	Jane Austen's Fathers: the Abdication of Responsibility	111
Chapter V	The Progressive Development of the Unworthy Suitors: Integrating Danger	160
Chapter VI	Men Who Get It Right: Jane Austen's Accepted Suitors	215
Chapter VII	Conclusion - The Achievement of the Novels	271
Bibliography		276

ABSTRACT

Jane Austen's novels are chiefly about women, courtship and marriage, but the context for her heroines' growth to maturity is a rigidly patriarchal society. No previous full-length study has explored the novels' depiction of the men who are the personification of this patriarchy. This dissertation focuses exclusively on the portrayal of men in the novels, and provides a comprehensive account of male authority and responsibility, its limits and its obligations. Representation of this inegalitarian world grows more sophisticated over the course of the six novels; in particular, the depiction of the male characters provides a valuable commentary not only on the few choices women have, but also on the acuity of perception and high degree of self-discipline, not to mention courage, the women portrayed require to protect themselves where their future happiness and material well-being are concerned. Relations between men and their brothers and sisters create a solid verisimilitude in the novels and these bonds are portrayed realistically as often complicated, frustrating or shallow, and occasionally as warm, supportive and understanding. Fathers mainly are found wanting. Collectively, they powerfully illustrate the theme of the abdication of responsibility which pervades Jane Austen's novels. The role of unsuccessful suitor, embodied in the early novels by clear-cut villains, later evolves into a much more complex rendering of human interaction in a world of shades and gradations where little is what it seems. Determining these men's faults requires an increasing subtlety and this aspect of interaction between the sexes aptly underlines the difficult task of discernment which women face in understanding and trusting men. A few men, the accepted suitors, get it right and stand out for their willingness to accept their faults and limitations, to grow as persons, to listen to women, and to treat them with equality and mutuality. The novels' representation of the world of men demonstrates also an evolution in the depiction of masculine emotion, a development which culminates in Frederick Wentworth's impassioned love note to Anne Elliot. The hallmark of Jane Austen's portrayal of men, the liars as well as the listeners, is the fairness of her characterization; it models an equity which few women could have experienced, and marks the novels' vision as a significant contribution to English Literature.

EDITION AND ABBREVIATIONS

The edition of the texts used is the Chapman one from Oxford University Press: Jane Austen, *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1933). All subsequent references are to Chapman's edition containing the following volumes.

Vol. I *Sense and Sensibility*, 3rd ed., 1933.

Vol. II *Pride and Prejudice*, 3rd ed., 1932.

Vol. III *Mansfield Park*, 3rd ed., 1934.

Vol. IV *Emma*, 3rd ed., 1933.

Vol. V *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, 3rd ed., 1933.

Vol. VI *Minor Works*, 1954.

In quotations from the text I have left the spelling and punctuation as found in the Chapman edition, including archaic usages such as her's for hers.

The abbreviations which I have used for Jane Austen's works throughout this dissertation appear below parenthetically.

Sense and Sensibility (SS)

Pride and Prejudice (PP)

Mansfield Park (MP)

Emma (E)

Northanger Abbey (NA)

Persuasion (P)

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CHAPTER I

Jane Austen in Context: The World of Men

It is commonplace in critical discussion of Jane Austen's work to focus on the author's portrayal of women. Jane Austen's intelligent and attractive presentation of her heroines' growth to maturity and marriage, her subtlety in creating credible supporting casts of mothers, sisters and aunts, and her keen awareness of the details and complexities of women's lives in an inegalitarian society all strike the reader as the major achievements of the novels. The world in Jane Austen's novels is a seemingly female world and initially the men appear to be important only in as much as they support the plot or help the heroines' development. Against the prominence of female characters in the text and with the notable exception of such men as Fitzwilliam Darcy, Frank Churchill, and Frederick Wentworth, the portrayal of masculinity, of male interactions, of men as individual characters, in short, of the male world, may seem the subtext. This is an illusion -- in fact, it is the context. The world Jane Austen lived in and the world in which she set her novels are both patriarchal. Unquestionably, her work reads as an exploration of women's search for a space for themselves within the restrictions of a strong patriarchal system. The novels not only form a critique of the inequities and impossibilities which women faced under such a system, but also provide insight into how the expectations of that society affected men as well. What emerges from the texts, in both the social

commentary and the obvious, progressive, artistic development, is a serious effort to reconcile the discrepancies of authority and servility, of duty and irresponsibility, of reality and idealism. The solutions suggested by the texts -- the alternatives to the prevailing ethos that the novels imply -- are uncommon for the time and are as striking an achievement philosophically as they are artistically.

What emerges from the portrayal of men in the novels is that this writer, Jane Austen, understands men, is well aware of the failings of the patriarchal system and yet, in an arresting act of faith in human potential, outlines in a handful of her men and the women who accept them as husbands the potential for a better world. The novels reveal a commitment to conservative ideology, but not in an exclusive or unthinking way that remains uncritical of the institutions and practices on which the Regency world was based. Through their course the novels examine and comment directly and indirectly on the need constantly to renew one's commitment in order to keep the institutions fresh. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to assert that the novels propound the responsibility of every individual to define, redefine, and refine one's role in one's society.

Given the gift of critical perception that the novels demonstrate, Jane Austen, it seems, was well prepared to undertake a novelistic exploration of women's place and responsibilities in society. Growing up in an atmosphere which encouraged reading and writing in literature and journalism, she had the good fortune to develop the requisite craft. If one took at face value Jane Austen's remarks about her small pieces of ivory, it would be logical to presume that the unmarried daughter of a country rector would have little to offer, as woman or artist, about men. Such,

however, is not the case based on the evidence of the texts; all six novels reveal experience and insight rather than naiveté about the ways of the world of men. Although chiefly secondary characters, the men seem a definite advance in characterization and verisimilitude over their eighteenth-century predecessors.¹ Jane Austen's work is further distanced from its predecessors by the novelist's seeming refusal to portray any characters as faultless or heroic. As Gilbert and Gubar astutely observe:

Like Anne Elliot, who explains that she will 'not allow books to prove anything' because 'men have the advantage of us in telling their own story,' Austen retains her suspicions about the effect of literary images of both sexes, and she repeatedly resorts to parodic strategies to discredit such images, deconstructing, for example Richardson's influential ideas of heroism and heroinism.²

The fathers, sons, brothers and lovers, the clergymen, sailors, gentlemen and cads offer a fascinating spectrum of masculinity worthy of its own full-length study both for what it reveals about men in the world and as a critical commentary on the

¹ I am thinking here particularly of the male characterization in Richardson, Burney, Edgeworth, Wollstonecraft, and the gothic novels of Radcliffe. See: Frank W. Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1967). This remains one of the basic studies of Jane Austen's literary background. See also: Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 292-299; Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1983) 61-86; and more generally, Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) 224-240; Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1986) 13-32, 149-150; and Peter L. De Rose, *Jane Austen and Samuel Johnson* (Washington: University Press of America, 1980) 1-11.

² Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 119.

society which is depicted. The fairness of Jane Austen's vision as a writer may well emerge as her crowning achievement.

A simple yet striking distinction made by Mary Wollstonecraft supplies a valuable perspective on this balance in Jane Austen's presentation of her characters. Writing about truth and duty in Chapter III of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft says, "Women, I allow, may have different duties to fulfil; but they are *human* duties, and the principles that should regulate the discharge of them, I sturdily maintain, must be the same."³ In their roles as fathers and sons, brothers and uncles, in their lives as men in the world, chiefly landed gentry, clerics, militia men and sailors, the men in the novels are drawn, measured and frequently found wanting in light of the "principles that should regulate the discharge of *human* duties." Of the suitors Jane Austen creates, all the villains fail and even the heroes stumble. Fathers are chastened for their abdication of parental responsibility and clerics reproached for self-indulgence and lack of example. Yet it is misleading to suggest that all of Jane Austen's men are created from the same mould. A careful examination of the novels, in the generally accepted chronological order of *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*, shows a progressive development in the artistic ability with which the

³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Miriam Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975) 139.

world of men is portrayed, coupled with an increasingly sophisticated vision of society.⁴

The novels' burgeoning understanding and broadening view of life are nowhere more evident than in the way the anti-hero role is integrated into the text and in the increasing confidence with which the emotional lives of the male characters are delineated. The advance that a Frank Churchill represents over a John Willoughby is one example of a growing sense in the texts that the world is more one of shades and gradations than one of clear distinctions. Frank Churchill is rejected not because he is evil or deceitful, but rather because he would be an unsuitable partner for Emma. The subtlety with which Mr. Knightley's emotional dilemma over how and when to assert his feelings for Emma is painted shows a grasp of male inner life as firm as the understanding of men in the world demonstrated in the portrayal of clergymen and sailors. The recasting of the penultimate chapter of *Persuasion* to include Captain Wentworth's impassioned letter to Anne Elliot is another and bolder example of the author's control and discernment.

Thematically and structurally the roles played by men are obviously an essential part of the similar pattern in the six novels, but Jane Austen never repeats herself. The variation on theme is revealing. The effect of finding in each novel an absent or ineffectual father figure raises several important issues about Jane Austen's

⁴ For further details on the chronology of composition see: R. W. Chapman, *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems*, 1st ed., 1948 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) 175-182, B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) 63, and B. C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968) 4-5.

men and the difference between the ideal and the real. The stridency of tone in the description of Sir Walter Elliot is quite unlike the patience and indulgence with which Mr. Bennet's flaws are described, even when one takes into account that Mr. Bennet is simply more likeable and long-suffering than the pretentious Sir Walter.

Another pertinent consideration in exploring evidence of a consciousness of the male world in the novels is the deliberate balancing of the text with a subtext in which most male-to-male interactions take place off stage. For example, Mr. Bennet's quiet, socially obligatory and amusingly pragmatic visit to his new neighbour at Netherfield Park is an essential circumstance to set in motion the action in *Pride and Prejudice*. The details of that meeting are not included in the dramatic narrative, but that it was a lone social call made without Mrs. Bennet's awareness goes well beyond the proper decorum of the time for establishing social intercourse. Deftly, in her first few hundred words, Jane Austen illustrates both the tensions between the male and female worlds on a broad scale and the particular tensions between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet on a personal level. Clearly, Jane Austen's perceptions were not limited, however small her chosen canvas. She deals not only with her heroines' development, but also with the stress between the sexes, a strain exacerbated by inequality, such as the unequal voice women had in determining the direction of their lives. At the same time she can sensitively, as well as wittily, comically and satirically, chronicle the male rites of passage: marriage, ordination, enlistment, and succession. Hers is the art of selection and control, of detail and allusion, of balance and scale. Her novels speak much about men. To understand Jane Austen's men

is to gain a fuller comprehension of her limitations, her vision, her achievements as a writer.

i

To date, no full-length study of Jane Austen's representation of men forms a part of the scholarship or critical analysis of her canon. A careful review of the critical heritage, made so accessible by B. C. Southam's two anthologies, reveals a singular inattention to the male characters who people her work.⁵ Clearly, from 1811 to 1940, the period covered by Southam's extensive research, the portrayal of the male characters, both directly as persons and, even more so, indirectly as representatives of patriarchal society, is passed over in a way that indicates an unawareness of these issues as topics for comment. There are, to be sure, specific references (the most prescient of which are included below and in succeeding chapters) that not only reflect the differences in critical reading from era to era, but also demonstrate that critical acuity requires, above all, self-knowledge of the social, cultural and gender biases which one brings as critic to the examination of a work of literature. Two of the keenest nineteenth-century readings of Jane Austen's novels and, in fact, the only significant notice of her "fine vein of feminine cynicism,"⁶

⁵ B. C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* [Volume 1, 1811-1870] (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), and B. C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage, Volume 2, 1870-1940* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987).

⁶ Mrs. Oliphant, from "Miss Austen and Miss Mitford," in Southam, vol. 1, 216.

her "touch so fine we often do not perceive its severity,"⁷ are by women writers who, it is no exaggeration to claim, are unique in their time for recognizing the powerful force of the irony in the novels as a comment on her society. Further, a perusal of David Gilson's exhaustive *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* produces only a handful of notes and articles which reflect an interest in Jane Austen's men per se.⁸ Indeed, it has been only within the last decade that, with the advances of feminist critical theory, readers and critics have begun to focus on the wealth of insight into female socio-political, economic, and personal self-awareness which is to be read in women novelists' representation of men. As Elaine Showalter cogently argues in *A Literature of Their Own*, men represent all the "cultural and historical forces that relegate women's experience to the second rank."⁹ Given such import, how men are portrayed, and the sophistication of the commentary her representations evince, form an essential part of understanding not only Jane Austen's awareness and acuity, but

⁷ Julia Kavanagh, from "Miss Austen's Six Novels," in Southam, vol. 1, 177.

⁸ David Gilson, *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). Chief among these are: Carole Berger, "The Rake and the Reader in Jane Austen's Novels," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 15 (1975) 531-544; Mary Burgan, "Mr. Bennet and the Failures of Fatherhood in Jane Austen's Novels," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 74 (1975) 536-552; Edward Copeland, "The Burden of *Grandison*: Jane Austen and Her Contemporaries," *Jane Austen: New Perspectives, Women in Literature*, new ser. 3, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983) 98-105; Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Jane Austen and Heroism," *New York Review of Books*, Feb. 1979: 37-43; Michael Jackson, "Jane Austen's View of the Clergy," *Theology*, 5 (1975): 531-538; Judith Wilt, "Jane Austen's Men: Inside/Outside 'The Mystery'," *Men by Women, Women in Literature*, new ser. 2, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981) 59-76; Jeanne K. Welcher, "Jane Austen's Men: A Fair Share of Excellence," *Confrontations*, 7 (1973) 97-102.

⁹ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, rev. ed. (London: Virago, 1982) 36.

also her place in the evolution of a female literary identity. Before this specific aspect of Jane Austen's tradition is surveyed more thoroughly, however, it is useful first to establish the more general modern critical context.

A number of the recent critical appraisals of Jane Austen's 'politics' are particularly useful in exploring her values and her biases in presenting a portrait of society. It is essential to an understanding of Jane Austen's portrayal of men in her work to establish her experience of her world as expressed in the novels, and to put to rest the old-fashioned myths that she was unaware and unconcerned with the larger related issues of her day, and that these concerns do not appear in her novels. Tony Tanner deals decisively with the issues of context and content in Jane Austen's novels in the introduction to his invaluable reading of her work. He includes one of the more extreme views of Jane Austen's limited scope only to destroy the premise:

To quote only one writer, who has made a point made by many others in various ways, reading Jane Austen's novels 'it would take an abnormally acute reader to realise that there had been a war on at all'. . . . As we shall see, it certainly would not have taken an 'abnormally acute' reader to gather from Jane Austen's novels that there had been a war on: indeed, it would have taken an abnormally obtuse one *not* to gather just that, particularly a reader of *Persuasion* but also a reader of *Pride and Prejudice*. More generally, it has become clear that Jane Austen was much more aware of contemporary events, debates and issues, of the wars and domestic unrest, of the incipiently visible results of the Industrial Revolution, and of a radical change taking place in the constitution of English Society, than the conventional view allows, or perhaps wants to allow.¹⁰

¹⁰ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan, 1986) 4.

In his book, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, Warren Roberts painstakingly details the references, often subtle, throughout the novels which show Jane Austen's awareness not only of troop movements, naval mutinies and engagements, but also of church and government politics, and civil unrest. Christopher Kent, another historian who makes a major contribution to Jane Austen scholarship, in "Real Solemn History' and Social History" draws on his knowledge of the deployment of the army to explain that, even in such a seemingly insignificant detail as Wickham's posting after Darcy buys him a commission in the "socially more prestigious regular army,"¹¹ Jane Austen is applying her knowledge of life in an England at war and suffering from internal unrest:

Even as a regular soldier, Wickham is not sent abroad, but to Newcastle in the turbulently industrial North. This recalls another point: that the army was not simply for use against foreign enemies. In the almost complete absence of effective police forces in England the army was central to the maintenance of order at home.¹²

The concerns of economic life and estate management are raised in a number of ways which indicate more than a passing awareness of the chief issues of the day. Sir Thomas Bertram's long absence from Mansfield Park while he is in Antigua raises questions about colonization and the slave trade, and is also a telling and well-integrated authorial comment central to the abdication theme of the novel. Sir Thomas' interest in assuring the profitability of his West Indian investment during war-time takes him away from his home responsibilities as *paterfamilias* and local

¹¹ Tanner 104. Tanner makes use of information from Christopher Kent, "Real Solemn History' and Social History," in *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, ed. David Monaghan (London: Macmillan, 1981) 86-104.

¹² Kent 100.

squire at a time when, one could argue, his family, his tenants, and his country need him at home to look after interests of more than solely personal gain. Emma's relief of the poor is one of her quiet works of charity, but David Aers places her beneficence in a much wider socio-historical context. He explains how the enclosure of common lands which made the fortunes of George Knightley and promised to do the same for his tenant, Robert Martin, was also responsible for a growing number of unemployed who had lost their last few means of self-sustenance with the increasing privatization of hunting and fishing rights concomitant with the enclosure movement's denial of access to arable land.¹³ The world of *Persuasion* not only reflects the history of the war with France and the prize money which made many a sailor's fortune, but also describes the changes in society and the value of money which are contributing factors in Sir Walter Elliot's decision to remove himself and his family from the family seat, abandon his responsibilities as lord of the manor, and rent Kellynch Hall to Admiral and Mrs. Croft.

There is a further context which is essential here to give perspective to the preoccupation with the scale of Jane Austen's work evident in so much of the critical commentary before the mid-point of this century and unfortunately in some ways still pervasive. It is misleading to establish Jane Austen's awareness of politics and current affairs, her alertness to the world around her, without questioning why it is that the criterion of representing the 'larger world', for lack of a better phrase, seems so important. Julia Prewitt Brown in *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and*

¹³ David Aers, "Community and Morality: Towards Reading Jane Austen," in David Aers, Jonathan Cook, David Punter *Romanticism & Ideology: Studies in English Writing 1765-1830* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) 118-136.

Literary Form explores the "commonplace view that Jane Austen is not a great novelist because her subject matter is too 'restricted' -- that is, historically insignificant or emotionally shallow," only to expose the historical and aesthetic biases which presuppose "an antithesis between women and history, between domesticity and history, and between the self and society."¹⁴ Brown's study of the novels takes issue with the dismissive and predominantly male critical view which disparages the importance of Jane Austen's achievement; she concludes that, "as the first great woman author in England, Jane Austen gave meaning to domesticity for the first time in English fiction. Her novels are the first to fully assert the cultural significance of marriage and family, their role in social and moral change."¹⁵

A further impediment to understanding Jane Austen's work is the assumption that, in addition to being unaware of or concerned with unimportant domestic issues, she was uncritical of the society in which she lived. In his introduction to *Jane Austen and the Drama of Woman*, LeRoy Smith outlines two general readings of Jane Austen's work:

The dominant emphases are a conservative view -- Austen is primarily a moral writer, she accepts the structure and values of her society and she is indebted to the eighteenth century for her beliefs -- and a radical view -- her fiction exhibits a division within her mind and personality and a conflict with her society.¹⁶

¹⁴ Julia Prewitt Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) 1.

¹⁵ Brown 1.

¹⁶ LeRoy Smith, *Jane Austen and The Drama of Women* (London: Macmillan, 1983) 1.

Claudia Johnson in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* summarizes even more perspectives attributed to the author:

Accordingly, Austen has appeared to us in a number of contradictory guises -- as a cameoist oblivious to her times, or a stern propagandist on behalf of a beleaguered ruling class; as a self-effacing good aunt, or a nasty old maid; as a subtly discriminating stylist, or a homely songbird, unconscious of her art.¹⁷

In his brief but acute introductory survey of Jane Austen criticism, LeRoy Smith explores how the works of D. W. Harding and Marvin Mudrick, in particular, challenged a long-popular view of Jane Austen "as a complacent, entertaining novelist of manners, conventional and orthodox in her opinions, niggling and aloof in her judgments" and proposed alternate readings in which they "offered a view of Austen as a 'subversive' critic consciously or unconsciously engaged in a private war with her social environment."¹⁸ Of course, the 'regulated hatred' and 'irony as defence' points of view have been themselves challenged and found somewhat restrictive as readings. This is not to deny, however, the much needed freshness which D. W. Harding's startling *Scrutiny* article brought to what, with a few outstanding exceptions, was a tired and patronizing body of work focused on "dear Jane" as a witty personality and dedicated in a revisionist way to making her family background increasingly upper class. Harding's psychological reading explores the evidence in the novels of a range of authorial response to her life and surroundings, and moves the novelist from the remote pedestal where she had been decorously

¹⁷ Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) xiii-xiv.

¹⁸ Smith 2.

honoured as one skilled only in "expressing the gentler virtues of a civilized social order."¹⁹ What Harding found was something much more complex:

fragments of the truth have been incorporated in it ["a seriously misleading impression" of her work and intentions], but they are fitted into a pattern whose total effect is false. And yet the wide currency of this false impression is an index of Jane Austen's success in an essential part of her complex intention as a writer: her books are, as she meant them to be, read and enjoyed by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked; she is a literary classic of the society which attitudes like hers, held widely enough, would undermine.²⁰

The overall effect of Harding's seminal essay was to reintroduce Jane Austen's work to critical appraisal.

Because of its sensational nature Harding's article in many ways overshadowed a far more balanced and scholarly work published earlier in 1939: *Jane Austen and Her Art* by Mary Lascelles.²¹ Southam describes it as "the first book to provide a full-scale account of Jane Austen based upon thorough historical and bibliographical scholarship; and on the critical front . . . [breaking] fresh ground in applying James's ideas on the 'art' of the novel."²² One of the other writers who responded most effectively in the cause of rehabilitating Jane Austen's reputation from the gentle, maiden aunt of the Janeites to intelligent, highly skilled writer was Marvin Mudrick. His 1952 study, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defence and Discovery*,

¹⁹ D. W. Harding, "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review*, 8, 4 (March 1940) 347.

²⁰ Harding 347.

²¹ Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art*, 1st ed., 1939 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

²² Southam, vol. 2, 124.

remains an essential critical text.²³ Ian Watt, in the comprehensive but now somewhat dated review of Jane Austen criticism which opens his collection of critical essays, credits Mudrick with "working out in detail the relationship . . . between Jane Austen's attitude toward the literature of her time and her development of the use of irony for contrasting what is with what should be."²⁴ Mudrick's book stimulated highly energetic discussion which has added to the reader's understanding not only of the breadth and depth of Jane Austen's achievement, but also of the limitations of any single critical or analytical approach to her work. Alistair Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels*²⁵ and Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* prove this latter point while at the same time providing key readings of the novels and the socio-political background of Jane Austen's era. Likewise, David Monaghan's 1980 study, *Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision*, has provided an essential reading for writers concerned with the social context of the novels.²⁶

Undeniably there are as many Jane Austens as there are critical discourses. Her work has elicited a range of responses from the most subjective projections of personal taste, class, and philosophy to painstaking attempts at objective readings

²³ Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defence and Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).

²⁴ Ian Watt, "Introduction," *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed., Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963) 12.

²⁵ Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971).

²⁶ David Monaghan, *Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

that acknowledge the reader/critic's biases, but which are nonetheless, in the light of passing time, also products of their age and whatever prevailing societal ethos informed the author. Having examined the wealth of material available to the contemporary critic, LeRoy Smith comes to a highly allusive conclusion that is as astute as it is provable, and provides a refreshingly balanced view of the author's work and ethic:

Far from 'copping-out', acquiescing to an unjust system, adjusting reality to fit her dreams, suppressing her anger in a display of 'regulated hatred', or disguising her knowledge with a 'cover story', Austen faced a major social problem openly, honestly and realistically. She placed herself thereby in the forefront of the unformed movement for its solution.²⁷

Reconciling Jane Austen's wider liberal vision, which he accepts as a given, with the fact that she held many "Tory sympathies," Tony Tanner says, "it does not follow that her work is uncritical of her society in many profound ways. . . . In fact Jane Austen remains within the ideology of her class and partly (and increasingly) transcends it."²⁸ The tension which this perspective creates propels the drama in the novels and is the basis for both the satiric and comic impulse or response. LeRoy Smith also sees Tony Tanner's transcendent Jane Austen; for him the liberal side of the narratives finds a focus in the novels' interest in the women's choices.

It is as a result of current interest in women's issues that the most stimulating critical assessments of Jane Austen's work during the past decade have been produced. Feminist readings such as that of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have

²⁷ Smith 44-45.

²⁸ Tanner 5.

added immeasurably to an understanding of the particular, frequently disparaged, and often disadvantaged, place of women writers in a patriarchal society by amplifying their struggling, strangled voices. Gilbert and Gubar's chapter on Jane Austen's juvenilia is a comprehensive survey of her early experiments in fiction and surpasses the usual consideration of works never intended for publication to delineate a more far-reaching reading of the early pieces. For example, of the family's elaborate reactions to a knock at the door in Jane Austen's *Love and Friendship* (1790), Gilbert and Gubar write:

Clearly this discursive speculation on the knocking at the door ridicules the propensity of sentimental novelists to record even the most exasperatingly trivial events, but it simultaneously demonstrates the common female ennui at having to maintain polite conversation while waiting for a prince to come. In other words, such juvenilia is important not only because in this early work Austen ridicules the false literary conventions that debase expression, thereby dangerously falsifying expectations, especially for female readers, but also because she reveals here her awareness that such conventions have inalterably shaped women's lives. For Jane Austen's parody of extravagant literary conventions turns on the culture that makes women continually vulnerable to such fantasies.²⁹

While it is difficult to deny the vulnerability of women in a patriarchy, what emerges from the novels is a glimmer of the possibility that courageous, self-aware women can make a difference in the quality of their own lives through common sense and by refusing to accept at face value not just literary conventions but societal conventions as well. Elizabeth Bennet's freedom compared with that of the Bingley sisters is a case in point. In Jane Austen's novels there are no princes. The discussion of the suitors which follows focuses on the novels' presentation of these

²⁹ Gilbert and Gubar 113-114.

men not as heroes or saviours, but as men with feelings, failings and shortcomings common to humanity.

Like the other major critics before them, Gilbert and Gubar not only make their own distinct and substantial contribution to literary criticism, but also define the field, as it were, for many feminist writers who follow. This is not to say that the conclusions reached by Gilbert and Gubar are always supported or even supportable. It is enlightening and helpful, for example, to read that:

Austen demystifies the literature she has read neither because she believes it misrepresents reality, as Mary Lascelles argues, nor out of obsessive fear of emotional contact, as Marvin Mudrick claims, nor because she is writing Tory propaganda as Marilyn Butler speculates, but because she seeks to illustrate how such fictions are the alien creations of writers who contribute to the enfeebling of women.³⁰

But the fact remains that no one exclusive reading of Jane Austen's motives is truly possible, or, for that matter, even desirable if the reader and critic wish to avoid the same kind of single-minded enfeeblement that these critics deplore. Few would disagree that "for Austen, the domestic confinement of women is not a metaphor so much as a literal fact of life,"³¹ or that:

Austen actually uses her self-proclaimed and celebrated acceptance of the limits of her art to mask a subversive critique of the forms of self-expression available to her both as an artist and as a woman, for her ridicule of inane literary structures helps her articulate her alienation from equally inadequate societal strictures.³²

³⁰ Gilbert and Gubar 120-121.

³¹ Gilbert and Gubar 124.

³² Gilbert and Gubar 127.

Jane Austen's position as a woman in a patriarchal society and as a person doubly separated from her social class by being both not married and not self-sufficient economically gives her an outsider's perspective. This point of view is also seen in the novels' attention to the plight not only of women, but also of men, many of whom are equally victims of the 'societal strictures' of Regency England.

Gilbert and Gubar's exposition breaks down when, in their earnest rush to expose the intense pressures on women to conceal and repress their real reactions to the limitations of their lives, they fail to acknowledge that all men did not by the fact of their gender have access to the power, influence, and economic freedom denied women. The drama which Jane Austen describes in her novels is a human one of growth and development. It is, despite the peculiarities of time and setting, a timeless story. This is what renders the male as well as the female characters of endless interest. For this same reason an observation by Gilbert and Gubar such as, "the story of the female prisoner is Catherine's *only* independent fiction, and it is a story which she must immediately renounce as a 'voluntary, self-created delusion' which can earn only her self-hatred" can distract the reader's attention from another more central dimension of the text -- the depiction of Catherine's growth into her own, happy adulthood.³³

Nancy Armstrong, writing more recently in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, takes exception to the approach of Gilbert and Gubar. In Armstrong's view, "Gilbert and Gubar virtually ignore the historical conditions that women have confronted as

³³ Gilbert and Gubar 141.

writers, and in so doing they ignore the place of women's writing in history." ³⁴ Armstrong goes on to argue in her study "first, that sexuality is a cultural construct and as such has a history; second, that written representation of the self allowed the modern individual to become an economic and psychological reality; and third, that the modern individual was first and foremost a woman." ³⁵ Further, the particular focus which is helpful here is Armstrong's insistence that "domestic fiction unfolded the operations of human desire as if they were independent of political history." ³⁶

Margaret Kirkham in *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* provides another valuable feminist contribution to Jane Austen criticism. Her chapters on women, morals and education, and on the emergence of the novel explore Jane Austen's composition in the context of eighteenth-century feminist ideas and the Feminist Controversy of the turn of that century. Kirkham's conclusion is that:

Austen's subject-matter is the central subject-matter of rational, or Enlightenment, feminism and that her viewpoint on the moral nature and status of women, female education, marriage, authority and the family, and the representation of women in literature is strikingly similar to that shown by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. ³⁷

Kirkham's study clearly helps dispel the assumptions that the moral interest so evident in Jane Austen's novels was exclusively personal. Kirkham convincingly

³⁴ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 8.

³⁵ Armstrong 8.

³⁶ Armstrong 9.

³⁷ Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1986) xi.

connects the morality in the novels with the general developments of Jane Austen's times. Reading Wollstonecraft's two novels, *Mary* and *The Wrongs of Woman*, readily confirms Jane Austen's superior artistic ability, but the similarity of the concerns, despite the distinct voices of these women, is proof of Kirkham's thesis of a "common line of feminist concern and interest."³⁸

While this study of Jane Austen's representation of male characters acknowledges the utter necessity of the feminist and female perspectives as outlined by Showalter to a composite modern reading of the novels, they are not the only perspectives from which the portrayal of men can or will be examined.³⁹ LeRoy Smith's reading is apposite:

In Austen's case, the tendency has been either to deny that her interest went beyond affirming the status quo or to depict her as a victim of repression whose art disguised her frustration. Both treatments, however, appear reductive. Austen could plausibly take a position on the 'woman question' that would be radical in her day and also maintain a conservative outlook in other matters, and her writing suggests that she did look and feel deeply on both sides of a question.⁴⁰

Claudia Johnson, writing more recently, takes an even broader perspective. In Johnson's account, "Austen emerges as nonradical and nonreactionary, as a critical spirit working through novelistic forms in order to defend and enlarge a liberal middle ground."⁴¹ Jane Austen is not so much the warrior of ideas as the seeker

³⁸ Kirkham xi.

³⁹ Showalter 13.

⁴⁰ Smith 8.

⁴¹ Johnson, jacket notes.

of truth, what Patricia Spacks calls a "truth of possibility."⁴² Again, Tony Tanner echoes this wider vision when he writes, "the overriding concern of Jane Austen's novels is the nature of true utterance."⁴³ It is difficult to disagree with this assertion or with LeRoy Smith's assessment that "real life informs Jane Austen's art, and the latter gives back a pattern for behaviour Her message is not a negative one -- concealment, repression and accommodation -- but a positive one -- the possibility of personal freedom and happiness."⁴⁴ The vision in Jane Austen's novels is not pessimistic; the structure and movement of the novels, and the value placed on growth and awareness point optimistically to fulfilment of human potential.

ii

This textual study accepts Jane Austen's preeminent place in literary history and, because it does not seek either to enter the discussion on her literary lineage, or to add to the wealth of material exploring her awareness of and response to her literary predecessors, it is essential to establish what is taken as given. It is noteworthy in the critical heritage mentioned above to observe that Jane Austen emerges gradually from the early associations with Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth. Early custom not only grouped her within the tradition of women novelists, but also by focusing on her assumed connectedness to the eighteenth-

⁴² Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Muted Discord: Generational Conflict in Jane Austen," in *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, ed. David Monaghan (London: Macmillan, 1981) 177.

⁴³ Tanner 6.

⁴⁴ Smith 9.

century male mode, particularly of Johnson and Richardson, managed to present her as far more derivative than it is now possible to argue, and to define her achievement by what it was not: not Smollett, not Fielding, not Radcliffe, not Inchbald.

Walter Scott's compliment to Jane Austen, which self-deprecatingly calls attention to his ability with the "big bow-wow strain" of novel writing, equally hampered assessment for more than a century by focusing the assumption, often gender-biased, that to do something well on a small scale is not as worthwhile an achievement as to do so on a large scale and therefore requires apology to be mixed with praise.⁴⁵ But Jane Austen's literary history and heritage are the province of other studies. Jane Spencer's *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* is one of the current assessments which defines the present field of critical inquiry and helped to focus the parameters of this examination of Jane Austen's representation of men.⁴⁶ Spencer writes:

Eighteenth-century England witnessed two remarkable and interconnected literary events: the emergence of the novel and the establishment of the professional woman writer. The first of these has been extensively documented and debated, while the second has been largely ignored. Yet the rise of the novel cannot be understood fully without considering how its conventions were shaped by the contributions of a large number of women, their writing deeply marked by the 'femininity' insistently demanded of them by the culture to which they belonged. . . .

If women's writing is important to the history of the novel, the novel is no less important to the history of women's search for a public voice. In the eighteenth century it was an important medium for the articulation of women's concerns, and its rise was centrally bound up

⁴⁵ Walter Scott, in Southam, vol. 1, 106.

⁴⁶ Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

with the growth of a female literary voice acceptable within patriarchal society.⁴⁷

This is essentially what Catharine Stimpson recognizes when she writes in the Foreword to Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* that "the woman who wanted to write could obey the Proper Lady and inhibit her creative and imaginative impulses, or, more aggressively, she could engage in strategies of resistance, from accommodation to subversion."⁴⁸

For Poovey the literature produced by women in these circumstances reflects "the lived experience of cultural values."⁴⁹ It is how Jane Austen's representation of men affirms such a vision that is of interest here. Spencer's further explanation of her stance provides a necessary context as valuable for discussion of Jane Austen's picture of the male world as it is for Spencer's broader analysis:

I do not claim that in any respect, thematic or stylistic, women's writing is *essentially* different from men's: indeed the most crucial insight afforded by feminism is in my opinion the deconstruction of the opposition masculine-feminine as essential categories. But if women writers exhibit no essential 'femininity', they are still working within a patriarchal society that defines and judges them according to its notions of what femininity is. They may internalize their society's standards of femininity and reflect this in their writing. Or they may write in opposition to those standards. In short, women writers are in a special *position* because of society's attitude to their sex; and their work is likely to be affected by their *response* to that position (even if the response is an attempt to ignore a situation which might be debilitating if acknowledged). Women having been oppressed *as*

⁴⁷ Spencer viii-ix.

⁴⁸ Catharine Stimpson, "Foreword," Poovey vii.

⁴⁹ Poovey vii.

women, it is not only reasonable but necessary to consider women as forming a group with significant interests in common. ⁵⁰

With this in mind, Jane Miller's simple but powerful reminder in *Women Writing About Men* that, "in according respect and admiration to George Eliot and to a few other women writers, men have applied their own standards, and not only to their [women's] art, [but also to] their subject matter, their sensibilities and their moral attitudes" provides an even more focused context for looking at Jane Austen's approach to her subject matter. ⁵¹ "Whether the men in women's novels have been intended as realistic portraits, romantic fantasies or a mixture of both, they have not always been recognized for what they are: men seen, desired and understood by women," writes Miller, but this is not to say that women critics and commentators have always understood the integrity of such an approach to Jane Austen's portraits of men any more clearly than male readers and writers. ⁵² Virginia Woolf assessed Jane Austen's work many times in the course of her life and may well have been in Southam's words her "most sympathetic critic in treating questions relating to the woman novelist," ⁵³ but Woolf's sense that there was "too little of the rebel in her [Jane Austen's] composition, too little discontent, and of the vision which is the cause and reward of discontent," seems to miss the subtlety of what, to present-day

⁵⁰ Spencer ix.

⁵¹ Jane Miller, *Women Writing About Men* (London: Virago, 1986) 141.

⁵² Miller 142.

⁵³ Southam, vol. 2, 240.

readers, is an essential part of Jane Austen's voice.⁵⁴ It will be one of the concerns of subsequent chapters of this study to appraise the accuracy of Woolf's comment that:

the chief damage which this conservative spirit has inflicted on her art is that it tied her hands together when she dealt with men. Her heroes were less the equals of her heroines than should have been the case, making allowance for the fact that so it must always be when a woman writes of men or a man of women. It is where the power of the man has to be conveyed that her novels are always at their weakest; and the heroines themselves lose something of their life because in moments of crisis they have for partners men who are inferior to them in vitality and character.⁵⁵

The seeming oversight of Jane Austen's progressive ability to portray male emotion powerfully is one of the many challenges to rereading provided by Woolf's commentary.

An example of contrasting views from Woolf's contemporaries can be found in Reginald Farrer's estimation that:

of the feelings of her men, of course, Jane Austen has nothing to say at first hand, is too honest an artist to invent, and too clean a woman to attempt the modern female trick of gratifying her own passions by inventing a lover, and then identifying herself with his desires, in so far as she can concoct them. Yet it would be quite a mistake to call her men pallid or shadowy.⁵⁶

Another surfaces in G. K. Chesterton's assertion:

no woman later has captured the complete common sense of Jane Austen. . . . She could describe a man coolly. . . .

Jane Austen knew much more about men than either of them [the Brontës, and George Eliot]. Jane Austen may have been protected from the truth: but it was precious little of truth that was protected

⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf, in Southam, vol. 2, 241.

⁵⁵ Woolf, in Southam, vol. 2, 242.

⁵⁶ Reginald Farrer, in Southam, vol. 2, 253.

from her. When Darcy, in finally confessing his faults, says "I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice *though not in theory* [emphasis Chesterton's]," he gets nearer to a complete confession of the intelligent male than ever was hinted by the Byronic lapses of the Brontës' heroes or the elaborate exculpations of George Eliot's.⁵⁷

Contemporaneously, Walter Raleigh was writing to R. W. Chapman on the clubability of Jane Austen's young men; albeit in a personal letter, his remarks are a low-water mark in subjective criticism:

Her young men, my Gawd! I will only take Darcy and Bingley [as examples]. Of course they have no profession -- they have money. But there is no scrap of evidence, no indication, that they can *do* anything, shoot a partridge, or add up figures, or swim or brush their hair. They never talk of anything except young women, a subject taboo among decent young men. (I find that women mostly don't know that men never talk intimately about them. Jane didn't know this). Well, Darcy and Bingley have only one interest in life -- getting married, and marrying their friends one to another. As for the young women, they are marvellous and incomparable, so that Jane is a swell all the same. But, her young men would be black-balled in any club.⁵⁸

Looking at historical criticism, with the obvious advantage of distance and time, makes the gender, social, and cultural biases seem much more obvious than those of our present age which may not as yet be observable with the same kind of clarity. Given this shortsightedness, there seem to be three challenges in currently understanding the representation of the world of men in the novels. The first is the ability to move beyond bias to acknowledge that Jane Austen could possibly have wanted or needed to make a comment on her society, let alone on the men and institutions that determined its course. Second is allowing that such comment in the novels may not be entirely one of approbation or one which could be made openly.

⁵⁷ G. K. Chesterton, in *Southam*, vol. 2, 239-240.

⁵⁸ Walter Raleigh, in *Southam*, vol. 2, 94.

And the third crux is judiciously exploring the novels' subtext as well as their context to determine not only the novelist's voice, but also her authorial vision.

The distinction between the author as a real historical personage and the author as the voice in a particular work, made so cogently by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, is particularly useful here to explain the parameters of this study.⁵⁹ What has been referred to above as the authorial voice or authorial vision, Booth calls the "implied author" when he writes, "our sense of the implied author includes not only the extractable meanings but also the moral and emotional content of each bit of action and suffering of all characters."⁶⁰ In his specific discussion of Jane Austen, Booth defines "the 'author herself'" by distinguishing between "the real Jane Austen [and] an implied author . . . [who] heightens the effects by directing our intellectual, moral, and emotional progress."⁶¹ Without belabouring this point, it is useful to see how Booth reiterates his concept toward the end of his thought-provoking examination of the role of the 'implied author' in *Emma*. Having fully listed the 'values' implicit in the novel, "because it is only thus that the full force of Jane Austen's comprehensive view can be seen," Booth continues:

there is clearly at work here a much more detailed ordering of values than any conventional public philosophy of her time could provide. Obviously, few readers in her own time, and far fewer in our own, have ever approached this novel in full and detailed agreement with the

⁵⁹ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961).

⁶⁰ Booth 73.

⁶¹ Booth 256.

author's norms. But they were led to join her as they read, and so are we.⁶²

This investigation of the men in Jane Austen's novels, and of the world of men as represented therein, is not a search for the historical Jane Austen, Miss Austen of Steventon and Chawton. What is sought is a perception of the implied author's sense of the life of men, men as persons, men as part of the patriarchy, men as lovers and listeners, men as liars and fools, because that vision helps us to an understanding of ourselves, of a female point of view, and of the power of literature to express a timeless sense of our shared humanity.

In the succeeding chapters this study will explore the myriad of ways Jane Austen's novels portray men's failures and successes in doing their human duty. This exploration is limited to the six novels that were the product of her adult writing. The juvenilia and the extant letters are available to modern critics, but are not included in the scope of this examination for differing reasons. Mary Poovey's comment about Jane Austen's letters sums up the response of most readers to the extant correspondence. She writes:

Our access to Jane Austen's personal attitudes to historical events and to propriety will always be blocked by her sister Cassandra, who destroyed many of Austen's letters and censored numerous others; moreover, the letters that did survive at times convey contradictory opinions and, what is perhaps even more confusing, almost always employ a decidedly ambiguous tone.⁶³

The shifting ironic tone in the novels is difficult enough to plot; to attempt the same with the bowdlerized letters not only invites misinterpretation, but also, as a

⁶² Booth 262.

⁶³ Poovey, 173.

biographical exercise, has limited application in this study's focus on the voice and vision of an implied author. Likewise, Jane Austen's juvenilia have not been included. Gilbert and Gubar, as well as Poovey, have examined this material thoroughly; indeed, Gilbert and Gubar note that:

Austen's adolescent fiction includes a larger "slice of life" than we might at first expect: thievery and drunkenness, matricide and patricide, adultery and madness are common subjects. Moreover, the parodic melodrama of this fiction unfolds through hectic geographical maneuverings, particularly through female escapes and escapades quite unlike those that appear in the mature novels. ⁶⁴

The youthful excesses of her apprenticeship ventures into comedy and satire, chiefly offered for family entertainment and enjoyment, are clearly evidence of the artist's development, but because they were not intended for publication these fragments are peripheral to the examination of the authorial voice in her adult presentations which follows. The novels' representation of the clergy, examined in the next chapter, indirectly substantiates the unpredictability of biography. Concentration on the completed works published or intended for that wider audience allows for a manageable body of text that explicitly has the author's imprimatur. As Booth sapiently observes of this adult "presence" in the stories, "only here can we find a mind and heart that can give us clarity without oversimplification, sympathy and romance without sentimentality, and biting irony without cynicism." ⁶⁵ Here begins an understanding of Jane Austen's representation of the world of men.

⁶⁴ Gilbert and Gubar 114.

⁶⁵ Booth 266.

CHAPTER II

The Portrayal of Clergymen and Other Professionals

There are, of course, any number of ways to introduce a discussion of male authority and responsibility as represented in Jane Austen's novels, but few offer the entrée which is provided by her depiction of that quintessential male hierarchy, the Church. Not only does an examination of Jane Austen's clergymen prepare the reader for the novels' representation of the world of men, but their characterization and presentation are also keys to understanding the comic and satiric vision, the values, and the moral ethos which pervade her works.

Historically, Jane Austen's father, the Reverend George Austen, was Rector of Steventon and she grew up in the rectory there in the presence of many young men, her Oxford-educated brothers and her father's pupils especially. Two of her brothers (first James and eventually, after several other careers, Henry) also became clergymen. In the introduction of his chapter on religion in *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, Warren Roberts exhaustively lists all of the author's other familial connections with the clergy of the Church of England, and comments on the culture or way of life which such extensive involvement with the Church of England may be supposed to comprehend. "Besides being the daughter of a country parson in Southern England, [he writes] Austen was connected in countless ways, through friends and relatives, to the conventions, customs, ways, traditions and outlook of the clerical profession. While her world was that of the English village, her view on to

that world was through the Rectory window." ¹ Although Roberts' list is comprehensive, it is of interest only as a sort of knowledgeable background to the presentation of the clergy in the novels.

In fact, for the male characters, both major and minor, who are in Holy Orders or who aspire to ordination in the novels, their chosen vocation in and of itself is of little or no significance either to their behaviour or to the plot of their respective novels. Notable exceptions, of course, are Edmund Bertram and the Reverend William Collins, as in these instances the fact of their profession makes a clear difference both to the action and the meaning of the novels. While characters like Mr. Elton and Dr. Grant deserve notice for their behaviour and for the acuity of the commentary they form on the world of men and for the representation of the established church made through their characterizations, their profession as clerics must be considered as secondary to their presentation as social and moral beings. A comparison with the two most memorable parsons in eighteenth-century novels, Parson Adams in Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742), and Dr. Primrose in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), highlights the difference in Jane Austen's approach. The humour of Adams and Primrose relies on the juxtaposition of their actions with their vocation. In Jane Austen not only is the tone sharper and less gently accepting of human foibles, but also where comedy is the intention it results from the innate qualities of the person, not from his calling.

¹ Warren Roberts, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1979) 109.

It is this exploratory, take-nothing-for-granted, attitude in the novels that makes the clergymen such an interesting place to begin to understand their representation of complex human relations. Jane Austen's view may have been through the Rectory window, but it was unshuttered; the English village in the novels is a microcosm and their purview the vanity of human wishes. As Tony Tanner puts it, "her concern is with conduct, almost never with religious experience."² For Henry Tilney and Edward Ferrars, the fact of their vocation is not raised as an issue of major concern; Jane Austen gives no special dispensation of grace or protection from error to her clergy. Tilney and Ferrars are knowing portraits of men and their characterizations demonstrate an awareness of the subtler nuances of human motivation and interaction. Warren Roberts comments that "these clergymen have been seen as conventional fictional types or as social types that differed little if at all from the other male characters, possessing the same strengths and weaknesses as their lay counterparts."³ Alistair Duckworth gives a broader critical context to Roberts' observation with his assertion that "few novels may be properly termed 'theological.' As a form the novel's area of concern seems typically to be 'ethical.'"⁴ Duckworth aptly concludes by citing Angus Wilson's concise appraisal that after Samuel Richardson the English novel deals with the question of "right and wrong" rather than "good and evil."⁵ In Jane Austen's clergymen the reader is served notice

² Tanner 132.

³ Roberts 110.

⁴ Duckworth 26.

⁵ Duckworth 26.

not to expect romanticized or rosy generalizations about the roles and institutions which men, and for that matter, women, fill or represent in society. There is no bias in favour of the rectory in her novels. ⁶

The rationale for including "clergymen in her novels but not God" seems straightforward. ⁷ It is a given that the Church of England was a ubiquitous and, to a large extent, essential part of the organization of the kind of communities portrayed in the novels, but the outward focus of the Church was more social than religious. Certainly, as Gilbert Ryle observes, Jane Austen's "heroines face their moral difficulties and solve their moral problems without recourse to religious faith or theological doctrines. Nor does it ever occur to them to seek the counsels of a clergyman." ⁸ Agreeing that Jane Austen "draws a curtain between her Sunday thoughts, whatever they were, and her creative imagination," ⁹ Margaret Kirkham reasons that,

since the novelist wishes to show us heroines capable of learning morals through experience and the exercise of their own judgment, she does not send them off to get the advice of the few rational clergymen available in her fiction, for to do so would prevent her showing that while the Church of England ordains such moral teachers

⁶ Laurence Lerner begins a chapter on Jane Austen in *The Truth-tellers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967) 23, with the assertion that Jane Austen does not believe in God, but goes on to make a distinction similar to Wayne Booth's invocation of the 'implied author.' Lerner asserts that without the convention of distinguishing between the historical personage and the novelist "literary criticism is impossible." Lerner's conclusion is that "Jane Austen the novelist did not believe in God because God is totally absent from her work."

⁷ Roberts 110.

⁸ Gilbert Ryle, "Jane Austen and The Moralists," in *Critical Essays on Jane Austen*, ed. B. C. Southam (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968) 117.

⁹ Ryle 117.

as Mr. Collins, Mr. Elton and Dr. Grant, the natural moral order of things allows Miss Bennet, Miss Woodhouse and Miss Price (under Providence) to do very well without them, having within themselves, as Miss Price puts it, 'a better guide . . . than any other person can be' (MP 412).¹⁰

Another essential consideration is expressed by Irvin Ehrenpreis: "Her clergymen, whether heroes or fools, never discuss doctrine. If they did so, by her scheme of moral, metonymic contrasts, she would have to treat one sect as superior to another, and the religious distinction would bury the individual traits."¹¹ It may well have been that, alerted by the exhausting moral dilemma over religious beliefs in her 'favourite novel', *Sir Charles Grandison*, Jane Austen could see no purpose to be served in her fiction by further invidious debate.¹² Clearly it is to the great advantage of the novels that they focus on the human elements which are common to all and avoid both the divine and also the fallacy of representing men of the cloth without feet of clay. Michael Jackson suggests that "Jane Austen's clergy are part of the fabric of society. They belong to it; they are woven into it. They have

¹⁰ Kirkham 83-84.

¹¹ Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Jane Austen and Heroism," *New York Review of Books* (February, 1979) 42.

¹² F. B. Pinion, *A Jane Austen Companion* (London Macmillan, 1973) 164-165. Pinion provides a succinct overview of Jane Austen's response to Richardson and Fielding, and includes both her nephew's recollection that, "every circumstance narrated in *Sir Charles Grandison*, all that was ever said or done in the cedar parlour, was familiar to her," and the passage from the *Memoir* noting that, "Richardson's power of creating, and preserving the consistency of his characters, as particularly exemplified in *Sir Charles Grandison*, gratified the natural discrimination of her mind, while her taste secured her from the errors of his prolix style and tedious narrative."

human failings as her characters must in order to help forward the comedy." ¹³

Interestingly, two of Jane Austen's early commentators would more or less agree.

Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1843 as follows:

She has given us a multitude of characters, all in a certain sense, common-place, all such as we meet every day. Yet they are all as perfectly discriminated from each other as if they were the most eccentric of human beings. There are for example, four clergymen, none of whom we should be surprised to find in any parsonage in the kingdom, Mr. Edward Ferrars, Mr. Henry Tilney, Mr. Edmund Bertram, and Mr. Elton. They are all specimens of the upper part of the middle class. They have all been liberally educated. They all lie under the restraints of the same sacred profession. They are all young. They are all in love. Not one of them has any hobbyhorse, to use the phrase of Sterne. Not one of them has a ruling passion, such as we read of in Pope. Who would not have expected them to be insipid likenesses of each other? No such thing. Harpagon is not more unlike to Jourdain, Joseph Surface is not more unlike to Sir Lucius O'Trigger, than every one of Miss Austen's young divines to all his reverend brethren. ¹⁴

Not surprisingly, John Henry Newman's assessment (which, Southam notes in anthologizing the remark, dates from before his conversion to Roman Catholicism) is somewhat different from Macaulay's: "What vile creatures her parsons are! she has not a dream of the high Catholic ethos." ¹⁵ Neither Macaulay nor Newman, however, takes the characters as anything but serious, accurate representations of men as they know them. Newman's cavil addresses social class or theological taste, not the accuracy of the portraiture, it seems, and neither writer remarks an ironic

¹³ Michael Jackson, "Jane Austen's View of the Clergy," *Theology* (Volume 78, 1975) 536.

¹⁴ Thomas Babington Macaulay, in Southam, vol. 1, 122.

¹⁵ John Newman, in Southam, vol. 1, 117.

undertone in Jane Austen's clergymen, or the cumulative effect which their several portrayals have as a comment on the representatives of the established church.

The depiction of the various clergymen in Jane Austen's novels offers the reader and critic alike an introduction to her view of the world of men, to the prevailing tension between the ideal and the real, and to the concern expressed through all six novels with the abuse of authority and the abdication of responsibility. The presentation of the role of the clergy and the characterization of them form a commentary on the essential emptiness of one of those institutions where one might reasonably expect to find honour, decency, a model of proper behaviour, and regard for others. The novels' portrayal of the ordinary and extraordinary successes and failures of these men provides readers the opportunity to come to an initial understanding of Jane Austen's authorial stance and the moral vision that emerges from the novels: a vision which ultimately will be shown as both progressive and conservative in its insistence that all persons regardless of gender have a similar moral duty.

i

It is in *Mansfield Park*, that most sober of Jane Austen's novels, that the only substantial discussion of the role of the Church and the clergy takes place. Consistent with what has been observed above, the topic is raised there not in relation to the divine or to religious experience, but as a choice of profession and in the context of the role the church, as an institution, plays in representing and maintaining the status quo in society. The visit to Sotherton Court has a centrality

in *Mansfield Park* which sets it apart, along with a handful of other scenes in Jane Austen's novels, as the achievement of a consummate artist. It is useful here to examine the relevant passages in some detail. The actions of the characters as they tour the house and grounds of which Maria Bertram is to become mistress have implications for the rest of the novel not only in a structural or organisational sense, but also because they thematically prefigure the eventual denouement. It is while viewing the mansion's chapel that Mary Crawford first discovers that Edmund Bertram intends to take Holy Orders in the not-too-distant future. The ensuing discussion explicitly aligns the participants in the various stances where they are ultimately found after the action of the remainder of the novel. On second reading the exchanges at Sotherton clearly suggest that Edmund's and Mary's relationship is doomed from the moment his choice of career is revealed. The gulf between their separate value systems and approaches to life, and the differences in their capacities to understand and take seriously those things which traditional society would regard soberly, set up a tension which is released only in Edmund's final renunciation of Mary. The endorsement by the 'implied author' of Fanny Price's ethical stance establishes the absolute moral grounds for the ensuing action, but the disparagement of Mary's flippancy in no way diminishes the strength of her attraction to and love of Edmund, or the temptation she represents for him. Nor, certainly, does the fact that he knows what is proper to the person of a clergyman make Edmund's infatuation any easier for him to overcome, or make him any more desirable or any less erring, in light of traditional morality, in his personal conduct.

Declan Kiberd's reading of the resolution of Edmund and Mary's relationship reflects the intricacies of the dilemma which they face and underlines the novel's sophisticated comprehension of the full complexities of human interaction. Kiberd writes, "the side of him [Edmund] that remains haunted by her smile is the side which he will now have to repress as the husband of Fanny Price, a woman who may love him, but who can never respond like Mary to his vitality as well as his self-control."¹⁶ Clearly, in *Mansfield Park* the view of society is not the black and white world one associates with the Rectory; human motivation and interactions prove far too complicated to support such a view. Even when characters make black and white decisions as Edmund eventually does, the insight and integrity of the novel require that the personal cost be acknowledged. As LeRoy Smith puts it, "the principled man voluntarily limits his freedom."¹⁷ On the surface this distinction may seem inconsequential, but in fact it is a reiteration of the separation between real and ideal which marks Jane Austen's presentation of the clergy and it is also representative of the basic approach to character which she develops through all her work. Fathers, brothers, and suitors, both successful and unsuccessful, are all portrayed in bas-relief, as it were, against the expectations and associations of the internally established context of what is proper to the various types or roles. The refusal to take as a given any stereotyped expectation of behaviour is, as will be shown in this dissertation, the cornerstone of the novels' achievement. Her fathers

¹⁶ Declan Kiberd, *Men and Feminism in Modern Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1985) 87.

¹⁷ Smith 83.

are not good men simply by the act of siring children; the clergymen are not paragons by virtue of ordination. The questioning, critical eye and ironic turn of mind, so evident in the novels, paves the way for the realistic novels of Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, for the novel tradition as we know it today.

In terms both of this discussion and of *Mansfield Park*, the chapel at Sotherton takes on symbolic proportions as emblem of the clash of values old and new. Fanny's disappointment with the "mere, spacious, oblong room, fitted up for the purpose of devotion -- with nothing more striking than the profusion of mahogany and the crimson velvet cushions --" (MP 85) for not being an awe-inspiring space, reveals the strength of her imagination and the influence of her reading: "nothing melancholy, nothing grand . . . no aisles, no arches, no inscriptions, no banners" (MP 85-86).¹⁸ Her reaction is reminiscent of Catherine Morland's disillusionment with Northanger Abbey. One tends to forget that Fanny's enduring and unblinking realism is the achievement of her exertions to educate herself despite her lack of opportunity for active experience or much guidance save from Edmund, and it is interesting that Jane Austen includes this glimpse of Fanny's mind as not quite as fully formed in the mature and resolute principles with which she later comes to be

¹⁸ Jane Austen, *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1933). All subsequent references are to Chapman's edition containing the following volumes.

Vol. I *Sense and Sensibility*, 3rd ed., 1933.

Vol. II *Pride and Prejudice*, 3rd ed., 1932.

Vol. III *Mansfield Park*, 3rd ed., 1934.

Vol. IV *Emma*, 3rd ed., 1933.

Vol. V *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, 3rd ed., 1933.

Vol. VI *Minor Works*, 1954.

In quotations from the text I have left the spelling and punctuation as found in the Chapman edition, including archaic usages such as her's for hers.

associated. At this point Edmund still plays the tutor and explains to Fanny the private purposes of such a chapel compared with the community chapels in castles and monasteries, and the more public forms of worship in the parish church. In relating the history of the chapel, Mrs. Rushworth indicates that her late husband left off the practice of having a domestic chaplain read prayers for the household. Mary's smiling "New Woman" reaction, "every generation has its improvements," (*MP* 86) establishes her in the popular, secular camp.¹⁹ Fanny's response favours the preservation of tradition, in a way which prefigures her role in the reestablishment of Mansfield Park, and shows that, inexperienced as she is, she is not without her ideas of how things ought to be managed. "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!" (*MP* 86).

It is easy to miss on a first reading the strength with which what proves to be Mary's tragic flaw, as far as Edmund and the moral background of the novel are concerned, is presented here. Subsequently, it is clear how Jane Austen firmly manages thematic imperatives. When Mary responds to Fanny, "It must do the heads of the family a great deal of good to force all the poor housemaids and footmen to leave business and pleasure, and say their prayers here twice a day, while they are inventing excuses themselves for staying away" (*MP* 86-87), her words not only capture her flippancy, but also mark the core issue in *Mansfield Park* of the role of the patriarchy. Edmund's retort, "That is hardly Fanny's idea of a family

¹⁹ Kiberd 87.

assembling If the master and mistress do *not* attend themselves, there must be more harm than good in the custom" (*MP* 87), indirectly yet succinctly puts the finger on what is lacking at Mansfield and emphasizes Edmund and Fanny's mutual understanding. Mary's failure to see the practice of religion as a central human concern, and her observation on the "do as I say, not as I do" approach to management of a household, are reflections not just of her upbringing, but also of the increasingly secular, self-centered, and irresponsible society that the novels portray. The reason for the late Mr. Rushworth's abandonment of prayers is not given, but it is symptomatic of what the novels picture as wrong with the patriarchy. The standard of behaviour espoused in the novels reiterates a belief that with great power comes great responsibility and an absolute requirement to act in a way which is responsive to the greater good, not simply to answer personal inclinations or whims. Unfailingly throughout her works this is the moral balance in which Jane Austen weighs her characters. Given the inequality between men's and women's freedoms, and the far greater control which men had over their lives and the lives of those around them, how men exercise their authority and take responsibility is the real measure of their manhood, their enlightenment, and ultimately their worth as persons.

Mary Crawford concludes her revealing imaginings of how grateful past servants and members of the household would have been could they have known that the prayers would be left off and they could have ten more minutes in bed, with the comment that "in those days, I fancy parsons were very inferior even to what they are now" (*MP* 87). The shocked reaction of her hearers is predictable, but it

is worth noting that Jane Austen includes the information not only that it took Edmund some time to think how politely to react, to turn his mind away from understanding that Mary's views are more than an amusing sketch, but also that Fanny, timorous and mild-mannered, and still at this point a girl, "felt too angry for speech" (MP 87). Anger is not commonly a reaction which Jane Austen represents, and as such it is always an indication of complex as opposed to simply rash emotional response to something in the situation. Mary's persistence in her glib approach to the topic elicits several further responses from Edmund on public and private worship, the most interesting of which is a reflection on the theme of mental self-discipline. The measured tones of Edmund's response emphasize the seriousness of his approach to self-discipline. The reader hears the voice of Fanny's teacher:

"We must all feel *at times* the difficulty of fixing our thoughts as we could wish; but if you are supposing it a frequent thing, that is to say, a weakness grown into a habit from neglect, what could be expected from the *private* devotions of such persons? Do you think the minds which are suffered, which are indulged in wanderings in a chapel, would be more collected in a closet?"

"Yes, very likely. They would have two chances at least in their favour. There would be less to distract the attention from without, and it would not be tried so long."

"The mind which does not struggle against itself under *one* circumstance, would find objects to distract it in the *other*, I believe; and the influence of the place and of example may rouse better feelings than are begun with." (MP 87-88)

The struggles of the mind are very much a part of the world of *Mansfield Park*; for Edmund, for Fanny, there are both rewards and pains for their exertion. For those who will not struggle, for Mary, for Henry, for Maria, their lack of perseverance results for each of them in emptiness and unhappiness, in a freedom which is also a prison.

Part of the struggle for Edmund has already begun. Mary Crawford is lively and attractive in a way, one senses, that is new to Edmund. The conversation has become more serious than even he would like it to be. In concluding the speech referred to above, Edmund somewhat reluctantly concurs with Mary's observation on the length of services. Obviously tactful, but also somewhat smitten, he finds a way to agree with at least one thing Mary has said and makes an ambiguous remark on his experience of chapel at university. Depending on how one reads the pause and tone of Edmund's statement, it can be either a continuation by way of example of the reference to long services, or a fond remembrance of a part of his university life which he valued. "The greater length of the service, however, I admit to be sometimes too hard a stretch upon the mind. One wishes it were not so -- but I have not yet left Oxford long enough to forget what chapel prayers are" (*MP* 88). At times in Jane Austen's work, especially so in *Mansfield Park*, it is possible to become so involved in the seriousness of the moral tone that the comic spirit which informs even that novel is forgotten. Edmund's squirming may be embarrassing, but it is also an amusing and acute portrayal of mixed male emotions. His demeanour in this exchange signals a new stage in Edmund's ethical development and his growth to self-knowledge. It is only after this dialogue in which Mary, to her credit, has been utterly candid, that she and the reader learn that Edmund intends to 'take orders' soon after his father's return releases him from overseer's responsibilities at Mansfield.

The topic of Edmund's choice of a profession in the church is not dropped here, however. Mary reintroduces it as soon as she, Edmund and Fanny are in the

wood; obviously she has some trouble comprehending why any one would deliberately make such a choice. His response, "why should it surprise you? You must suppose me designed for some profession, and might perceive that I am neither a lawyer, nor a soldier, nor a sailor," (MP 91), reiterates the well known limits of career choices for second and subsequent sons, while Mary's reply outlines the more fanciful chance of an uncle or grandfather who has left a fortune for the second son. Ivor Morris points out how often in Jane Austen we are presented with scenes, not dissimilar, where one or both persons of a potential couple quickly ascertain the financial potential of the other party.²⁰ Economically, though not necessarily socially, being a clergyman was usually low on the list, and in this case if Mary is to entertain further some idea that has entered her head which will depose Tom Bertram's initial ascendancy there, it is absolutely essential to have as much information as possible. This is not the only instance in Jane Austen's novels where similar considerations of career options give an opening into the world of men, the inequalities of the system of primogeniture, and the often difficult experience of being brought up in wealth and style which one cannot hope to replicate in one's own adult life. Edward Ferrars faces such a dilemma through choice and circumstance, and both George Wickham and John Willoughby, as will be seen in a subsequent chapter, condemn themselves to marital unhappiness in order to maintain a certain style of living. Although the reader's attention is never specifically guided to the juxtaposition, in all of the novels men face these difficult

²⁰ Ivor Morris, *Mr. Collins Considered: Approaches to Jane Austen* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) 35-36.

decisions, moral choices really, that are similar to the kind of restrictive predicament which women in the novels regularly face. Of course men have the advantage that propriety allows them to be active rather than passive in choosing their fates. With the singular exception of Emma, no woman in Jane Austen is free from the requirement to consider prudently the financial aspects of any potential partnership. In fact, as has been remarked by a number of critics, it is a mark of their singular moral courage that such figures as Elizabeth Bennet, Fanny Price, and Anne Elliot dare to face the social, economic and personal consequences of their choices.

The possible consequences of Mary Crawford's infatuation with Edmund Bertram are not much to her liking, despite Edmund's attractiveness otherwise, and the result is an exchange in which her underlying feelings of frustration with his status are exposed as much as her values. In Mary's scheme of the world "men love to distinguish themselves, and in either of the other lines, distinction may be gained, but not in the church. A clergyman is nothing" (MP 92). Edmund's reply merits full repetition:

"The *nothing* of conversation has its gradations, I hope, as well as the *never*. A clergyman cannot be high in state or fashion. He must not head mobs, or set the ton in dress. But I cannot call that situation nothing, which has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally -- which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence. No one here can call the *office* nothing. If the man who holds it is so, it is by the neglect of his duty, by forgoing its just importance, and stepping out of his place to appear what he ought not to appear." (MP 92)

Edmund's distinction between the office and the man is central to Jane Austen's representation of men and morals in her work. Whether the responsibilities be those of the church, the state, the estate, the suitor or the parent, the value system

found in the novel remains unchanging in the assertion that a person has an individual obligation to do his duty. Although the clergy's role is of 'first importance,' both 'temporally and eternally,' the implications are clear for all walks and stations in life. In the words of Mary Evans:

Austen recognizes a dialectic in human relations which makes her a complex and far from didactic novelist. She does not wish to show the justice of a single case, or a single cause, but is at pains to reveal that human beings, men and women, construct their fates and have in their power the ability to mould their desires and temper their ambitions in ways which can produce relationships of lasting value. In this understanding of the world there is no place for moral abdication. Men can not claim that the home is no responsibility of theirs, any more than women can claim that they are seduced or 'led astray' by men.²¹

This non-discriminatory vision of male and female mutual responsibilities, this expectation that one does not renounce or ignore one's obligations to one's self, to one's family, and to the rest of the human community, forms the moral background against which Fanny Price, the Bertrams and the Crawfords play out the drama of their formative years.

When the tour of the interior of the Sotherton house concludes, the various parties move out of doors. The subsequent exchange of views between Mary and Edmund in the Park is important for a number of reasons. First, it establishes the strength of Mary's character and her determination not to be moved in her opinions, both of which have important repercussions structurally and thematically. Second, it continues to outline a view of the role of the clergy which distinguishes carefully the manner in which clergy can transmit values and shows Jane Austen's acute

²¹ Mary Evans, *Jane Austen and the State* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987) 84.

appreciation of the nuances of moral pedagogy, what Jan Fergus calls "emotional didacticism" and which also is clearly Jane Austen's ideal.²² Third, it establishes the distinction between the London world and the view from Mansfield Park which has been extrapolated in a number of generalizations by critics concerning country versus city values both in this novel and in the rest of Jane Austen's work. Mary's initial retort indicates that her acquaintance and the basis of her judgment of the clergy's role are based only on her experience of them in the limited part of their office which takes place in the pulpit, and reveals her unawareness of a role that would "govern the conduct and fashion the manners of a large congregation for the rest of the week" (*MP* 92-93). Even her choice of the word 'govern' is revealing of how far apart Mary and Edmund's perceptions of pedagogy are. The problems for a clergyman who wants to be involved with his parishioners in a city of London's size are acknowledged by Edmund, but he will not allow that the metropolis is as representative of the rest of the country as Mary thinks it to be. Edmund's reply is a condemnation of London as a place where good cannot flourish, but his emphasis, as Mary Evans indicates of Jane Austen's attitude to urban environments in general, is not that:

towns are inherently immoral, rather that urban life can allow the silly, or the morally corrupt, to articulate and demonstrate more fully the range and depth of their cupidity. To those with the kind of values that Austen endorses the city offers no threat: the city may be dirty and noisy and the glare from the buildings oppressive but it is not in itself the cause of corruption.²³

²² Fergus 4.

²³ Evans 39.

What Edmund values is the power of example which the clergyman provides, where the congregation can know his private character and observe his general conduct and find that he knows and shows what he ought; morals cannot be 'governed.' Even Jan Fergus, whose study argues for Jane Austen as a didact, albeit a special kind, acknowledges that the author's focus is rarely if ever on the prescriptive; rather it is on the favourable results of good example operating on a mind open to self-examination and reflection. As it is with the individual so it could be with the nation; as Edmund puts 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 every where found, that as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation." (MP 93)

The gulf between Edmund's 'teach and recommend' and Mary's 'govern' is, ultimately, unbridgeable.

Nina Auerbach's strong reaction to the 'oughts' of *Mansfield Park* is helpful and elucidating here as a reading, but, all things considered, faulty in its conclusions. She picks up Jane Austen's careful use of the word 'ought' in the novel and draws attention to it as weighted with unspecific authority. She writes:

Though the large and loveless house that gives it its name has made many readers feel that *Mansfield Park* is Jane Austen's most oppressive novel, its dominant emotional atmosphere introduces a certain vertigo, evident in the apparent rocklike solidity, but the true and hopeless elusiveness, of the word "ought." "Ought" tolls constantly, its very sound bringing a knell of absolutism, and nobody uses it with more assurance than the hero and heroine. Fanny can dismiss Henry Crawford simply because "he can feel nothing as he ought," while Edmund freights the word with religious and national authority; "as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation." As a barometer of feelings, morals, and institutions, the word seems an immutable touchstone, but in fact it has no objective validation. Its authority in the novel is entirely, and alarmingly, self-

generated. The great houses Mansfield and Sotherton scarcely institutionalize the "ought" that resounds in the novel's language; the Portsmouth of the Prices and the London of the Crawfords are equally ignorant of its weight. It has no echo in the world of households and institutions.

Yet this lack of official authority does not prevent the novel's misguided characters from using the word with the same assurance that Fanny and Edmund do. Sir Thomas says of a Fanny who is brewing rebellion, "She appears to feel as she ought" (230); for Mary, the party with which Maria Rushworth inaugurates her miserable marriage finds everything "just as it ought to be" (406); Maria herself avoids only the word in seeing the marriage as "a duty" (72). Even Edmund, who has transmitted its value to Fanny, abuses the word throughout the novel, beginning with his myopic pressure on Fanny to live with her hated Aunt Norris: "She is choosing a friend and companion exactly where she ought" (60). The incoherence underlying Edmund's authoritative vocabulary tells us that the word recurs anarchically, for there is no objective code to endow it with consistency. Fanny, for example, longs for a loving reunion with her indifferent mother, hoping that "they should soon be what mother and daughter ought to be to each other" (366), but as usual the novel provides no objective image of this "ought": in *Mansfield Park* and throughout Jane Austen's canon, mothers and daughters are at best indifferent and at worst antagonistic, depriving the commanding word of validation.²⁴

What Auerbach seems to miss is that in *Mansfield Park* the validation, the authority, for 'ought,' comes not from institutions, from the architectural or personal symbols which represent them, or from roles or positions one fills in private life, but from the individual in and of herself; from the person who, even in the isolation which is Fanny's lonely east room or squalid parlour in Portsmouth, accepts the responsibility to do her duty. It is here that "ought" gets its "validation." There is, perhaps, a parallel in Auerbach's use of the adjective "commanding" to define "ought" and Mary's use of "govern" -- both focus on the externally decreed. Edmund's temptation

²⁴ Nina Auerbach, "Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm: Feeling as One Ought about Fanny Price," in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983) 219-220.

does not diminish his vision of propriety, of moral accountability, of ethical obligation. The failings of the young Bertrams and their father which Auerbach illustrates are given an unhappy irony by Jane Austen for, in fact, the Bertrams know the forms or formulation for the 'objective code'; it is the substance which they have failed both to internalize and to inculcate. So when Auerbach says: "this lack of official authority does not prevent the novel's misguided characters from using the word with the same assurance that Fanny and Edmund do," she unwittingly comes at the real text. Understanding that there can really be no official or ultimate external moral authority, and determining the basis for one's actions in light of that awareness, is the business of Jane Austen's novels. Her men and women are distinguished not along sexual or hierarchical lines, but in their ability to understand that moral governance can only truly be generated of and from the self, "entirely and alarmingly" if you will. Embargoes, dictates, commands, the sum and total of the regulations society can impose are only barriers to be overcome, challenges of will, unless there is an inner sense of the rationale for such governance. An internalization of morality which develops through thoughtful observation of behaviour and its consequences, through self-awareness and self-discipline, and through a conscious determination to consider not only the consequences of one's actions for the self, but also their effects through action or example on the communities of which one is a part, from family to nation, is encompassed in the ideal "ought".

Countless characters throughout the novels live with the consequences of their perseverance or lack thereof in striving for the greater good. In the world of Jane

Austen's novels individual identity and morality are inextricably tied;²⁵ actions and attitudes define the self and the future is determined not so much by external forces as by the force of individual will working to grow, to improve, to understand. Mary Crawford's equivocating deflection of the conversation at Sotherton Park to concentrate on Fanny's affirmative response to Edmund's definition of the clergy's role, her prophetic reply to Edmund's wish that he could convince her likewise of the importance of good clerical example, ("I do not think you ever will"), and her persistence in urging "You really are fit for something better. Come do change your mind. It is not too late. Go into the law" (*MP* 93) equally show that while she has heard what Edmund has been saying, she understands none of it. The precarious balancing act which defines women's lives in Jane Austen's novels is identified forcefully in the identical strength with which Fanny Price and Mary Crawford approach their worlds. Within the context of their class, of the society in which they live, their self-determination leads in two distinct directions. Mary Crawford's perseverance in self-indulgence offers emptiness, while Fanny's struggle and endurance in serving needs beyond her own augurs well for her future fulfilment in the terms she has chosen. Alistair Duckworth's argument that "Jane Austen affirms society, ideally considered as a structure of values that are ultimately founded in religious principle, at the same time as she distinguishes it from its frequently corrupted form" is perfectly illustrated in the fates of these two women and the clergyman in their life.²⁶ Edmund's self-sacrifice, his determination, as Gene Koppel

²⁵ Duckworth 25.

²⁶ Duckworth 28.

puts it "to strive toward the goals which . . . right reason recognizes as valid" may seem the ultimate retreat to conservative and patriarchal values, and in some ways it is.²⁷ But, at the same time, it is also a triumph for the supremacy of personal values and self-determination. As will be shown in the further discussion of Edmund in the chapter on successful suitors, his characterization is also a benchmark in Jane Austen's novels for the sensitive, realistic portrayal of male ethical development.

ii

For reasons of both style and authorial development, Jane Austen's portrayal of clergymen is not always as sensitive as in her presentation of Edmund Bertram. The clergyman who would most immediately come to mind for the majority of Jane Austen's readers is not Edmund Bertram; it is that pompous figure of fun from *Pride and Prejudice*, the Reverend William Collins, Rector of Hunsford in Kent. An earlier creation than Edmund Bertram, Mr. Collins is drawn with more particular and restricted comic and satiric purposes in mind. In her later novels few if any characters get the kind of treatment which Mr. Collins does, and as such he represents a starting point from which to assess the significant growth which takes place in Jane Austen's ability to balance and incorporate character fairly as she develops as a novelist. The discussion in this dissertation on the evolution of the rejected suitors from villain figures to more integrated anti-heroes similarly focuses on the increasing skill with which the author was able to avoid stereotype and

²⁷ Gene Koppel, *The Religious Dimension of Jane Austen's Novels* (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Research Press, 1988) 3.

caricature in favour of a more realistic portrayal of the mixture of frailties which represents the complexities of the human condition. To be fair, although the comedy and satire in *Pride and Prejudice* gain a certain resonance from the fact of Mr. Collins' vocation, it has as much to do with his human foibles as with his supposedly spiritual calling. He is a perfect foil to Mr. Bennet's cynical sense of humour, a self-serving point of view which Elizabeth has to understand and overcome as part of her growth to responsible adulthood, and Jane Austen does not develop Collins beyond that point.

As comedy, Mr. Collins' misplaced assurance in his suit for Elizabeth Bennet's hand is amusing but painful to witness until her rejection clarifies his character. Then he is established as both a figure of fun and a symbol of the dire ends to which a woman might be induced in order to avoid spinsterhood. Charlotte Lucas' quick acceptance of Mr. Collins' proposal of marriage underlines their mutual desperation to meet others' expectations of them: for her, her family's desire that she marry and make way for her younger sisters to do likewise; for him, Lady Catherine's pragmatic wish that he soon marry and thus, the reader suspects, be rendered ineligible lest his eyes or her daughter's wander inappropriately. Any real growth or progressive development as a character in Mr. Collins would violate his function in the novel thematically as a representation of arrogance, sycophancy and sanctimony and structurally as a focus for part of the plot which revolves around the inequity of entailed property. He represents a type and as such is relatively predictable in his behaviour and his pronouncements. His letter of sympathy and advice to the Bennets after Lydia's misadventure is a classic which echoes all the non-Christian

sentiments which one expects from a clergyman of his ilk in such circumstances. The comic effect of his cant may have as its provenance Restoration drama or the comedy of manners as presented by Richard Sheridan in *The Rivals* (1775) or *The School For Scandal* (1777).

Yet, even here where the echoes are strong, the art of Jane Austen's novels is the art of refinement and adaptation of previous modes to suit their particular vision and sense of fairness. Mr. Collins' parental upbringing and education is included, albeit in a brief summary, by way of explaining the forces at work in shaping his attitude and demeanour, in fact, his survival mechanisms in a society which holds little comfort for those who, one way or another, cannot take care of themselves:

Mr. Collins was 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 father; and though he belonged to one of the universities, he had merely kept the necessary terms, without forming at it any useful acquaintance. The subjection in which his father had brought him up, had given him originally great humility of manner, but it was now a good deal counteracted by the self-conceit of a weak head, living in retirement, and the consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity. A fortunate chance had recommended him to Lady Catherine de Bourgh when the living of Hunsford was vacant; and the respect which he felt for her high rank, and his veneration for her as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his rights as a rector, made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility. (PP 70)

Similarly, Charlotte Lucas ironically reflects this instinct to self-preservation. In a novel which features so many different kinds of unhappy marriages, the Collins-Lucas match provides an extreme against which even Lydia and Wickham's elopement pales. The narrator's voice intrudes in the presentation of Charlotte

Lucas and Mr. Collins in a way Jane Austen was able to eschew in later works, but it is effective in making several points that would be almost impossible to present with such force otherwise. There is no subtlety, despite the irony, in a reflection like that on Charlotte's acceptance, where the commentary reads:

The stupidity with which he was favoured by nature, must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuation; and Miss Lucas, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment were gained. (PP 122)

A further illustration compounds Charlotte's case while at the same time in a more characteristic Jane Austen way making astute comment on the less romantic realities of marriage for women in an inegalitarian society. The male remains the rescuer of the female by means of his economic resources but nowhere is there room in this picture for any other traces of myth:

The whole family . . . were properly overjoyed on the occasion. The younger girls formed hopes of *coming out* a year or two sooner than they might otherwise have done; the boys were relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte's dying an old maid. Charlotte herself was tolerably composed. She had gained her point, and had time to consider it. Her reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable: his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. -- Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservation she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it. (PP 122-123)

There are few if any examples in Jane Austen's canon of a cooler or plainer statement of the facts of women's lives and the web of motivations and desire which constitute familial interaction.

Shocked as Elizabeth Bennet is by her friend's behaviour, at her unflinchingly realistic view of marriage, she cannot help but note how well Charlotte has been able to shift for herself when several months later she visits the couple at Hunsford. Through astute management of the space at her disposal, Charlotte has arranged that most desired of spaces, a room of one's own:

The room in which the ladies sat was backwards. Elizabeth at first had rather wondered that Charlotte should not prefer the dining parlour for common use; it was a better sized room, and had a pleasanter aspect; but she soon saw that her friend had an excellent reason for what she did, for Mr. Collins would undoubtedly have been much less in his own apartment, had they sat in one equally lively; and she gave Charlotte credit for the arrangement. (*PP* 168)

Charlotte's room is a symbol of her ability to make the best of a difficult situation. It is one woman's response to the restrictions imposed by being a person only as one man's daughter or another man's wife. Jane Austen's tone is comic, and her restraint prohibits authorial comment, but here, as elsewhere in the novels, comedy is only the daylight side of tragedy. Hunsford Rectory has none of the squalor of the Prices' Portsmouth abode, but it is an equally barren landscape for the soul. Later, in *Emma*, a figure like Mr. Elton, who shares more of Mr. Collins' character traits than initially one may suppose, is presented in a much less broadly comic mode. Mr. Elton's marriage on the rebound to a Miss Hawkins savours much more of the ruffled dignity of a fortune hunter who has been rebuffed than the buffoon for whom the choice of partner is merely the matter of forty-eight hours 'attitude readjustment.' This refinement gains for the author a verisimilitude that emphasizes the challenge that correctly reading other human beings presents to all characters, let alone the inexperienced young adult. The crudely comic directness of a Mr.

Collins gives way in general to a complex vision of human interaction and the difficulty of making rational, moral decisions in a world where increasingly authority is ambiguous and responsibility lax.

The other men in Jane Austen's novels who are also clergymen are a mainly undistinguished lot, but they bear reference here by way of completing the assertion that her clergymen are one clear way of beginning an understanding of the range and complexity in her portrayal of the world of men. Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*, whose indecisive youth concludes with Holy Orders, is discussed at some length in the chapter on successful suitors. His character forms a nice counterpoint to the character of Edmund Bertram, whose motivation for the clerical life is more of a proper vocation. Ferrars represents those countless young men who fall into scenes of clerical life by default, like James Moreland and Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, and, one suspects, like Charles Hayter in *Persuasion*.

Dr. Grant, the Rector of Mansfield, distinguishes himself and the institution he represents by his particularity about his food, his insensitivity to his wife and his untimely apoplexy and death as the result of "three great institutionary dinners in one week" (*MP* 469). In fact he easily lives up to Newman's estimation of "vile creatures." Mary Crawford relates her experience of Dr. Grant with the certainty that characterizes most of her opinions:

"I am not entirely without the means of seeing what clergymen are, being at this present time the guest of my own brother [-in-law], Dr. Grant. And though Dr. Grant is most kind and obliging to me, and though he is really a gentleman, and I dare say a good scholar and clever, and often preaches good sermons, and is very respectable, I see him to be an indolent selfish bon vivant, who must have his palate consulted in every thing, who will not stir a finger for the convenience

of any one, and who, moreover, if the cook makes a blunder, is out of humour with his excellent wife. To own the truth, Henry and I were partly driven out this very evening, by a disappointment about a green goose, which he could not get the better of. My poor sister was forced to stay and bear it." (MP 111)

As Christopher Gillie observes, "It is characteristic of Mary that her contentions are commonly right as far as they go, but right for the wrong reasons."²⁸ The Reverend Mr. Norris, whom Dr. Grant had succeeded at Mansfield, was no less distinguished for his 'gouty complaints,' but no doubt paid for his sins in the purgatory of marriage to Miss Ward, the infamous Mrs. Norris, scourge of Fanny Price. His death provides for the introduction of a new family into the neighbourhood and allows his widow the opportunity to be even more cautious of spending her own money.

In *Emma*, the Reverend Mr. Bates, Vicar of Highbury, unfortunately leaves his widow real reason to watch her money, and the dependence of Mrs. and Miss Bates on the kindness of neighbours further emphasizes the theme of women's economic dependence, explored not only in *Emma*, but also throughout Jane Austen's work. Finally there are also those clergymen who are never really introduced as characters in themselves but whose presence as representatives of the church in the various communities portrayed is capitalized on by the author to justify the peregrinations of a character such as Captain Wentworth whose clergyman brother is chiefly useful as someone to visit, first at Monkford and later in Shropshire. Jane Austen was no idolizer of the clergy or the church; her portrayal serves notice, here as with other institutions and roles she portrays, that her focus

²⁸ Christopher Gillie, *A Preface to Jane Austen* (London and New York: Longman, 1985) 18.

is on the individual person, on the strengths and weaknesses which characterize the person, and the choices each person makes in living one's day-to-day life. Mary Evans' contention that "it is only through the constant reiteration and identification of the values of mutuality, co-operation, and honesty that a society worth living in can continue" is equally apposite to Jane Austen's perception and presentation of the clergy as it is as a summary of the attitude which informs all her work.²⁹ It is Jane Austen's great achievement that, as she grew as a writer, she was able to portray progressively the complexities of achieving such vision of community.

iii

There are several other categories of character whose professional occupation is their initial point of identity. Among these are sailors, members of the militia, lawyers, men in trade, and farmers, gentlemen farmers, and landowners. These are the men who swell the scene and provide the background community or context for the action of the novels. Because in the remainder of this dissertation the discussion chiefly focuses on men in their personal capacities, in their roles as members of families and in familial relations and interactions, it is appropriate to make brief observations here about several of these professional men by way of completing the picture of Jane Austen's range in presenting the world of men. Earlier it was indicated that her view from the Rectory window was unshuttered; in her passing references to men in these other occupations, and especially, late in her career, in her references to the Navy, the reader is given a range of allusion which refutes any

²⁹ Evans 87.

residual idea that Jane Austen was unaware or uninformed of, uninterested or uninvolved in, the full experience of life in her day. Just as her representation of clergy such as Mr. Norris, Dr. Grant and Mr. Collins suggests such abuses in the established church as negligence, careerism, vocational unsuitability and unpreparedness, so too the passing references to other institutions which form this background to the novels provides a subtle but cogent chronicle of life both in and beyond the village. Such life by definition in her society meant male endeavours; such commentary, likewise, applies to the world of men as she saw it and understood its currents.

Warren Roberts' and Christopher Kent's contributions to our understanding of Jane Austen's witness of the socio-political events of her day have been acknowledged above. That George Wickham's movements and those of the local military establishment represent more than an inconvenience and/or opportunity for the younger Bennet women's social life may come as a surprise to the uninitiated reader. It is typical of Jane Austen that she should make every detail ring as true as possible. R. W. Chapman long ago charted the author's almost certain use of almanacs for the years represented in her fiction and her accuracy in presenting the time necessary to travel from place to place. "Jane Fairfax is an orphan because her father, a soldier, died in action" abroad and "Colonel Brandon, a gentry younger son, went off to serve in India to forget a thwarted love affair," Kent reminds us, but these elements are just part of broader stories of these two officers.³⁰

³⁰ Kent 99.

Colonel Brandon's assiduous care of Eliza Williams on his return to England, though related in the somewhat trite terms of the popular romance, establishes his character as an officer and a gentleman. Although his actions can not redeem his father and brother or assuage the utterly selfish and base advantage they took of their privileged positions in the patriarchal system, Colonel Brandon's quiet charity does portray the extent to which individual efforts can make a difference even in an unjust system. There is, to be sure, no indication here or elsewhere in the novels to suggest that the author's vision of society and sense of propriety would have extended beneficence further than Colonel Brandon's. No indication is given here, or in the banishment of Maria Bertram-Rushworth, that the morality of the novel would have allowed a less stringent punishment than Maria's exile or a less distanced application of charity than the two Elizas receive from Colonel Brandon. What Brandon does is judicious, even generous, but in the prevailing moral scheme of things, which Jane Austen does not challenge here, it is liberal that he provide for these unfortunate women; it would have been unacceptable, for example, for him as a bachelor, to have taken Eliza under his own roof given the circumstances of her mother's death and her own illegitimacy.

Jane Fairfax's story is another illustration of a benevolent professional's individual intervention for the improvement of another's lot. With both parents dead, Jane is destined to be an additional burden on the meagre resources of the Bates but for Colonel Campbell's generosity. The details of Jane's story bear retelling:

The compassionate feeling of a friend of her Father gave a change to her destiny. This was Colonel Campbell, who had highly regarded Fairfax, as an excellent officer and most deserving young man; and

farther, had been indebted to him for such attentions, during a severe camp-fever, as he believed had saved his life. These were claims he did not learn to overlook, though some years passed away from the death of poor Fairfax, before his own return to England put anything in his power. When he did return, he sought out the child and took notice of her. He was a married man, with only one living child, a girl, about Jane's age: and Jane became their guest, paying them long visits and growing a favourite with all; and before she was nine years old, his daughter's great fondness for her, and his own wish of being a real friend, united to produce an offer from Colonel Campbell of undertaking the whole charge of her education.

The plan was that she should be brought up for educating others; the very few hundred pounds which she inherited from her father making independence impossible. To provide for her otherwise was out of Colonel Campbell's power . . . his fortune was moderate and must all be his daughter's; but by giving her [Jane] an education, he hoped to be supplying the means of respectable subsistence hereafter. (*E* 163-164)

This passage raises several points worth noting. Given the possibilities open to Jane Austen's imagination, it is interesting that she makes Campbell an officer. The comings and goings, the restrictions and liabilities of his profession, and the details of his financial circumstances are a perfect fit for her needs at this point in her story. Such successful selection of detail is not the accomplishment of a naive artist. In addition, the narrator's comment, "these were claims which he did not learn to overlook," is a typical and telling reflection on the prevalence of rationalization in the area of social responsibility, and it is also fitting and apt for the cameo characterization she is creating. Further, that Colonel Campbell's actions are generous and gratuitous not only makes a heartening story, but also forms a nice contrast with Emma's less-than-generous treatment of Jane Fairfax on even a merely social level. Of course, part of Emma's coming of age is her realization of her social obligations and she comes to understand how poorly she has acted toward Jane. Significantly, Colonel Campbell's example is but one of a number of models of

benevolence and right-minded community responsibility from which she can learn. Taken as a whole and given Jane Austen's impeccable attention to verisimilitude, the Colonel's portrait emerges as one of her happier representations of responsible behaviour. Christopher Kent's deft assessment is as germane to this particular vignette as it is to her full opus: "Jane Austen's novels are not about history, not self-conscious substitutes for, or rivals of it. They are themselves the very evidence of social history."³¹ While several other acts of generosity in the novels stand out as less gratuitous they are no less likely representations of life as she knew it. Sir John Middleton's offer to Mrs. Dashwood of Barton Cottage, "on very easy terms," has more to do with his insatiable gregariousness and unhappy marriage than is initially understood. Similarly, Henry Crawford's securing of William Price's promotion is complicated, in his own words, by "twofold motives" and "views and wishes more than could be told" (*MP* 300). The reader is left to ponder these tainted exertions of authority, but clearly the benefits to the recipients are undiminished by the complex motives of the benefactors.

Henry Crawford's intervention also cues the reader to another of the areas where Jane Austen obliquely demonstrates her awareness of how business is transacted in the world of men. Her personal, familial experience of the Navy was, of course, extensive. Two of her brothers had distinguished Naval careers and achieved the rank of Admiral. Admiral Crawford's intervention for William Price's preferment demonstrates exactly how one got ahead in the Navy of the period, a Navy which had changed insignificantly, as Jane Austen knew, since the time of

³¹ Kent 102.

Smollett's gruesome accounts of life before the mast. Her portrayal of Dick Musgrove in *Persuasion* accurately records the background of a typical midshipman. This "very troublesome, hopeless son . . . had been sent to sea because he was stupid and unmanageable on shore" (P 50). The fleeting reference to young Musgrove balances the far more mellow picture of the officers gathered in Captain Harville's snug home, just as the oft-noted concluding sentences of the novel bring home the realities of Naval life for all ranks and their families as well:

the dread of future war [was] all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance. (P 252)

There are three other occupations which Jane Austen's characters portray: law, farming and commerce. As is the case with all the professions and occupations which Jane Austen's men pursue, the work is done off-stage, as it were, and the occupation is of importance not in or of itself so much as necessary background for exploration of character. Although occasionally the author will include a simple phrase like Emma's reference to Mr. William Coxe as a "pert young Lawyer" who would not do as a replacement for Mr. Elton in Harriet's heart, such a character is rarely introduced, but this technique has its use in suggesting the range of the Highbury community. John Knightley is a decent representative of the legal profession despite his impatience and occasional irritability. The small scattering of references to his career and his London life generates the sense that the author was in command of the details of the profession, its sphere of influence, its relation to

the Inns of Court, and the economic and social levels of its practitioners. In *Persuasion* Mrs. Clay's father, John Shepherd, comes off something the worse, not so much in his role as a lawyer/agent as in his personal values. His interest in Sir Walter's affairs clearly extends to the promotion of his daughter's social interactions and aspirations for notice by Sir Walter and Elizabeth. Even here what strikes the reader is the realism which informs the action. Mrs. Clay is a widow with two children returned to her father's abode after what is described as "an unprosperous marriage." Nothing could be more reasonable than for her and her father to combine efforts to secure her another livelihood and position. Livelihood is of interest also to Jane Austen's farmers whether they be tenants like the up and coming Robert Martin, experienced landowners like Sir Thomas Bertram, or misguided improvers like poor Rushworth befuddled in his own wood at Sotherton Court. In trade or business Mr. Gardiner of *Pride and Prejudice* has prospered and eminently represents right-thinking and decisive action where necessary. His success puts him on a footing, if not equal, at least where he can approach Mr. Darcy without apology. In the same novel the Bingley sisters are described as "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" (PP 15). In *Emma*, Mr. Weston, who was a successful businessman after his military career, reaps the rewards of his labours in his happy social life in a Highbury where Mr. Cole's success likewise spells upward social mobility and increased material comforts similarly the result of England's rapid advances as a world trading power. The details of war and trade, of social change and political

activity are not Jane Austen's chosen topic, but she could not have written as tellingly and as meaningfully about her society without an acute understanding of the social forces at work in her world. Ensuing chapters examine in detail the relationships which men pursue, establish and disdain, but the contexts share one salient feature: Jane Austen's "critical, realistic eye."³² Male authority and responsibility are explored unblinkingly.

³² Evans 76.

CHAPTER III

Men in Their Roles as Brothers and Friends

Other chapters in this study of the world of men portrayed in the novels of Jane Austen focus on the three groupings of the major male characters. There are striking observations to be made from an examination of men as they are presented in their roles as fathers, as accepted lovers and as rejected suitors. Separate chapters are devoted to discussion of the richly varied characters presented in these three roles in each of the six novels; from looking at the suitors a pattern emerges which, while it is diverse, is progressively developed over the course of Jane Austen's writing. Likewise, although there is not the structural similarity from novel to novel in the role of the father figure that there is in the suitors, there is certainly a broad similarity in that fathers, with rare exception, are presented as derelict in their responsibilities and erring either by disregard for duty or through an overzealous sense of their patriarchal authority. Jane Austen deploys these characters well as agents of structure and theme, and she creates interesting lives for them as credible background for their respective roles in the novels.

There are, however, two other aspects to the presentation of male characters which also deserve detailed attention because of their importance to the overall artistic achievement of the novels. In presenting the major characters, Jane Austen develops for a number of them a series of secondary relationships which illuminate their characters and contribute both overtly and covertly not only to our sense of

their individual personalities, but also to the overall themes of the particular work in which they appear. Of particular interest are the instances of men in brother-brother and brother-sister relationships and the more general portrayal of male friendships and relations with other men. In an exploration of Jane Austen's themes of duty and responsible authority in the novels, these relationships are an invaluable source of the kind of background detail which cumulatively has such an important effect in the realization of full characterization, particularly as various incidents, as well as the tone of these relationships, reflect on the character's growth and development or lack thereof. In some ways this could be called the male subtext of the novels; this too is Jane Austen's portrait of the male world of her day, her representation of the patriarchy and its scions in action. In combination with a look at men in the two or three professional roles which they occupy, namely as clergyman, and as soldiers and sailors in the previous chapter, examination of these ties or their lack gives a complex view of men's lives, their shortcomings, their aspirations and their accomplishments, which plays no small part in the strong sense of verisimilitude which pervades the novels. There are no immediately observable patterns for the presentation of these brothers and friends or their relationships, but within each individual work there emerges a rationale which reinforces our perception of the mastery of detail which is synonymous with the novels' achievement. A retrospective view shows several areas where, as is the case with the fathers, the absence of what one might expect ideally to find in various relationships, especially familial ones, has the cumulative effect of commentary on the isolation of the individual not only in society, but also within the family circle.

In *Northanger Abbey*, the Reverend Henry Tilney's relationship with his older brother, Captain Frederick Tilney of the 12th Light Dragoons, succinctly illustrates the use Jane Austen makes of male kinship and minor characters to reinforce her themes. In the portrayal of the Tilney brothers she does not focus on their professional affiliations; it is their dissimilarity and lack of fellow-feeling as brothers which becomes a point of attention in their presentation. Henry, in keeping with the usual pattern for the second or younger sons of the gentry, has chosen to take Holy Orders after his education at Oxford. In a system of primogeniture the options for younger sons were, in some ways, almost as circumscribed as the choices for women. In the case of the Tilney brothers, however, it does not seem to be the issues of fortune and inheritance which separate the brothers so much as their individual approaches in dealing with other human beings. Captain Frederick Tilney's flirtation with Isabella Thorpe is the kind of idle and dangerous dalliance which characterizes John Willoughby and George Wickham in later novels. Yet the presentation of his attentions to Isabella is ambiguous both in its result and in the authorial attitude to his behaviour. Even Henry's reactions are more *laissez-faire* than one might expect from one whose rectitude is above question in the rest of his actions.

No small part of Catherine Morland's attraction for Henry Tilney is her relative freedom from the taint of fashionable views and pretences. An early exchange between them helps to illustrate Jane Austen's economy in making one scene carry weight at several different levels. To Catherine's exclamations that, if

she could only have her parents and siblings with her in Bath she should be "too happy!", which conclude ingenuously "Oh! who can ever be tired of Bath?", Henry knowingly and instructively answers:

"Not those who bring such fresh feelings of every sort to it, as you do. But papas and mammas, and brothers and intimate friends are a good deal gone by, to most of the frequenters of Bath -- and the honest relish of balls and plays, and every-day sights, is past with them."
(NA 79)

The fashionable ennui and disaffection with traditional relationships clearly are not part of Catherine's personal response to her visit to the spa, but Henry's comment also achieves three other ends. It allows Henry obliquely to compliment Catherine's naturalness. It serves to alert Catherine to the prevailing affectations, the knowledge of which she needs to acquire, if only for self-protection, as the ensuing action soon proves. Third, in a subtle way, these comments also establish the context for a great deal of the action in the remainder of the novel. Beneath the affectation there is little true affection of the kind evinced by Catherine's wishing for her family. Certainly neither the Thorpes nor the Tilneys have anything like the family relations to which the Morlands can lay claim. Henry's relationship with his brother and the kind of behaviour which Frederick demonstrates are the antithesis of concern for others. Interestingly, what Jane Austen does with Frederick is to match him with one of the most self-centered and manipulative of her female creations with a result that is vital to the structure and theme of the novel, but which raises an important question of authorial intent.

Frederick Tilney, although "a very fashionable-looking, handsome young man," does not quite answer for Catherine, in comparison to his younger brother.

In fact, to her eyes "his air was more assuming, and his countenance less prepossessing. His taste and manners were beyond a doubt decidedly inferior." This view leads to the pointed narrative comment that "his [Frederick's] admiration of her was not of a very dangerous kind; not likely to produce animosities between brothers" (NA 131). Even given due consideration to the parody, the idea of brotherly animosities reinforces the subtext that all is not what one might wish in some family relations. Here, and throughout Jane Austen's work, one sees fraternal competitiveness and tensions as a common occurrence. The timing of Frederick's introduction is a further example of the skill with which Jane Austen counterpoises character and action. While Catherine is immune to his charms, Isabella Thorpe, already engaged to James Morland, is not; a flirtation begins immediately, only to be enhanced by the news that Morland's income is to be smaller than Isabella had anticipated. Henry pronounces his brother's trifling behaviour "no more than I believed him perfectly equal to" (NA 133), and the attentions Frederick and Isabella pay each other are soon enough to cause her to break off her betrothal to James in anticipation of a better offer from the heir to Northanger Abbey.

In their insightful exploration of the multiple layers of action and meaning in *Northanger Abbey*, Gilbert and Gubar pursue the double jeopardy of women, who in the absence of any sense of themselves, follow the false and misleading roles modeled in romantic fiction. Through a combination of her naiveté and her native intelligence Catherine misreads or overlooks the attractions of casting herself as a fashionable heroine. But as Gilbert and Gubar note:

Isabella is a heroine with a vengeance: flirting and feigning she . . . runs after men with single-minded determination not even barely disguised by her protestations of sisterly affection for Catherine.

Contorted 'with smiles of most exquisite misery, and the laughing eye of utter despondency,' Isabella is continually acting out a script that makes her utterly ridiculous.¹

The lies that are the script of the fashionable world are as much "coercive fictions" as are the roles prescribed for women in romantic novels. This dangerous symbiosis where fact follows fiction and fiction in turn informs fact until the supposedly separate entities are indistinguishable is the morass from which Isabella is unable to escape. The cogency of such an illustration of the limitations of women's education is poignant and damning.

Frederick Tilney is well versed in the double talk which represents fashionable society and is thereby responsible for one of the most insightful comic sequences in the novel. As an illustration of Isabella's falseness to both James and his sister, Jane Austen reveals her waiting in the Pump Room hoping for a rendezvous with Captain Tilney. In her naiveté Catherine fails to pick up half of Isabella's meaning, but the exposure to Miss Thorpe's easy rationalizations and guile is a part of Catherine's education in the ways of the world. Isabella's recitation of "Tilney says" ends with his arrival and the ensuing conversation is the most blatant flirtation Jane Austen records in her work, underscoring the emptiness which is a result of a devaluation of the courtship ritual:

His first address made Catherine start. Though spoken low, she could distinguish, "What! always to be watched, in person or by proxy!"

"Psha, nonsense!" was Isabella's answer in the same half whisper. "Why do you put such things into my head? If I could believe it -- my spirit, you know, is pretty independent."

"I wish your heart were independent. That would be enough for me."

¹ Gilbert and Gubar 129-130.

"My heart, indeed! What can you have to do with hearts? You men have none of you any hearts."

"If we have not hearts, we have eyes: and they give us torment enough."

"Do they? I am sorry for it; I am sorry they find any thing so disagreeable in me. I will look another way. I hope this pleases you, (turning her back on him,) I hope your eyes are not tormented now."

"Never more so: for the edge of a blooming cheek is still in view -- at once too much and too little." (NA 147)

Deciphering this double talk is simpler for the reader than for Catherine, but she picks up enough to grow "quite out of countenance" with the Captain's behaviour and to be concerned that Isabella is "unconsciously" encouraging him. Jane Austen makes her comment another way as well, of course, in that Isabella unknowingly summarizes her own fate when she asserts that men have no hearts. For the dashing Captain, trifling is just a game; for Isabella, for the woman in such a byplay, the man's heartless behaviour has much more serious consequences.

Henry Tilney's attitude toward his brother's conduct is amazingly uncensorious for what one might expect from a clergyman. Convinced that Captain Tilney is the only party offending decorum in his meetings with Isabella, Catherine tries again to have Henry intervene before Frederick's heart is irrevocably engaged in what she naively assumes is a hopeless attachment to her friend. Henry answers her request that he make his brother aware that Isabella is engaged and, under further close questioning, refuses specifically to name his brother's behaviour or condemn it outright. Eventually Catherine provokes a stronger response from Henry with her unsophisticated questioning. He comforts Catherine with the conjecture that with Frederick's return to his regiment the romance will be over and merely something to laugh at between Isabella and James. What is never clear is exactly how much

Henry suspects his brother's real duplicity, whether he scorns it, and how much he is playing, therefore, the discreet gentleman role for Catherine. It is clear that he is not his brother's keeper; it is clear that he does not have the kind of intimate relationship with his brother which Catherine has with hers; and it is clear that he has no high estimation of Isabella's attachment to James Morland. Henry Tilney's refusal to condemn directly either Isabella or Frederick may be the tactful response of the gentleman who would certainly never discuss infidelity with a young woman, but it also gives the exchange an undertone which suggests either values in flux or a double set of standards. The idea that one is guided by one's own conscience and lives with the consequences of one's actions is new to a naif like Catherine. Catherine's inexperience (not to mention Isabella's unsuspecting vulnerability) and her exclusion because of her gender from certain kinds of knowledge emphasize her real powerlessness in this situation. This impasse is reiterated throughout Jane Austen's works in variations on the theme of the ways women's traditional roles exclude them from knowledge of the world and perpetuate the need for male protection. As Gilbert and Gubar observe:

in all her novels Austen examines the female powerlessness that underlies monetary pressure to marry, the injustice of inheritance laws, the ignorance of women denied formal education, the psychological vulnerability of the heiress or widow, the exploited dependency of the spinster, the boredom of the lady provided with no vocation. And the powerlessness implicit in all these situations is also a part of the secret behind the graceful and even elegant surfaces of English society that Catherine manages to penetrate. Like Austen's other heroines, she comes to realize that most women resemble her friend Eleanor Tilney, who is only "a nominal mistress of [the house]"; her "real power is nothing."²

² Gilbert and Gubar 136.

Suppression is not at any great remove from this kind of patriarchal protection and Henry must confront the issue as well as the possible emancipating consequences of female education.

Interestingly, unlike his brother, Henry comes to his understanding of the power of knowledge via a moral system which centers on mutuality and equality in a rejection of the traditional double standard of sexual propriety. Claudia Johnson, in her commentary on Henry Tilney's "famous conceit jocularly likening marriage to a country dance," focuses on the anxiety which that much-quoted passage manifests about infidelity or lack of male control and offers an historical context. She writes:

Given the centrality of illicit sexuality to the fiction of the time, Henry's disquisition rings with special significance, especially since it is always attempting to forestall the threat of faithlessness. In comparison with her contemporaries, Austen's fiction is exceedingly discreet. Though she never excludes the illicit entirely, she displaces it onto the periphery of her plots. But from there it exercises considerable influence. Henry's speech is the closest Austen gets to commentary on the subject of fidelity until *Mansfield Park*, and even there the topic is integrated into the dramatic fabric of the plot, rather than isolated and discussed as an abstract issue, as it is here.³

The "special significance" noted by Johnson is undeniable both for *Northanger Abbey* and as a statement of values which do not change over the course of all six novels. Henry voices his standards of behaviour in the abstract much more openly than he can or does in the particular instance of his brother: "those men who do not chuse to dance or marry themselves, have no business with the partners or wives of their neighbours" (NA 76), and he goes on to proclaim that "in both [matrimony and dancing], man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal . . . it

³ Johnson 44.

is their duty to endeavour to give the other no cause for wishing that he or she had bestowed themselves elsewhere" (NA 77). His responses to Catherine's enquiries about Frederick's behaviour are couched in similar terms, and in the subsequent novels the seriousness of individual responsibility is reiterated without alteration or diminution. In his discussion of John Willoughby's flouting of convention in *Sense and Sensibility*, LeRoy Smith encapsulates the other half of the equation Henry proposes:

Social conventions help to control or reduce the male's advantages. The man who honours them and thus voluntarily limits his freedom, whether from a concept of right and wrong or from a code of behaviour appropriate to his nature or his social position, is Austen's 'principled' man.⁴

Clearly, what Catherine comes to understand is that just as a man chooses to be 'principled' or 'unprincipled', so too a woman ideally has that choice. The theme which Isabella Thorpe and Frederick Tilney illustrate so amusingly has reverberations for all the men and the women in Jane Austen's world.

Commenting to Catherine on Frederick's behaviour shortly after it becomes known that he has not engaged Isabella, Henry says:

"I have very little to say for Frederick's motives, such as I believe them to have been. He has his vanities as well as Miss Thorpe, and the chief difference is, that, having a stronger head, they have not yet injured himself. If the *effect* of his behaviour does not justify him with you, we had better not seek after the cause." (NA 218-219)

In other words, all's well that ends well, but is it really, one wonders. Isabella has been exposed, James is saved from marriage to a shallow and deceitful woman, and

⁴ Smith 83-84.

Frederick unabashedly returns to his regiment, disappears from the story and is not heard of again, even in the somewhat unsatisfactory tying up of loose ends evidenced in the manufacture of a lover and a future for Eleanor. Such a summary glosses over the fact that, despite her faults and acknowledging her free choice to act and suffer the consequences, Isabella is the only one really to be hurt. She emerges from this round of dancing without a partner, and, what is more, without the awareness that anything less than stoical passivity on her part while waiting to exercise her "power of refusal" again will certainly impair her chances of making some kind of a marriage. Frederick really does no one any good in the novel except James Morland, but he does provide an interesting early example of Jane Austen's full knowledge of the adult masculine world and her ability to use the details of such material creatively and with a sure ear for dialogue. Her skill at integrating characters, particularly those whose behaviour is morally questionable or ambiguous, develops somewhat later. The picture of manhood, of male irresponsibility, portrayed by Captain Tilney stands in clear contrast to that of his brother, but he shares with his father a callous disregard for others and a selfish determination to have his own way. The abrupt ending which provides a new and happy home for Eleanor may seem cobbled, yet it has the effect at least of leaving the Abbey empty save for the General and eventually the Captain, his true inheritor. Obliquely, at least, Jane Austen disinherits them from the benefits and pleasures of familial support and love which in her novels are the birthright only of the principled.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Edward Ferrars' relationship with his younger brother Robert mirrors that of the Tilneys in all but the reversal in birth order. Edward, the elder son, is, like Henry Tilney, serious and uninterested in the ways of the fashionable world, while Robert is an affected fop of the kind who can dally endlessly over the selection of a toothpick case at the jewellers. Like Frederick Tilney, Robert Ferrars is essential to the movement of the plot of the novel and his behaviour is both a contrast to and a rereading of his brother's. Interestingly, they both engage in deception about their relationship with Lucy Steele, but where Edward's motives are to preserve the appearance, at least, of family peace, Robert's actions are calculated solely for personal ends. *Sense and Sensibility* is early Jane Austen and the depiction of a number of characters, especially the secondary ones, lacks the sophistication one comes later to expect. Robert Ferrars is a case in point: in many ways he remains a caricature, but withal, it is engrossing to see some of the author's techniques of character development in their formative stages. Throughout the novels Jane Austen regularly avoids surprise introductions of characters, unless, as in John Willoughby's sweeping Marianne literally off her feet, it serves some other end. Otherwise the effect she seems to strive for is the integration of characters, such as Frank Churchill's established presence and role in *Emma* long before his arrival in Highbury. In this instance Robert Ferrars' name is made known before he is introduced, but with less sophistication. When Lucy makes her sly confession to Elinor that she is engaged to Mrs. Ferrars' son, Elinor naturally, given her relationship with Edward, assumes that Lucy means Robert. This confusion ironically prefigures the conclusion to the novel, and in that shows the kind of

technique familiar in later works, but for the most part Robert's portrayal is wooden.

Like much of the rest of *Sense and Sensibility*, Robert is presented first through narrative commentary. When the Dashwood sisters arrive at Gray's the jewellers, "one gentleman only was standing there, and it was probable that Elinor was not without hopes of exciting his politeness to a quicker dispatch" (SS 220), but such is not the case:

The correctness of his eye, and the delicacy of his taste, proved to be beyond his politeness. He was giving orders for a toothpick-case for himself, and till its size, shape, and ornaments were determined, all of which, after examining and debating for a quarter of an hour over every toothpick-case in the shop, were finally arranged by his own inventive fancy, he had no leisure to bestow any other attention on the two ladies, than what was comprised in three or four very broad stares; a kind of notice which served to imprint on Elinor the remembrance of a person and face of strong, natural, sterling insignificance, though adorned in the first style of fashion. (SS 220-221)

What Jane Austen initially takes a ninety-nine word sentence to describe she then summarizes simply as the "puppyism of his manner," but not before she indulges her wry humour by couching Elinor's assessment of Robert in words which are equally applicable to a toothpick case. After a parting glance, "such a one as seemed rather to demand than express admiration, [Robert] walked off with an happy air of real conceit and affected indifference" (SS 221). It is not until thirty pages later that the reader and the Dashwoods discover that this apparition has in fact been Edward Ferrars' brother. On introductory presentation he seems a figure from a Fanny Burney novel or some restoration comedy, and as events turn out it is the stereotypical fop whom he most closely resembles. W. A. Craik's observation that Robert is "not much more than machinery of the plot" emphasizes his importance

to resolving the Lucy dilemma. Someone must do something with Lucy so that Edward can be free to marry Elinor, and Robert is as logical a choice as any. Even if it comes as a surprise, "something so silly" as Craik puts it, is quite in character.⁵ LeRoy Smith's reference to this as "Austen's *coup de théâtre*" is well chosen as a reminder of the theatricality of this reversal in the action.⁶

Thematically, Robert is as important as he is structurally. Although there is little development of his character and the only conversational dialogue which Jane Austen gives him is precious nonsense about cottages and a fixation on Dawlish, the narrative commentary on Robert, his relations with his mother and brother, the motivation for his attachment to Lucy and his life as a married man, forms the core of an authorial statement about false values and the absence of familial responsibility. Several of these comments are helpful to understanding the seriousness of the novel's overall conclusion. Elinor's reaction when she sees the brothers together at a musical evening, "while she wondered at the difference of the two young men, she did not find that the emptiness and conceit of the one, put her at all out of charity with the modesty and worth of the other" (SS 250), captures much of the theme of the novel; just as John Dashwood's inability to distinguish "that one is superior to the other" (SS 297), neatly sums up his total lack of perception and understanding. Both Edward's "boyish infatuation" with Lucy and Robert's careless attachment are understandable in view of their mother's values and the kind of home in which they were raised. By way of explaining Lucy's

⁵ W. A. Craik, *Jane Austen: The Six Novels* (London: Methuen, 1965) 51.

⁶ Smith 85.

attraction for him during his dreary time at school, Edward says to Elinor, "my mother did not make my home in every respect comfortable, . . . I had no friend, no companion in my brother, and disliked new acquaintance" (SS 362), and goes on to reveal what easy prey he was. Mrs. Ferrars' subsequent acquiescence in forgiving "Robert's ingratitude to *her*, and breach of honour to *me* [Edward]" (SS 372), not only affirms Robert's status as favourite son, but also comments on the weakness of Mrs. Ferrars' morality and sense of fairness in her treatment of her family. If her children are always at odds it is not entirely their own doing. Before Jane Austen dismisses Robert into his hasty and certainly acrimonious if not entirely unhappy marriage, she further reinforces the shallowness of his actions by revealing that "he was proud of his conquest [of Lucy], proud of tricking Edward, and very proud of marrying without his mother's consent" (SS 376). The irony of the novel's concluding remarks on Mrs. Ferrars and her family is made even heavier by the contrast with the warm friendship which develops between Colonel Brandon and Edward Ferrars and the happiness of both the newly married couples at Delaford.

The heavy-handedness of the end of *Sense and Sensibility* is not repeated in Jane Austen, but as it stands it is a clear early statement of the author's concern for the failure of family members to do their duty and act responsibly in their respective roles as friends, brothers and parents. For another less sanguine vision of Elinor's and Marianne's fate one turns to David Monaghan's insightful comment that, "because of Jane Austen's failure to find objective correlatives to replace the courtship ritual, there is, then, a considerable discrepancy between what is claimed

for Barton-Delaford and what the reader actually experiences."⁷ The interpretation of the novel's conclusion becomes something of a watershed for optimists and pessimists, leaving one to determine that the ambivalence is far from unintentional. It is an ambivalence which requires further exploration in the discussions in subsequent chapters about suitors, successful and otherwise, and Jane Austen's portrayal of marriage.

In *Mansfield Park*, Tom Bertram is well-integrated through his role as eldest son and heir of Mansfield Park, and although he is not the focus of action in the novel, his presence is vital in a number of ways both for who he is as a character and for what he represents in terms of Jane Austen's artistic development. Mary Crawford's reaction to the fact that it is Tom, not Edmund, who is heir is central to the theme of property and propriety.⁸ Tom Bertram's active and traditionally masculine life-style portrays a kind of man who is quite unlike the two brothers previously discussed. This is partially because, unlike Frederick Tilney and Robert Ferrars, Tom Bertram is not presented in the context of flirtation, courtship or marriage. In fact, Tom's first love seems to be horses, and although his extravagance has mortgaged Edmund's expectations, he seems, either wisely or selfishly, to avoid getting entangled in the various *affaires de coeur* which beset his brother, sisters and neighbours. Where Tom Bertram differs most significantly from other brothers is in his regeneration. Jane Austen makes use of Tom's illness late in the novel as a

⁷ Monaghan 46.

⁸ Tanner 19.

turning point for his awareness of the behaviour and demeanour expected of one in his position. In some ways it is crudely done; there is very little to go on save the narrative assurance that his illness and long convalescence have served him and ultimately Mansfield Park well, but his reformation from prodigal to thoughtful son is necessary in the overall scheme of the novel. It is, therefore, useful to explore his portrayal and integration as a character and to examine his role as a brother and the part of the world of men he represents.

In the general descriptions of the Bertram family which establish the household Fanny joins at ten years of age, Tom is presented as "just entering into life, full of spirits, and with all the liberal disposition of an eldest son, who feels born only for expense and enjoyment" (*MP* 17). In a contrast with Edmund's solicitous attentions to Fanny, Tom's attentions are much more casual and set the tone of his relationship with her throughout the novel: "His kindness to his little cousin was consistent with his situation and rights; he made her some very pretty presents, and laughed at her" (*MP* 18). Jane Austen is prescient here; the tone of the narrator is clearly not to be taken at face value and even such a seemingly insignificant remark as "consistent with his situation and rights" serves to develop the theme of dereliction of duty which is central to the novel. On the surface Tom is pleasant and certainly not the plague on Fanny which her female cousins and Aunt Norris are, but the real context of the comment is that Tom is following his father's example, which cannot be faulted for the generosity that prompted him to offer Fanny a home, but is terribly wrong in regarding how she is accepted into the family and treated by them, how she is educated and prepared for adult life. That much

of this concern falls to Edmund by default is a further comment on how far Sir Thomas and Tom Bertram are from the amorphous, if not oxymoronic, ideal of benevolent patriarchy. Later, Jane Austen returns to Tom's gifts to Fanny and catalogues them as "present upon present . . . the table between the windows was covered with work-boxes and netting-boxes, which had been given her at different times, principally by Tom" (*MP* 153). This amplification of Tom's carelessness to avoid repeatedly giving the same presents exemplifies the kind of fit and telling detail with which Jane Austen economically exposes personality and creates character layer by layer.

Fanny is not the only one whose life is affected by what is seen as due to Tom's "situation and rights." Sir Thomas' solution to the financial crisis caused by Tom's extravagance is to rob Peter to pay Paul: "the younger brother must help to pay for the pleasures of the elder" (*MP* 23). Sir Thomas' speech on the matter is an excellent example of the patriarchal attitudes which permeate Mansfield Park and have been Tom's guide as to what is due fraternal respect:

"I blush for you, Tom," said he, in his most dignified manner; "I blush for the expedient which I am driven on, and I trust I may pity your feelings as a brother on the occasion. You have robbed Edmund for ten, twenty, thirty years, perhaps for life, of more than half the income which ought to be his. It may hereafter be in my power or in your's (I hope it will), to procure him better preferment; but it must not be forgotten, that no benefit of that sort would have been beyond his natural claims on us, and that nothing can, in fact, be equivalent for the certain advantage which he is now obliged to forgo through the urgency of your debts."

Tom listened with some shame and some sorrow; but escaping as quickly as possible, could soon with cheerful selfishness reflect, 1st, that he had not been half so much in debt as some of his friends; 2dly, that his father had made a most tiresome piece of work of it; 3dly, that the future incumbent, whoever he might be, would, in all probability, die very soon. (*MP* 23-24)

The direct representation of Sir Thomas' pronouncement and the indirect relation of Tom's reaction and rationalization are an important part of Jane Austen's subtext of selfishness and emptiness at the great house. In fact, her phrase 'cheerful selfishness' would not be inappropriate applied to Captain Tilney or Robert Ferrars' overriding attitude to life. LeRoy Smith's comment that "Tom shows by his selfishness and self-indulgence the debilitating effect of encouraging a sense of superiority and privilege early in the minds of male children" aptly applies not only to all the children in this novel but could equally be said of a number of characters in the other novels.⁹ Fitzwilliam Darcy comes most quickly to mind.

The author's concern to integrate Tom into the life at the Park is obvious in her handling of him in the latter part of the first volume and early part of the second; after that he essentially disappears. On his arrival from Antigua, Tom is happy to assert his rights as eldest son and heir, without a thought, it seems, as to why he was taken to Antigua and Edmund left with the responsibilities of running the estate for a year. Tom's return from the West Indies marks the beginning of the 'present' action for the remainder of the novel, coincides with the beginning of Fanny's nineteenth year, and corresponds to the arrival at the parsonage of Mary and Henry Crawford. Because Mary's role is so central to the action of the novel, her opinion of the two brothers and her initial perplexity as to which one to be attracted to are useful in further establishing both the differences between the

⁹ Smith 113.

brothers and in giving Edmund a share in physical attractions which one does not often associate with his 'stuffy' attitudes:

She acknowledged . . . that the Mr. Bertrams were very fine young men, that two such young men were not often seen together even in London, and that their manners, particularly those of the eldest, were very good. *He* had been much in London, and had more liveliness and gallantry than Edmund, and must, therefore, be preferred; and, indeed, his being the eldest was another strong claim. She had felt an early presentiment that she *should* like the eldest best. She knew it was her way. (MP 47)

With her usual economy, Jane Austen manages to convey quite as much by way of introduction to Mary as she reveals about how the Bertrams appeal to an experienced Londoner. The ironic subtext is potent here. One can reasonably conclude that it is Tom's London experience, with all its patina of refined gallantry, which in fact helps keep him immune to Mary's charms, just as Edmund's inexperience makes him all the more vulnerable. Ultimately, however, it is Mary's London upbringing and sophistication which prove too great a barrier for Edmund to cross. This layered irony refutes the suggestion that Jane Austen is too overtly moralistic or didactic. Andrew Wright's long-ago contention that Jane Austen's "irony is the instrument of moral vision, it is not a 'technique of rejection'" is concisely illustrated.¹⁰ The novels are "too complex to allow a merely didactic interpretation."¹¹ Certainly it would be difficult to abstract a single reading, let alone a firm prescription from the foregoing passage. And so it is with much of the rest of her work: the reader or critic who seeks a single authorial vision or stance

¹⁰ Andrew H. Wright, *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962) 24.

¹¹ Wright 34.

will have trouble finding one except from the greater distance as a vivid portrayal of the contrarities of life.

The description of Tom which follows Mary Crawford's appraisal is typical of Jane Austen's shifting point of view. The ostensibly objective assessment is that:

Tom Bertram must have been thought pleasant, indeed, at any rate; he was the sort of young man to be generally liked, his agreeableness was of the kind to be oftener found agreeable than some endowments of a higher stamp, for he had easy manners, excellent spirits, a large acquaintance, and a great deal to say. (*MP* 47)

Clearly this says what enjoyable company Tom could be, but the agreeable, straightforward tone of the first clause, the 'who could argue with this' acquiescence that whether Mary likes him or not, he is a charming man, is undercut by the qualifying "generally" and the backhanded compliment which says that, indeed, his "endowments" were not of the "higher stamp." Certainly there is a clear discrimination being made here about different kinds of young men, but while the author is concerned to set it out, she is not in a rush to make a judgment that one manner of man is superior to the other. Not, that is, until the point of view shifts to interpolate Mary's thoughts. Without a sentence break the commentary continues: "and the reversion of Mansfield Park, and a baronetcy, did no harm to all this. Miss Crawford soon felt, that he and his situation might do" (*MP* 48), and there follows a catalogue of the advantages of an attachment to Tom which sets up the central conflict of the novel. Mary's calculations neatly set out Tom Bertram's world and what marriage to him would entail:

She looked about her with due consideration, and found almost every thing in his favour, a park, a real park five miles round, a spacious modern-built house, so well placed and well screened as to deserve to be in any collection of engravings of gentlemen's seats in the kingdom, and waiting only to be completely new furnished -- pleasant sisters, a

quiet mother, and an agreeable man himself -- with the advantage of being tied up from much gaming at present, by a promise to his father, and of being Sir Thomas hereafter. It might do very well; she believed she should accept him; and she began accordingly to interest herself a little about the horse which he had run at the B---- races. (MP 48)

Ironically, this is not to be Mary's world, though it will always be Tom's, even without the sisters. Tom's interest in horses and the company of his racing friends soon take him away from home for six weeks, sufficient time for Mary to learn enough of Edmund's "endowments of a higher stamp" to be quite unsettled.

Tom Bertram's role in the novel has one other significant feature: his part in the production of *Lovers' Vows* at Mansfield Park. It is his casual invitation, precipitously taken up by Mr. Yates, which brings the idea of play-acting to the fore, with all its long-term and disastrous results. Jane Austen prefigures the family disruption and tensions exacerbated by the play in an amusing cameo between Fanny and Tom during an informal ball. Again, we are given a glimpse into the world that is Mansfield Park, but this time through Tom's eyes. He comes in from seeing to a sick horse and disappoints Fanny's desire to dance by his languorous half-hearted offer to do so. When she declines, as he clearly wishes her to do, he comments on the other couples dancing around them, Edmund and Mary, Julia and Henry, Maria and Rushworth:

"I only wonder how the good people can keep it up so long. -- They had need be *all* in love, to find any amusement in such folly -- and so they are, I fancy. -- If you look at them, you may see they are so many couple of lovers -- all but Yates and Mrs. Grant -- and, between ourselves, she poor woman! must want a lover as much as any one of them. A desperate dull life her's must be with the doctor," making a sly face as he spoke towards the chair of the latter, who proving, however, to be close at his elbow, made so instantaneous a change of expression and subject necessary, as Fanny, in spite of everything, could hardly help laughing at. -- "A strange business this in America, Dr.

Grant! -- What is your opinion? -- I always come to you to know what I am to think of public matters." (MP 118-119)

Tom's disinclination to dance changes abruptly, however, when Mrs. Norris suggests a rubber of whist. Even her calculated suggestion that he and Dr. Grant can play for half-guineas instead of half-crowns holds no charms, and his comments as he unceremoniously urges Fanny to the dancing, "I wish my aunt were a little less busy!" (MP 119), shows his recognition of her habitual role in the family as well as his awareness, albeit limited, of the various attractions and flirtations going on in the family. At no point, however, does the author expand on Tom's particular awareness, nor does he act in any way to prevent or intervene in the smouldering hostilities between his sisters over the casting of the part of Agatha to play against Henry Crawford's Frederick. Tom does pull rank, as it were, on Edmund to quash his younger brother's aversion to the play-acting by reminding him to "manage your own concerns, Edmund, and I'll take care of the rest of the family," and asserting his status as heir, "I have quite as great an interest in being careful of his house as you can have" (MP 127). The authorial comment that "it was, indeed, a triumphant day to Mr. Bertram and Maria. Such a victory over Edmund's discretion had been beyond their hopes, and was most delightful" (MP 158) speaks tellingly of long-standing family tensions and alliances. When Sir Thomas' return puts an end to *Lovers' Vows*, it is Tom who rushes into the breach his mother's untimely revelation causes and who steers the conversation clumsily to the weather and the shooting. Home being a little too constricting in the ensuing days, however, he is off, and appears in person in the novel no more.

Tom's illness does provide yet another glimpse of the adult male world; though conveyed in a single paragraph, the impression is one of carelessness and lack of fellow-feeling as characteristics of Tom's set of London friends:

Tom had gone from London with a party of young men to Newmarket, where a neglected fall, and a good deal of drinking, had brought on a fever; and when the party had broke up, being unable to move, had been left by himself at the house of one of these young men, to the comforts of sickness and solitude, and the attendance only of servants. Instead of being soon well enough to follow his friends, as he had then hoped, his disorder increased considerably, and it was not long before he thought so ill of himself, as to be as ready as his physician to have a letter dispatched to Mansfield. (*MP* 426)

This illness does serve in an allegorical sense as well as a structural one; the illness of self-indulgence has long infected Mansfield Park. It also tidies up the details of Tom's life, gives Edmund reason to delay his decision whether to write or to visit Mary to settle their future, and provides the occasion for Mary to disgrace herself in Fanny's eyes by her musings on the possibility of Tom's death and the consequences for Edmund. Jane Austen's flirtation with coincidence here points to the further paradox with which she could have turned the plot. Just as she wonders about "Sir Edmund," so the reader is left to speculate how much more amenable would have been a Mary Crawford receiving the address of Edmund as heir of Mansfield Park. The myriad of 'what if's' which conclude this novel successfully direct attention to the infinite ramifications of all choice, and help to give perspective to the more tragic consequences of Maria and Henry's actions.

Finally, Tom Bertram differs from the two previous portraits of brothers in that he is changed as a result of his experiences. Unlike Captain Tilney and Robert Ferrars, Tom Bertram, who "gradually regained his health, without regaining the

thoughtlessness and selfishness of his previous habits" (MP 462), does not leave the novel unregenerate. The point is firmly made:

He was better for ever for his illness. He had suffered, and he had learnt to think, two advantages that he had never known before; and the self-reproach arising from the deplorable event in Wimpole Street, to which he felt himself accessory by all the dangerous intimacy of his unjustifiable theatre, made an impression on his mind which, at the age of six-and-twenty, with no want of sense, or good companions, was durable in its happy effects. He became what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself. (MP 462)

To read this conclusion as mere moralizing within Elizabeth Bowen's framework of a Jane Austen who inhabited "a small and very secure world, in which values were not questioned: nothing got dragged up," is to miss both the essence and rationale of a characterization like Tom Bertram.¹² On three of the levels of meaning, literal, allegorical, and ironic, Tom Bertram is far more complex than a simple and prescriptive illustration of conventional morality. Artistically, he represents an advance in Jane Austen's vision of the world as a place of shades and gradations, not of black and white. It is a panorama, however, which strikingly never widens to admit the views of independent-minded women like Mary Crawford and Maria Bertram.

John Knightley in *Emma* plays a less prominent role than does Tom Bertram, but he serves Jane Austen well in several regards. His being both George Knightley's younger brother and husband to Emma's sister, Isabella, helps not only quickly and economically to establish the tightly knit cast of characters essential to

¹² Wright 25.

the novel's action, but also to emphasize the intimacy and consequent stresses of the various familial relations. The difference in temperaments between John and his brother makes him a perfect foil and the distinctions are not always to George Knightley's advantage. The strength of their relationship as brothers allows Jane Austen to make a comment on the 'Englishness' of not speaking of their mutual affection, and through this and several references to John's profession in the law, we are given another glimpse into the adult male world beyond the novels.

Talk of the anticipated visit by the John Knightley family for Christmas serves as their introduction and provides an opportunity for the narrator to acquaint the reader with several of the opinions held at Hartfield about these members of the family and their behaviour. Mr. Woodhouse holds similar beliefs about his elder daughter's marriage as were expressed in his "poor Miss Taylor" attitude to the governess' nuptials, and thinks his son-in-law too rough with the children. Just as the three pairs of brothers previously discussed are presented in ways that reflect the major themes of their respective novels, so too does John Knightley's personality serve to emphasize facets of the themes in *Emma*. In her introduction of him, on his arrival at Hartfield, Jane Austen writes:

Mr. John Knightley was a tall, gentleman-like, and very clever man; rising in his profession, domestic, and respectable in his private character; but with reserved manners which prevented his being generally pleasing; and capable of being sometimes out of humour. He was not an ill-tempered man, not so often unreasonably cross as to deserve such a reproach; but his temper was not his great perfection. (*E* 92)

In a novel where so much happens within extremely close quarters, and which emphasizes the need for forbearance, John Knightley's impatience is an aggravation.

The manner in which Emma handles this additional stress is an essential part of her characterization. Claudia Johnson's discussion of *Emma* takes the distinctive turn of focusing on all the things which Emma does well, picking up Mrs. Weston's assertion that "where Emma errs once, she is in the right a hundred times" (*E* 40), and presents an impressive list, not of 'accomplishments' like brushing the reading list which Mr. Knightley gave her, but accomplishments of a social kind which have nothing of glamour to them, but are, rather, the social skills of dutifully managing situations and getting through dull, circumscribed days.¹³ A careful reading of the novel reveals numerous instances, easily passed over, in which Emma's sharp opinions are given only as her thoughts, never expressed to her companions of the moment. Her self-control is certainly one of her unsung virtues. From the context of *Emma* emanates a strong aura of the claustrophobia of women's lives in all the Highburys of early nineteenth-century England. Johnson's argument details this well; she writes, for example, of Emma's efforts to maintain harmony:

Mr. Woodhouse's two-fold hostility to disruption and indigestion so unfits him for the duties incumbent upon the head of a respected household that Emma is often obliged to ignore or to oppose him quietly for decency's sake, and in the process she displays powers of delicacy and forbearance which are the more impressive given the vivacity of her own temper and the incisiveness of her wit. When a most unpatricianlike selfishness on Mr. Woodhouse's part would exclude even as old and indispensable a friend as Mr. Knightley from dinner, Emma's "sense of right" interferes to procure him the proper invitation. . . . Her diplomacy is characteristically inobtrusive [sic], as when she steers hypochondriacal companions away from topics, such as the insalubriousness of sea air, likely to occasion disputes not the less rancorous for their manifest pettiness; or when she intercedes to

¹³ Johnson 121-143.

separate warring conversants, as when John Knightley indulges in one of his many eruptions of peevishness against Mr. Woodhouse himself.¹⁴

It would be difficult to disagree with John Knightley's view of his father-in-law; it is the impression of him which most readers take away from the novel. But John Knightley's lack of grace and patience, however justified his opinions, only serves to make life uncomfortable. Taken together, Mr. Woodhouse and John Knightley's touchiness increases the sense of the severely limited opportunities for free expression which Emma has at hand and helps explain the fascination for Emma not only of Harriet, but also of all other means of vicariously exploring some of the more unrestricted emotions like those involved in courtship. The scene to which Johnson refers concisely illustrates those character traits which the narrative introduction has designated for John Knightley, and also achieves another end by portraying in George Knightley, as he steers the conversation away from John's peevishness about Mr. Perry, exactly the same kind of social tact which Claudia Johnson recognizes in Emma. While the contrast with his brother highlights their distinct personalities, it is also one of a series of small displays of how like-thinking Emma and Mr. Knightley are in their perceptions of their social responsibilities.

While John Knightley serves Jane Austen as an undismissible source of family tension, providing occasions for her to highlight his brother's consideration, delicacy, and diplomacy, as epitomized in the brothers' separate reactions to the snow on Christmas eve, she also is careful to present a whole range of admirable characteristics in him. In fact, this reflects a development in Jane Austen's ability

¹⁴ Johnson 130-131.

to integrate good and bad characteristics in an individual personality, a development which is most notably demonstrated in the shift from villain to anti-hero in the portrayal of her unworthy suitors. John Knightley's discomfort in a social milieu, his disdain for visiting and dinners, for anything which takes him away from his own hearth, is woven into the novel in a sophisticated exercise in verisimilitude, making his character ring true. Jane Austen's ability to capture the nuances of human interactions provides wry amusement when, immediately after John Knightley's abysmal and pettish behaviour at Randalls, the narrator relates that:

for Mr. John Knightley, ashamed of his ill-humour, was now all kindness and attention; and so particularly solicitous for the comfort of her father, as to seem -- if not quite ready to join him in a basin of gruel -- perfectly sensible of its being exceedingly wholesome. (E 133)

In fact, there are certain similarities in John Knightley and Henry Woodhouse's love of routine and domestic accord, which are all the more striking for the amount of effort demanded from the women in their lives who maintain such an atmosphere for them.

There are two other aspects to the presentation of John Knightley which bear consideration: his amiable relationship with his brother and what he represents as a male figure in the novel. The brothers Knightley are most interesting in that theirs is an exclusively positive relationship founded on true affection, deep mutual concern and similar interests. Unlike the relationships between Frederick and Henry Tilney, Edward and Robert Ferrars, and Tom and Edmund Bertram, there seem to be no underlying tensions, rivalries or divisions between George and John Knightley. Jane Austen takes time to describe in some detail the basis for their ongoing

friendship, which from previous examples clearly does not simply happen by reason of birth. When John Knightley arrives after an absence of some months his greeting to his brother is noted:

"How d'ye do, George?" and "John, how are you?" succeeded in the true English style, burying under a calmness that seemed all but indifference, the real attachment which would have led either of them, if requisite, to do everything for the good of the other. (*E* 99-100)

There then proceeds a summary of their talk which encapsulates the relationship which they enjoy:

The brothers talked of their own concerns and pursuits, but principally of those of the elder, whose temper was by much the most communicative, and who was always the greater talker. As a magistrate, he had generally some point of law to consult John about, or, at least, some curious anecdote to give; and as a farmer, as keeping in hand the home-farm at Donwell, he had to tell what every field was to bear next year, and to give all such local information as could not fail of being interesting to a brother whose home it had equally been the longest part of his life, and whose attachments were strong. The plan of a drain, the change of a fence, the felling of a tree, and the destination of every acre for wheat, turnips, or spring corn, was entered into with as much equality of interest by John, as his cooler manners rendered possible; and if his willing brother ever left him any thing to inquire about, his inquiries even approached a tone of eagerness. (*E* 100)

When Mr. Woodhouse's peace of mind determines that the Christmas visit of the John Knightley family must be devoted entirely to Hartfield, John and George acquiesce. When John Knightley's opinions disrupt the tranquillity of the hearth at Hartfield, George intervenes. When John Knightley's projected concern about the weather causes consternation at Randalls, it is George who addresses himself to solving his brother's anxiety as well as Mr. Woodhouse's. When George Knightley can bear to watch no more of Frank Churchill's attentions to Emma as witnessed at Box Hill, it is to his brother's house that he takes his silent jealousy, determined to

learn indifference. When George announces his engagement, John "enters like a brother into my [George's] happiness" (*E* 464), but without falsifying his estimation of Emma in his congratulations. When John Knightley sees the opportunity of advancing the happiness of Robert Martin and Harriet Smith, he has none of Mr. and Mrs. Elton's scruples about Harriet's social status reflecting badly on their own. When someone is needed to attend to Mr. Woodhouse during the newly-weds' sea-side tour, John Knightley agrees to extend his stay at Hartfield to accommodate them. The picture is so full of nuance that it resonates with the fullness of happy family life, with understanding and acceptance of individual quirks and aberrations, unlike anything previously portrayed in Jane Austen's work.

There are several other pairs of brothers in the novels. Colonel Brandon has a brother whose story he relates to Elinor Dashwood, William Price has several younger Prices with whom he maintains contact, and Frederick Wentworth has a brother Edward, a clergyman, whose postings conveniently provide Captain Wentworth with a reason to be in the neighbourhood or away from it as plot needs are served. In none of these instances is the brotherly relationship or the brother himself as a character of any significance to this discussion.

Male friendships are portrayed in a number of different ways throughout the novels. True to life, these relationships are presented both as happy and supportive and as failures of trust and duty. Several are central to thematic imperatives, such as Darcy's early friendship with Wickham and later with Bingley and Mr. Gardiner, or Colonel Brandon's benevolent offer to Edward Ferrars. Others, like Mr. Elliot's relations with Sir Walter and with Mr. Smith, are based on deceit and false witness.

Casual acquaintanceships, like James Morland and John Thorpe's, are doomed to pass, but Tom Bertram's easygoing friendship with John Yates, which introduces him to the household, has serious repercussions and ends, more happily than might have been expected, in his marriage to Tom's sister Julia. Likewise, General Tilney's quickness to credit John Thorpe as a young gentleman worthy of notice leads him to be deceived twice by him on the topic of Catherine Morland's expectations. The firm alliance of comrades-at-arms like Captains Harville and Wentworth with Lieutenant Benwick is similar to that bond between Colonel Campbell and Lieutenant Fairfax which prompts the compassionate feelings of Colonel Campbell to undertake the support and education of his friend's orphaned daughter Jane Fairfax. There are men who are friends to all: Mr. Weston and Sir John Middleton are distinguished by their extroverted natures and their love of company. Finally there are friendships which cross class barriers such as those of George Knightley with his tenant John Martin and his servant William Larkins.

ii

The other fraternal relationships which require attention are those which Jane Austen creates between brothers and sisters. To read Jane Miller's fascinating chapter, "Brothers," is to be struck with the presentation of a context which can be said hardly to exist in Jane Austen's novels -- a revelation of critical interest. Miller writes in her consideration of the men in Brontë's *Villette*: "these are men created by a woman and watched in the novel by a woman. They do not simply produce or

reflect Lucy Snowe's ambivalence, they are themselves its products."¹⁵ One has no sense in Jane Austen of the intensity with which Charlotte Brontë explores the emotional nuances of Lucy Snowe's or Caroline Helstone's psyches; Jane Austen simply maintains more distance from all her characters, male and female. Later in her discussion of *Villette*, Miller brings this point into even clearer focus:

The brother has been for many women novelists the first remembered object of a woman's love for men and envy of them. . . . The brother is all that the sister might have been but for her sex. His are the life and possibilities she might have had. He may also be the one man she has unconditionally loved, the one by whom she is known.

Charlotte Brontë imagined lovers and husbands as brothers, twins, alternative versions of herself, who would know her, accept her and who were themselves knowable and intimately related. She also doubted the brother's good faith toward her, suspected his maleness and apartness, and tested and punished these brothers for the pains of being a woman in a world where men controlled women's vision as well as their lives.¹⁶

No such anguish or anxiety informs Jane Austen's presentation of her male characters as brothers or, for that matter, in any other role, but her presentation is nonetheless interesting precisely for that reason. For the most part, there is very little communication between the novels' brothers and sisters and very little is made of brother-sister friendship *per se* in the novels. It is as if the relationship were one she chose not to explore or one which held few secrets for her and provided no stimulus to her creative imagination. This is particularly interesting when one considers that mutual respect, trust, esteem and friendship, all of which would characterize a good brother-sister relationship, are the same characteristics with

¹⁵ Miller 89.

¹⁶ Miller 101-102.

which the author, eschewing passion and romance, requires of her couples as the basis for a happy marriage. In the course of the novels, there are several examples of truly callous brotherly behaviour, and several of warmth and protective concern, but chiefly the relationship is innocuous. The variations and possibilities which Jane Austen does present are revealing and worthy of note, particularly as a means of understanding how her women view men.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry Tilney and his sister Eleanor are close friends. She endures his teasing and even at one point warns Catherine not to pay much heed to his blandishments:

"Henry," said Miss Tilney, "you are very impertinent. Miss Morland, he is treating you exactly as he does his sister. He is for ever finding fault with me, for some incorrectness of language, and now he is taking the same liberty with you." (NA 107)

Underlying the banter, however, is a real attachment, born not simply of kinship, but also of the shared unhappy experience of life with the General and the shared secret of her prospects of engagement and marriage as an escape from Northanger Abbey. The brief time which Henry and Catherine have at Northanger Abbey while the General is in London allows them a pleasant week of courtship and gives Catherine and Eleanor time to develop their friendship without the constraint of the General's presence. The warmth and mutual understanding between brother and sister provides the perfect model for Catherine's own growth into lasting adult relationships. By contrast, John and Isabella Thorpe seem to have only the most superficial relationship, but he does distinguish his younger sisters as "both very ugly" (NA 49). Gilbert and Gubar examine the Thorpes as a pair caught playing roles they can neither fully understand nor escape:

[He is] as trapped in the stereotypes of masculinity as she is in femininity, [he] continually contradicts himself, even while he constantly boasts about his skill as a hunter, his great gig, his incomparable drinking capacity, and the boldness of his riding. Not only, then, do the Thorpes represent a nightmarish version of what it means to see oneself as a hero or heroine, they also make Catherine's life miserable by preying on her gullibility and vulnerability.¹⁷

By contrast, Bishop Whatley's reaction in his 1821 review of the novel makes a telling distinction between the brother and sister and names the 'type' Thorpe represented for many of Jane Austen's Regency and Victorian readers. He writes:

we could not resist giving a specimen of John Thorpe, with his horse that *cannot* go less than 10 miles an hour, his refusal to drive his sister 'because she had such thick ankles,' and his sober consumption of five pints of port a day; altogether the best portrait of a species, which though almost extinct cannot yet quite be classed among the Palaeotheria, the Bang-up Oxonian. Miss Thorpe, the jilt of middling life, is, in her way, quite as good, though she has not the advantage of being the representative of a rare or a diminishing species. We fear few of our readers, however they may admire the naiveté, will admit the truth of poor James Morland's postscript, 'I can never expect to know such another woman.'¹⁸

James Morland's arrival in Bath seems to mean more to Catherine than to him, although this may simply be accounted for by difference of age and experience. When James finds Catherine less tractable than previously he is not above using emotional coercion. "I did not think you had been so obstinate, Catherine," said James; "you were not used to be so hard to persuade; you once were the kindest, best-tempered of my sisters" (NA 99-100). In his letter to Catherine once his engagement has ended, however, James turns to his sister for solace: "you are my only friend; *your* love I do build on" (NA 202). While Jane Austen captures the

¹⁷ Gilbert and Gubar 130.

¹⁸ Richard Whatley, in Southam, vol. 1, 101-102.

overwrought emotionalism in the trite phrasing of his words, she also sends up the typical correspondence of gothic literature. It is Claudia Johnson's contention that:

Brothers are treated with great respect in Austenian criticism, certainly with much more than they deserve if *Northanger Abbey* and *The Watsons* are considered with due weight. Because it is assumed that Austen's feelings for her brothers -- about which we actually know rather little -- were fond and grateful to the point of adoration, the sceptical treatment brother figures receive in her fiction has been little examined.¹⁹

In her discussion she does not distinguish any difference in the tone of John Thorpe's remark on his sisters' looks and Henry Tilney's reference to Eleanor as "my stupid sister" (NA 113): "for in each case, the cool possession of privilege entitles them to disparaging banter, not the less corrosive for being entirely in the normal course of things."²⁰ It is difficult to argue against the cumulative effect of any form of derision, but John Thorpe is clearly a boor, while not only is Henry "more polished," but his relationship with Eleanor is solid and in its context "stupid" is used affectionately and ironically simply to tease Eleanor about her fears for Frederick's safety. Further, another way to read what Johnson calls Tilney's "self-proclaimed expert[ise] on matters feminine from epistolary style to muslin" is as a natural consequence of the closeness of his relationship with his sister and of a sensitive consciousness of the minutiae of her world.

There is really nothing positive which can be said about the brother-sister relationships in *Sense and Sensibility*. Neither Edward nor Robert evince any warmth toward their sister Mrs. John Dashwood, nor for that matter does she evoke any.

¹⁹ Johnson 37.

²⁰ Johnson 37.

Her influence with her mother and husband serves only selfish personal ends and "the family, far from being the mainspring for all moral and social affections, is the mainspring instead for the love of money."²¹ John Dashwood's meanness toward his step-mother and half-sisters avoids the tragic only because it fails to have any real lasting effect on their lives. In the historical context of family financial arrangements his abuse of power is highly reprehensible and unforgivably self-indulgent. Structurally, the actions of the John Dashwoods and their easy rationalization of the rest of his family into relative poverty provide impetus for their move to Barton Cottage. Thematically, John Dashwood's mercenary preoccupations and superficial interest in the lives of his sisters underline the satiric message that many of the relationships which supposedly stabilize society are in fact empty, meaningless, and bankrupt. Seen through Elinor's eyes, John Dashwood's selfishness is worse than indifferent; figuratively and literally he is the active despoiler of the natural. His sisters' welfare is of no more moment to him than the old walnut grove which he destroys and replaces with the artificial climate of a greenhouse. All her interactions with this half-brother are a test of Elinor's forbearance; not only does he try her patience with his dismissive unconcern, but also, because Elinor understands John more than he ever will himself, she is hard put at times to keep from making him aware of her unflattering assessment of his behaviour.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, a number of brothers are presented in respect to their treatment of their sisters. Darcy, of course, is an ideal brother: caring, cautious and discreet. It is a compliment to the relationship he enjoys with his much younger

²¹ Johnson 53.

sister that she is saved from George Wickham's machination by the thought of "grieving and offending a brother whom she almost looked up to as a father" (*PP* 202). Although Georgiana's role in the novel is brief -- W. A. Craik rightly points out that "She is deliberately kept out of the action to satisfy the exigencies of the plot," -- there is no other brother-sister relationship like theirs in the novels.²²

Georgiana's social position puts her in a position somewhat similar to Eleanor Tilney's and her notice of Elizabeth Bennet and her kind attentions to her are as much a mark of Elizabeth's having arrived at a turning point as the similar notice from Eleanor is for Catherine. The resemblance ends there, however, because unlike Catherine, Elizabeth has much she can tell and teach the sister of her husband-to-be. Although it is never specified, there is a definite sense that Darcy and his sister are in collusion. When Darcy asks Elizabeth, "Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my sister to your acquaintance?" Elizabeth immediately knows that this "must be the work of the brother" and she recognizes it as it is intended, a "compliment of the highest kind" (*PP* 256-257). With small, careful touches Jane Austen fills in this background picture at Pemberley and through inference the 'off-stage' relationship between Darcy and Georgiana is portrayed. It is a movement away from the elder brother as father-figure, respected, admired and sometimes feared, to a more natural and comfortable alliance. Rather than being a point of contention, Georgiana's mistake with Wickham seems to have brought brother and sister closer together and the narrative commentary confirms Darcy's concern that his sister marry wisely. Ironically, his early hope that something

²² Craik 84.

might develop between Georgiana and Mr. Bingley is later dashed by Jane Bennet's reascendance. Clearly the role Darcy expects his sister to play in his reacquaintance with Elizabeth indicates an intimacy which both value. The closing paragraphs of *Pride and Prejudice* provide a wonderfully optimistic picture of the family at Pemberley, and confirm the expectations of Darcy and Elizabeth's household management:

Pemberley was now Georgiana's home; and the attachment of the sisters was exactly what Darcy had hoped to see. They were able to love each other, even as well as they intended. Georgiana had the highest opinion in the world of Elizabeth; though at first she listened with an astonishment bordering on alarm, at her lively, sportive, manner of talking to her brother. He, who had always inspired in herself a respect which almost overcame her affection, she now saw as the object of open pleasantry. By Elizabeth's instructions she began to comprehend that a woman may take liberties with her husband, which a brother will not always allow in a sister more than ten years younger than himself. (PP 387-388)

Charles Bingley's attentions to his sisters pass without authorial comment. His generosity with them mirrors Darcy's beneficence despite their showing a good deal less to love and care for than Georgiana. Likewise, Edward Gardiner's feelings for his sister Mrs. Bennet are never named, but his actions speak for only the best of intentions in his readiness to be of assistance in any way to the family at Longbourn-house.

At Mansfield Park the siblings are fractious and not particularly attached or attuned to one another, but by contrast Mary and Henry Crawford, and Fanny and William Price, are deeply attached friends and confidants. This state of family affairs suits the author's depiction of the problems at the Park, and serves, in the case of Mary and Henry, to allow the reader the information from their conversation

of the genesis of Henry's feelings for Fanny. William's devotion to his sister is rewarded paradoxically by Henry Crawford, but more than that, the lasting attachment between William and Fanny stands as an emblem of all the things which money, power and position cannot buy. The relationship between William Price and his sister Fanny is of special interest, ironically, and deserves further attention. Twice in the course of the novel Fanny's tender feelings for her brother are especially noted and single her out for attention. Fanny's desire to send a letter to William shortly after her arrival at Mansfield Park and her lack of courage in asking how to go about it are the basis for her initial and formative contact with Edmund. Just as Henry Crawford does later, Edmund finds her tender-heartedness toward William endearing. Fanny's strong feelings for her brother are one great source of happiness for her, but they also make her vulnerable. The consequences of this vulnerability, for better and worse, are the parameters of her story. When Henry Crawford wants a way to impress Fanny, nothing could have been of more moment than securing William's preferment. Little does Henry know that Fanny's heart beats strongest for the man who replaced William as active, present, brother-figure the day he got his father to frank her first letter. The relationship between William and Fanny is treated with dramatic irony, but never with cynicism or satiric intent. In contrast to the relations among the Bertram siblings it speaks of love and trust and perseverance where one expects to find them and thus forms one of the few hopeful glimpses of human interaction in the novel.

Like Fanny and William, Henry and Mary Crawford are bonded in their adversity. As orphans, raised by Admiral Crawford and his wife, they are presented

as obviously knowing each other well, but there is no sense that anything in their relationship stimulates either to be their better selves. In fact, quite the opposite, Mary acquiesces in Henry's plans to make himself agreeable to Fanny, and her refusal to condemn Henry's and Maria's behaviour signals the end of her charm for Edmund. They are much more essential to the novel in which they appear than are John and Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*, but there is a similar sense throughout of their being a pair.

It is in *Mansfield Park* that one is most aware of a possible illustration of Miller's idea not of "men created by a woman", but of "men watched by a woman." Fanny Price sees all and her insight protects her and gives her power, within limits, to determine her own fate. There is no sense of envy, resentment, or repression surfacing in her vision of the men around her. Because she knows herself, Fanny has a unique ability to see into the hearts of others.

In *Persuasion*, Captain Wentworth and his sister Mrs. Croft enjoy a pleasant reciprocal relationship in which she is not uncomfortable in setting her younger brother, or any man for that matter, to rights. More sentimental is Captain Harville's attachment to the memory of his late sister Fanny, while Charles Musgrove's attitude to his sisters seems to be just the same stance he adopts toward his wife, to ignore them. When Mary Lascelles talks of the perspective in Jane Austen's novels, she refers to the way the author uses such characters as William Larkins and Mrs. Goddard to give a life and sense of fullness that extends beyond the realm of the story. She writes:

It is a method analogous with that of pictorial perspective for persuading us that, if *these* objects are clearly visible because they are near, and *those* hard to see because they are far, then there may well

be others that are invisible because they are farther. By presenting her people in perspective, as none but a writer with an exact sense of scale can do, Jane Austen indicates recession, and so gives the impression of a limitless human world beyond her visible scene. Herein lies the value of many minor characters who contribute nothing to the impetus of the story.²⁸

Herein lies the value, also, of many of the brother-sister relationships, both those dimly and those clearly portrayed; they give a verisimilitude which enhances the present action while contributing to the sense of an invisible story occupying a nearby sphere. They illuminate the major characters so involved and provide through vignettes, particularly of the sisters, further insight into their relatively powerless position in family hierarchies and society.

Unlike the studies of major characters in the novels which constitute subsequent chapters, this examination of chiefly secondary characters in their roles as brothers and friends does not suggest generalized conclusions or reveal a pattern of artistic development. What is clear, however, is that Jane Austen was far from naive or unobservant when it came to drawing and fleshing out her casts of supporting characters. Her interest as novelist, as story-teller, is in the telling detail, the nuance of behaviour, the home truth of the human heart in all its vicissitudes. It was to be left to the Brontës and even more significantly to George Eliot to take sibling relationships as a topic of major concentration in a novel. The Cass brothers in *Silas Marner*, and the Bedes in *Adam Bede* merely lay the foundation for the insight and pathos which inform the story of Tom and Maggie Tulliver's turbulent relationship in *The Mill on the Floss*.

²⁸ Lascelles 197.

It remains to be seen through the further analysis of Jane Austen's novels whether the positive notes rung by the relationship of the Knightley brothers and the community of warm-hearted sailors are part of a mellowing process in the final two novels, as opposed to the emptiness of brotherhood portrayed by the supporting male characters in the earlier works. Whatever the case, one can firmly assert that these men, like her more comprehensive creations, reflect some concerns about human relations, families, marriage, and the present and future of society. Jane Austen's unflinching choice to present the truth as she saw it is never compromised or finessed. The result in no small way contributes to the effectiveness of the novels and the reader's sense of involvement in the web of relationships which constitute family and community life.

CHAPTER IV

Jane Austen's Fathers: the Abdication of Responsibility

While we follow with interest the progress of Jane Austen's heroines toward marriage and establishments of their own, it is by looking at the family backgrounds from which they come that we become most fully aware not only of the novels' commentary on marriage, family life and the social and economic realities of the times, but also of the value system which they promote and validate and against which men and women alike are portrayed. Mary Wollstonecraft's comment cited in the Introduction to this study, to the effect that 'human duties' are the same for men and women, supplies a useful context for examining one of the major roles featured in Jane Austen's presentation of men: men as fathers and father figures. In their lives as men in the world, chiefly as landed gentry and clerics, men are drawn, assessed and frequently found wanting in light of the 'principles that should regulate the discharge of *human* duties.'

Given that the organizing premise of law and society in Jane Austen's time was patriarchal, the presentation, in all six novels, of patriarchs as flawed characters demands close reading. LeRoy Smith gives two helpful definitions of patriarchy which provide a balance in which to take the measure of Jane Austen's presentation:

Austen lived in an hierarchical society organized on patriarchal principles. As defined by a defender, a patriarchy 'associates authority and leadership primarily with males . . . [who] fill the vast majority of authority and leadership positions.' As defined by an opponent, it is a 'system in which men -- by force, direct pressure, or through ritual,

tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.' Both proponents and assailants regard patriarchy as an ancient, universal and dominantly masculine society. ¹

The reality of life for Jane Austen's women was not simply that marriage was, as LeRoy Smith goes on to say, "the expected means for a single young woman to gain social and economic security" ² -- it was virtually the only way. Charlotte Lucas' plunge, at twenty-seven, into a marriage in which she sacrifices "every better feeling to worldly advantage" (*PP* 125) underlines the desperation which was, potentially, the lot of women. Apart from that of governess, no careers were available and the life of a spinster was most frequently only a default option. Both situations reduced women to a subservience no less real than that of most women in marriage, but without the social status and relative financial security of a wife. The rules of primogeniture, and the resulting financial dependence, meant that only rarely and in rare circumstances could a woman maintain her independence and maintain herself financially. That Jane Austen's young women seem preoccupied with winning husbands merely reflects the harsh social and economic realities of the patriarchal system of the time. Jane Austen portrays a few happily married couples, but there are no happy families in her oeuvre, with the possible exception of the Gardiners in *Pride and Prejudice* and the Harvilles in *Persuasion*, both of whose family lives take place off stage. Looking at men's role in family life, one finds that, apart from Elizabeth Bennet's uncle and Captain Harville, none of the fathers or father figures

¹ Smith 9.

² Smith 87.

in the six novels is portrayed in a positive light. That the young women in the novels, bound as they are legally as chattels, cannot look to their fathers for direction, assistance and reassurance is a potent statement about the family and society.

The pattern of deceased, absent, and irresponsible father figures did not, of course, originate with Jane Austen. It is a literary convention which long predates the novel. All of the novelists generally considered to have exerted the strongest influences on Jane Austen made use of the motif in one form or another. Samuel Richardson's three novels offer three variations on the theme. Pamela leaves home to go into service and, being far from home, is effectively orphaned, despite her correspondence with her parents, a situation which suits her various fictions well. Clarissa Harlowe's treatment at the hands of her family, particularly her father's disavowal and his unmoveable sense of his infallibility and inalienable rights as a patriarch, is the cause of her suffering banishment and eventual death. In *Sir Charles Grandison* the reader quickly garners an overwhelming sense of the eponymous hero's utter probity in his treatment of his undeserving father. Again here, having the father absent serves the novelistic imperatives well because it relieves Richardson of the necessity to sustain the fiction that any mortal man could father, or for that matter any woman mother, such a paragon. Richardson's work is far less concerned with character development than with the conduct book didacticism which was his purpose and delight.

In Fanny Burney's works similar conventions apply. The complicated story of Evelina's progenitors establishes both the character's and that novel's lineage from

Caroline Evelyn. Even when Sir John Belmont allows himself to acknowledge that Evelina is his daughter, the focus of the reader's attention is on Evelina's exemplary behaviour not her father's conduct. Both *Cecilia* and *Camilla* employ a similar distancing of the heroine; in both the later novels the heroines are in the care of guardians. Similarly, in Mary Wollstonecraft's brief novels, before their premature demises, fathers are presented as mercenary, unfeeling and incapable of either understanding or meeting the needs of their families. The whole premise of Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* is the repeated failure of the male heirs to manage their personal lives, influence their families' behaviour for the better, and make the estate a sound economic support. Although Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft come somewhat closer to the impression given by Jane Austen's novels of discontent with the patriarchal system, none of her predecessors creates characterizations as well rounded or as well integrated into a sequence of logical events. In fact, the plausibility of the father figures whom she does create, and the credibility of the absence of those fathers, both major or minor figures, who are away or dead, represent one of the more notable advances of her fiction over her predecessors.

Given Jane Austen's awareness and acuity, portraying a strong patriarchal system of governance, both familial and political, in which no patriarchs are presented as successful, fulfilled, or even responsible in the role cannot be dismissed as an unconscious or unintentional commentary on the social system in which she lived. Fathers and father figures, with rare exception, are flawed characters whose errors in judgment, example, involvement, and guidance are, quite beyond the reality of human frailty, a focus of malaise and of culpable negligence in the whole system

of family life. Jane Austen's men as fathers have a social and political significance which not only establishes the tone of each novel and determines the heroines' respective dilemmas, but also collectively develops a clear critique of "patriarchal hierarchy as a proper foundation for social organization."³ Examination of the fathers in the individual novels builds a body of comment which cannot be dismissed as anything less than a condemnation of the essential organizational premises under which Jane Austen, as a person, lived, and against which the discernment and self-awareness of her characters are judged. Further, in portraying these fathers and father figures, the novels demonstrate an extensive awareness of the world of men. Throughout the six novels the references to the daily lives, the pursuits, the actions and reactions of the men both as text and subtext, clearly show a firm control of the subject and the material.

Mary Evans' chapter "Questioning the patriarchal order" is invaluable, (particularly in light of feminist readings) in succinctly addressing the potentially confusing issues of Jane Austen's views on the patriarchy, male and female responsibilities, and family life. She writes:

Jane Austen's world contained relatively little specific legislation on sexuality and morality, but situations arose of course in which judgments about individual behaviour had to be made. Austen's thesis is consistent with the principle of moral equality between the sexes: men and women must, and should, act according to the same values, and the behaviour of one sex is no excuse for misbehaviour of the other. This principle of a single standard of sexual morality pre-dates the Enlightenment.⁴

³ Mary A. Burgan, "Mr. Bennet and the Failures of Fatherhood in Jane Austen's Novels," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 74 (1975) 537.

⁴ Evans 44.

Evans then outlines two essential aspects of Jane Austen's portrayal of society which establish a view of the author's vital morality:

First, Austen values the part that women play in domestic and family life, and second, she portrays women as acting, and capable of acting, independently of men and patriarchal interests. Austen's morality then is one which does not endorse worldly self-interest, public and fashionable standards, material self-enhancement, or entrepreneurial greed. It is a moot point . . . whether these attitudes and standards should be associated essentially with men, on the grounds that an inclination to accumulate material profit and public power and status is a male rather than a female attribute. . . . Even so, Austen points out in all her novels that even if it is men who are more actively engaged in the public world, it is entirely incorrect to assume from this that women have neither an interest in, nor an influence over, those vexed questions of . . . profit and loss, gain and accumulation, and status and hierarchy. Women, she emphasizes . . . do not inhabit a distinctive social or moral world.⁵

It would be difficult to read the record of patriarchal failure depicted in the novels and maintain that Jane Austen was unaware of or uninvolved with issues at the very base of the social system in which she lived. General Tilney is a tyrant and a bully whose children live in fear of his anger. The Reverend Richard Morland, Catherine's father, is mentioned in the novel, but nowhere is he given the power of speech or action. He is a passive, uninvolved figure whose permission and opinions are presented through his wife as intermediary. The late Henry Dashwood's failure to know his son John's true selfishness has painful and irreparable consequences for his wife and daughters. Mr. Bennet, though an interesting portrait of resignation and passive aggression, is portrayed over the course of his life, from his youthful infatuation through to the upbringing of his daughters, as delinquent and self-indulgent. Sir Thomas Bertram, who also has a daughter who fails to maintain the

⁵ Evans 44-45.

high level of morality and self-respect demanded in the novels, lives to stand corrected in moral and familial management by his niece Fanny. The scenes of family life in Portsmouth clearly illustrate that it is not from her parents' abode either that Fanny has imbibed her strong principles of ethics and decorum. Mr. Woodhouse is the most ineffectual of the parents with his valetudinarian ways and his stay-at-home fear of the outside world. Sir Walter Elliot is dismissed as guardian or guide in his very introduction in the novel where his vanity and obsession with his place in society mark him as seriously unaware of the realities of the lives around him in his own family and immediate community. But these pictures are not presented with the idea of overthrowing the institution of marriage and family life. Jane Austen does not focus on the abstract idea of the family any more than she does on the Church as an institution: her focus is always on individual action. As Evans comments:

It is absolutely true that in the development of her plots and characters Austen is not interested in the criticism of the institutions of bourgeois society; rather she is concerned with the values that individuals attach to these institutions and their motives for involvement in them. . . .

The point is not therefore anti-marriage; it is an argument against the circumstances which force individuals, men and women, to put material and social advantages before respect and a shared sense of values. Austen therefore mounts a considerable case against a society which encourages in individuals material greed and social status, and devalues, or undervalues, the principles of care for others and genuine concern for their welfare. . . . Her novels are powerful statements on the importance of the domestic world, mutuality and respect between the sexes, and the rights of women to self-determination. ⁶

⁶ Evans 57-58.

To return to the definitions of patriarchy which LeRoy Smith posits, when patriarchy is a system which coerces, excludes, devalues or discriminates, then Jane Austen is definitely an opponent; her novels prove her always to be the opponent of male/female inequality and her morality is not gender-specific.

The pervasive theme of abdication of parental responsibility in Jane Austen's novels applies not only to the fathers and guardians of the heroines, but also to the paternal interactions, past and present, depicted for the other main characters. In fact, in a significant number of situations the fathers are deceased, but Jane Austen either includes direct reference to their effectiveness as parents or leaves the reader to judge based on the observable behaviour of the offspring. John Thorpe's father is dead, as is John Willoughby's. Colonel Brandon's father is presented in Eliza Williams' sad story as even more successful a tyrant than General Tilney. John Dashwood has selfishly embarked on a course of indulgence which does not promise well for his son Henry's chances of receiving adequate parental guidance. Darcy's father is blamed for Darcy's pride and for Wickham's lack of a personal sense of responsibility. Henry Crawford has no living father, and neither the Admiral nor his brother-in-law, Dr. Grant, the rector, is presented as capable of setting the young man on a straight course. Mr. Rushworth's father leaves him a large inheritance, but not enough sense or discernment to choose an appropriate marriage partner. John and George Knightley are spared paternal skeletons in the closet; in fact, there is no reference whatsoever to any parental background for them. Frank Churchill has two father figures, his real father, Mr. Weston, and his adopted father, Mr. Churchill. The former has little role in the upbringing of his son, and the latter is presented as

a mere shadow beside the figure of Mrs. Churchill. In *Persuasion* there is some variation: Captain Harville is presented as a happy family man, but the junior Musgroves' squabbling offsets this picture and the mood is not prevailingly optimistic despite the happiness which is Anne Elliot's reward for her sense and patience and self-reliance. The thematic value and the structural utility of these unflattering pictures of male roles in family life are more or less obvious. There is not much of a story if Henry Dashwood had been able to provide for his family better than he did or if Sir Thomas Bertram and Fanny's father had been all they could have been, had they been open earlier to the insights their children's lives bring them. Cumulatively, the portrait of fathers and paternal interactions with all those around them forms a telling chronicle of men and women and the failure of human duty.

Of all the fathers, Mr. Bennet is the most fully characterized and in some ways the most memorable; Sir Thomas Bertram is the most complex. Mr. Woodhouse and Sir Walter Elliot are more one-sided in their presentation and the reader remembers them respectively for their dithering and vanity, but both are involved in the action and are presented through dialogue which allows the reader to receive impressions and make assessments of character. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine's father is given no dialogue. The reader is told that he is "a very respectable man . . . [with] a considerable independence and two good livings" (NA 13), that he taught his daughter "writing and accounts" (NA 14), and that when the Allens invite Catherine to accompany them to Bath both parents "were all compliance" (NA 17). Clearly he plays no central role in the novel, but it is useful

to look at a couple of references to him to understand how Jane Austen builds a male context in her novels. The comparatively generous manner in which Mr. Morland provides for his son when James engages to marry Isabella Thorpe illustrates a sense of duty and responsibility to what is right for his son -- a sense of duty which is not portrayed in any comment or concern from Mr. Morland about Catherine's trip, the suitability of her chaperons or the kind of acquaintances or experiences she will encounter in Bath, or on her subsequent visit to Northanger Abbey. Mr. Morland, as patron and incumbent of a living of about four hundred pounds a year, is prepared to accept a reduction in his family income to establish his eldest son, and promises an estate of similar value as a future inheritance. It is coincidence rather than fatherly insight that the legal "necessity of waiting between two and three years before they could marry" (NA 135) proves to be a perfect test of Isabella's attachment to James. Interestingly, although there are a number of opportunities in letters and conversations, it is not until after the engagement has been broken off that there is any expression of parental concern about James's choice. As usual Mrs. Morland is the voice for both parents; speaking to Catherine she says:

"We are sorry for him," said she; "but otherwise there is no harm done in the match going off; for it could not be a desirable thing to have him engaged to a girl whom we had not the smallest acquaintance with, and who was so entirely without fortune; and now, after such behaviour, we can not think at all well of her. Just at present it comes hard to poor James; but that will not last for ever; and I dare say he will be a discreeter man all his life, for the foolishness of his first choice." (NA 237-238)

Jane Austen's portrayal here of parental responsibility is revealing of the common assumptions and concerns about the importance of money in marriage which Mrs.

Morland's dismissive "entirely without fortune" demonstrates, yet at the same time it would be difficult to disagree with the commonsensical estimation that James may be the better person for his early mistake. One is left to ponder whether the Morlands, knowing that there would be a test of time, were willing to let events with James and Isabella take their natural course; or less generously, whether parental concerns were ever voiced when James first went to Fullerton to discuss the proposed marriage. The ambiguity works well either way for their characterization, but reminds us that Jane Austen was anything but ambiguous on the topic. Lord David Cecil's oft quoted aphorism on Jane Austen's view of love and money ("it was wrong to marry for money, it was silly to marry without it") is the standard against which, as far as the financial aspects of marriages are concerned, the appropriateness of a match is judged.⁷ Mary Evans' observation on Jane Austen's economic sense is well-founded:

To Austen, the world is not a romantic place in which men and women can form relationships that never have to be located in material reality; on the contrary, the relationships with the best chances of success are those in which the contracting parties have considered with some care the circumstances in which they live. . . . The sexes have equal responsibilities -- both moral and material -- for the world which they, and their children, will inhabit.⁸

In this context the seeming after-thoughted timing of Mrs. Morland's concerns reveals a disregard for parental responsibility.

⁷ Lord David Cecil, in R.W. Chapman, *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1961) 191.

⁸ Evans 62-63.

The Morlands' initial reaction to Catherine's unexpected and unaccompanied return from Gloucestershire is reported as more what one might expect of any parent. They are concerned about the unpleasantness which may have been a consequence of such a journey and would not knowingly have allowed her to travel alone. They deplore the General's behaviour, but, we are told, "it did not oppress them by any means so long [as it did Catherine]" (NA 234). In the Morlands' lack, at the least, of excitability, Jane Austen may be simply pointing to the realities of life in a family with ten children and extensive parish duties. As such, the observation is in itself a telling one. As Catherine's guardian during her time at Bath, Mr. Allen is just as passive as Mr. Morland. The activities of Catherine and Mrs. Allen are of little concern to him; such statements as he makes are platitudinous and marked by self-indulgence and self-satisfaction. Catherine Morland is clearly his wife's charge. Mary Lascelles' comment about Mrs. Allen's role -- "she is to oppose her comatose good humour to the hysterical concern of the heroine's guardians in the novel of sentiment" -- is equally applicable, however, to Mr. Allen.⁹

The other father figure in *Northanger Abbey*, General Tilney, is pivotal in the action and adds the dimension of father as tyrant to Jane Austen's portrait of the family. Eleanor and her brothers Captain Frederick and the Reverend Henry live in the shadow of their father and fear his moodiness, his irritability and his thoughtless decisiveness. Tony Tanner in his discussion of *Northanger Abbey* makes two pertinent observations about General Tilney which help distance this patriarch from the "gothic" gloom with which he is associated for many critics. Tanner says:

⁹ Lascelles 153-154.

The fact -- not the 'fancy' -- is that General Tilney 'had acted neither honourably nor feelingly -- neither as a gentleman nor as a parent.' I should stress again the General is the figure of the father in the book -- the one with all the powers of summons and dismissal, promotion and prohibition. Catherine's actual father is by contrast, though a clergyman, both weak and permissive: not a force in the book.¹⁰

And further on Tanner comments acutely that "it is the anger in *Northanger Abbey* which is the real hidden horror."¹¹ Interestingly, despite his role as autocratic patriarch, General Tilney is in some ways more acted upon and reactive than active, which is not to say he is more sinned against than sinning. Twice he allows John Thorpe to deceive him about the extent of Catherine's financial prospects, and willingly acts precipitously on what turns out to be the lies and exaggerations of a totally unreliable youth. This behaviour gives a certain credence to the avarice that is one of his prime motivations, but adds an element of credulity that ameliorates the impression of him as utter tyrant. Nevertheless, General Tilney's behaviour to Catherine is indefensible, both before and after her engagement to Henry. The passage which Tanner quotes above serves not only as an authorial comment, but also, coming as it does from Mrs. Morland, indicates Jane Austen's fairness and insight: there are at least degrees of failure in parenting.

In the end, when General Tilney's mistake of believing Thorpe and his subsequent dismissal of Catherine from his house become known to Henry, the younger Tilney acts quickly to apologize in his father's stead. Then, on his own initiative, and regardless of a predictably negative reaction from the General, he asks

¹⁰ Tanner 45.

¹¹ Tanner 47.

for Catherine's hand. Jane Austen writes that the meeting between father and son "had been of the most unfriendly kind. Henry's indignation on hearing how Catherine had been treated, on comprehending his father's views, and being ordered to acquiesce in them, had been open and bold" (NA 247), and she proceeds to outline the General's usual stand with his family:

The General, accustomed on every ordinary occasion to give the law in his family, prepared for no reluctance but of feeling, no opposing desire that should dare to clothe itself in words, could ill brook the opposition of his son, steady as the sanction of reason and the dictate of conscience could make it. But, in such a cause, his anger though it must shock, could not intimidate Henry who was sustained in his purpose by a conviction of its justice. (NA 247)

The pall General Tilney throws over life at the Abbey, his failure to enter into the lives of his three adult children with anything like mutuality and respect, leaves him in the end the Abbey's only inhabitant. Eleanor and Henry create their own spheres of happiness and, one assumes, Captain Tilney, in a manner not unlike his father's, will see that his own best interests are served despite the consequences for others.

Jane Austen's ability to sketch a credible background with true economy of words manifests itself in her portrayal of General Tilney as well as it does elsewhere in her novels. Certainly, the reader does not enter into his emotional life in the way one becomes acquainted with Captain Wentworth's intimate feelings, or know him at different levels as one does Mr. Bennet, but flawed in character as the General is, he is not a flawed characterization: Jane Austen creates a life for him prior to the novel which both helps to explain some of the General's behaviour and gives a ring of authenticity to this man's stormy life beyond what one might initially imagine. It is on Catherine's second evening at the Abbey that General Tilney is seen "slowly

pacing the drawing-room for an hour together in silent thoughtfulness, with downcast eyes and contracted brow" (NA 187). The author's comic intention in illustrating Catherine's misapprehension somewhat masks this and several other references to the fact that, although clearly not an easy man with whom to live, he may still miss his late wife's presence and company, and even avoid some of the more powerful reminders of her, such as the fir grove and her bedroom. Henry's opinion of the effect of his mother's death on his father is that:

"We have not all, you know, the same tenderness of disposition -- and I will not pretend to say that while she lived, she might not have had much to bear, but though his temper injured her, his judgment never did. His value of her was sincere; and, if not permanently, he was truly afflicted by her death." (NA 197)

Henry's comments on discerning Catherine's fantastic story casting his father as an English Montoni help also to display the General as a dimensional character and assist the reader to come to a fuller understanding of Jane Austen's skill as an observer of human interactions as well as a literary critic. When it becomes clear to Henry that "the extravagance of her late fancies" (NA 198) has led Catherine to the gothic conclusion that the General must have killed his wife, he brings her up short and demands that she:

"Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English and that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you -- Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open?" (NA 197-198)

Robert Hopkins, B. C. Southam, and Warren Roberts have all commented at length on the political implications and authorial insight which informed Henry's list of questions.¹² In particular, the possible reference to anti-treason laws which established an internal network of political spies has drawn much attention. The idea that, human nature being what it is, we are all more curious about the activities of our neighbours than is properly our business, needs no political reference, however, to suit the immediate purpose here. That is to say, the community is too small not to be aware of any suspicious activities and, conversely, the community, that is the male community, is complicit in its unspeaking awareness of certain practices. A comment by Claudia Johnson in a slightly different context is illuminating. Discussing the politics of the gothic element in *Northanger Abbey*, Johnson writes:

But in Radcliffean gothic, the focus of Austen's parody, the political valence of gothicism is not so clear, and this despite the conservatism of Radcliffe herself. True, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* affirms a Burkean strain of paternalism by reiterating negative object lessons in the need for regulating violently subversive passional energies, lessons which apply equally to Emily, Valencourt, Montoni. But when one shows how father surrogates like Montoni wield legal and religious authority over women in order to force marriages and thereby consolidate their own wealth, one is describing what patriarchal society daily permits as a matter of course, not what is an aberration from its softening and humanizing influences. The cozy La Vallée, presided over by the benevolent father St. Aubert, and the isolated Udolpho, ruled by the brooding and avaricious Montoni, can be seen not as polar opposites, then, but as mirror images, for considered from the outside, protectors of order and agents of tyranny look alarmingly alike. Struck by the same double message in turn-of-the-century architecture, Mark

¹² Claudia Johnson supplies these useful references: Robert Hopkins, "General Tilney and Affairs of State: The Political Gothic of *Northanger Abbey*," *Philological Quarterly* 57 (1978) 213-225. B. C. Southam, "General Tilney's Hot-Houses," *Ariel* 2 (1971) 52-62. Warren Roberts' book *Jane Austen and The French Revolution* is referred to in an earlier chapter.

Girouard relates the Gothic revival in English country houses specifically to the "spectre of the French Revolution" and subsequent reassertion of authority: "Country houses could project a disconcerting double image -- relaxed and delightful to those who had the entrée, arrogant and forbidding to those who did not." ¹³

The double image in *Northanger Abbey* is potent. We do glimpse in General Tilney both the tyrant pretending to hospitality, and the sorrowing, defensive, and ultimately, hostile man behind the tyrant. In his son's commentary we have the terrible irony that, despite his protestations about Christians in a civilized land, the life of woman (in this case his mother, but equally his sister and all women in the 'rational kingdom') was not guaranteed to be safe, secure, valued or least of all, happy despite the local spies. This social observation cannot be misread. While the General is clearly one man and one whose motivation and actions we have been led to understand yet not condone, there is clearly enough "anger" and cruelty in the world of *Northanger Abbey* to make it quite clear that there are no 'happily ever afters' while values like those of the General hold sway.

Yet Johnson's conclusion misses the point that Jane Austen is not proposing a radical solution:

To depict the respectable country gentleman not as one who binds himself benevolently and responsibly to inferiors, but who on the contrary behaves as though his social superiority absolved him from responsibility to inferiors, is to cross over into the territory of radical novelists, whose fictions expose petty tyrants of General Tilney's ilk. Not until *Persuasion* would Austen again arraign a figure of his stature so decisively. ¹⁴

¹³ Johnson 33-34.

¹⁴ Johnson 46.

Instead, Jane Austen creates a model in her heroine of the kind of growth to self-awareness and the ability to judge sensibly and correctly which are the qualities Henry urges Catherine to exert and which the novel presents as the only way that society can be changed for the better. The standards by which the fathers are judged are no different from those by which all other characters, male and female, in the novels are judged. For a father like General Tilney the failure is clearly one of abusing the wealth and power which is his, properly, only to protect and guide his family; his is the failure to know himself and govern his temper and his greed. There is no mistaking the strong indictment of General Tilney and his conduct, but the novels are not advocating that the family unit be abandoned as a model, rather that those who join and create families take their responsibility seriously. Through their course, all six novels call individuals first to self-respect, which then in turn prepares a person for true respect of others and allows for the possibility of the mutuality missing in so many of the families portrayed.

While Catherine Morland at least has Henry Tilney to help her at a critical time in her growth to maturity, in *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor Dashwood has no one to whom she can turn for advice or support after the death of her father. Catherine, by dint of circumstance, escapes any serious consequences of her father's neglect, but the Dashwood sisters are not so fortunate. The late Mr. Henry Dashwood's failure truly to know the heart of his son (and of his daughter-in-law) is certainly as much the cause of the unfortunate circumstances in which his family find themselves, as are the inequities of the traditions of primogeniture and entail.

Mary Burgan, discussing Mr. Bennet's unfortunate financial circumstances, comments that:

One obvious source of unreasonable stress is the system of primogeniture, but the comedy of the entailed inheritance so richly engages the folly of Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* that the reader may fail to note how cruel the system of law behind it is judged to be: that Jane Austen should base so many of her plots upon the injustice of primogeniture denotes her recognition of its evils even while she uses them affirmatively for comedy.¹⁵

Unadulterated human greed and selfishness are likewise exposed in the picture of John and Fanny Dashwood casually dismissing the claims of his step-mother and sisters to more than a subsistence. While we laugh at their *reductio ad absurdum* logic, both initially and in subsequent encounters, notably at the jewellers, and in John Dashwood's assignment of responsibilities which are rightly his own to Sir John Middleton because Middleton is "kin," the reality which underlies this comedy has too much of the social reality of Jane Austen's time and too much of timeless human nature for the reader to dismiss it. In the novels' world all actions have consequences; there are no purely private acts. In *Sense and Sensibility* Henry Dashwood's failure to provide sufficiently for the family of his second marriage is quite the most memorable thing about him. His blind trust in his son's ability and willingness to act honourably distinguishes him as more wishful than provident.

Sense and Sensibility provides one other representation of fatherhood and that is in Colonel Brandon's sad story of his own father's conduct, which has all the hallmarks of the world of Richardson's *Clarissa* or Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*. Eliza Williams, niece and ward of Colonel Brandon's father, is forced

¹⁵ Burgan 537-538.

by him to marry the Colonel's elder brother against her will: "Her fortune was large, and our family estate was much encumbered. And this, I fear, is all that can be said for the conduct of one, who was at once her uncle and guardian" (SS 205). Like Clarissa, Eliza was held captive, "was allowed no liberty, no society, no amusement, till my father's point was gained," but unlike her literary predecessor, Clarissa, Eliza capitulates in an unhappy marriage with Colonel Brandon's brother, who "had no regard for her, [whose] pleasures were not what they ought to have been, and [who] from the first treated her unkindly" (SS 206). This unfortunate union ends in divorce, at the time permitted only on the grounds of the wife's infidelity, and then granted only by private bill in Parliament, which facts only serve to emphasize the complete control over a woman's life held by her father, then her husband, and handed by one to the other. Colonel Brandon reiterates the theme of parental responsibility in his comment: "But can we wonder that with such a husband to provoke inconstancy, and without a friend to advise or restrain her, (for my father lived only a few months after their marriage, and I was with my regiment in the East Indies) she should fall?" (SS 206). That Jane Austen should include such a tale, clichéd even in her time, has been criticized as the failing of a relatively inexperienced novelist. But rather than work to artistic disadvantage, however trite the story, it echoes and reverberates through the novel and throws into clear relief the real possibilities of dishonour with which several of the other characters in the novel flirt. Gilbert and Gubar make an interesting comment on this "interpolated tale" device which ties it to previous literary presentations:

For Austen, the libertine is a relative of the Byronic hero, and she is quite sure that his dangerous attractions are best defused through ridicule: "I have read the *Corsair*, mended my petticoat, & have

nothing else to do," she writes in a letter that probably best illustrates the technique. Because she realizes that writers like Richardson and Byron have truthfully represented the power struggle between the sexes, however, she does seek a way of telling their story without perpetuating it. In each of her novels, a seduced-and-abandoned plot is embedded in the form of an interpolated tale told to the heroine as a monitory image of her own more problematic story.¹⁶

In *Sense and Sensibility*, by giving a personalized example of the extreme which Marianne manages to avoid and with which Lucy Steele tempts fate in her elopement, Eliza's story, and that of her daughter which follows, add an element of reality which is also essential to balance the less attractive, even prissy, side of Elinor's caution and sense.

Paragons are few and far between in Jane Austen's novels and, as he relates the further details of Eliza Williams leaving "the offspring of her first guilty connection" (SS 208) to his care, Colonel Brandon explains that it is not only negligent and selfish parents or guardians who make errors in the upbringing of their wards: he himself has erred. Trusting young Eliza for a visit to Bath to the temporary care of the father of one of her school friends, "a very good sort of man . . . well meaning, but not a quick-sighted sort of man" (SS 209), Colonel Brandon lives to regret his own imprudence when he discovers that she has been seduced and abandoned by John Willoughby. Colonel Brandon's sense of the dishonour done his ward finds expression in challenging Willoughby to a duel which ironically neither wins. This is quite unlike the conclusion of *Clarissa* where Lovelace, mortally wounded by Colonel Morden, hopes that his death will somehow atone for his villainy. This reference to the sporting male world where the two men met "by

¹⁶ Gilbert and Gubar 119.

appointment, he to defend, I to punish his conduct" (SS 211), though related in one short paragraph only, never again obtrudes quite so directly in Jane Austen's work.

Also notable in *Sense and Sensibility* is Jane Austen's portrayal of the first of three women in her novels who, taken together, provide both an insight into a completely different kind of father-figure, and an exploration of one kind of female use of powers that are traditionally male. Mrs. Ferrars, like Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Mrs. Churchill, who follow her in subsequent novels, is a woman who has the power of money, and control over her wealth and its bequest. All three women use their power just as ruthlessly as any man in the novels to control the behaviour and attempt to interfere in the decision-making of those around them. Like General Tilney before her, Mrs. Ferrars is ultimately thwarted, but not until the damage is done. Because Jane Austen has created such a figure in a patriarchal society it is worthwhile to examine the characterization and role to see if the author distinguishes between the sexes or equates matriarchs with the father-figure and judges accordingly. Claudia Johnson's comment that "Mrs. Ferrars, of course, is utterly collusive with patriarchal interests" acknowledges the connectedness of the two.¹⁷ Jane Austen writes that like an anxious father, Mrs. Ferrars wants to see her first-born son involved "in political concerns, to get him into parliament, or to see him connected with some of the great men of the day" (SS 16), and to that end as Johnson observes, she uses the chief power she has over him -- her wealth. Throughout the novel there are no redeeming insights to alleviate the initial impressions of Mrs. Ferrars. After finally meeting her in person Elinor reflects

¹⁷ Johnson 70.

that "she had seen enough of her pride, her meanness, and her determined prejudice against herself " (SS 238); clearly this is a person to whom appearances and place are everything, even to the disinheritance of a son or two when they do not reflect her vision of her powerful self. Claudia Johnson takes her analysis a step further when she contrasts the characterization of Mrs. Ferrars with that of Mrs. Smith and suggests that Jane Austen provides alternatives to negative patriarchs and matriarchs. She writes:

Against her, detail for detail, Willoughby's aunt stands in perfect opposition as a model of radical authority attempting unworldly and morally corrective coercion. For Mrs. Smith, morality is not a function of family interests as it is for the John Dashwoods, and the enhancement of family fortune takes second place to the fulfilment of obligations to basic decency, particularly toward seduced and abandoned women. Accordingly, she threatens to use her power to disinherit Willoughby in order to persuade him to behave honourably. . . . From the radical point of view, of course, it is Mrs. Smith's very refusal to abet what passes as commonplace "in the world," particularly insofar as it is injurious to the Elizas of it, that makes her an exemplary version of authority.¹⁶

Mrs. Smith's actions are singular in the novel, but Jane Austen also makes it clear that Mrs. Smith's 'show of force' in fact precipitates more wrong action on Willoughby's part. Johnson's comments on Mrs. Smith point the way to a more comprehensive understanding of the world of the novels, but miss the broader point that coercion is not a model of behaviour which is successful or acceptable even if the coercion is in a good cause. Jane Austen is not a polemicist. While the novels illustrate clearly that women have a difficult position in life, and that they are the victims of an inegalitarian society, the text also paints a middle ground between the

¹⁶ Johnson 70.

status quo and radical overthrow: this is for each person to endeavour to achieve a clear understanding of moral responsibility, to act not in male or female paradigms, but to act individually, humanely, with honour and self-knowledge. In the end Mrs. Smith's action has no more efficacy than Mrs. Ferrars', albeit a statement and model of moral integrity.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh is more a comic figure than is Mrs. Ferrars and is more developed and integrated as a character; because this takes place in tandem with her being used as a means of moving the plot, she has a distinctive personality beyond the merely mechanical. From Mr. Collins' arrival at Longbourn onward Lady Catherine's presence and influence are manifest. Mr. Collins seeks a wife at her prompting, and her hopes are sanguine for an eventual attachment between her daughter and Mr. Darcy. On acquaintance Elizabeth finds the awful power Mr. Collins ascribes to Lady Catherine as easily dismissed as he is. Later, Lady Catherine's hurried visit to Longbourn is guaranteed to fail to influence Elizabeth save to confirm all she ever thought about her Ladyship from her previous exposure. As Mary Lascelles points out, Lady Catherine's rudeness to Elizabeth over the use of a piano, which makes Darcy look "a little ashamed of his aunt's ill breeding" (*PP* 173), is an essential part of Darcy's learning that ill breeding is not confined to one social stratum.¹⁹ When Lady Catherine rushes to London to confront Darcy with the rumour of his engagement to Elizabeth, her report of the reception she received at Longbourn is all Darcy needs to give him hope and he leaves for Netherfield Park immediately. Like Mrs. Ferrars', Lady Catherine's manipulations come to naught

¹⁹ Lascelles 162.

and her best efforts to control events to her liking have the effect of precipitating the reverse.

Mrs. Churchill in *Emma* is never presented as more than a distant and demanding presence issuing summonses and controlling Frank Churchill's movements. Her own death, which is the only demise recorded in the present action in Jane Austen's novels, and the strength of Frank's egocentric personality prevent her from having any lasting negative effect on Frank's happiness. Clearly, Jane Austen has no sex bias in determining what is meet for those who take advantage of their powers over others to pursue selfish goals. LeRoy Smith is particularly illuminating here; his exploration of the idea of non-stereotypical roles and actions for men and women as an ideal in Jane Austen's work takes this idea one step further and provides an insight which bears comment. His observation that women like Mrs. Ferrars, Lady Catherine, and Mrs. Churchill "have found a means of escaping the closed female world and, as proof of their independence, copy male selfishness, lack of feeling for others and fondness for command," centres on the convention that there were strictly male and female ways of acting.²⁰ In the novels, he points out that logically, egotistical females pattern their behaviour on that of the egotistical males who "crowd her pages, products of a culture that provides them with the means and opportunities to rule."²¹ Smith then argues convincingly that, far from supposing this patriarchal governance the ideal, the novels promote the ideal that:

²⁰ Smith 36.

²¹ Smith 36.

individual men and women can develop what Dijkstra calls a balance of 'impulse and motive, of intellectual and emotional structures' that would locate responsibility for actions within the individual. Although patriarchal society attempts to divide the psyches of its members, some men -- Darcy, Knightley and Wentworth -- as well as some women discover the need to 'liberate themselves toward wholeness.'²²

It is this wholeness, the product of self-exploration and knowledge, toward which the novels move. The continuing process of gaining self-awareness is valued not simply as an end in itself, but as the means by which the enlightened individual demonstrates an understanding of the community context of all activity. In the novels many of the central characters, the fathers in particular, discover painfully and in different ways that it is never too late to learn. The relative inability of both Mr. Bennet and Sir Thomas Bertram to change, based on what they learn from their actions and the crises in their lives, varies the theme, and provides further insight into Jane Austen's representation of her world.

If actions have consequences in Jane Austen's world, then none of her fathers is given longer to contemplate the consequences of being "captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour which youth and beauty generally give" (*PP* 236) than Mr. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. By all the standards which Jane Austen sets as the measures and predictors of married happiness for her young couples, the Bennets' twenty-three year union is certainly a failure, more, however, for Mr. Bennet than for his wife. The picture of Mrs. Bennet is not one calculated to engage the reader's sympathy the way that Mr. Bennet's situation does. We are

²² Smith 41.

aware of Mr. Bennet's inner life; we suspect Mrs. Bennet has none. Mr. Bennet's is a sure and subtle portrait of male indolence and languor, of cynical resignation, in the face of the depressing realities of his life. He has chosen his life's partner for the wrong reasons and long since rued his error in judgment while, at the same time, compounding it daily. He is a man defeated by the consequences of trying to beget the son needed to hold onto his property. He is contemptuous of his marriage partner and his passive-aggressive reaction to his situation manifests itself in teasing, withholding information, and bitter wit at the expense of his wife, younger daughters, and neighbours. His major motion is that of retreat, chiefly into his library, and "to his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement" (*PP* 236). In the novels, male withdrawal from power is not a solution to the crisis of authority which was one of the chief problems of the age. Growing up in a house where the parents separate themselves as much as possible, the family, not surprisingly, is divided. Jane and Elizabeth are closer to their father, Kitty and Lydia are clearly their mother's protégées, and poor pedantic Mary seems oblivious to her place in limbo. As Mr. Bennet says when Elizabeth urges him not to allow Lydia to go to Brighton, "Do not make yourself uneasy, my love. Wherever you and Jane are known, you must be respected and valued: and you will not appear to less advantage for having a couple of -- or I may say, three very silly sisters" (*PP* 231-232). Mary Burgan sees Mr. Bennet as having abdicated his role and responsibility for educating his daughters at some point after having exerted himself properly in the raising of Jane and Elizabeth. Burgan rightly states the Bennets' dilemma when she looks beyond their money problems. She writes:

It is not merely the lack of money, however, which jeopardizes the chances of Elizabeth and Jane for marriage; it is the lack of what Jane Austen calls "connections." Mr. Bennet's retreat from familial responsibility -- his leaving the field almost exclusively to the exertions of his wife -- has meant that the younger three daughters have grown up to be silly and useless girls. They, like his wife, have become too enjoyable as objects of Mr. Bennet's irony to be given up by him to a long process of education into good sense; it is easier for him and less self-accusing to tell himself that their characters are unalterable. Nevertheless, in the responsibilities of a society based upon laws of extensive familial interaction, they would be a burden upon any man who wished to marry Elizabeth or Jane: indeed the web of "connections" involved in such marriages is what has caused Darcy to take Bingham [sic] away from the temptations of the society of the Bennets.²³

No attempt to explain or rationalize the divisions in the family is entirely successful; Jane Austen has created a minor mystery which the differences in temperament among the five daughters cannot fully explain, but all of the possibilities lead to the single conclusion that Mr. Bennet has not properly exerted himself in the care and guidance of his children or his wife. At some point in the past Mr. Bennet has given up more fully than previously his attention to his parental duties; one can only speculate that here, as in so many other of her insights, Jane Austen draws with acute psychological accuracy the distancing brought about by growing resentment that none of his younger three daughters is the male heir he both wished for and required if anything of the pride he had lost in his marriage was to be salvaged both materially and spiritually. That the elder daughters emerge relatively unmarked with the flaws of either parent is better luck than management.

Because one major theme of the novel is Elizabeth's growing away from her family and learning to see them and others as they really are, the reader increasingly

²³ Burgan 540.

relies on Elizabeth's view and opinions of her father as a way to understand him. She is well aware that "conjugal felicity . . . domestic comfort. . . . Respect, esteem, and confidence, had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown" (*PP* 236). Nor has she, as Jane Austen writes:

been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what she could not overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents, talents which rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife. (*PP* 236-237)

There is something touching in this portrait of the failed patriarch; Jane Austen draws him with sympathy even while she judges him and finds him wanting. In the end the proclivity of a life-time's want of discretion and decorum serves to wound his two favourite daughters and we are left with the picture of him arriving at Pemberley alone and unannounced in contrast to the warmth and love with which the Gardiners are regularly received. Mary Burgan draws attention to the exchange over the supper table after the announcement of Jane's engagement. Even with the quiet and sweet-tempered Jane Mr. Bennet's impulse is to distance not just those he should love, but also those he does love, with his wit. He concludes his congratulatory remarks with a comment on Jane and Bingley's similarity in character:

"You are each of you so complying, that every servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income."

"I hope not so. Imprudence or thoughtlessness in money matters, would be unpardonable in *me*." (*PP* 348)

Burgan finds Mr. Bennet's comment unfeeling in that it fails "to take into account Jane's sense of how little her family has had to offer in her marriage contract." Further she finds Jane's reply fraught with referential meaning. "Jane has never criticized her situation openly -- her unspoken trial of humiliation and loneliness have been evident only to Elizabeth -- nevertheless, her reply to her father indicates the novel's evaluation of the effects of his fatherhood."²⁴ Burgan is only partly correct, however, in her observation that Mr. Bennet "provides a rare example of a character who slips from 'round' to 'flat': failures in him which may at first seem complicated and tragic are eventually revealed to be obsessive and only pathetic."²⁵ True, one tends to get bored with Mr. Bennet's ways and to share Elizabeth's growing sense of distance from him. We see this natural outcome of Elizabeth's development as her own person most clearly in the several conversations which take place between father and daughter in the aftermath of Lydia's elopement, and in particular, in their exchange in the library, where he has sent for her, having just been asked for her hand in marriage by Fitzwilliam Darcy. Clearly, here, Mr. Bennet is not flat; what Burgan reads as flat is really just the failure to grow: one feels that Mr. Bennet is still capable of "surprising in a convincing way."²⁶ Tony Tanner refers to the geometry in Jane Austen's novels by which the author "helps to make us appreciate the value of the real thing by juxtaposing a travesty or parodic

²⁴ Burgan 539.

²⁵ Burgan 539.

²⁶ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971) 106.

version of it." ²⁷ Just as her parents' marriage illustrates many of the pitfalls to be avoided in choosing a life partner, and Lydia's heedless union portrays the kind of error which Elizabeth, by exertion and self-control, has avoided, so too does her ability to transcend her circumstances, to integrate what she has learned about herself, and to maintain a proper sense of discretion and decorum contrast with her father's failure in identical areas of self-exertion. Despite the above, neither father nor daughter is portrayed as any less concerned for the other's feelings. Elizabeth, the narrator says,

did not fear her father's opposition, but he was going to be made unhappy, and that it should be through her means, that *she*, his favourite child, should be distressing him by her choice, should be filling him with fears and regrets in disposing of her, was a wretched reflection, and she sat in misery till Mr. Darcy appeared again, when looking at him she was a little relieved by his smile. (*PP* 375)

For his part, Mr. Bennet is true to character; even when he is wishing his daughter all happiness, he cannot help but use his personal and unhappy frame of reference: "I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband . . . My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life" (*PP* 376). Yet when he says "I could not have parted with you, my Lizzy, to any one less worthy" (*PP* 377), one senses that Mr. Bennet, for once, has dispensed with his wit and speaks from his heart.

Elizabeth's relationship with the Gardiners, her aunt and uncle, has been mentioned briefly above, but in a discussion of fathers and father figures deserves individual attention. The Gardiners' marriage contrasts in every way with that of the

²⁷ Tanner 79.

Bennets: it is, as Tony Tanner says, the "real thing" and their good influence offers another insight into how Jane and Elizabeth have turned out as sensibly as they do.²⁸

At key times both during the course of the novel and in the period of Elizabeth's life which precedes the novel's action, it is obvious that her aunt and uncle have provided much stronger guidance and support than her parents. It seems that the Gardiners are there when Elizabeth needs them, and they literally and figuratively are her entrée to Pemberley. When firm, decisive, unemotional action is required to resolve the Lydia and Wickham crisis, it is Mr. Gardiner who takes charge, sends his brother-in-law back home to Longbourn, and provides a respectable albeit unappreciated haven for Lydia in the interim before her actual marriage. In the end it is the Gardiners for whom Elizabeth is preparing to play chatelaine at Pemberley during Christmas, and the implication is quite clear that the Bennets, at least Mrs. Bennet, will be visiting infrequently, if at all. Interesting as this contrast in behaviour is within the novel, it also has ramifications when reviewing the whole range of father figures covered in this discussion because it throws the failures into relief and helps balance a perception one might reasonably draw from the preponderance of erring fathers that Jane Austen was rejecting all fathers, not simply illustrating the vanity of human wishes and the range of self-deception to which the mind not in the habit of critical self-analysis is susceptible.

There is only one other father in *Pride and Prejudice* who plays a significant role and that is Mr. Darcy, father of the hero. He is not presented as a character in his own right, but through the several references to him, he helps to illustrate

²⁸ Tanner 79.

another theme in Jane Austen's presentation of the ways in which, even with the best intentions, fathers fail to do what is best for their offspring. That she should include the references made by Darcy to his own father's failure to restrain him as he grew in pride and to his father's generosity to George Wickhazn but blindness to his faults show a kind of indulgence which, though a natural enough parental mistake, points to the ease with which any lessening of attentiveness in the upbringing of children can lead to problems at some later point. Jane Austen clearly removes financial considerations from any causal relationship with successful fathering: rich as Mr. Darcy is, entailed though Mr. Bennet's property is, it makes no difference to the myopia which afflicts them both. When Darcy believes he may have a second chance with Elizabeth, he confesses the rightness of her accusations on the night of his first proposal and details some of the upbringing he had:

As a child I was taught what was *right*, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately an only son, (for many years an only *child*) I was spoilt by my parents, who though good themselves, (my father particularly, all that was good and benevolent and amiable,) allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to *wish* at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. (PP 369)

Of course the credit which Darcy gives Elizabeth for helping him see the error of his ways also reinforces the theme of mutuality in good marriages, and contrasts with the Bennets' inability to learn from one another. Here Darcy and Elizabeth succeed where their fathers have failed in the ultimate Jane Austen test: the ability to know one's self and act correctively on that self-awareness.

Neither Mr. Bennet nor Mr. Darcy senior live to feel the results of their errors in judgement and proper assertiveness with anything like the sharpness with which, despite his good intentions, Sir Thomas Bertram is forced to consider his oversights as a father in *Mansfield Park*. Of all Jane Austen's novels, it is *Mansfield Park* in which the depiction of the patriarchal system is of most interest. As a father figure, Sir Thomas Bertram bears the weight of his own actions and personality, and also the burden of representing his class, its values and inadequacies. With a sureness for which the portrait of Mr. Bennet only partially prepares the reader, Jane Austen deftly manages to make Sir Thomas believable in both roles, and in doing so makes a telling commentary on values and morals in early nineteenth-century England. *Mansfield Park* is a watershed for social criticism in Jane Austen's novels; what has been implied previously is now portrayed explicitly, and of all her novels it is the one which is most unsettling for most readers. Indeed, Tony Tanner believes that *Mansfield Park* is not only Jane Austen's most profound novel, but "one of the most profound novels of the nineteenth century."²⁹

By right of position in his family and his neighbourhood, Sir Thomas Bertram is perfectly situated to be portrayed as a powerful and generous paterfamilias and the ideal representative of his class and the ethos of the English landed gentry. In his article "Jane Austen and Heroism," Irvin Ehrenpreis succinctly clarifies one of the assumptions which uninformed readers of the Janeite type erringly make. He writes, "For Austen, the social class that mattered was indeed the gentry, rising no higher than the baronets. It is interesting that peers never have a role in her work, except

²⁹ Tanner 143.

dowager Viscountess Dalrymple in *Persuasion*." ³⁰ Further, Ehrenpreis precisely distinguishes the rural world, its values and hierarchies from the London world of Court and business:

Austen, in fact, accepts a social ideology that goes back to the seventeenth century, and cuts across divisions based on the source of one's income. In this ideology the church is not united against any other category of economic, political, or social types; neither are the landed classes or the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, all these strata bifurcate at the same point; the gentry against the peerage, the lower clergy against the bishops, the tradesmen of the provincial towns against the great merchants and bankers in London. ³¹

When a critic asserts, as Margaret Kirkham does, that the "domestic government of an English estate is exposed as based on false principles," it is useful to have the kind of framework which Ehrenpreis supplies as background. ³² Kirkham's further comment that the "education of Sir Thomas Bertram, Bart, MP, rather than of Miss Fanny Price" is one of the novel's central subjects is particularly appropriate in the context of this understanding. ³³ The theme of crisis in authority is depicted from multiple points of view and the importance of individual exertion is paramount.

In *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas Bertram's rule of his family is a dominant force in the action of the novel; against his stern dominance most of his family act with varying degrees of improper behaviour, all as unflattering to him as to themselves. These range from benign neglect by his seemingly senseless wife

³⁰ Ehrenpreis 41.

³¹ Ehrenpreis 41-42.

³² Kirkham 98.

³³ Kirkham 98.

through underhanded and self-serving manipulation by Mrs. Norris; from his eldest son's squandering of his inheritance, and his daughter's vacuous hypocrisy, to Fanny's fear and trepidation. In a scene with echoes of John and Fanny Dashwood's rationalization of selfishness, Sir Thomas, his wife and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Norris, illustrate one of reigning principles of *Mansfield Park*, as they undercut by their self-interested considerations much of the real fitness and charity in their decision to help Mrs. Price raise her family. Money is all-important and the consideration of financial implications is foremost in all decision making. Even in these initial scenes, Jane Austen establishes revealing similarities between Mrs. Norris and Sir Thomas. The busybody, Mrs. Norris, whose "love of money was equal to her love of directing" (*MP* 8), is not so different from Sir Thomas though he takes a far more remote approach to the management of his family and dependents. In deciding to adopt one of his nieces, Sir Thomas makes it clear to Mrs. Norris that, should the adopted niece not marry, there is a commitment and a duty at least to pride, to "consider ourselves engaged to secure to her hereafter, as circumstances may arise, the provision of a gentlewoman if no such establishment should offer as you [Mrs. Norris] are so sanguine in expecting" (*MP* 7). This is no small undertaking, nor is his decision to assume personally the direction of his Antigua interests when his elder son amasses serious debts which must be discharged at expense to Edmund's inheritance. In his own way, in his own view of the world and his place in it, he is doing what he sees as right. The scheming and self-aggrandizement which motivates Mrs. Norris' every notion is not dissimilar to Sir Thomas' broader plans for the family's material gain. Although he has an abundance of faults, Jane Austen's

characterization of Sir Thomas has a careful verisimilitude. He acts on principle, albeit wrong and vainglorious, and this gives a strength to the novel which would be unachievable if he could be dismissed as merely petty and self-serving in the way of Sir Walter Elliot, for example. Sir Thomas' chief faults lie in his pride of position, in his seeming inability to be relaxed and affectionate within the bosom of his family, and in his willingness to be deluded. This is made explicit in the authorial comments about the education which Sir Thomas provides for his daughters. Sir Thomas goes through all the right motions to make his daughters like their mother; there are the requisite lessons in music, French and drawing, he is at the expense of a governess and masters. At no time does he show any awareness that under Mrs. Norris' insidious influence his daughters are developing into a pair of proud, deceitful, selfish and self-satisfied young women:

In everything but disposition, they were admirably taught. Sir Thomas did not know what was wanting, 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. (*MP* 19)

The part of Maria and Julia's behaviour to Fanny which is reprehensible is understandable from the lack of familial example of proper attitude and attention to her. That so much of the running of his household is abdicated to Mrs. Norris' vicious governance is a criticism of the cypher on the sofa and is also an indication of the lack of attention on Sir Thomas' part to the details of his family's day-to-day life. A patriarchal society concentrates enormous power in the hands of the head of the family; with that power comes serious responsibility not freedom. What is more, as the marriages of so many of Jane Austen's parents show, it is only when the

responsibilities are shared and not concentrated in one partner that there is a true basis for marital and familial happiness.

Given the previous context of the lack of responsible assertion in the Bennet household when that patriarch abdicates, it is notable in *Mansfield Park* that a patriarch who actively exerts himself, supposedly in his family's best interests, also meets with emptiness in his marriage and grave disappointments in the adult behaviour of three of his four children. The problems at Mansfield Park are not just Sir Thomas' or of his making, but evolve from a complex of causes and reasons. Sir Thomas has, like Mr. Bennet, chosen unwisely in picking as his marriage partner a weak and languorous woman who in this case has at least the advantage of being a decorative addition to the home. Certainly there is little of the mutuality, that sense of interplay, of challenge and assistance to do what is right which forms the ideal partnership in all Jane Austen's novels. Mary Lascelles' careful reading of the novel does reveal, however, a fascinating pattern of behaviour on Lady Bertram's part and she reminds the reader how skilfully Jane Austen uses even the most listless character. Lascelles observes "a startling direct correspondence between her [Lady Bertram's] reaction to events and their emotional reality," and convincingly cites as examples Lady Bertram's utter passivity at her daughter's wedding and her animation under the influence of the idea of handsome and rich young Henry Crawford's love for Fanny Price.³⁴ In Lascelles' words, the "momentous return" of Sir Thomas brings Lady Bertram "nearer agitation than she had been for the last twenty years" (*MP* 179), and in a small way this glimpse of emotion gives flesh to the idea of their

³⁴ Lascelles 156.

marriage. Though she may love Sir Thomas she is nevertheless incapable of exerting herself on his behalf or that of her children. Ironically, she fully meets the limited expectations her society had of women and Sir Thomas' shortcomings, dreadful as they are, gain a poignancy against this background.

The use and abuse of his power haunt Sir Thomas in the failings of his children. All react to the severity of his governance by seeking some kind of escape because force breeds this reaction. His eldest son is a profligate; his younger one indecisive and, perhaps, bland. His elder daughter disgraces herself in her acquiescence in a marriage to a man she neither loves nor respects and in her subsequent scandalous affair with Henry Crawford. His younger daughter elopes to escape returning to the strictness of the family home. In the reflections which are his bitter cup at the end of the novel, we are told that Sir Thomas gradually begins to understand the "most direful mistake in his plan of education" (*MP* 463). It is difficult to acquit Sir Thomas' 'fatherly' behaviour in the matter of Maria's engagement. He is disappointed in Rushworth and sees that his daughter's behaviour to her fiancé is "careless and cold." Unaware of Maria's involvement with Crawford, Sir Thomas can hardly be blamed if his timing of the interview with his daughter was off, although Jane Austen states if he had been three or four days earlier Maria's answer would have been different. But there is a tone in the representation of their exchange which reveals both the father and the daughter as wanting in forthrightness:

With solemn kindness Sir Thomas addressed her; told her his fears, inquired into her wishes, entreated her to be open and sincere, and assured her that every inconvenience should be braved, and the connection entirely given up, if she felt herself unhappy in the prospect of it. He would act for her and release her. Maria had a moment's

struggle as she listened, and only a moment's: when her father ceased, she was able to give her answer immediately, decidedly, and with no apparent agitation. . . .

Sir Thomas was satisfied: too glad to be satisfied perhaps to urge the matter quite as far as his judgment might have dictated to others. (*MP* 200-201)

On later consideration of how his own "severity" taught his daughters to repress their true feelings from him and take the indulgence and flattery of Mrs. Norris as a more convivial guide, Sir Thomas is more forthcoming:

He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they [his daughters] had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which alone can suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. . . . He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them. (*MP* 463)

The ambition and mercenary connections which motivated him to encourage Maria's marriage to Rushworth, and which equally apply to his encouragement of Fanny's engagement to Crawford, are renounced and there is clearly a painful growth in self-awareness as a result of his family ordeal. His own endurance in an unequal marriage may well have allowed him to conclude that less than perfectly matched couples can survive, but he has learned that this is not a proper basis on which to encourage other unions.

Lest the prospect of a reformed patriarch become overly hopeful, however, there remains the matter of Maria's banishment from home. Is this an abuse of power and a concession to the false values of outward appearances, as opposed to a generous and Christian forgiveness based on an understanding of how he had failed his daughter? Severe as it may seem, in context of the times Sir Thomas'

actions are unusually tolerant, even benevolent. The conclusion of "momentous discussions" is that:

As a daughter -- he hoped a penitent one -- she should be protected by him, and secured in every comfort, and supported by every encouragement to do right, which their relative situations admitted; but farther than *that* he would not go. Maria had destroyed her own character, and he would not by a vain attempt to restore what never could be restored, be affording his sanction to vice, or in seeking to lessen its disgrace, be anywise accessory to introducing such misery in another man's family, as he had known himself. (*MP* 465)

The rationale has its integrity and at the same time underlines the actual position of woman as chattel, as 'goods' passed from one man's house to another's. Only when one looks at Fanny's role in the novel, and the theme of the personal power of refusal and self-denial which she represents, does the aptness of Maria's fate, albeit in an historical moral context, become evident.

Tony Tanner's perceptive discussion of the interrelation of property and propriety clearly sets out the standard which one finds as a reference throughout the novels. "Property", he writes, "was a necessary, but not sufficient, basis for a stable and orderly society. Decorum, morality and good manners -- in a word, 'propriety' - - were equally indispensable"; he then goes on to propose that for Jane Austen the one without the other could "prove helpless to prevent a possible revolution in society."³⁵ The tones of sober judgment and concern which Tanner explores in Jane Austen's critique of society are well-supported. In terms of *Mansfield Park* it helps to explain some of the heavy morality which Fanny and to some extent Edmund represent:

³⁵ Tanner 18.

Jane Austen constantly sought to establish and demonstrate what was the necessary proper conduct in all areas of social behaviour, why she scrutinised so carefully any possible deviance from, or neglect of, true propriety -- in her own writing as well as in the behaviour and speech of her characters. To secure the proper relationship between property and propriety in her novels was thus not the wish-fulfilment of a genteel spinster but a matter of vital social -- and political -- importance. That is why it is in many ways irrelevant to argue whether she was a relatively mindless reactionary or an incipient Marxist. She did believe in the values of her society; but she saw that those values had to be authentically embodied and enacted if that society was to survive -- or deserve to survive. She indeed saw her society threatened, but mainly from inside: by the failures and derelictions of those very figures who should be responsibly upholding, renewing and regenerating that social order.³⁶

In the marriage of his son and Fanny Price, Sir Thomas lives to see such an authentic embodiment not only of the values he would wish Mansfield Park to represent (and maybe thought he did) but also of the comprehensive awareness and steadfastness which he was unable, himself, to achieve. Sir Thomas represents the potential to use effectively one's mistakes as a basis for growth and change. The reformation at Mansfield Park is Jane Austen at her most serious. Her seriousness colours and shades, but does not diminish, her essential optimism for the potential in both man and society for improvement through steady, right-minded exertion of individual moral sensibility motivated not by the wish to preserve a system which wants to perpetuate itself, but by concern for the best interests of others.

The other father in *Mansfield Park* is Fanny's real father at Portsmouth. Jane Austen's portrait of him and his family is unique in her work, showing as it does a world and way of living, which, for all their extreme contrast with the elegance and plenty at Mansfield Park, are no less empty and bereft of parental model or

³⁶ Tanner 18.

guidance. The description of Mr. Price hints that he may be a victim of society, but ultimately reiterates the theme and value of personal exertion. The young Crawfords, likewise, are in want of models of right behaviour. Mary flees from the home of her uncle and guardian, Admiral Crawford, when after the death of Mrs. Crawford, he brings his mistress to live with him. For both Mary and Henry "early independence and bad domestic example" (*MP* 467) prove to be too much for them to overcome and ultimately they are found wanting.

Emma seems to have escaped most of the ill effects one might expect from the example of her father. As she comes of age and begins to assume the role her father would normally play in their small community, Emma encounters difficulties which, were Mr. Woodhouse more active and alert, could be resolved with a little parental advice. Of course had Emma the Gardiners to support and advise her, there would be no story, because the very essence of *Emma* is the delight of watching the heroine learning by her mistakes and growing into her estate. Emma learns that being an autocrat, ordering others' lives for them, is not acceptable to her or to others in the "ill-assorted" people with whom she is in regular contact. Emma's mistaken impression of how one successfully uses the power of money and position is not dissimilar to the mistakes of Sir Thomas Bertram or General Tilney, despite the differences in scale. Mr. Woodhouse's over-cautious concerns about his diet and the weather, as well as his solicitousness for others' health, are his chief characteristics. Margaret Kirkham raises a debatable point, however, in her assertion that Mr. Woodhouse is "a selfish old woman." Kirkham believes that:

Jane Austen mocks her heroine in the one respect where she believes herself to be above reproach. Unable to see him as he really is, Emma suffers from a peculiarly insidious form of paternal tyranny for, with all her apparent independence, she is prevented from growing up.³⁷

Mr. Woodhouse is a quizzical figure, but he is far from controlling Emma in any larger sense. She controls him, and the ease with which she does misleads her into thinking that she can likewise manage the lives of others. In some ways Mr. Woodhouse is the very antithesis of a strong patriarch and yet he is also controlling in his own valetudinarian way. Jane Austen does not fail to use Mr. Woodhouse's infirmities to advantage in her text, but they are essentially background. The Box Hill scene in which Emma's impatience bursts forth as rudeness to Miss Bates gains a resonance when considered in light of how many times at home she obviously has to bide in patience with her father's ways. In her reflections after the incident she hopes that "As a daughter . . . she was not without a heart" (*E* 377), and the reader cannot but feel more fully the burden which Emma regularly bears at home. She eventually learns that this and other burdens are the price of her relative social freedom.

No critical discussion of fathers in *Emma* would be complete without reference to Mr. Knightley as a substitute father figure for Emma. Interesting though that concept is, Mr. Knightley is, from the very beginning, also Emma's suitor and it is in this capacity that his complex role is discussed in a later chapter. The other fathers who round out the various spheres of paternal activity in *Emma* play only minor roles, but offer in typical Jane Austen fashion brief insight into some of

³⁷ Kirkham 126.

the realities of her society, the glimpses which quietly give her novels substance and such pleasing verisimilitude. One such father, Harriet Smith's illegitimate parent, is unnamed. Given the standards of the time and weighed against the behaviour of others in similar circumstances in the novels, Harriet's father seems to have acted responsibly in providing financially for her and ensuring that she was educated. John Willoughby was less conscientious. Emma's fanciful speculation on Harriet's parentage is revealed to be mere wishfulness and she eventually comes to regret the notions she implants in Harriet's suggestible mind. Harriet's parentage is also important in the novel as a cogent comment on the values of the patriarchal society. Much as she may wish to elevate Harriet's social standing, Emma is powerless to do so. Harriet is literally and figuratively the embodiment of the sexual and moral double standard. Illegitimacy is an affront to the values of a traditional patriarchal society which even Jane Austen's broadened social sensibility seems unable to accept.

The other father whose story is presented in *Emma* is Mr. Weston. His problems as a young man, when he was obliged by a variety of circumstances to give up his son Frank to his wife's brother and sister-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Churchill, give an edge to the security and happiness of his new life as husband to Miss Taylor. Captain Weston was left on the death of his first wife "rather a poorer man than at first, and with a child to maintain" (*E* 16). The Churchills' offer to take the "whole charge" of little Frank is accepted as the most advantageous arrangement for all concerned. Jane Austen writes: "Some scruples and some reluctance the widower-father may be supposed to have felt; but . . . they were overcome by other

considerations" (*E* 16), and Frank becomes the heir to Enscombe. There is a certain similarity between these circumstances and those, less dramatic, of Jane Austen's brother Edward, who was adopted as heir by his cousins the Knights and who ultimately took their name. Included here as background to the novel, both Harriet and Frank's stories provide additional depth to our understanding of men's lives, the choices they make and the effects their behaviour has on others.

Fathers in *Persuasion* fare both better and worse than in the earlier novels: Sir Walter Elliot is dismissed in the early chapters, but the portraits of Mr. Musgrove senior and of Captain Harville as fathers are brief but pleasant and happy representations of warmth and caring within their respective family settings. Indeed, there is very little to be learned about Mr. Musgrove except that he seems to be hospitable and agreeable; he joins his wife in mourning the loss of a son whom he had sent to sea with the hope that, under a stronger system of discipline than could be expected at home, Richard would mend his "very troublesome" and "unmanageable" ways. Mr. Musgrove's relations with the rest of his family who figure in the action, his son and two daughters, are unexceptional, marked by understanding and acceptance of them as individuals with their peculiarities and foibles. The descriptions of Captain Harville's little house "near the foot of an old pier of unknown date" (*P* 96) could hardly form a greater contrast with the spaciousness of Kellynch Hall. The warmth of the hospitality, the "ingenious contrivances and nice arrangements of Captain Harville, to turn the actual space to the best possible account," the picture of "repose and domestic happiness" (*P* 98),

and the report of useful household industry all emphasize the empty formality of Sir Walter's home life. The Harvilles' home contrasts also with the idleness and lack of self-exertion for the good of others in Charles and Mary Musgrove's dwelling at Uppercross Cottage.

Anne Elliot's maturity in age and wisdom and self-reliance announce her as no longer requiring paternal guidance or being susceptible to paternal influence, for good or ill. Sir Walter Elliot is so utterly shallow and self-involved that he is less a real character than many of Jane Austen's other father figures. His obsession with the *Baronetage* is the one activity which can rouse his vanity beyond the reflected image of himself. Kirkham contends that:

Sir Walter Elliot is treated more harshly than any other Austen patriarch. In *Pride and Prejudice* the sympathetic character of Mr. Bennet, and his warm affection for his second daughter, had made the morally independent role of Elizabeth all too easy. Having mocked Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* and reduced Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* to a condition not unlike that of Lady Bertram, Austen created in Sir Walter Elliot a *pater familias* whose character closely resembles that of the smart society woman of uncertain age, much despised in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature.³⁸

After Lady Elliot's death he lives without financial restraint and between himself and his eldest daughter manages almost to disinherit himself from the property which gives him his title. Although, as an unmarried daughter, Anne Elliot remains dependent on her father, he is for her a figure of the past. Her sense of decorum is such that her behaviour never reflects the affronts she regularly receives from him, but Jane Austen makes it clear that Anne's "knowledge, which she often wished less, of her father's character" (*P* 34) distances and protects her from his behaviour at this

³⁸ Kirkham 149.

point in her life. *Persuasion*, like no other Jane Austen novel, is about a mature young woman, and the inclusion of the father as a gravely flawed patriarch serves more to highlight the changes in society represented by the Navy, by William Walter Elliot and the social climbing Penelope Clay, than as useful, steady, paternal influence. One senses in *Persuasion* a new order in society where to be blindly self-absorbed is to be passed over and taken advantage of by the unscrupulous. The small sympathy which Elizabeth Elliot's unenviable situation generates is balanced by a hopefulness and an optimism that no daughter of Frederick Wentworth and Anne Elliot will be at a loss for disinterested parental love and support.

David Monaghan's assertion that "by the time she wrote *Persuasion*, Jane Austen seems to have lost faith in the gentry" emphasizes the evolution which takes place over the course of the novels in the novelist's thinking about class and control in society.³⁹ For Tony Tanner "the novel shows that English society is in between an old social order in a state of decline and desuetude, and some new 'modern' society of as yet uncertain values, hierarchies and principles."⁴⁰ To be sure change was afoot and, whether faith in the Navy was justified or not, the fact remains that the novelistic presentation of the patriarchy anticipates this change from the beginning. The picture which emerges is clear: in all six novels the emphases and the values are consistent. The position as head of a family is one of power and potentially of prestige; it offers scope not only for intimate and benevolent involvement in the lives of the members of the family, but also for personal

³⁹ Monaghan 143.

⁴⁰ Tanner 249.

fulfilment. Yet with this heavy obligation comes the all-too-human temptation to use one's position of power for selfish motives rather than selflessly for the good of those in one's care. More importantly, because the novels are so much about marriage, Jane Austen time and again illustrates the folly of establishing a family without careful consideration of one's personal limitations and those likewise of one's partner. The specifics vary from novel to novel, but there is an essentially timeless comment on the discharge of "human duties." The responsibility of fatherhood is a serious undertaking, not to be entered into without maturity, self-awareness, and forethought. Mr. Bennet, Mr. Dashwood, and Sir Walter Elliot all share among their limitations a similar lack of the careful financial management which the peace and comfort of their respective families require. General Tilney and Sir Thomas Bertram, though unlike in striking ways, are both blind to the real needs of their families for guidance and a more intimate personal involvement by both parents. The list of mistakes goes on, and the examination of Jane Austen's portrayal of family life would be pessimistic were it not for the strong notes of hope which she sounds as her heroines' wedding march. It is in the mutuality of the young couples at the end of the novels, and in the sharing of responsibility only caught in glimpses in the Gardiners, the Harvilles, and even the Bertrams, that the novels reveal their vision of the ultimate value of a willingness to learn, to change, to grow and especially, to share.

CHAPTER V

The Progressive Development of the Unworthy Suitors: Integrating Danger

In each of Jane Austen's novels, at some point before the heroine finally chooses or accepts her husband-to-be, she consciously rejects a male character, often another possible suitor, who has failed to manifest the qualities of mind and manner which are demanded not only by the heroine, but also, through implication, by the moral structure of the novel. The portrayal of these unworthy male characters in the novels provides an opportunity, unlike that offered by any other character or theme, to comprehend the breadth of Jane Austen's awareness and understanding of the complexities of men's and women's lives. Interestingly, these unworthy men also demonstrate the progressive development in Jane Austen's writing more succinctly than any other single aspect of her work. In the course of the novels, as she delineates the dark side of courtship, she also succeeds in incorporating the unworthy into the communities she portrays with increasing finesse and plausibility: an artistic achievement which powerfully underscores the complexity of women's limited choices and the utter importance for women of learning not to accept men at face value. Most importantly, just as the accepted suitors discussed in the subsequent chapter form a commentary on what constitutes an acceptable marriage partner, the rejected suitors chronicle the range of sad, even tragic, fates which threaten women's security and happiness. This is especially so for those who have not successfully developed

a critical capacity to judge carefully and accurately about life issues of which their usual position of powerlessness in a patriarchal society denies them knowledge. In *Jane Austen: Irony as Defence and Discovery*, Marvin Mudrick sees the move away from parody in the early novels as a major step "toward a free responsible consideration of the individual, toward the question of personal decision and personal value."¹ As the heroines develop as individuals, each one must come to terms with the jeopardy of their place in the world of men: their ability to make free personal decisions and grow to maturity as self-actualized persons is constantly in peril. Likewise, an examination of Jane Austen's mode of male characterization and the improvements she makes in the presentation of what is initially a stock villain character reveals both her increasing sensitivity to these men as individuals and a coincident growth in her ability to portray men with confidence and equity. Of further significance is the commentary which these characterizations form on the choices young men take and the pressures they face in finding their place in a society with double standards of behaviour not only as regards men's and women's behaviour, but also in the conflicting demands that men marry sensibly and well, balancing their future fiscal livelihoods against personal integrity and happiness. The everyday realities of life emerge as complicated and full of pitfalls and pratfalls.

Chief among Jane Austen's unworthy male characters are John Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*, George Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*, Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, and Frank Churchill in *Emma*. John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* and William Walter Elliot in *Persuasion* play similar roles in their respective novels,

¹ Mudrick 63.

but their presences are incidental and episodic in comparison with the foregoing.² In creating the four main unworthy characters, Willoughby, Wickham, Crawford and Churchill, Jane Austen has a serious, well-defined purpose in mind and expends considerable effort in making these men plausible. Viewed chronologically, the unworthies in Austen's four central novels demonstrate a steady progression from villain to anti-hero: Willoughby and Churchill form the extremes, while Wickham and Crawford are anticipatory, transitional figures. The actual evolution of the unworthy characters occurs in Jane Austen's technique of characterization and her weaving of the characters into the fabric of the novels. Like the progression itself, part of the reason for the development is time-ordered: the novels begun in the 1811-1817 period of activity have a more sophisticated and tolerant view of human interaction, a focus on individual integrity, and a questioning acceptance of the conventions of social order.

What is even more important about these Jane Austen men is that they are central to her heroines' growth to maturity. These are, for the most part, physically and socially attractive men who command attention and brighten, by their sheer energy, the interactions in which they engage. They all appear, for a time at least, as potential marriage partners for the heroines. Julia Prewitt Brown remarks, in the

² In some ways William Walter Elliot requires special explanation. *Persuasion* sets aside the pattern established by the four central novels and is the culmination of Jane Austen's achievements in male characterization, but it is marred by the failure to give William Walter Elliot dimension or real plausibility. Given the author's other achievements in *Persuasion*, the departure it represents from old patterns and the fact that the novel was not completed fully before her death, it is not unreasonable to assume that William Walter would have been, in as much as he is necessary to the novel at all, more integrated in further revisions.

introduction to her study of social change and literary form in the novels, on the pattern which emerges:

Almost every Austen heroine at some point is confronted with a sexually assertive man, and she either loses interest in him as an imaginative counterpart (Elizabeth and Wickham, Emma and Frank Churchill) or rejects him because of a conscious understanding of the danger of his sexuality (Elinor and Willoughby, Fanny Price and Henry Crawford). It seems that passion is antithetical to what these heroines are striving for, in the words of Elizabeth Bennet, as 'rational creatures,' as women who are seeking to know themselves and control their lives. In the end they marry the men who have helped them most in this struggle, who have been most critical of them and most conscious of their compelling need for honesty.³

The rejected men, the passionate ones, represent that which must be avoided by the heroines if they are to survive in their rigidly restricted milieu: the wrong, the deceptive, the ill-advised and the secretive. They are presented also, with progressive artistic finesse, as having distinct lives of their own, as suffering too, for their actions and choices, and in some ways as being as much victims of the rigidity of the society in which they live as are the women they deceive. Tony Tanner makes this explicit when he writes of "the cruel coercive powers of society and the ruthlessness with which many of its members were willing to manipulate or 'correct' the aberrations of individual passion in the interests of wealth or some illusory hierarchical propriety."⁴ Who these men are, what is attractive about them, and why, ultimately, they are found unworthy is an integral part of Jane Austen's representation of her world.

³ Brown 14.

⁴ Tanner 81.

Three terms are used with specific meaning in this discussion. 'Unworthy' is used here generically simply to designate the broad role Thorpe, Willoughby, Wickham, Crawford, Churchill and Elliot play in their respective novels. To some extent they are all unworthy or unacceptable, displaying as they do a rather questionable sense of personal honour, a lack of moral force and an absence of proper respect for the integrity of other individuals. 'Villain' is used in two complementary ways: the first is a reference to the stereotyped literary role of a person of uncouth mind or manner who is deliberately a scoundrel or a criminal; the second, resulting from the first, is as a particular reference to John Willoughby and George Wickham. The term 'anti-hero' is applied to Henry Crawford and Frank Churchill and, with the further explanation supplied in the footnote above, to William Walter Elliot, to differentiate them from Willoughby and Wickham and to highlight Jane Austen's development of the role. An adaptation of Abrams' definition of anti-hero illustrates the appropriateness of the term in reference to the later unworthies. Abrams says an anti-hero is "a man who, instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power and heroism in the face of fate is petty, ignominious, ineffectual or passive."⁵ Abrams' words echo Jane Austen here. In *Emma*, Miss Woodhouse's reaction on discovering that Frank Churchill, Jane Austen's most admirable anti-hero, has been engaged secretly for nine months, illustrates what might well be considered the Jane Austen definition of anti-hero. Emma says: "So unlike what a man should be! . . . None of that upright integrity, that strict

⁵ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) 204.

adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life" (E 397). Two other words which require brief definition are 'hero' and 'gentleman.' There are no real Jane Austen heroes in the sense of male paragon. Rather than the term hero, 'accepted suitor' more accurately describes the role played by the chief male characters in the novels. Like a hero, the accepted suitor is always a gentleman; his conduct conforms to a high standard of propriety and correct behaviour, but he also has weaknesses and flaws. Although both the villain and the anti-hero are foils to the worthy suitor, the villain is used as his direct contrary, unconscious of or incapable of sustained proper behaviour, selfish and lacking in consideration for others, while the anti-hero is accepted as much more the flawed gentleman than the complete rogue.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen's sense of parody is particularly keen as she ridicules many of the tired literary clichés of the day. The aspects of the conventional villain which Jane Austen chooses to parody are naturally those which stand out in her mind as dominant traits, those which represent the popular novel tradition for her. Through her characterization of John Thorpe, Jane Austen cleverly caricatures the typical villain of the novels of sensibility. Like Richardson's Robert Lovelace in *Clarissa*, or Sir Hargreave Pollexfen in *Sir Charles Grandison*, of whom he is his own pale imitation, John Thorpe attempts to control the life of the heroine cum anti-heroine, Catherine Morland. His silly behaviour in carrying Catherine away in his carriage against her will, but returning because of darkness, is a purposeful Jane Austen spoof on the conventional kidnapping of the heroine.

At the same time, however, the incident like so many others shows the novelist's awareness of former modes. John Thorpe's control is found not in physical power, but in the force and malice of his lies. Yet the openness of Thorpe's lies is another part of the parody. John Thorpe, as a burlesque villain, lacks even the finesse which transforms bold-faced falsehoods into sly hypocrisy. The reasons for duplicity on Thorpe's part are similar in a deflated way to those of both his eighteenth-century predecessors and the villains in Jane Austen's later novels: John Thorpe is selfish and mercenary. It is his boastful exaggeration of Catherine's wealth which first attracts another truly villainous figure in the novel, General Tilney. Ironically, General Tilney's superior position enables him to overcome Thorpe's aspirations. Jane Austen's comic play with traditional plots concludes when Henry Tilney, a clergyman rather than the traditional disinherited count or duke of gothic fiction, explains John Thorpe's lies and tells his father of Catherine's true spiritual and temporal worth.

Northanger Abbey is a novel with a double theme of learning to distinguish between literature and life, and of coming to terms with the actualities of the real world. It is fitting that the villain should be at once a parody figure from past literature and an agent of the more serious theme of learning to cope with life's difficulties. John Thorpe's role as an example to Catherine of wrong action prefigures the presentation of a villainous figure in the later works. Catherine is the first example of a Jane Austen heroine judging the villain figure. Her budding individuality, her taking a stand of her own for the first time, anticipates a regular scene in the later heroines' growth to maturity. The narrator comments:

Little as Catherine was in the habit of judging for herself, and unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt, while she bore with the effusions of his endless conceit, of his [John Thorpe] being altogether completely agreeable. (NA 66)

Unlike John Willoughby and George Wickham, John Thorpe does not have all the appearance of a gentleman; he fails to hide his real nature successfully. On cursory examination his air and manner, though somewhat easy, are nevertheless perfectly correct, but his stupidity and his lack of refinement are soon apparent. The deviousness, the mercenary bent, the boorish nature which Thorpe soon displays become standard revelations about the unworthy and are used to demonstrate the heroine's growing discernment and to justify her rejection of the villain. The movement to maturity and marriage in *Northanger Abbey* is not diminished by the parody. Thorpe's control over Catherine is not dissimilar to Willoughby's power over Eliza Brandon or Marianne Dashwood, or Wickham's over Georgiana Darcy and to some extent, Elizabeth Bennet. In all cases the villain's actions are responsible for a considerable amount of the novel's movement and interest, but while a 'bad' man like Thorpe is largely incidental to Catherine's story, in the later novels the villain is more a part of the fabric of the novel and requires more discernment for the heroine to identify.

John Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*, is Jane Austen's only conventional villain and his characterization is marked by the limitations of such a figure. Willoughby is presented, thematically, chiefly in terms of his potential to be a good husband, as are the other unattached men in the novel, and he is characterized by

little more than an air and a manner. Not until he is exposed as a villain do Willoughby's easy acquiescence in Marianne Dashwood's tastes and his singular lack of moral force strike the reader as flaws in his character or gaps in the characterization. Like his eighteenth-century predecessors mentioned previously in this and other chapters, Willoughby requires development as an individual personality to come alive fully as a character.

Because *Sense and Sensibility* has two heroines, Willoughby not only figures as unworthy suitor to Marianne Dashwood and as a foil to Colonel Brandon, but also serves as a contrast to Edward Ferrars, the eligible but pallid suitor of the other heroine, Elinor Dashwood. Willoughby successfully fulfils his role as unworthy suitor and his ultimate rejection is justified by his mercenary attitude to marriage and his treatment of Marianne. The sudden reversal in his actions becomes a major problem with Willoughby's characterization: the lack of development and integration of his role into the novel marks him as more a structural and thematic expedient than a well-rounded individual. The manner in which Willoughby is used to facilitate the advancement of plot and theme in *Sense and Sensibility* is a fair indication of the novelist's intentions in that respect for the role of unworthy male in the succeeding works. But, that said, it would be wrong to assume that Jane Austen presents Willoughby without fairness or insight or sympathy. His 'story' forms a subtext of the world of a certain kind of man and the inequities of the patriarchal system which he represents and in which he traps himself. Mary Evans' analysis is perceptive: "as *Sense and Sensibility* unfolds it is clear that Jane Austen is developing a sustained and coherent attack upon fantasies of romance and visions

of transcendent relationships between men and women." ⁶ Given Marianne's sensibility, understanding the inadequacy of self-fulfilment exclusively through another person is her crucial test of personhood.

John Willoughby literally and figuratively sweeps Marianne Dashwood off her feet in his first appearance in *Sense and Sensibility*. The gratitude Willoughby secures by his action is swiftly replaced by admiration of his "beauty" and "gracefulness" (SS 43). Indeed, the effect which he has on Marianne explains both the general impression created by his physical appearance and indicates something of Marianne's character and the sensibility that make her so susceptible to Willoughby's "manly beauty" and charm:

His person and air were equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story; and in his carrying her into the house with so little previous formality, there was a rapidity of thought which particularly recommended the action to her. (SS 43)

Mrs. Dashwood's query, as to whom she was obliged for the kind act, elicits little information, but Marianne is content with her first impressions:

His name was good, his residence was in their favourite village, and she soon found that of all manly dresses a shooting-jacket was the most becoming. Her imagination was busy, her reflections were pleasant, and the pain of a sprained ankle was disregarded. (SS 43)

Clearly, it is not only Marianne who on first impression is supposed to view John Willoughby as a romantic hero. There is no hint or allusion that John Willoughby is anything like his possible namesake, the villainous Sir Clement Willoughby of Fanny Burney's *Evelina*. The reader's suspicions are not aroused until later when

⁶ Evans 40.

John Willoughby suddenly leaves Devonshire without explanation or intention of returning, but as Mary Evans rightly observes:

The semi-fantastical figure of Willoughby who emerges out of the woods to rescue Marianne is a figure who eventually reveals himself to have been created out of Marianne's dreams and romantic aspirations: the 'real' Willoughby, in the sense of the specific human being who enters into specific social and sexual relationships with others, is a callous and inadequate adventurer. The 'real' feeling which Marianne sees in Willoughby is little except his need to demonstrate sexual power over women, and it is a power in part created by her own need for romance and identification with a male other. Hence it is precisely Marianne's lack of genuine autonomy or sense of self that encourages her to project fantasy on to Willoughby -- a projection that elicits from Willoughby the living out, in the isolation of the Devon countryside, the dream of the romantic hero.⁷

Marianne, inexperienced and unwary of the world, has no one and no power to protect her.

The timing of John Willoughby's introduction in *Sense and Sensibility* is important in establishing both his character and his role in the novel and the difficulty for the heroines in judging someone who is presented as an acceptable member of their community. Coming, as it does, immediately following a description and discussion of Colonel Brandon, Willoughby's retiring and somewhat lifeless rival, the introduction is not randomly placed; rather, it is carefully timed for maximum effect. The contrast between Brandon and Willoughby is immediate and obvious; the parts they play as agents of theme are appropriated to each early in the novel. Following Willoughby's initial presentation, Sir John Middleton performs a significant function by providing a background and verification of John Willoughby's presence in Devonshire. Not until much later in the novel, when some evidence of

⁷ Evans 40-41.

good character or intentions is sought, does the actual paucity of concrete detail about Willoughby's background become evident. At this early point the reader, like the Dashwoods, is pleased to learn that Willoughby is a yearly visitor to Mrs. Smith at Allenham Court, a property which Willoughby is to inherit on her death. Because he is assigned a place in the community and known by Sir John he seems part of the community and an adherent to its standards. Middleton's commendation of Willoughby, "As good a kind of fellow as ever lived, I assure you. A very decent shot, and there is not a bolder rider in England" (SS 43), immediately opens the doors of Barton Cottage to the dashing young man.

It is characteristic of the later unworthy male characters that they lead the heroine to commit indiscretions; so it is with Willoughby. Willoughby's conduct and example lead Marianne to rash action on several occasions and Elinor, true to her character, censures them. Three incidents bear mention because they show how Jane Austen develops a sense of character through characters in conflict. The first involves Willoughby's gift to Marianne of a horse. She accepts readily and not until Elinor explains the financial responsibility with which Marianne is burdening their mother does Marianne unwillingly relinquish her present. A second occasion is Marianne's agreement with Willoughby's spiteful speech against Brandon on the morning that the Colonel is forced to cancel the planned visit to Delaford, his estate in Dorsetshire:

Elinor then heard Willoughby say in a low voice to Marianne, "There are some people who cannot bear a party of pleasure. Brandon is one of them. He was afraid of catching cold I dare say, and invented this trick for getting out of it. I would lay fifty guineas the letter was of his own writing."

"I have no doubt of it," replied Marianne. (SS 64-65)

Such indiscreet expression of sentiment is reminiscent of Willoughby's earlier remarks about Brandon being ". . . just the kind of man . . . whom every body speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to" (SS 50). It is noteworthy that the author allows her villain to speak for himself and leaves the reader to draw conclusions from what is said. Jane Austen never quite resolves the question of what men say and how they say it, but in the subsequent novels she makes great strides in moving away from purely narrative presentation into dialogue that is striking for the sense it gives of immediacy. The third incident, the unchaperoned visit to Allenham Court, shows Marianne and Willoughby flouting convention. Marianne completely and naively trusts Willoughby's honour, which, judging chiefly by appearances, she has yet no reason to doubt.

Months later in London John Willoughby's villainy begins to obtrude and Marianne's romantic dream becomes her nightmare. His treatment of Marianne appears totally inconsistent with his unreserved displays of affection in Devonshire. He does not answer Marianne's notes and leaves his card only when the Dashwood sisters are out making calls. The whole confused emotional muddle reaches a crisis when Willoughby ignores Marianne at a party. Attending in the company of Sophia Grey, a young lady encumbered with fifty thousand pounds, Willoughby is cruelly distant and slights his former acquaintances. When he does speak to Elinor, it is only to exchange the coldest pleasantries; he dismisses Marianne's astounded queries with brief reference to having left his card the previous week. The heroines are caught in a difficult social situation and Willoughby's subsequent letter is churlish

and impersonal, denying the fervour of past emotions. The explanation for Willoughby's complete change is presented in two parts. The first, stimulated by Willoughby's marriage to Miss Grey and Marianne's wretched emotional state following the ruin of her expectations, comes from Colonel Brandon. In confidence with Elinor he relates the sordid tale of Willoughby's seduction and desertion of Eliza Williams Brandon, his ward, discussed in the previous chapter. Colonel Brandon emotionally concludes his story with a clinching condemnation of Willoughby which echoes loudly of its eighteenth-century precursors:

"He had left the girl whose youth and innocence he had seduced, in a situation of the utmost distress, with no creditable home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his address! He had left her promising to return; he neither returned, nor wrote, nor relieved her." (SS 209)

The second, later, part of the explanation is from Willoughby's own mouth. Hearing from Sir John Middleton that Marianne is on her death-bed, Willoughby rushes to Cleveland in a typically rash manner to seek Marianne's forgiveness and to explain his conduct to Elinor in an attempt to make her hate him less. Willoughby's confessions do not signify a reformation but they do constitute a singular reference point in Jane Austen's works for questions of authorial intent and control. Willoughby begins by simply trying to excuse most of his failings and gives the impression that he wants to be allowed his misconduct, allowed to maintain his double standard. He is successful inasmuch as he is assured of forgiveness, but what is more important at this point is the sensibility he arouses in Elinor. In part of their highly-charged discussion Willoughby admits that his relationship with Marianne began as mere vain trifling. As Willoughby says:

"Careless of her happiness, thinking only of my own amusement, giving way to feelings which I had always been too much in the habit of

indulging, I endeavoured, by every means in my power, to make myself pleasing to her, without any design of returning her affection."
(SS 320)

He goes on to explain that his financial situation was such that he was unable to marry without money; that even when he felt himself captivated by Marianne and honour-bound to engage her, he procrastinated because of his desire to marry wealth. When Elinor challenges Willoughby to explain his treatment of Eliza, Willoughby attempts to excuse himself by claiming that Eliza was a willing accomplice. Willoughby's view of the seduction and desertion of an innocent young woman as a petty crime indicates the depth of his failings. Moral lassitude is always unacceptable in the novels and its rejection is the hallmark of sensible women and men. In this same context, Willoughby dismisses Mrs. Smith's reproach of his immoral conduct on the grounds that his benefactor is too formal in her notions and ignorant of the ways of the world. The illogical stance from which he argues demonstrates again his incomprehension of the seriousness of his actions and their consequences. Willoughby's sentiment here also reflects the kind of double standard in sexual behaviour which caused such a controversy when illustrated by Henry Fielding in his novel, *Tom Jones*. The debate about acceptable material for inclusion in a novel was one of long standing by Jane Austen's time. Samuel Johnson's famous essay in *The Rambler*, 4, was the definitive response of the didactic world. It registers his concern not only with immorality, but more specifically with its attractive presentation in novels, many of the readers of which Johnson felt would not be able ethically to evaluate the material. And as Jocelyn Harris points out in the introduction of her edition of *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson's "conviction,

corroborated by the acclaim for *Tom Jones*, that even the 'restorations' [the additional volume of remedial revisions to *Clarissa*, published to address the disputes raised by that novel's publication] had failed to convert a naughty world at last drove him to contemplate another full-scale work." ⁸ Jane Austen's novels, obviously in agreement with Richardson and Johnson's side of the debate, censure licentious activity as hypocrisy.

The meeting at Cleveland concludes after several indiscreet references by Willoughby to his wife. In the end, he is penitent, he is remorseful, and he is punished for his transgressions by his marriage to a woman whom he neither esteems nor loves, but on whom he is financially dependent. There is no real reformation, because Willoughby does not change for the better, but his plight is not presented without sympathy. He remains the same ambiguous combination of gentlemanly appearances and villainous conduct, but the reader also glimpses his troubled heart. It is this imaginative and empathic leap which begins to distinguish Jane Austen's creative ability.

The most interesting result of the confessions at Cleveland is the effect which Willoughby has on Elinor. Marvin Mudrick provides the extreme analysis when he writes:

We must nevertheless at this point observe Elinor -- and presumably the author -- almost in love, and quite amorally in love, with him. Not only does irony fail here for the moment, but the conscience of the novel, the formal conscience of the rural gentry, becomes embarrassingly transparent; and through the flagrant inconsistency of her heroine Jane Austen is herself revealed in a posture of yearning

⁸ Harris, Jocelyn, "Introduction" to Samuel Richardson *Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) vii.

for the impossible and lost, the passionate and beautiful hero, the absolute lover.⁹

This is blatantly overstated. What really happens is much less Brontë-ish, but nevertheless significant in the development of Jane Austen's portrayal of male-female interactions. Willoughby is powerfully attractive; Elinor acknowledges his persuasiveness and appeal; Jane Austen allows it to happen. The translation of Willoughby's confession from its probable epistolary origins to the present dialogue/monologue marks an important achievement in presenting intense emotional interaction. Granted it is still somewhat awkward and unbalanced, but the insight is accurate and the feel is right. Acknowledging Willoughby's attractiveness is not giving in to him (that is, losing artistic control) or condoning his behaviour; it does, however, in a few short pages enliven both the heroines. The reader understands Marianne's feelings better, and the unexpected depth in Elinor's character is exposed. Through this scene Jane Austen moves into the even more ambiguous and fully adult world portrayed in her subsequent novels. Marianne's essential task of shifting the locus of her reality from story-book to the real world receives its perfect artistic complement in a story-book hero later revealed as a villain. Jane Austen, even early in her career, demonstrates an unerring imaginative sense of juxtaposition. John Willoughby is well suited to underline the serious message that learning occurs not only through pleasant experiences.

Given the realities of life for women in her world, the reader cannot help feeling that Marianne is better off for having awakened from her dream. Even

⁹ Mudrick 85.

when, to use Tony Tanner's imagery, the sickness and the secrecy have passed, one is left, not as Tanner says "with the lurking suspicion that one of the things hidden behind the screen is a potentially tragic ending,"¹⁰ but with a sense that now Marianne, and Elinor, too, can get on with the tough business of making their own happiness, without relying on some external agent such as romantic hero, or a suitor or husband, to provide complete fulfilment. Marianne's marriage to Colonel Brandon is not a tragedy any more than the setting aside of youthful dreams and fantasies is for any young adult. The real tragedy in the novel's conclusion is the marriage of Sophia Grey and John Willoughby where the hard painful light of reality dawns too late to prevent the human wastage. Mary Evans' comments on real and imagined needs can be amplified here to point effectively to some of the male dilemmas as well as female ones in establishing adult relationships:

Austen's constant reiteration of the theme of the danger of romance and sexual fantasy is entirely in keeping with modern feminist views on the subject. Unlike previous male authors such as Henry Fielding, or later female authors, for example Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Austen takes a long and cool look at relationships founded on such socially constructed values as physical attraction and a perception of need that is closer to fantasy than to fact. And it is this distinction between real and imagined need that allows Austen to make many of her female characters into such entirely adult, and fully moral, beings.¹¹

It is also a distinction between real and imagined need that distinguishes Jane Austen's villains and anti-heroes from the accepted suitors. The men who can live within the frame of their own realities, socially and financially, as well as morally and

¹⁰ Tanner 101.

¹¹ Evans 53.

emotionally, are her worthies. In creating John Willoughby she demonstrates an acute awareness that reaching maturity is no easier a task for men than for women.

With George Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen achieves a new realism in characterizing a villain. She adds dimension and plausible motivation to the role; *Pride and Prejudice* is not so overtly thematic as *Sense and Sensibility*, and Jane Austen allows herself more scope. Like the other unworthies, Wickham is important as a catalyst in the heroine's growth to self-awareness and maturity, chiefly through his example of unacceptable behaviour. In the progression of the novels George Wickham represents the emergence of a subtext as text. The repeated theme of the importance of women's learning discernment, learning to judge accurately, underlines the consequence the novels attach to women's exercising wisely the few choices they have in a world which is often misleading and deceptive. Jane Austen emphasizes the difficulty of this task of discernment by blurring the clues and integrating the unacceptable behaviour of the villain. David Monaghan observes that "like Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen operates on the assumption that women are inherently as intelligent and rational as men. The fact that, in the pedagogic relationship into which her lovers usually enter, the woman is as likely to be the instructor as the man, is indicative of [this]," and implies that the relations between men and women where there is not the recognition of this mutuality are doomed.¹² Men who attempt to deceive or mislead women, men who are not open to the possibility of a mutual learning experience, men who cannot or will not be taught by

¹² David Monaghan, "Jane Austen and the Position of Women," in *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, ed. David Monaghan (London: Macmillan, 1981) 107.

women, are not acceptable as suitors and are not portrayed as fully realized persons in the novels. Jane Miller sums up this propensity more succinctly: "Jane Austen condemns men who assume their superiority over women to be unproblematic, natural."¹³ For Jane Austen's heroines, gaining such awareness is not easily accomplished.

Rational explanation of the villain's unsuitable conduct is one of Jane Austen's chief means of integrating the unworthy into the novel and creating the uncertainty and concomitant tension which provide the drama. Structurally and with a regard for verisimilitude, it is difficult to present the unworthy with gentlemanly charm and demeanour and then reverse the characterization to display strong mercenary and libidinous inclinations. Ultimately, the unworthy must be without merit: the 'evil' side of his character is required to explain his rejection. When a seeming gentleman like John Willoughby or George Wickham is suddenly revealed as a hypocrite, however, he loses a good deal of his credibility as an individual; furthermore, the heroine's perceptiveness is drawn into question. The explanation which Jane Austen creates for Wickham's nature is more convincing, is less an outright shock, than the reversal in John Willoughby; as such it indicates the author's growing skill. It also forms a telling comment on how difficult it is truly to know another person.

Correct behaviour is the conspicuous aspect of George Wickham's entrance in *Pride and Prejudice*, an entrance marked by the overwhelming impression he makes on the Bennet sisters. He is first noticed at a distance walking with Mr.

¹³ Miller 37.

Denny, an officer friend of Lydia Bennet. The narrator swiftly supplies the reason for Wickham's being in Meryton, and his immediate association with the militia in the responsible position of an officer serves as a form of background and helps to establish him in the novel. The narrator's description of Wickham's air and openness also picks up the thread of correct behaviour that runs through the paragraphs which introduce John Willoughby:

His appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address. The introduction was followed up on his side by a happy readiness of conversation -- a readiness at the same time correct and unassuming (PP 72)

Given such first impressions the Bennets' reactions are perfectly understandable. Before his introduction is actually completed, however, Wickham is thrown into conflict with Fitzwilliam Darcy, whose foil Wickham is to be throughout the remainder of the novel. Elizabeth Bennet is the only member of the group who notices the emotion in the men's faces as they meet: "Both changed colour, one looked white, the other red" (PP 73). The chance meeting quickly concludes. Wickham's initial presentation accomplishes a variety of aims and occurs at the most advantageous psychological moment for both the reader and the Bennet sisters. It brightens a rather dull morning walk to Meryton taken by the five Bennet women in company with their pompous, boring cousin, the Reverend Mr. William Collins. Wickham presents a dramatic contrast to Collins' pious nonsense, as Willoughby does to Colonel Brandon's seemingly stuffy propriety. The sudden unplanned meeting between Darcy and Wickham is both a skilful piece of structural design and a deft portrayal of male aggression circumvented by the demands of polite company.

The encounter instantly establishes the antagonism between the two men and in doing so casts an aura of mystery around their past relationship. It is obvious that the two gentlemen know each other, and that they are not pleased to have met. From what the reader has already seen of Darcy, Wickham's uneasiness is quite understandable. By making Elizabeth the only witness to the brief exchange between Wickham and Darcy, Jane Austen not only confirms Elizabeth's role as heroine, but also in this, the first meeting of the three characters, fixes the triangle which is so important to the theme and structure of the novel with Elizabeth's prejudiced discernment as its base.

Once Wickham's presence in Meryton is settled, he is rapidly accepted by the local society, taken at his appearance and judged accordingly as a most pleasant companion. Elizabeth is attracted to Wickham and the narrator clearly specifies that Wickham is a cut above the average military man:

The officers of the ----shire were in general a very creditable, gentlemanlike set, and the best of them were of the present party; but Mr. Wickham was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk, as *they* were superior to the broad-faced stuffy uncle Philips, breathing port wine, who followed them into the room.
(PP 76)

Wickham is amiable, his manners are easy and comfortable, he makes good conversation and is a charming dinner guest; in short, he is everything that Fitzwilliam Darcy seems not to be. The scene in Philips' drawing room which follows is one of Wickham's most important in the novel. Rather than join the others at whist, Wickham places himself at a table with Elizabeth and engages her in conversation. Elizabeth, her curiosity aroused by the tension between Wickham and Darcy on the previous day, is anxious for some clue concerning what has passed.

Wickham surprises her by introducing the subject himself with a hesitating question as to how long Darcy has been at Netherfield. Elizabeth answers and cannot contain an inquisitive statement about Darcy's wealth and property in Derbyshire. Wickham replies in a leading manner that:

"Yes . . . his estate there is a noble one. A clear ten thousand per annum. You could not have met with a person more capable of giving you certain information on that head than myself -- for I have been connected with his family in a particular manner from my infancy." (PP 77)

Elizabeth's interest is stimulated by this circumstance and to her relief Wickham mentions the previous day's meeting. Encouraged by his openness, Elizabeth is betrayed by Wickham's seeming frankness into exposing her prejudice against Darcy. One imprudent move is followed by another and Wickham, after explaining, disarmingly, that his opinion is biased, begins to recount his story of mistreatment at Darcy's hands. Before Wickham continues, however, he firmly establishes that it is Darcy who is in the wrong when he says:

"Oh! no -- it is not for *me* to be driven away by Mr. Darcy. If *he* wishes to avoid seeing *me*, he must go. We are not on friendly terms, and it always gives me pain to meet him, but I have no reason for avoiding *him* but what I might proclaim to all the world; a sense of very great ill usage, and most painful regrets at his being what he is." (PP 78)

Elizabeth's sympathy is easily gained. George Wickham's particular complaint against Fitzwilliam Darcy is that he denied him the presentation of the Kympton living when it became vacant. Wickham's duplicity in this scene is remarkable, but the reader is not usually aware of it on first reading. Here as elsewhere in the novel, Jane Austen replicates for the reader the heroine's experience of being unable to know what is happening, with the result of a significant gain in our empathic

response both at the time and later when all is revealed. The entire scene is presented in dialogue and on a second reading the reader can see the subtle manner in which Wickham takes advantage of Elizabeth's willingness to express her opinions. He recapitulates the points Elizabeth makes, manoeuvres her to complete agreement with his extreme view of Darcy and consciously attempts to raise his own position in her eyes. One excellent example of this tactic is Wickham's statement about Darcy being publicly disgraced: "Some time or other he *will* be -- but it shall not be by *me*. Till I can forget his father, I can never defy or expose *him*" (PP 80). The narrator then indicates the marked effect of such remarks on Elizabeth: "Elizabeth honoured him for such feelings, and thought him handsomer than ever as he expressed them" (PP 80). Jane Austen concludes the scene with typical irony. As it turns out, Wickham's remark about Darcy could easily be applied to his own behaviour. Wickham says, "but Mr. Darcy can please where he chuses. He does not want abilities. He can be a conversible companion if he thinks it worth his while" (PP 82). Wickham's collaboration and support of Elizabeth's mistaken opinion of Darcy is one of his chief functions in the novel and influences several future actions. In terms of the development of Jane Austen's portrayal of men this scene shows both insight and control not fully realized earlier. It echoes in some ways the dynamic of Willoughby's confession, but the compression, the subtlety and the tone in this scene show the author in firmer control of her material.

Like the unworthy suitors in the other novels, George Wickham leads the heroine to indiscretion and enlightenment. Elizabeth, her pride wounded, is susceptible and eager to feed the prejudice she holds toward Darcy. In some

ways, Darcy is the initial villain figure in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth's unquestioning belief in Wickham's carefully worded slander of Darcy's character indicates this eagerness and underlines another flaw in her character, the partial inability to judge the true nature of other people. Not until much later in the novel, after Wickham has been exposed as the mercenary rake that he is, does Elizabeth realize the impropriety of the whole of Wickham's revelations or realize how Wickham has hidden his faults behind Darcy's. Wickham's integration is cleverly set; he enters all charm and gentlemanly conduct with hardly a trace of duplicity to suggest to the heroine, or to the reader on first reading for that matter, his true character. Elizabeth pays little attention to the warnings she receives, but the cool sensible advice concerning money and marriage given by Elizabeth's aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, determines Elizabeth to re-examine her relationship with Wickham. Mrs. Gardiner's remarks are interesting from another viewpoint as well: they show just how convincing Wickham's appearances are. The older and more experienced Mrs. Gardiner's concerns are only about his money not his morals:

"Do not involve yourself, or endeavour to involve him in an affection which the want of fortune would make so very imprudent. I have nothing to say against *him*; he is a most interesting man; and if he had the fortune he ought to have, I should think you could not do better. But as it is -- you must not let your fancy run away with you."
(PP 144)

As events develop, however, Elizabeth hardly has time to re-examine her relationship with the dashing young soldier before he becomes captivated with a Miss King who had recently inherited ten thousand pounds. Although Wickham temporarily drifts out of Elizabeth's immediate circle, the consequences of Elizabeth's conversations with Wickham remain.

Wickham does not enter the novel again until much later, but he figures prominently in what is essentially the turning point of the Darcy-Elizabeth relationship. When Elizabeth and Darcy meet at Rosings Park, the strained civility which characterized their intercourse at Netherfield continues until Darcy's cousin, Colonel Fitzwilliam, unwittingly reveals Darcy's responsibility for Charles Bingley's virtual jilting of Jane Bennet. Unfortunately Fitzwilliam's information coincides with Darcy's admission of his true feeling for Elizabeth and his decision to abandon his pride and ask her to be his wife. Elizabeth phrases her rejection with energy, particularly in regard to Wickham as she accusingly declares:

"You have reduced him to his present state of poverty, comparative poverty. You have withheld the advantages, which you must know to have been designed for him. You have deprived the best years of his life, of that independence which was no less his due than his desert. You have done all this! and yet you can treat the mention of his misfortunes with contempt and ridicule." (*PP* 192)

The prejudice and the folly begin to emerge. Darcy leaves after several more angry exchanges, but the next morning presents Elizabeth with a letter giving an accurate account of his misinterpretations of Jane's feelings for Bingley, and the true circumstances in the Wickham case. The final disclosure which Darcy makes is that the previous summer Wickham had played upon childhood emotions and almost succeeded in convincing Georgiana Darcy, Darcy's sister, to elope with him. The venal and spiteful motives are dealt with only momentarily, but sufficient evidence is presented to indicate Wickham's real nature.

This unmasking of Wickham is similar to that of John Willoughby, and his sordid past justifies his dismissal, but here the effort to provide a reasonable explanation is more fully realized than in the two earlier works. The details which

Darcy's letter supplies concerning the Kympton living fit with the half-truths of Wickham's story to Elizabeth. The attempted elopement, though trite and conventional, is also integrated; the motive of revenge and a desire for money covered by a guise of love are consonant with Wickham's hypocritical nature and ring true psychologically. The introduction of Georgiana later in the novel supports the elopement story simply in that her actual presence as a character in the novel (in a way that Eliza Williams, Willoughby's victim, is not) adds realism and immediacy, and lends an element of credibility and cruelty which the story of Willoughby and Colonel Brandon's ward in *Sense and Sensibility* lacks. The effect of the disclosures on Elizabeth is an integral part of the novel. She may have been aware of the possibility that Wickham was not all he seemed to be when ten thousand pounds made Miss King suddenly more attractive than herself, but it is more probable that Elizabeth calculated the changed emotions as practicality on Wickham's part, having wisely been prepared to be pragmatic herself. Certainly Elizabeth was unprepared for the contents of Darcy's letter. The revelation about Wickham, then, becomes a central focus in Elizabeth's understanding of herself, her failings and weaknesses, and of the deceptive adult world. Theme demands that she come to terms with her pride and prejudice before she and Darcy can be joined, and Wickham's actions force her to the necessary catharsis. Jane Austen acquaints her readers with the detailed process of acceptance through which Elizabeth passes; for the first time in Jane Austen's work, the inner conflict is dramatized. After her reading of the letter comes a consciousness of error, then the inner debate in which Darcy's 'new' ideas eventually replace Elizabeth's old conceptions. When she

realizes how wrong she has been, Elizabeth convicts herself of pride and prejudice and is ready to enter a new world of maturity where Wickham and all he represents are rejected. The villain is, indeed, the catalyst of the heroine's progress as an individual.

A brief encounter between Elizabeth and Wickham illustrates Elizabeth's new-found awareness and consequent moral authority. When their conversation turns to Darcy, Wickham asks if that man has improved in essentials:

"Oh, no!" said Elizabeth. "In essentials, I believe, he is very much what he ever was."

While she spoke, Wickham looked as if scarcely knowing whether to rejoice over her words, or to distrust their meaning. There was a something in her countenance which made him listen with an apprehensive and anxious attention (PP 234)

Elizabeth subtly indicates to Wickham that she has a changed opinion of Darcy and in her speech she assumes power over Wickham:

"When I said that he improved on acquaintance, I did not mean that either his mind or manners were in a state of improvement, but from knowing him better, his disposition was better understood."

Wickham's alarm now appeared in a heightened complexion and agitated look; for a few minutes he was silent; till, shaking off his embarrassment, he turned to her again (PP 234)

Elizabeth obviously has the advantage over Wickham and for the first time a Jane Austen villain is put on the defensive. Information is one of the few sources of power to which women have access, and can therefore be used effectively to command respect. Willoughby had ready excuses for his treatment of Eliza when Elinor asked that he vindicate his conduct toward Colonel Brandon's ward. Wickham, on the other hand, though not reduced to silence, is placed on his guard. Elizabeth definitely does not resume the role of gullible, opinionated innocent.

George Wickham is not mentioned in the novel again until Elizabeth receives a distraught letter from Jane informing her that Lydia and Wickham have eloped to Scotland. Wickham's true self is exposed not simply by the elopement but by his requiring a financial settlement before he will marry Lydia. Darcy's magnanimity in buying Lydia's token respectability and in taking care of Wickham forms a perfect and enlightening final contrast to Wickham's wretched part in the scandal. When Lydia and her husband shamelessly return to Meryton, Jane Austen includes one more scene between her heroine and the villain just to confirm, it would seem, where each stands in the restructured relationship. This meeting, which takes place in the Bennet garden, is important in demonstrating that Wickham does not change, that he is willing, even at this point, to make Elizabeth believe Darcy has wronged him. Wickham, unaware that Elizabeth knows everything about him including the Georgiana escapade and Darcy's part in Lydia's marriage, asks Elizabeth if she visited Kympton, and then inquires if Darcy has ever mentioned the circumstances of Wickham's not receiving the living. Elizabeth's reply to this and Wickham's further questions is sharp enough to remind him, as she reminded him earlier, that her opinion of Darcy has changed; that she is privy to full knowledge of the events:

"I *did* hear, too, that there was a time, when sermon-making was not so palatable to you as it seems to be at present; that you actually declared your resolution of never taking orders, and that the business had been compromised accordingly."

"You did!" (PP 329)

The final confirmation of Elizabeth's growth, of her superiority, is her authoritative closure of the whole matter as topic for any future discussion between them: "Come, Mr. Wickham, we are brother and sister, you know. Do not let us quarrel about the

past. In future, I hope we shall be always of one mind" (*PP* 329). Their new roles are established and Wickham, having unconsciously helped Elizabeth to maturity, is repudiated by her, but retained in the novel as a figure of folly and imprudence. His marriage with Lydia is as great a contrast with Elizabeth and Darcy's happy and comfortable union as it is similar to Lydia and Elizabeth's parents' unfortunate match. The reader may try in vain, as Elizabeth did earlier, to "recollect some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence, that might rescue him [Wickham] from the attacks of Mr. Darcy," but there is, at the same time, a certain strength and believability in Wickham which gives his characterization integrity (*PP*, 206). Jane Austen's efforts to add dimension and scope and thus to integrate her unworthy are relatively successful, probably as successful as possible using a convention where the villain's dismissal is justified ultimately by his impropriety. The attempt to develop this role indicates a structural and thematic awareness not only of the artistic restrictions of a villain figure per se: the strict paradigm of right and wrong, of a black and white representation of human behaviour neither completely represents the dilemma faced by the young women whose acumen is being tested, nor fully portrays the complexities of young men's lives. *Pride and Prejudice* is a turning point in the canon; the three novels that follow are marked by their presentation of the heroine's task of discernment as being a more active one and do not rely on outright villainy to signify or justify the unworthy's unsuitability as a possible marriage partner. In a development which has the effect of emphasizing women's difficulty in interpreting men's motives and behaviour, the unworthy suitors' actions and motivations are portrayed with more

subtlety and their faults or flaws, their unsuitability as partners, as more difficult to detect. The net result is an increased verisimilitude and more sophisticated characterizations: a deeper representation of life and a sharper understanding of the intricacy of human interactions.

In her creation of Henry Crawford, Jane Austen directly confronted the problem of allowing the unworthy to function as a free agent without resorting to the stereotype that seems structurally imperative to highlight the heroine's growth. As a result of this apparently impossible ambivalence, *Mansfield Park* is Jane Austen's most complicated and ambiguous novel. It is also the most overtly moral of the novels. In a letter written to her sister, Cassandra, almost two years after work on *Mansfield Park* had commenced, Jane Austen suggested that the subject of her new novel was "ordination."¹⁴ She could hardly have chosen a more equivocal or all-encompassing topic. Ideally, "ordination," or taking holy orders and entering the ministry, is a sign of maturity which bespeaks perseverance and dedication to a set of principles and beliefs. As such, ordination has a counterpart in marriage, always an important reflection of theme in the novels. The close relationship between the two adult rites is clarified in the narrator's remarks on Edmund's state of mind before Fanny's coming out ball:

Edmund was at this time particularly full of cares; his mind being deeply occupied in the consideration of two important events now at hand, which were to fix his fate in life -- ordination and matrimony -- events of such a serious character as to make the ball,

¹⁴ Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters to her sister Cassandra and others*, ed. R.W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1959) letter 76, 298.

which would be very quickly followed by one of them, appear of less moment in his eyes (MP 254-255)

The novels require the achievement of individual and social maturity in all the heroines before they marry, but to marry a clergyman, a distinctive kind of maturity seems necessary: a perseverance, dedication and denial equal to that of the person in orders.

It would be difficult for a reader of *Mansfield Park* to miss the collision of two distinct worlds when the Crawfords, both Londoners, arrive in rural Northamptonshire. Education and example have made great differences in the respective outlooks of London and Mansfield Park. It is against the standards upheld by Fanny, the picture of feminine virtue, and, to an extent, Edmund, the epitome of gentlemanly instincts, that all the characters are judged worthy or unworthy. The only attribute which Fanny obviously lacks is firm confidence in her own judgment. She is aware of the value of the highly moral code upon which she bases her conduct, yet to reach full maturity she also has to show perseverance in proper action. In her study, *Sex and Subterfuge*, Eva Figs makes a distinction which is of material help in explaining Fanny's difference from other Jane Austen heroines:

Fanny is good in the way that traditional Christianity has required women to be good: dutiful, submissive, self-effacing. Instead of having the virtues which go to make a good wife, usually embodied in the heroine of a courtship novel, Fanny's virtues are essentially those of a dutiful daughter. A daughter of God as well as man, since it comes to the same thing.¹⁵

¹⁵ Eva Figs, *Sex and Subterfuge* (London: Macmillan, 1982) 104.

In *Mansfield Park*, conviction of the rightness in adhering to a certain course of action must be firm enough to endure the tests of time and of temptation. It is Henry Crawford's performance in these tests which eventually reveals his weaknesses, his unworthiness; in his initial presentation flaws are only suggested.

Henry Crawford is first introduced in Chapter Four of *Mansfield Park*, and, there is an obvious attempt to integrate him more fully, and give him more dimension as a character than his predecessors. As is usual in the novels, the full impact of certain passages is not felt until after a reading of the whole novel. So it is with the early descriptions of Crawford, where Jane Austen not only presents the character at face value and hints at his duplicity, but also establishes Crawford's relevance to the themes of education and example in the novel: two themes which figure strongly in the narrator's remarks in the few paragraphs which introduce Henry and his sister Mary. The reader is first told of the wealth from which these "young people of fortune" derive their present independence and status. Henry Crawford is the only one of the unworthies for whom money is not a consideration in selecting a marriage partner. Jane Austen then quickly outlines the forces which have shaped Henry and Mary Crawford. Their guardians are portrayed as remiss. The Admiral's action on the death of his wife, besides providing a valid reason for Mary leaving his house, is a fair clue to an understanding of the behaviour of his nephew: "Admiral Crawford was a man of vicious conduct, who chose instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his own roof" (*MP* 41). Henry's later actions confirm the assumption that his close association with his uncle has irreparably damaged his moral fibre. Crawford's non-acquiescence in Mary's wishes

for their own establishment in Norfolk rather than an extended visit to the Grants' is another indication of his character, suggesting as it does, his restless, flitting nature. The narrator warns: "To anything like a permanence of abode, or limitation of society, Henry Crawford had, unluckily, a great dislike" (MP 41).

Courtship and marriage themes are also prominent in the introduction of Henry Crawford. Mary informs her sister that not only have her friends tried in vain to win Henry's heart, but: "He is the most horrible flirt that can be imagined. If your Miss Bertrams do not like to have their hearts broke, let them avoid Henry" (MP 43). Henry's reply, partially a defence against Mary's charge, is as revealing as the charge itself. The tone of his remarks, and, in retrospect, the selfishness and irony in his statements, betray him. Henry says:

"You will allow for the doubts of youth and inexperience. I am of a cautious temper, and unwilling to risk my happiness in a hurry. Nobody can think more highly of the matrimonial state than myself. I consider the blessing of a wife as most justly described in those discreet lines of the poet, 'Heaven's *last* best gift.'" (MP 43)

Poetic touchstones are usually suspect in Jane Austen and the combination of tone and occasion with the sense expressed in "Heaven's *last* best gift" is no different. Never so early in a novel has Jane Austen hinted at her unworthy's faults as she does in *Mansfield Park*. Both John Willoughby and George Wickham are allowed to pass undetected for a considerable time before their deceitful natures are revealed. These hints, subtle or otherwise, are not totally representative of the first impression Henry creates, however. The reaction of his half-sister, Mrs. Grant, is a good example:

. . . Mrs. Grant received in those whom she hoped to love better than ever, a young man and woman of very prepossessing appearance. Mary Crawford was remarkably pretty; Henry, though not handsome,

had air and countenance; the manners of both were lively and pleasant, and Mrs. Grant immediately gave them credit for everything else.
(MP 41-42)

On the surface Henry Crawford is the perfect young gentleman: courteous and personable. Jane Austen recapitulates the point when the Bertrams' initial response to Crawford, "black and plain," is quickly changed after more exposure to Henry's manner. Before two days had elapsed Henry was deemed "the most agreeable young man the sisters had ever known, and they were equally delighted with him" (MP 44). In the two previous novels, first impressions of the villain are not trustworthy assessments and here Jane Austen takes her convention slightly farther to indicate exactly the effect of Crawford's pleasing manner in gaining him favour. Clearly, Henry Crawford has a winning way and knows how to use his attractiveness to his own best advantage.

Moving from the introductory material, the novel immediately begins to portray the interaction of the society at Mansfield. Henry Crawford necessarily plays an important role in the interplay and it is interesting to see how cleverly and subtly he is integrated into the fabric of the story. With regard to structure, theme, and particularly character, Jane Austen prepares for the triangle formed by Henry, Edmund and Fanny later in the novel. Fanny's passivity is emphasized in the opening volume, but later her thoughts and actions on receiving Henry's proposal make it evident that this young woman is an active and unusually keen observer. Fanny finds that she judges Henry Crawford, to a large degree, by his conduct on the day-long visit to Sotherton Court and by his careless and improper flirtation during the choosing of and rehearsing for the play, *Lover's Vows*. The selfish, vain and

unfeeling attitude frequently displayed by Crawford toward Maria and Julia outweigh all his charm and polish in Fanny's eyes. The effect of this charm, however, is a significant force in furthering the action of the novel.

Sir Thomas Bertram's return from Antigua marks the end of the first volume, but structurally the stage is not cleared until after the Rushworth marriage claims Julia as well as Maria. When Fanny is left the sole young woman at Mansfield Park and the only possible companion for a bored Mary Crawford, the way is prepared for the main action of the novel. The initial characterizations of the principals are sufficiently strong by this point to create certain expectations; the seeds for the few key actions on which the plot turns are sown with skill and care. At the Grants' dinner table Fanny becomes the obvious target for Henry's charm. Jane Austen is particularly prescient here in her understanding of human nature and her ability to use normal human motivations to move her story along. Despite all his effort to elicit some response from Fanny, however, Crawford meets only with cold disapproval. Ironically, her disdain is irresistibly attractive to him; his male vanity affronted, he firmly resolves to make Fanny love him. When Crawford explains his intentions to Mary, she demonstrates her understanding of her brother's personality and simultaneously displays her own inconsiderate attitude:

"And so this is her attraction after all! This it is -- her not caring about you -- which gives her such a soft skin and makes her so much taller, and produces all these charms and graces! I do desire that you will not be making her really unhappy; a *little* love perhaps may animate and do her good, but I will not have you plunge her deep, for she is as good a little creature as ever lived, and has a great deal of feeling." (MP 230-231)

Although he begins this task with no thought of endangering his own emotional stability, Crawford quickly finds that there are many attractive aspects of Fanny's personality which he had previously overlooked. The deep emotion evident in Fanny's relationship with her brother, William, for instance, reveals to Crawford Fanny's emotional capacity and strengthens his determination to be numbered among those closest to Fanny's heart: "It would be something to be loved by such a girl, to excite the first ardours of her young, unsophisticated mind!" (MP 235-236). He decides to lengthen his stay at Mansfield and brings his flirtatious technique, displayed earlier in scenes with Maria, into full force. He spares no effort in his attempt to win Fanny; he pays fine compliments, reads the navy lists, lends William a hunter, and tries to minimize any residual harmful effect of his dalliance with Fanny's cousins. The first result of these exertions is that Crawford unconsciously succeeds in convincing Sir Thomas that he is genuinely in love with Fanny and thereby gains that patriarch's support. Indeed, as far as Crawford is concerned, he is really in love with Fanny and ready for "Heaven's *last* best gift." His remarks to Mary show that in one sense of the word his love is 'true' love:

"Yes Mary," was Henry's concluding assurance, "I am fairly caught. You know with what idle designs I began -- but this is the end of them. I have (I flatter myself) made no inconsiderable progress in her affections; but my own are entirely fixed." (MP 292)

Whether or not his love is true in the sense of enduring becomes the question. Mary Evans' dictum that "the fully developed characters in Austen's fiction are not . . . those who 'need' others in a desperate sense; they are already able to live in a certain harmony both with themselves and with others" applies well to Crawford

here.¹⁶ There is a desperation underlying his demeanour which cues the reader to suspect his haste as that of someone who is afraid he may run out of energy. Commenting on this change in Crawford's temperament, at a point in the novel after William's preferment has been obtained and marriage unsuccessfully proposed to an indignant Fanny, the narrator says:

He was in love, very much in love; and it was a love which, operating on an active, sanguine spirit, of more warmth than delicacy, made her affection appear of greater consequence, because it was withheld, and determined him to have the glory, as well as the felicity, of forcing her to love him. (MP 326)

The hint of perversity in Henry's nature glimpsed in the above statement is elaborated upon in an explication of Fanny's complex emotional state following the proposal. Jane Austen, using Fanny's alert perspective, compares the old and new Henry Crawford; after labelling the old Henry as the "clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria Bertram," she explains with open irony and subtle underscoring that:

He was now the Mr. Crawford who was addressing herself with ardent, disinterested, love; whose feelings were *apparently* become all that was honourable and upright, whose views of happiness were all fixed on a marriage of attachment; who was pouring out his sense of her merits, describing and describing again his affection, proving, *as far as words could prove it*, and in the language, tone, and spirit of a man of talent too, that he sought her for her gentleness, and her goodness; and to complete the whole, he was now the Mr. Crawford who had procured William's promotion! (MP 327-328, italics mine)

Crawford's love-making is too violent and too ostentatious for Fanny's sensibilities. The results of his romantic endeavors are considerably less than he expects; he simply alienates himself from Fanny who, having watched his previous trifling, cannot

¹⁶ Evans 41.

accept his protestations of love as being in any way sincere. Although he tries to prove his sincerity in a variety of ways, by conversing on serious topics like the Church liturgy for example, he sounds shallow and unconvincing. To Fanny, Henry, the best actor in *Lover's Vows*, simply seems to be assuming another role, that of the eager lover. Fanny and Mansfield Park require Henry's voluntary submission to what is essentially a test of time and temptation. As Crawford says when Fanny expresses her doubts about his constancy, "My conduct shall speak for me -- absence, distance, time shall speak for me" (*MP* 343). As it turns out, absence, distance and time do indeed speak for Henry Crawford's fidelity.

Before his fall, however, there is one more meeting between Henry and Fanny. This final meeting takes place in Portsmouth, where Fanny has been exiled by Sir Thomas in the hope that she might learn to estimate Crawford's worth differently. It is important because, during the course of Crawford's two-day visit, Fanny finally begins to see some of Henry's good characteristics. In Portsmouth Henry's manners are more refined than ever and his conduct is perfectly discreet; his solicitude for Fanny's mental as well as physical well-being is commendable. His expressed plan to rectify some of his oversights at his estate in Norfolk shows what seems to be a determination to persevere in right moral action as well as in his love for Fanny. For the moment it seems the possibility of Fanny's affection as a reward gives Henry a real basis for reform and enables him to endure the tests of time and temptation. It is as if he might truly become one of those rare men who listen to and learn from women, the successful Jane Austen suitor. Jane Austen engages the reader intensely in this possibility and builds a store of good will toward the young

man. As Mary Evans says: "with consummate skill, Austen teases her readers into supposing that Henry Crawford is not, perhaps, such an unacceptable man after all."¹⁷ The sudden reversal of all good intentions, the elopement with Maria Rushworth, changes everything. Henry reverts to his original role, learned early in London, of vain, self-gratifying flirt, and Fanny's worst suspicions are confirmed.

Probably no point in Jane Austen's work has been more misunderstood than the seeming reversal in Henry Crawford's characterization. An early commentator, Lord David Cecil, in his Leslie Stephen Lecture, outlines the basis for the major misapprehensions while giving his opinion on the consistency of Jane Austen's intentions:

In *Mansfield Park* she sacrifices form to fact. The original design of the book obviously intended Henry Crawford to fill the role of villain. But as she works Jane Austen's creative power gets out of control, Henry Crawford comes to life as a sympathetic character; and under the pressure of his personality the plot takes a turn, of which the only logical conclusion is his marriage with the heroine, Fanny. Jane Austen was not one to be put upon by her creatures in this way. In the last three chapters she violently wrenches the story back into its original course: but only at the cost of making Henry act in a manner wholly inconsistent with the rest of his character.¹⁸

R. Brimley Johnson's appraisal of the situation is similar to Cecil's estimation. He takes exception to Jane Austen's concluding remark that, "Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his [Crawford's] reward -- and a reward very voluntarily bestowed -- within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary" (*MP* 467). Johnson contends that "Henry Crawford *would* have

¹⁷ Evans 29.

¹⁸ Lord David Cecil, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935) 19.

persevered and uprightly' had he been consistently developed." ¹⁹ R.W. Chapman's response to Cecil's criticism answers most of the critics who feel, with some justification, that Crawford's characterization was done an injustice. Chapman succinctly dismisses Cecil's statements in a manner not unbecoming Jane Austen herself. He says, "I suggest that it is Lord David, not Jane Austen, who is blinded by Henry's all but irresistible charm." ²⁰ In support of his viewpoint Chapman applies the credo 'innocent until proven guilty' as a sound critical rule, and then proceeds to give adequate example of Jane Austen's awareness of the flaws and merits in her work to prove that she knew what she was doing with Henry.

What Chapman does not suggest is a rereading of the novel with a view to the early and frequent subtle intimations that what happens to Crawford is exactly as Jane Austen intended. The reversal is perfectly in keeping with Crawford's real nature, with the selfish and immature young man who had "indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long" (MP 467). In Mary Evans' more direct language, "the exercise of his sexual powers," the need "to demonstrate to himself the powers of his sexual attractiveness" is his "fatal weakness." ²¹ There is nothing inconsistent about a young man who displays all the outward refinements of a gentleman but who, at the same time, has flaws and weaknesses, lacks self-awareness, or is subject to his passions. These facets make the character complex,

¹⁹ R. Brimley Johnson, quoted in Kenneth L. Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 142.

²⁰ Chapman 195.

²¹ Evans 29.

but not inconsistent. In the complexity of Crawford's characterization and the part he plays in the novel lies the essence of the development from villain to anti-hero. By creating a character with flaws such as Crawford's, Jane Austen superbly manages a considerable advance in the sophistication of her style. The logic of the situation demands, not, as Cecil suggests, that Fanny and Henry marry, but that Fanny's judgment of Crawford's personality be affirmed, as in the extant ending. While serving the author's schematic needs, Henry Crawford is also a free agent, a well-developed, rational, believable male character with an existence beyond his faults. Jane Austen makes it quite clear from the beginning of the novel that Fanny's heart belongs to Edmund, if and when he should choose to claim it. Fanny's examination of conscience after her refusal of Crawford's proposal indicates that her motives are pure and blameless: ". . . but she trusted, in the first place, that she had done right, that her judgment had not misled her; for the purity of her intentions she could answer" (*MP* 324). In Fanny's case not only must she reject the unworthy suitor, but she must also persevere in her decision as long as reasonable, given her high morals and pure intentions; that is, as long as Crawford remains vain and selfish and/or Edmund is unmarried. The author's achievement with Fanny Price is to portray a young woman who against all odds knows when, in Jane Miller's words "men get it wrong and are not to be trusted."²² Steadfastly and unblinkingly Fanny demonstrates the power of seeing, knowing and persevering.

²² Miller 61.

Frank Churchill in *Emma* is Jane Austen's ultimate achievement with the role of unworthy male character and completes the progression detailed here. Frank Churchill functions as an individual with an existence apart from his role as anti-hero; his characterization is completely consonant with the mature artistry which distinguishes *Emma* as the most polished of Jane Austen's completed works. Above and beyond the usual topics of marriage and maturity, *Emma* is a novel about duty. On Jane Austen's terms, before Emma can be ready to marry she must show that she is capable of making judgments uninfluenced by her imaginings and demonstrate that she has the right perspective of her powerful personal position and her duty to Highbury society. Her relationship with Frank Churchill forces Emma to come to a realization of her duty, tries her judgment, makes her take issue with false action and aids her not only in recognizing merit in others, but also in becoming an example of virtue herself. George Knightley, Emma's neighbour and eventually her husband, makes an enlightening comment about duty which solidly incorporates it as one of the novel's chief standards: "There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chuses, and that is, his duty; not by manoeuvring and finessing, but by vigour and resolution" (*E* 146). Not only does such a statement help to define a gentleman, but also it states the principle which Emma, as an adult woman, must know and practice. Jane Spencer's observation about the conclusion of *Emma* assigns the novel a special place in literary history:

It is not just that, as one critic [Trilling] has pointed out, Emma 'has a moral life as a man has a moral life,' but that she is the first character in English fiction, male or female, to have a moral life so richly created and yet ironically analyzed. Characterization of men in the novel only reached a comparable level after Austen's example had shown the way. The tradition of the lover-mentor and the reformed coquette grew out of a narrow didactic role prescribed for the woman

writer; but in using it, women novelists expanded and deepened the fictional presentation of human character."²³

Emma Woodhouse must accept her position of power and responsibility in the community and treat it seriously. She must learn her duty.

Duty is a key word in relation to Frank Churchill as well, and it plays an important role in his introduction and integration into the novel. Churchill does not personally enter the novel until the fifth chapter of the second volume, but by that time Jane Austen has made him completely a part of Highbury as the son of a respected citizen. The preparations for Churchill's introduction are extensive; he is mentioned much earlier and presented much later than any of his predecessors and at least part of the success of the characterization derives from this careful groundwork. A brief account of the troubled Weston-Churchill marriage and the ensuing problems which resulted in Frank Weston's adoption by his aunt and uncle explains Frank's residence with them in Yorkshire. Churchill is the first and only unworthy who interacts with a parent or guardian who is also present as a character in the novel, and Jane Austen uses this father-son and other relationships cleverly.

W. A. Craik notes that:

. . . in the construction of *Emma* . . . characters are very often seen by means of those most concerned with them: Harriet is always seen through Emma, Jane through Miss Bates, and Mr. Elton through Harriet and Emma by turns; Frank therefore stands out by being seen in relation not to one person but to many: to Mr. Weston, Mrs. Weston, Mr. Knightley, Miss Bates and Emma by turns; in fact, in relation to everyone but the one whose relations with him ought to be known, Jane Fairfax. Other people's opinions, being so varied and

²³ Spencer 177.

attributing such different motives to him, make him a puzzling figure, and force the reader to reserve judgment on him.²⁴

The aura of mystery surrounding Churchill keeps him interesting and is sustainable because his flaws are minor, compared with the criminal activity of a Willoughby. Further, Frank stays on in the novel without being dismissed; his deception is forgiven, and Frank functions as a full member of the community without the taint which marks Wickham for life as not a gentleman.

The activity of judging and attributing motives which Craik identifies is a vital part of Jane Austen's representation of Highbury life. For example, Mr. Weston's marriage to Emma's former governess and closest friend, Anne Taylor, provides ample reason to expect Frank Churchill to visit and pay his respects to his new stepmother; indeed, it is his duty to make the journey to Surrey. The congratulatory letter which Churchill sends to Mrs. Weston suggests that he is partially conscious of his responsibilities as a son, but the constant postponement of his trip to Highbury raises serious doubts for Mr. Knightley as to how well young Churchill knows what is right and proper. The discussion and frequent mention of Frank Churchill serves a less obvious purpose, however, than delineating the important contrasts between Churchill and Knightley. They keep Frank present in the reader's mind. In fact, the last chapter of the first volume is devoted solely to a discussion between Emma and Mr. Knightley regarding the propriety or impropriety of Churchill's continued absence. The manner in which Jane Austen prefigures the Emma, Knightley, Churchill triangle is highly effective. Emma defends Frank while Knightley criticizes

²⁴ Craik 146-147.

him; the positions they assume for much of the remainder of the action are well established. Jane Austen has also prepared in the opening volume for the relationship between Emma and Frank. The marriage of Emma's best friend to Frank's father seems to promote such a match and there are several discreet references to the possibility of Frank's becoming Emma's suitor, the most significant of which is the narrator's explanation not of Mr. and Mrs. Weston's secret hopes, but of Emma's thoughts on the matter. Though she professes her intention never to marry, Emma does show an inclination to favour the possibility where Churchill is involved:

. . . there was something in the name, in the idea of Mr. Frank Churchill, which always interested her. She had frequently thought -- especially since his father's marriage with Miss Taylor -- that if she *were* to marry, he was the very person to suit her in age, character and condition. He seemed by this connection between the families, quite to belong to her. (*E* 118-119)

This proprietary preconditioning for a romance convinces the reader that, following the success of Emma and Frank's first meeting, their friendship can develop in only one direction. The echo is faint, but like Marianne, a part of Emma is not immune to the possibility of a kind of validation from a fantasy lover/suitor. She is too much of a realist to dwell on the possibility, but her vicarious involvement through Harriet speaks loudly of her need to become more self-aware.

When they finally meet, Emma's reaction to Churchill is fairly predictable, and, at the same time as the novelist explains Emma's first impressions of Frank, she also recapitulates and confirms the expectations of him raised throughout the first volume:

The Frank Churchill so long talked of, so high in interest, was actually before her -- he was presented to her, and she did not think too much

had been said in his praise; he was a *very* good looking young man; height, air, address, all were unexceptionable, and his countenance had a great deal of the spirit and liveliness of his father's; he looked quick and sensible. (*E* 190)

Jane Austen uses words here almost identical to those used in describing the other unworthies, particularly George Wickham as first seen by the Bennet sisters. Mr. Wickham's "fine countenance, good figure and very pleasing address" (*PP* 72) are not so different from Churchill's attributes. Similarly Wickham's "happy readiness for conversation" (*PP* 72) is echoed in the description in Churchill's conversational abilities. "She [Emma] felt immediately that she should like him; and there was a well-bred ease of manner, and a readiness to talk, which convinced her that he came intending to be acquainted with her, and acquainted they soon must be" (*E* 190). Point of view is important here. The novel revolves around Emma and her inability to discern the truth in many of the situations and personalities which she encounters, yet much of Churchill's character and action is presented from Emma's often limited point of view. Though fascinated by Churchill's charm and slightly occupied with her romantic aspirations, Emma sees particular failings in Frank almost immediately. Craik's observations are again apposite:

Frank is important because he explains Emma herself. He embodies the vital difference between the artistic principles governing Emma -- foolish conduct resulting from faulty judgment, but from motives fundamentally irreproachable, invariably honest and as frank as possible -- and his own downright wrong actions causing deliberate and consistent deceit, which produce nevertheless some of the same effects as Emma's own. ²⁵

²⁵ Craik 148.

It is the ultimate test of discernment for a heroine to identify wrong behaviour which is a subtle reflection of her own style and which consciously and unconsciously she encourages and elicits.

Although Frank Churchill finds his relationship with Emma Woodhouse quite affable, the other relationship in his life, much closer to his heart, does not proceed so smoothly. For obvious reasons of patriarchal authority and control, the social conventions of the period deemed secret engagements immoral and highly culpable. Churchill's personality and his easygoing sense of propriety make the situation much more comfortable for him than for Jane Fairfax, for whom the engagement is a continual, unnerving ordeal. There are many veiled references to Jane Fairfax in connection with Frank Churchill, but little does the reader suspect that anything more than the perfunctory relations of Weymouth public rooms exists. Part of the enjoyment of a Jane Austen novel is in the rereading; after the facts are known numerous sly hints and much unseen irony come to the surface. So it is with Frank Churchill's answer to Emma's query as to how well he knew Jane at Weymouth. His answer is circumspect and Emma declares "Upon my word! You answer as discreetly as she could do herself" (*E* 200). That Frank should on one hand solicit Emma's openness while on the other be unprepared to answer with a similar degree of openness is an ironic comment on his irresponsibility and negligence of his duty as a gentleman as Mr. Knightley defines one. On his return from a hasty trip to London to buy Jane a piano secretly, Frank says he went for a haircut and proceeds as if nothing out of the way had occurred, making himself helpful and pleasant to

everyone while at the same time deceiving the whole community with his polite calls to the Bates's residence.

It is characteristic of the unworthies that they lead the heroine to commit indiscretions, and Frank Churchill is no less guilty than his predecessors. When he leads Emma to indiscretion, however, there is neither the permanence nor the spite in his actions seen, for example, in Wickham's lies about Darcy. Churchill is simply more foolish than wicked, and he is not without insight. In an attempt to gain further details about the supposed liaison between a Mr. Dixon and Jane Fairfax, Emma mentions a boating accident in which Dixon saved Jane from falling overboard. She says to Frank, "But you observed nothing, of course, for it seems a new idea to you. -- If I had been there, I think I should have made some discoveries" (*E* 218). Frank replies with something like impatience, but impatience gilded with charm. His answer tells of his growing awareness of the strength of Emma's fancy. He says lightly: "I dare say you would; but I, simple I, saw nothing but the fact, that Miss Fairfax was nearly dashed from the vessel and that Mr. Dixon caught her . . . I do not mean to say, however, that *you* might not have made discoveries" (*E* 218, italics mine). If Emma is growing aware of Frank's real nature and his failings, Frank is equally aware of some of hers.

Though Frank has a decided effect on Emma, she is not distraught at Frank's sudden leave-taking in the way Marianne is when Willoughby disappears. Although she still has faults, meeting and assessing Frank Churchill helps Emma grow as an individual. Both Frank and Emma need to assume a greater degree of maturity and responsibility, but only Emma seems to develop as a result of their acquaintance.

When Emma examines their relationship she concludes that Frank is more in love with her than she with him. Her summary provides an interesting commentary on the man; she says:

"I do not look upon him to be quite the sort of man -- I do not altogether build upon his steadiness or constancy. -- His feelings are warm, but I can imagine them rather changeable. -- Every consideration of the subject, in short, makes me thankful that my happiness is not more deeply involved." (E 265)

Such thoughts demonstrate Emma's growing perception of Churchill's real nature, and these observations, interestingly based on Mr. Knightley's value system, serve to protect Emma from Churchill's further advances. Frank Churchill is placed in a position somewhat like Henry Crawford's where he must change and meet the standards required by the heroine before the possibility of any union between heroine and anti-hero could be considered. Julia Prewitt Brown gives this kind of development a special significance for the novel and Jane Austen's work when she writes: ". . . everyone is working, morally and psychically, to sustain this co-operative enterprise of civilized living. As in *Mansfield Park*, a certain amount of sheer psychic energy is required to make the social order endure."²⁶

Frank Churchill comes and goes frequently after his first visit to Highbury, but his two most striking appearances are in the scenes set at Donwell Abbey and at Box Hill. Quite apart from any other significance, these scenes are important because they demonstrate Jane Austen's handling of a range of emotions and motivation not seen previously in her male characterization. Frank Churchill has been portrayed as stubborn when the possibility of a dance in Highbury is being

²⁶ Brown 123.

discussed. At the strawberry-picking party at Mr. Knightley's estate he is remarkably out of humour: he is hot and cross, refuses to eat, eats and refuses to be mollified. The reader learns later that this bad mood was caused by a disagreement with Jane Fairfax. Jane Austen confidently manages the presentation of Frank's tenseness and irritability through both narrative and revealing dialogue. At Box Hill Frank's attempts to make Jane Fairfax jealous by flirting with Emma are handled with equal finesse. Frank's lack of understanding and compassion for Jane and the embarrassing position in which their secret engagement places her manifests the self-centredness of a spoiled young man. The comment which Jane makes concerning the weakness of those who commit themselves on short acquaintance betrays the turmoil which the clandestine betrothal causes her. Yet Frank ignores Jane's desperation and continues to toy with Emma. His unanswering, unreassuring silence is enough to determine Jane in her future course of action. The gulf between Frank and Jane is widened further by Frank's departure for Richmond because of Mrs. Churchill's recurrent illness, but fortunately, Mrs. Churchill's death frees Frank from the necessity of further secrecy. With Mrs. Churchill in her grave, Frank has little difficulty in obtaining his uncle's continuing support. The purpose of his deceit secured, Frank is all repentance. He breaks the news to his father and step-mother, who, amazed and wary of Emma's heart, pass on the information. Besides releasing Frank, Mrs. Churchill's death also serves as a catalyst for Mr. Knightley's profession of love and the climax of the novel in his proposal to Emma.

More than any other of the unworthy characters, Frank Churchill admits his failings. In a letter to Mrs. Weston following the announcement of his engagement,

he demonstrates a high self-consciousness and accuses himself of a shameful neglect of Jane's needs. More than any other unworthy character Frank redeems himself; even when the charm and enthusiasm of his letter is discounted, there remains sufficient true emotion to indicate that Churchill has the capacity to build on his mistakes. The letter which circulates in Highbury finally gives Emma an opportunity to make a balanced judgment of Frank and his conduct and to form an opinion of which even Mr. Knightley cannot disapprove. Because of his role in the novel, Mr. Knightley's own opinions of Frank after he finishes reading the letter are valuable as a comment on Churchill:

"He has had great faults, faults of inconsideration and thoughtlessness; and I am very much of his opinion in thinking him likely to be happier than he deserves I am very ready to believe his character will improve, and acquire from her's [Jane's] the steadiness and delicacy of principle that it wants." (*E* 448)

For Mr. Knightley, Churchill's repentance is one step, but Churchill's reform is another not yet taken. That he is allowed to continue in the denouement is a further notable factor in his total integration. Emma's thoughts reveal Churchill's major service as an unworthy:

. . . falling naturally into a comparison of the two men, she felt, that pleased as she had been to see Frank Churchill, and really regarding him as she did with friendship, she had never been more sensible of Mr. Knightley's high superiority of character. The happiness of this most happy day, received its completion, in the animated contemplation of his worth which this comparison produced. (*E* 480)

Churchill's example brings Emma to an awareness of Mr. Knightley's true merit, to maturity, and to a uniquely suitable marriage. The growth of the third party in the traditional love triangle from stock villain to fully integrated anti-hero, and the profound understanding of human nature with which Jane Austen imbues these

characters can well be cited, along with Jane Spencer's encomium on the development of the coquette and the lover-mentor, as another of her outstanding achievements.

Emma is Jane Austen's last fully completed novel and the last one published before her death. Frank Churchill, the unworthy in *Emma*, is the novelist's finest achievement with the role. The next novel, *Persuasion*, deserves mention, however, with regard to the continuance of the unworthy and the direction which the role takes there. It does not appear that Jane Austen had entirely finished with the manuscript of her last novel which was, in fact, published posthumously by the family. Certainly there were revisions in progress, particularly in the second last chapter, which Jane Austen recast as two separate chapters. These new chapters are a highly skilled advance over the one which they replace and as they now stand they are bracketed by two of the least satisfactory chapters in the novel. Every aspect of the new chapters works towards that fascinating unity of theme and structure, that perfect integration of detail and setting with the action in each scene, which distinguishes Jane Austen at her best. There is a change of time scheme corresponding to the altered locale and Jane Austen adds numerous details which provide depth and credibility in the chapters. One of these new details concerns the unworthy character in *Persuasion*, William Walter Elliot. Jane Austen begins to prefigure the relationship between Mr. Elliot and Mrs. Clay with two brief references to their being seen together talking on a street corner. That two of the best chapters of Jane Austen's composition should stand adjacent to the trite, artless chapter

containing Mrs. Smith's revelations about William Walter Elliot's villainy is not characteristic of a literary artist known for the flow and consonance of her work. Although there is no documentary evidence to support such speculation, the reader can only conclude that further revisions were planned.

In *Persuasion* William Walter Elliot is a minor figure without the larger structural and thematic duties assigned by Jane Austen to her four main unworthies. He is mentioned from the first chapter onward in what seems Jane Austen's attempt to integrate the characterization as she did with Churchill, but Elliot does not figure prominently until the concluding chapters of the novel. William Walter's final elopement with a sly, uncouth divorcee is in this case more the action of a villain than that of an anti-hero, but the mode of Henry Crawford's dismissal is not forgotten. The spectre of immoral behaviour in the unworthy is seen again. This ambivalence raises questions of Jane Austen's intentions for Elliot. That she should resort to the stereotyped villain in a novel which shows advancement in every other aspect, and most particularly in its portrayal of men, of male tenderness and vulnerability, would seem to be further evidence that the novel is not completed as it stands. The whole of Mrs. Smith's revelations about Elliot and his elopement with Mrs. Clay lacks plausibility and disrupts the harmonious flow of other events in the novel. It is hardly possible that the artist responsible for the beautiful rhythm of most of the novel could overlook discordant elements unless forced to do so by illness.

As serious and essential features of her art, Jane Austen's unworthy characters begin with John Willoughby, whom she uses primarily as an agent of

theme and structure. His characterization as an individual is weak because the novelist's attempts to supply a rational explanation for the actions of a stereotyped villain result in inconsistency. While Jane Austen's endeavors to solve these problems of consistency and overemphasis on structural and thematic duties in her presentation of George Wickham are not entirely successful, her efforts indicate her consciousness of the limitations of convention. The unworthy in *Mansfield Park* is a deliberate departure from the villain figure. Henry Crawford is more fully integrated and much more well-rounded as a character than Willoughby or Wickham. In Frank Churchill's characterization, consistency and integration altogether cease to be a problem. Even more than with Crawford, Churchill's structural and thematic responsibilities are artfully balanced with his individual personality. The unworthy's development aids recognition of the continuity of the heroes and heroines. The relationship between John Willoughby, Colonel Brandon and Marianne Dashwood has its integrity, but the Frank Churchill-George Knightley-Emma Woodhouse relationship has not only the integrity of the separate unit, it has the completeness and the fullness of the experience on which it is built. As a depiction of the world of men and the perilous aspects of courtship, the unworthy suitors reveal Jane Austen's increasingly sophisticated understanding of the complexities of that world and a concomitant ability to portray imaginatively and with increasing subtlety the ever-present need for women to be on their guard.

CHAPTER VI

Men Who Get It Right: Jane Austen's Accepted Suitors

The conclusion of all six of Jane Austen's novels turns on the marriage of the heroine to her accepted suitor. These unions are laden with meaning and seem to epitomize a triumph of hope over experience, at least as marriage is experienced by most of the other characters in the novels. If the fathers in Jane Austen's novels represent the heroines' literal and figurative heritage, and the rejected suitors stand for that which must be avoided, denied or repressed, then the accepted suitors paradoxically represent both the only relatively free choice the heroines get to make in their lives and a seeming continuance of the patriarchal status quo. The matter is further complicated by the evident ambiguity which these conclusions present for the reader. David Daiches touches on the issues when he writes: "Jane Austen's world is a woman's world, and in it the male characters are simply symbols of the different fates in store for women,"¹ but there is more to the matter here. Creating the heroes provided Jane Austen with the opportunity to have, as it were, her final ironic say on marriage, the family, and the future direction of society. Jane Austen's portrayals of men in the accepted suitor role merit examination for their portraits of men and their insights into the adult masculine world and Jane Austen's awareness of it. Further, because these are the men whom the heroines marry, their

¹ David Daiches, *A Study of Literature For Readers and Critics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948) 114-115.

characterizations provide a subtle authorial commentary on what constitutes an acceptable marriage partner and a good man.

The distinction made in referring to the characters involved (Henry Tilney, Edward Ferrars, Fitzwilliam Darcy, Edmund Bertram, George Knightley, and Frederick Wentworth) as accepted suitors rather than heroes is deliberate. The phrase 'accepted suitors' more accurately reflects their respective roles in the novels and helps to solve the problem which calling Edward Ferrars, for example, a hero raises. Despite the fact that two or three of these gentlemen are not particularly engaging, one cannot fail to recognize the essential truth of human nature in their portrayals. Fitzwilliam Darcy is the closest Jane Austen comes to a full-scale traditional hero; Edward Ferrars and Edmund Bertram, though the choice of their respective heroines, initially appear weak and ineffectual. Henry Tilney is clearly an echo of the lover-mentor from the works of Jane Austen's predecessors;² despite his seeming patronizing of Catherine he has a sensitivity and an energy which balance the portrait and make him attractive. George Knightley is as finely drawn a portrait as one finds anywhere in Jane Austen and is her one accepted suitor who most completely engages the heroine as an equal. With Captain Wentworth Jane Austen charts new territory in her development and portrayal of the suitor figure's emotional life. In all cases these accepted suitors offer a further opportunity to explore Jane Austen's understanding of the life of men and their world. There is a developmental progression marked by a discriminating and increasing ability to

² In addition to Sir Charles Grandison, chief among these lover-mentors would be Lord Orville in Fanny Burney's *Evelina*.

integrate the role into the fabric of the novels. The accepted suitors demonstrate Jane Austen's ability to create clearly individualized characters who, rather than simply fulfilling thematic imperatives, have a life and credibility of their own.

To return to the issue of the happy marriage endings to all six novels, it is useful to look at the various critical appreciations which the motif elicits. Jane Miller focuses precisely on a concern central to understanding who these successful suitors are and what they represent when she calls attention to the contrast between how the heroines fare in the marriage market as compared with their sisters. She writes: "the marriages of Jane Austen's heroines are not only better than all the clearly presented alternatives, they are, and spectacularly, better than the best, improbably fortunate. They are the exceptions."³ There are two helpful ways to look at these endings: internally and externally. Internally, the authorial intention, as developed through careful plotting and cumulative effect, clearly is to create a believability and a fitness for the match almost as a reward for the heroine's good behaviour in 'getting it right', for avoiding the pitfalls illustrated by the actions and lack of self-knowledge of the other characters. Externally, it is difficult to deny that when one views the novels from a distance, as it were, there emerges an overall sense that 'happily ever after' is illusory. Jane Miller pursues this apprehension to its logical conclusion:

The uneasiness we feel and find in the novels is sited precisely in that gap between the realities of fathers and families and the fairy-tale endings when one Cinderella gets her prince and 'the bells rang and everybody smiled.' It was Jane Austen above all who made of the woman's romantic novel a form which exposed as it soothed the pains of women's helplessness in taking control of their own lives. The

³ Miller 70.

tension which permeates the novels lies in the contrast between the realities of marriage and family life, boredom and ugliness, lack of privacy and lack of stimulation, and the merry wassail of those brief months of a woman's life during which everything seems possible and which will end in failure or a wedding. Jane Austen's apparently demure averting of her gaze from what follows stands for the difficult message she is giving to women. It is a message full of reminders and caveats and provisos, for her heroines have been warned that men get it wrong and are not to be trusted.³

Jane Spencer, in *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, regards this cautionary tone as a logical part of Jane Austen's adaptation of the didactic novel format and it is a useful way to reconcile the seeming incongruity of the inside/outside messages. Jane Austen's successful suitors are distinguished by their ability to get it right or by their demonstrated willingness, in common with the heroines, to admit their errors, to learn, and to grow as caring, responsible persons. Confirming Jane Austen's literary heritage, Spencer writes:

More important, though, than possible direct influences, or even particular points of resemblance between earlier women novelists and Austen, is the fact that these precursors had established the woman novelist's didactic role, and built up a tradition of the thoughtless heroine who needs an education in discretion and moral awareness. Austen's work is part of this tradition, though her attitude to it is complex, and her adaptations of it subtle and far reaching.⁴

The proof of the heroine's growth lies in her determination, as much as it is in her ability, to assure herself of a relationship where she will be respected and where she can reasonably expect, without being patronized, to have a room of her own and the possibility of equality. Spencer contends that:

³ Miller 61.

⁴ Spencer 167-168.

the Austen heroine is a woman who can rise above trifling and frivolity and deserves to be treated as a rational creature, as Elizabeth Bennet asks Mr. Collins to treat her. Yet, unlike Wollstonecraft in her novels, Austen integrates her thinking heroines into society as it is. Didacticism is not, for her, a method to be transformed into an attack on male authority and prerogative. Unlike Wollstonecraft she upholds the status quo, and has her heroines marry landowners or other leaders of the community, thus underlining her approval of the established hierarchy when those at the top fulfil their moral responsibilities.⁵

This is a potent reminder of a central condition for Jane Austen's approval not only of men, but also of women and society. Accepting "society as it is," seems, initially, an ambiguous attitude, pessimistic even, given the details of fathers and families which the novels outline. But integration is not assimilation, and the condition of Jane Austen's authorial approval, fulfilment of moral responsibilities, provides the necessary explanation that, although her superior couples obviously have to live in the world as it is, they also have demonstrated the ability, which is in no way a guarantee of success, to move beyond the lower common denominators of the status quo and assume the roles of moral leadership.

Over the course of the novels the subtext of the limitations in women's lives provides a powerful commentary on the society in which Jane Austen lived. Jane Miller's comment that "to read Jane Austen's novels as realistic *and* optimistic is wilfully to skate over the sense she gives of the constraints on women, the ignominies involved in any decision they make" helps to focus the reader's attention on the utter seriousness of the nuptials which conclude the novels.⁶ David Daiches, writing forty years before Miller, comes to a similar conclusion from a different direction

⁵ Spencer 168-169.

⁶ Miller 70-71.

when he writes, "all good comedy is potential tragedy and, if we follow up all the clues, it is to tragedy that we shall come. . . . the tragedy that lies far beneath Jane Austen's novels is part of those infinite reverberations which every good literary work sets up."⁷ Comedy, Jane Austen's chosen mode of expression, provides her with an acceptable voice for dealing with the uglier realities of her time, of women's lives in particular. Again Daiches' insights provide a complementary breadth to Miller's view. Daiches identifies *Pride and Prejudice* as a genuine comic novel:

in which at each point expression and construction enrich the cumulative significance of the whole. It is comedy in the sense that it approaches the question of the relation between the sexes from the point of view of a worried mother trying to marry off her daughters. This is a comic approach, but the subject continues to gather new and richer meanings at every turn. Comedy brushes the sleeve of tragedy and half turns for a moment to watch it recede. Nothing could be more comic than the portrait of Mr. Collins, but in the possibility of his marriage to Elizabeth and in his eventual marriage to Charlotte Lucas a host of sad and serious implications are set going beneath the surface of the novel. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that the whole problem of women's helplessness in a society devised by men is obliquely raised, or at least that this note is sounded, faintly but disturbingly, beneath the gay orchestration of the plot.⁸

The different approaches to the same conclusion and the similar choice of words, but dissimilar emphasis of Miller and Daiches, point the range of readings to which the novels are open. What all this means to the presentation of male characters, particularly in the leading role of accepted suitors, is that Jane Austen's decision not to take her stories past the altar stands fraught with "psychological and social realism" as a final statement which, furthermore, works creatively and figuratively as

⁷ Daiches 115.

⁸ Daiches 113-114.

representation of the limits of imagination and comedy.⁹ There are no 'happily ever afters' for Jane Austen's women or men. Their own good common sense tells them that successful relationships require honesty, commitment and concerted effort.

Jane Miller's perception of men created by women novelists carries a special significance with reference to Jane Austen's novels: "Whether the men in women's novels have been intended as realistic portraits, romantic fantasies or a mixture of both, they have not always been recognized for what they are: men seen, desired and understood by women."¹⁰ Ultimately in Jane Austen's work men reflect some of the author's deepest concerns about women, marriage, the family and her society, and her strength lies in her refusal to make the accepted suitors heroic: they all have feet of clay.

The portrayal of Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* provides a logical beginning for an examination of how Jane Austen's successful suitors evolve from their literary predecessors and change as appropriate to the requirements of each novel and the author's growing skill. Gerard Barker anticipates Jane Austen's adaptation with his comments on the work of Frances Sheridan and Fanny Burney:

Although as an exemplary hero Sir Charles Grandison represented a virtual dead end for fiction because his flawless character was irreconcilable with the realistic demands of the novel, once he was removed from the center of the stage and from the constraints imposed upon an official paragon, he could become a viable prototype for the idealized hero of the feminine novel. Directing attention not upon himself as an object of emulation but upon the traditionally ingenuous heroine, the Grandisonian hero assumed a supportive role in *Memoirs*

⁹ Poovey 238. Poovey's discussion of Jane Austen's handling of courtship and the myth of romantic love (238-240) is one of the most cogent in the canon of Jane Austen criticism.

¹⁰ Miller 142.

of *Sidney Bidulph* and *Evelina* which, though it weakened his stature, strengthened the novelist's freedom of action.¹¹

Clearly, Jane Austen's novels have no room for paragons. Over the course of her work there is a remarkable working out of the problem of how to present a character who can carry the weight that the role of 'hero' entails, but who is of interest as a recognizable and realistic portrait of a human being. Above all it is the utter believability of the suitors which is their chief attraction. The lover-mentor model which Jane Spencer chronicles in the novels of Jane Austen's predecessors is never far away, but the power which knowledge and experience give the traditional lover-mentor over a more naive heroine is balanced by a parallel story of his own growth and development and/or his overcoming obstacles.¹² Generally, Jane Austen contrives to put her heroines and their chosen husbands on a similar level and actively engages the reader in the process of verifying the fitness of the marriage which concludes each novel.

Much has been made of Henry Tilney's initial presentation in the novel and his attitude toward Catherine when he first meets her. There is, obviously, no

¹¹ Gerard A. Barker, *Grandison's Heirs: The Paragon's Progress in the Late Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985) 48-49. Frances Sheridan, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph: Extracted from Her Own Journal* (1761). Sheridan's most memorable character is Sidney Bidulph. No less a reader than Samuel Johnson commented favourably on the novel, although he questioned the novelist's right to make her readers suffer so much with Sidney's plight. The hero of the novel, to whom Barker refers above, is Orlando Faulkland, the third party in an elaborate love-triangle.

¹² Spencer 145-147.

definitive reading, but there is ample evidence to suggest that Henry's first conversation is not the repartee of a young man out to dazzle, but an attempt at polite conversation which reflects both his discomfort and inexperience in this particular social situation, and his attempt to distance himself from being so totally involved as to begin believing in the rituals of Bath and courtship. Jane Miller finds Tilney neither "attractive nor admirable when he teases and pontificates" ¹³ and Claudia Johnson finds that:

Against the selfishness of James Morland and the bluster of John Thorpe, Henry Tilney stands out, not in opposition, but if anything in clearer relief, for his unquestioning confidence in his focality and in the breadth of his understanding [which] prompts him to preempt not only the female's power of refusal but indeed even her power of speech in analogous ways, without doubting the propriety of his doing so. . . . A self-proclaimed expert on matters feminine, from epistolary style to muslin, Tilney simply believes that he knows women's minds better than they do, and he dismisses any "no" to the contrary as unreal. ¹⁴

Such readings miss, however, the wider scope of structural and thematic utility which is strong evidence for a much more benign appreciation of Henry's character.

W. A. Craik's comment that Henry is "equally relevant both to the burlesque and to the growth of Catherine's personality," ¹⁵ provides the basis for a fairer reading:

Jane Austen makes good burlesque use of him. Being well-informed and witty, Henry can introduce aspects of Catherine's role as romantic heroine which the action does not include. A fictional heroine should, for instance, keep a journal; Catherine, of course, does not: Henry

¹³ Miller 42.

¹⁴ Johnson 37.

¹⁵ Craik 16.

points out this, and also the difference between a literary journal, a probable real journal, and his own burlesque of both.¹⁶

When Catherine's comment that "something very shocking indeed, will soon come out in London" is misunderstood by Eleanor, Henry (who has picked up Catherine's meaning) certainly does tease his sister in his retort: "I will prove myself a man, no less by the generosity of my soul than the clearness of my head. I have no patience with such of my sex as disdain to let themselves down to the comprehension of yours" (*NA* 112). The context of Henry's remark and Eleanor's subsequent comments clearly indicate, however, that this is intended as fun, not as a sexist put-down. The subtext is not that Henry Tilney is a monster, which he surely would be if he were serious, but that Henry is strongly attracted to Catherine, and needling her and his sister gives him the time and distance to understand his own reaction. In fact, Henry has been listening better and understanding Catherine more readily than Eleanor has. One is reminded of Jane Miller's astute comment on Daniel Deronda in George Eliot's novel of the same name:

He is a hero who has time to hear her and to hear other women. We are returned to the irreducible difference between a man's hero, who would put achievement before love, and a woman's hero, who would be a rare and extraordinary man, prepared to love her and to hear her first.¹⁷

R. W. Chapman's assessment that Henry Tilney "has more wit than any of her young men except Henry Crawford" is an apt reminder that, although Jane Austen makes

¹⁶ Craik 17.

¹⁷ Miller 153.

social commentary, she is also in the business of entertaining.¹⁸ In *Northanger Abbey* what is said openly poses no threat; it is the secret and unspoken which is dangerous.

In his study of the structure of Jane Austen's novels, Andrew Wright comments that Henry Tilney's function is not only to "provide by his cleverness, his wit, and his *savoir-vivre* a sharp contrast to the 'goosish' heroine, but to take over as leading proponent of Jane Austen's point of view, when circumstances require."¹⁹ In fact, Catherine's errors, such as they are, are minor ones which there can be no doubt a little experience of the world acting on her innate good sense and her unaffected manners will correct. Likewise, as Margaret Kirkham points out:

Although he is a clergyman, [he] is not shown as always superior in his judgments . . . he is not without some of the affectations of a clever young man as is shown in his strictures on Catherine's use of 'nice,' and in his expounding of the fashionable doctrines of the 'picturesque.'²⁰

When all the burlesque is understood and the "love story" moves to a conclusion, Henry proves to be a pleasing combination of solid morality and ingenuous young lover. The narrator's concluding remark provides an appropriate end to the send-up of traditional romance:

Affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her 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. (NA 243)

¹⁸ Chapman 201.

¹⁹ Wright 109.

²⁰ Kirkham 88.

While it is interesting to speculate on more complicated authorial motives, to see Henry as more polemically significant than he is upsets the balance not only of the relationship between him and Catherine, but of the novel as a well-crafted whole. Jane Austen's achievement here is to take the traditional model of the lover-mentor and, by undercutting the usual patriarchal self-assurance with a young man's wit and anxiousness, to give us an entirely believable picture of a young graduate inexperienced in the ways of courtship, who listens to and learns really to appreciate Catherine.

Edward Ferrars is certainly Jane Austen's dullest suitor. Colonel Brandon at least has his romantic story of lost love, and his handling of the crisis when his ward is abandoned by John Willoughby provides at least minor action and interest in the novel. He suffers as much from current readers as he did from Marianne Dashwood's condemnation of his flannel waist-coat and John Willoughby's spiteful comment noted earlier: "Brandon is just the kind of man whom every body speaks well of, and nobody cares about" (SS 50). He does, however, fight a duel and his feelings for Marianne Dashwood, albeit quiet and unrequited for most of the novel, do show more than a spark of life. Edward Ferrars in some ways has less to recommend him to the reader, but the problem is more one of structure than of characterization. W. A. Craik makes the simple but illuminating observation that it is difficult to position a character like Edward so as to be attractive:

When Edward Ferrars appears, he is what he should be, but we do not see enough of him for him to seem Elinor's equal in importance as he clearly is in his virtue. The plot does not allow it. His role is necessarily inactive: he cannot court Elinor, and he cannot jilt Lucy, and even his resistance to his mother consists in *not* marrying Miss Morton, and in *not* giving up Lucy. A man situated between two women as he is between Lucy and Elinor can hardly avoid looking

ineffectual, if not ridiculous; the best Jane Austen can do for him is to keep him in the background once Lucy has appeared.²¹

Jane Austen's introduction of him is as much an ironic comment on the values of his mother and sister as it is an indication of his character:

Edward Ferrars was not recommended . . . by any peculiar graces of person or address. He was not handsome, and his manners required intimacy to make them pleasing. He was too diffident to do justice to himself; but when his natural shyness was overcome, his behaviour gave every indication of an open affectionate heart. His understanding was good, and his education had given it solid improvement. But he was neither fitted by abilities nor disposition to answer the wishes of his mother and sister, who longed to see him distinguished -- as -- they hardly knew what. . . . All his wishes centered in domestic comfort and the quiet of private life. Fortunately he had a younger brother who was more promising. (SS 15-16)

Coming as it does early in the third chapter the description above gives the reader clear notice of the theme of conflicting values which is the major focus of the novel. The novel's seeming approval of Edward's quiet, domestic inclinations is contrasted by the ironic assessment of his brother. In a way that is not as obvious in her characterization of Henry Tilney, Jane Austen runs headlong into what might be termed the Grandison problem when she created both Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon. For many readers Sir Charles Grandison overachieves Richardson's purpose in creating him: he is a perfect example of masculine rectitude and forbearance. Like Grandison, both Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon are gentlemen of high moral character; Ferrars, being the less experienced, is less the paragon than Colonel Brandon. But the fact remains that, despite the author's attempts to interest the reader in these men and her obvious awareness that

²¹ Craik 42.

illustrating development, growth or change in a character aids the reader's understanding and appreciation of the characterization, in fiction, as in fact, it is not usually good behaviour which interests us. Any fascination which Sir Charles Grandison, that masculine rendition of Clarissa, holds initially wanes over the course of the novel because of the predictability of his thoughts and actions. In fact, it is the predictability, rather than the predictably good, which ultimately weakens the reader's interest in Grandison's characterization. Conversely, the impulsiveness of a John Willoughby is the heart of his attractiveness. Choosing a husband whose demeanour falls somewhere between these poles of behaviour is the dilemma which all the Jane Austen heroines face. Jane Miller's understanding of this problem is two-fold:

The passionate love of Marianne for Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* may not, it is suggested, be of the kind to survive a marriage, let alone a marriage which is financially insecure. Yet the prospect of this lively young woman sharing the bed and bearing the children of Colonel Brandon is not an easy one to accept, and is likely to be felt as deserved punishment for earlier rashness or as penitentially making the best of a bad job. It would be unfair to suggest that Jane Austen altogether evades the question of what happens if a young woman finds her admirable husband impossible as a lover and a companion, though that eventuality might be thought fudged in favour of his probably having had more deficiencies in the first place, which it is a woman's duty to detect.²²

The recognition that sexual attractiveness is not necessarily to be trusted is paired with the reality that the 'admirable' can also be dull, quiet and routinely domestic. Jane Austen's realism, her recognition of the facts of women's lives, pervades the novels, and her vision of happiness is a spare, unromantic one which unfailingly

²² Miller 146.

recognizes the value of living life without illusions about one's self, one's partner, or the realistic basis of long-term relationship. In her world, at least, there is little room and little time for fantasy. The reader who rejects the promise of Marianne finding "her own happiness in forming his [Colonel Brandon's]" (SS 379) does so on individual terms, not the author's.

Philosophical considerations apart, it is also interesting to examine those skills in characterization which Jane Austen does bring to portraying Ferrars and Brandon. Both are believable characterizations in the sense of the credibility of the personalities with which she endows them. Edward Ferrars, more so than Colonel Brandon, is presented through small snatches of conversation and narrator observations. Brandon, at thirty-six, contrasts with Ferrars at twenty-three chiefly in his settledness and stability, but they are alike in their determination to endure. Through most of the novel Edward Ferrars is coming to terms with a personal sense of "right action." His youthful infatuation and engagement to Lucy Steele is as much a comment on his naiveté as on his need for warmth and affection in a life where home and family provide neither. Jane Austen truly excels in creating with such psychological realism a background which supports future actions. Like the older man, Ferrars finds out that doing the honourable thing is often painful. Learning to communicate his feelings and assert himself is made more difficult by his acute sense of having blundered in his attachment to Lucy Steele. In the scene where Edward reveals his brother's elopement with Lucy the embarrassment, the hesitation and the verbal communication are indelibly underlined by Edward's unconscious actions:

He rose from his seat and walked to the window, apparently from not knowing what to do; took up a pair of scissors that lay there, and while spoiling both them and their sheath by cutting the latter to pieces as he spoke, said in a hurried voice,

"Perhaps you do not know -- you may not have heard that my brother is lately married to -- to the youngest -- to Miss Lucy Steele." (SS 360)

Jane Austen's acuity as an observer of human nature serves her just as well in her male characterizations as in creating believable women. And always there is the sense of comedy, the knowledge of its origins in the painful and incongruous, and the unerring sense of focus so that a particular scene has those infinite reverberations which identify, in Daiches' words, "every good literary work." As a comment on where the heroines are 'going,' the accepted suitors in *Sense and Sensibility* represent stability and security and yes, predictability, but there is ample indication that these 'admirable' husbands will also provide, in their sensible accepting ways, room for their partners to enjoy a mutuality and a commonality not usually seen in the other marriages in the novels.

It is fitting that in the novel which most critics agree is the turning point in Jane Austen's career chronologically and artistically, she should have created her boldest and most memorable suitor: Fitzwilliam Darcy. He represents a synthesis of the Grandisonian hero's role, with all its stereotypical attainments and merits, with a spirited, engaging and attractively human picture of young manhood. Jane Austen moves deftly in a balancing act which weighs various possible extremes against success in characterization. Were Darcy to fail to be believable as a character, to have personal integrity or to be well-integrated, the whole novel would be

susceptible to falling off into fairy-tale. This could happen, likewise, were he too good to be true, too mild to sustain our interest, too arrogant to be changed believably, or too much the wealthy gentleman to meet the heroine on mutual ground. Part, at least, of the success of the portrait is founded in Jane Austen's technique of presenting the reader with a double sense of his metamorphosis: the changing perception of Fitzwilliam Darcy's real character, which the reader watches growing in Elizabeth's consciousness, is a pleasing confirmation of the reader's own growing awareness of Darcy's worth and his attraction to and for Elizabeth, picked up almost intuitively from clues which the author carefully deploys in her text prior to Elizabeth's enlightenment. The result is not so much a suspension of disbelief as a ready acceptance of the changes in the hero's attitudes and demeanour which are the outcome of his contacts with this most dynamic heroine. The arrogance of Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth is entirely consistent with what Jane Austen shows of him to that point, but by that point, both through Elizabeth's eyes and with our own, we have begun to understand the strength of mutual attraction which their reciprocal disregard disguises.

It is essential to an understanding of the happy ending to explain this mutual attractiveness. Indeed, if we are to understand who Fitzwilliam Darcy is and what he represents for the author, the issue of the novel's intention needs first be addressed. In her tightly woven discussion of the novel and the pursuit of happiness theme, Claudia Johnson says:

*If **Pride and Prejudice** legitimizes a progressive yearning for pleasure, it also gratifies a conservative yearning for a strong, attentive, loving, and paradoxically perhaps, at times even submissive authority. At no other time in Austen's career would she indulge a fantasy of this magnitude to this degree, for it is Darcy himself who secures the*

happiness the novel celebrates. As authority figure, "a brother, a landlord, a master" who holds, as Elizabeth remarks, "many people's happiness . . . in his guardianship" (*PP* 250), Darcy is singularly free from the faults that underline comparable figures elsewhere.²³

To suggest that Darcy alone "secures the happiness the novel celebrates" misses the rather obvious role which Elizabeth plays in determining the course of her own life through a growing openness to self-examination and a willingness to learn from experience, even when it is painful and embarrassing, or far more complicatedly, risky. The point which Johnson makes about the novel being "shamelessly wish fulfilling" both as private and political fantasy would be more effective if that line of argument acknowledged Elizabeth's achievement of assertion and independence. Certainly, of all the accepted suitors, Darcy is the deluxe model; whether he is also the novels' ideal marriage partner is not so easily answered. Further, Johnson's suggestion that Darcy is a fantasy creation, implying that his characterization is unbelievable, posits confusion in authorial intent and prerogative which are difficult to credit in the work of so careful a craftsperson as Jane Austen. If Elizabeth's happiness seems based merely on luck or good timing, or if Darcy's wealth and position obscure his willingness to grow and change, then the point of the novel has surely been missed.

W. A. Craik, in the introduction to her study of the novels, ties together two concepts about the novelist which would be difficult to put more succinctly:

She [Jane Austen] deliberately uses her powers and right of selection and arrangement to serve a number of mutually consistent purposes. She carries out the novelist's obvious and elementary duties, to sustain interest in her stories and characters, and to render the events plausible and the characters convincing; she manoeuvres her events

²³ Johnson 73.

and characters into an artistic form that has both proportion and inevitability; and she makes the form embody a moral assessment, first of her characters and their acts, and then, through them, of men's conduct in society. Her greatness lies in the way in which she combines the artist and the moralist; hers is a perfect, because a natural, reconciliation of the two, and in none of her six completed novels does either the artist or the moralist have to give way.²⁴

It is the novels' conviction of an ultimate, unchanging moral context which forms an absolute foundation for the work. Jane Austen's achievement lies in the unobtrusive manner in which she was able to incorporate these values into her work and embody them in one or two characters, in particular, who become the moral standard against which the actions and perceptions of others can be judged. Craik's second statement focuses on the subtlety of this achievement:

That she is a moralist is beyond dispute, yet it is plain that her characters and situations are not primarily vehicles of moral philosophy, as are those of *Rasselas*. Her novels are so far from being openly didactic that her moral purpose may be overlooked by very superficial readers, or misinterpreted by very ingenious ones. For though she is never obscure, Jane Austen is complex, and though she always writes with great simplicity . . . she suffers from being known as an ironist, so that her critics have chosen to detect irony even in her plainest and frankest statements.²⁵

Clearly, it is the element of ethical assessment which grounds all Jane Austen's characters in reality, in her reality, if not the modern reader's. Fitzwilliam Darcy may be exceptional, but he is exceptional because of the choices he makes, his openness to criticism and his willingness to struggle to be a decent human being in

²⁴ Craik 2.

²⁵ Craik 2. *Rasselas* is a novel by Samuel Johnson (1768) in which the great moralist focuses, through a series of the hero's adventures outside the Happy Valley, on the idea that none of the options one chooses in life can guarantee happiness, but that choices must nevertheless be made.

the context of his place and time. He may be wealthy and powerful and all that that entails in a patriarchal society, but Jane Austen's standard of acceptable behaviour is no different for Darcy than for others. Nor does she create him with faults which are easily acknowledged and rectified. Neither is Darcy a villain: there are none of the larger faults of pride of General Tilney or Sir Walter Elliot; the flaws in his character are, like Elizabeth's, ones of lack of self-knowledge. It is their similar errors of pre-judging which give their interactions and the novel itself its particular flavour. Darcy's growth from "complacency to self-knowledge and reformation" ²⁶ mirrors Elizabeth's, but Jane Austen does not lose sight of the essentially "asymmetrical relationship between . . . male power and female plight" ²⁷ -- to do so would invalidate all they embody. Given where Elizabeth and Darcy have come from, their arrival at a satisfying mutuality by the end of *Pride and Prejudice* endows it with a pleasing sense of equilibrium.

From the oblique reference to him in the opening sentence of the novel, Jane Austen keeps Fitzwilliam Darcy close to the structural and thematic centre of the action and makes all his appearances meaningful. The adult masculine world which he inhabits is not without its attractions. As Tony Tanner points out, the fathers of all of Jane Austen's "main men" [with the exception of Edmund Bertram] have died leaving them "all free -- perhaps too free -- to do what they like and marry, or seek to marry, whom they choose." ²⁸ It is attention to such details which gives Jane

²⁶ Craik 66.

²⁷ Tanner 46.

²⁸ Tanner 46.

Austen's novels such a sense of credibility. Nothing could be more natural than for Charles Bingley to take the house at Netherfield Park and invite his sisters and his closest friend, Fitzwilliam Darcy to join him there. The excitement and anticipation with which they are welcomed to the neighbourhood sets the tone and propels the action. Darcy is presented in two contexts here: in public and at social events, and privately at Netherfield. His remote public demeanour quickly is determined as haughty: "His character was decided, he was the proudest, and most disagreeable man in the world" (*PP* 11). Yet all during the period of his early acquaintance Jane Austen counterbalances this poor communal impression with his more agreeable at-home manners which Elizabeth has the opportunity to witness during Jane's convalescence at Netherfield, and more importantly by direct presentation of his growing infatuation with Elizabeth. This is a new departure for Jane Austen in the portrayal of a male character and the immediacy of the narration of Darcy's thoughts is remarkably effective in showing his personality. Additionally, it provides a wonderfully comic element to their understanding and misunderstanding of each other. Three examples illustrate this:

No sooner had he made it clear to himself and to his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. (*PP* 23)

Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger. (*PP* 52)

. . . they sat down the other dance and parted in silence; on each side dissatisfied, though not to an equal degree, for in Darcy's breast there

was a tolerable powerful feeling towards her, which soon procured her pardon, and directed all his anger against another. (PP 94)²⁸

Jane Austen also relays Darcy's appreciation of Elizabeth's beauty in other ways. One example is Darcy's reply to Miss Bingley during the gathering at the Lucas': far from contemplating how 'insupportable' the evening was, "My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow" (PP 27). This admission exposes him to much of Miss Bingley's mocking wit, but also serves notice to her that her charms have not made him oblivious to those of others. Jane Austen takes this interesting detail of male life one step further later in the novel when Darcy pointedly replies to Miss Bingley's almost desperate chronicle of the defects in Elizabeth's appearance:

"I remember, when we first knew her in Hertfordshire, how amazed we all were to find she was a reputed beauty; and I particularly recollect your saying one night, after they had been dining at Netherfield, '*She* a beauty! -- I should as soon call her mother a wit.' But afterwards she seemed to improve on you, and I believe you thought her rather pretty at one time."

"Yes," replied Darcy, who could contain himself no longer, "but *that* was only when I first knew her, for it is many months since I have considered her as one of the handsomest women of my acquaintance."

He then went away, and Miss Bingley was left to all the satisfaction of having forced him to say what gave no one pain but herself. (PP 271).

For a brief moment we have an insight into Caroline Bingley's jealousy and despair, but the exchange also shows Jane Austen's economy. Placed as it is just before the disastrous news from Lambton of Lydia's decampment, it reassures the reader of

²⁸ Craik 80. These three examples are those chosen by W. A. Craik and called "reported thought process."

Darcy's regard for the heroine, succinctly reviews their past misunderstandings, and by raising the issue of female helplessness or passivity in courtship, acts as a reminder of woman's plight just before the Bennet sisters' stock on the marriage market (thanks to Lydia and Wickham) takes a great drop. It is not this scene, however, which is the turning point of the novel. Darcy's proposal and especially his subsequent letter to Elizabeth form a central piece where both characters are challenged to re-examine their assumptions about themselves and about others.

Without going into elaborate particulars, it is well worth noting two striking effects which Jane Austen brings off in presenting the emotions of the proposal scene. First is her controlled escalation of language; both Darcy and Elizabeth struggle to restrain their growing anger, dismay, and frustration and their dialogue is a brilliantly dramatic display of conflicting almost violent emotions with the inevitable stripping away of decorous restraint to expose bare truth and feeling. The second is the fine details of the couple's physical reactions to each other's statements and accusations. Both blush and blanch in the intense heat of their exchange. The suitor has certainly got it wrong, the heroine no less certainly gives him no corner, and the result is a major advance for the portrayal of masculine emotion. Darcy's letter of explanation setting the record straight as far as he is concerned in the Bingley and Wickham affairs gives Elizabeth and the reader time to contemplate all that has passed. Elizabeth's response is explored in all its various shadings as she integrates and accepts both the new information and what it means in terms of her own shortcomings. Darcy's reactions are not revealed, apart from what the letter itself shows, until after the success of his second proposal to Elizabeth at the

conclusion of the novel. It is then that the reader discovers that the most powerful shock which Elizabeth delivered in her rejection of his first offer was her accusation of ungentlemanly conduct. Darcy's whole reaction is interesting for what it says of the standard of behaviour to which he subscribes:

"I cannot be so easily reconciled to myself. The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget: 'had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner.' Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me; -- though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice." (PP 367-8)

That he does "allow their justice" is Darcy's ultimate test and proof of his right and fitness not only to marry Elizabeth, but also to stand as a representative of all that is best in the tradition of English gentlemen.

Tony Tanner, writing about the effect which Darcy's letter has on Elizabeth's opinion of him, and as a moment of "intense realisation" about herself, says:

There can be few more important moments in the evolution of human consciousness than such an act of recognition. There is much in our literature as well as in our experience to suggest that the person who never comes to the point of saying, 'I never knew myself', will indeed remain for ever cut off from any self-knowledge -- what possible effect there is on his or her vision and conduct need not here be spelt out. If we don't know ourselves, we don't know our world.³⁰

Elizabeth in her way, and Darcy in his, both achieve a self-awareness that recognizes the lasting need for introspection and empathy as the basis for their future happiness. The conversation that follows their engagement illustrates this as does Elizabeth's restraint in not making a witty remark at Darcy's expense: "She checked

³⁰ Tanner 113.

herself. She remembered that he had yet to learn to be laughed at, and it was rather too early to begin" (*PP* 371).

One of the other bases of their future happiness is sometimes misunderstood or misrepresented and requires further discussion. The Darcy family seat of Pemberley plays a significant part in the novel. It is important as a representation of the adult masculine world which occupies Darcy's attention, but it also represents him. Elizabeth's chance visit to the great house becomes a turning point for her recognition not of her own faults or of Darcy's, for that has already taken place, but of his merits. Pemberley becomes a symbol of all the good that is in Darcy and it is where the heroine chooses to place her trust for a happy married life. The descriptions of Pemberley are of elegance itself and their first sight is a surprise and a revelation:

. . . the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on a rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; -- and in front a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place where nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. (*PP* 245)

In addition to the unpretentious good taste of the property, the visitors are soon informed by the housekeeper that Darcy is "the best landlord, and the best master that ever lived" (*PP* 249), and that as a brother he is generous, caring and solicitous of Georgiana's happiness. Here is confirmation of the kind of behaviour which Darcy describes as his toward Wickham; here is principle, discriminating judgment and benevolence. As a comment by the author on men and marriage Darcy and

Pemberley raise again the issue of woman's place, let alone her possible happiness, in a patriarchal society. The one qualification which Jane Spencer attaches to her observation that the conclusions of Jane Austen's novels support the status quo -- "when those at the top fulfil their moral responsibilities" -- is pertinent here as the condition under which Darcy redeems himself.³¹ Because Jane Austen carefully plots and demonstrates the changes in Darcy, they are ultimately more satisfying and more engaging than the kind of living through a wrong-headed infatuation which Edmund Bertram demonstrates and which, when he finally is Fanny's, leaves such a feeling of her persistence not really having been worth the effort. When Darcy tells Elizabeth, "You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased" (*PP* 369), and Jane Austen sends the happy couple off to Pemberley to prepare to receive their first guests at Christmas, there is clearly a sense that Pemberley will be run by both the master and the chatelaine, equals in intelligence and seemliness.

The role played by Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* has similarities to that of Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility* especially in the passivity of his relationship with the heroine. Edmund's fascination with Mary Crawford is not unlike Edward's with Lucy Steele, despite the differences in the women's social background and sophistication. Both novels are comparatively solemn and serious and this too seems to influence the presentation of the suitors. In some ways, in fact, it is a misnomer to call Edmund either a hero or a suitor, for in effect he is

³¹ Spencer 169.

neither. It is only at the very end of the novel in a projection of the months to come that the realization that he and Fanny are meant for each other strikes Edmund. Like Tilney and Ferrars, Edmund Bertram is in holy orders; for him, however, this is much more of an issue because of the way in which Mary Crawford reacts to his profession. Ultimately it is the recognition of her impropriety and unsuitableness for a life as the wife of a clergyman that turns Edmund away from London and all it represents in the novel and brings him back to the world of Mansfield Park where, like Elizabeth and Darcy, he and Fanny will, though with significantly less income and influence, be the moral arbiters of their world.

Edmund fills well the mentor role for Fanny. His kind attentions help Fanny in her initial adjustments to Mansfield Park and his solicitousness is the only bright spot in her early life there. If we recur to Miller's distinction between a man's hero and a woman's, Edmund is initially one of the listeners, not as a lover, but as a brother and friend. Interestingly, as he grows older he listens to others and himself less well; he lacks an understanding of his own heart, his own needs, and has little time to hear what Fanny is able to tell him. Edmund's grappling with the temptation of Mary Crawford and his own, until then unrecognized, passions intimately engages the reader in his story of growth and development. In fact, without the evidence of Edmund's tumultuous response to Mary, it would be hard to understand and credit him as worthy of Fanny, not in reference to his virtue so much as in recognition that he too has suffered and through that experience learned something about himself. In a roundabout way Fanny's status at the end of the novel earns her the right to be heard, and Edmund, who has put 'achievement

before love' in denying Mary because of his career, one hopes is ready again to listen. Jane Austen's insight into men's lives may never be more acute than it is here in this somewhat stuffy second son. His characterization rests firmly on an understanding of the dynamics of family life, and her ability with selectivity and a minimum of details to draw a portrait of a very complex set of familial interactions. The sisters, the mother, the older brother, the distant father, and the interfering Mrs. Norris, all contribute to our sense of the place Edmund has carved out for himself in this household, and give a particularly plausible and poignant aspect to the attractiveness of Mary Crawford to him.

Jane Austen's focus in *Mansfield Park* on a theme much larger than that represented by a single courtship naturally changes her attention to a particular suitor. In fact the very passivity of the heroine changes many of the relations one might expect to be explored. Fanny becomes our means of understanding both because it is her tenacious love for Edmund which keeps him in focus, and it is through his conversations with Fanny, many of them heart-rendingly painful for her, that Edmund is chiefly revealed. Edmund Bertram is presented in four phases. He is the first person to extend real warmth and kindness to Fanny in the initial stages of her adjustment to life at Mansfield Park. He plays a major role in his opposition to the play and subsequent acquiescence to acting in it. The third phase is as an obtuse advisor to Fanny in the matter of Henry Crawford's suit. Finally he is seen chastened and ordained, having put Mary behind him, and having learned to estimate more personally Fanny's esteem for him.

Jane Austen covers the period from Fanny's tenth to her sixteenth years in a few quick chapters. Yet in that ground-setting she does include a scene of

dialogue to illustrate the limits of the relationship which Fanny is to have with Edmund for much of the novel: that of brother and sister. Finding Fanny "sitting crying on the attic stairs" (*MP* 15), Edmund at sixteen is tender, empathic and supportive. He discovers Fanny's concern of the moment in her sea of despair and homesickness and rectifies the problem by furnishing her with writing materials and franking that she might write to her favourite brother. There is also a lengthy narrative summary of Edmund's further influence on Fanny's education which clearly establishes him as both mentor and idol in Fanny's eyes. Jane Austen writes:

Edmund's friendship never failed her: his leaving Eton for Oxford made no change in his kind dispositions, and only afforded more frequent opportunities of proving them. Without any display of doing more than the rest, or any fear of doing too much, he was always true to her interests, and considerate of her feelings, trying to make her good qualities understood, and to conquer the diffidence which prevented their being more apparent; giving her advice, consolation, and encouragement. . . . his attentions were . . . of the highest importance in assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures. . . . He recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attractions by judicious praise. In return for such services she loved him better than any body in the world except William; her heart was divided between the two. (*MP* 21-22)

This cameo of positive familial interaction is unique in Jane Austen's work, and helps establish the tone for the novel's overt theme of moral rectitude. It is also significant, in a novel which dwells on the consequences of dereliction of duty in the education of one's children, that Edmund should be so established early on as having quietly exerted himself in Fanny's interest to a far greater extent than any of his family. He is admirable, but he seems a prig; we want also to see his passion.

Edmund's part in the debate and decisions surrounding the staging of the play *Lovers' Vows* at Mansfield Park is clearly intended to balance the foregoing picture of perfection. Initially, Edmund opposes the play on grounds that really only make sense in the context of the stern propriety of patriarchal society. The opprobrium of theatricals in the house, especially with Sir Thomas absent and Maria engaged to be married, are repeatedly brought to the attention of all the other family members. Not only do his concerns fall on deaf ears, but they expose all the veniality of this rudderless family. Tom Bertram's reminder to his younger brother to "Manage your own concerns, Edmund, and I'll take care of the rest of the family" (*MP* 127) serves both as an ironic comment that, in fact, Tom cannot take care of the family, and as a reminder of the whole complex of family politics which revolve around birth order, especially male birth order, in patriarchal society. Edmund's career as a clergyman is in many ways determined by his being second son; fortunately, unlike many others in a similar position in fiction and in real life, he both believes in what he is doing and is suited to it. When Mary Crawford agrees enthusiastically to taking the part of Amelia, however, Edmund struggles briefly and is hooked. Jane Austen's representation of this change of heart is finely done. The narrator's comment, after Mary has sent a message to the Park from the Parsonage stating her willingness to take any part, that, "Edmund silenced, was obliged to acknowledge that the charm of acting well might carry fascination . . . and with the ingenuity of love, to dwell more on the obliging, accommodating purport of the message than anything else" (*MP* 129), serves as a reminder that this is an inexperienced young man fascinated and attracted by a lively, accomplished and urbane woman. Realistically, Edmund

realizes that his opposition to the play is an effort in vain, but before scarcely a day has passed Edmund is able to overcome his scruples entirely when Mary teasingly asks, "What gentleman among you am I to have the pleasure of making love to?" (MP 143).

Jane Austen brilliantly refracts much of the novel's previous and subsequent action in the mirror which the *Lovers' Vows* episode provides. The resulting conflicts provide a direction which the novel moves toward through the first volume, and becomes the chief reference point for judging character and behaviour as the following events unfold. Some of the short sharp exchanges hold meaning in the present context but also have endless reverberations. For example, as persuasion to Edmund to take Anhalt's part Mary reminds him that Anhalt is a clergyman. His tart reply escalates the testy tone of the edgy drawing-room discussions already in progress:

"That circumstance would by no means tempt me," he replied, "for I should be sorry to make the character ridiculous by bad acting. It must be very difficult to keep Anhalt from appearing a formal, solemn lecturer; and the man who chooses the profession itself, is, perhaps, one of the last who would wish to represent it on the stage." Miss Crawford was silenced; and with some feelings of resentment and mortification, moved her chair. (MP 145)

We will never know whether the author was also expressing personal irony as she wrote of the difficulty of keeping a certain clergyman from appearing a "formal, solemn lecturer," but in the end it is Edmund's sincerity, his inability to act a part or to be false, and his appreciation of the need for that which is formal and solemn, which makes clear to him that he and Mary are diametrically opposed in matters of basic principle.

What distinguishes Jane Austen's characterization of Edmund Bertram is the internal battle of conscience between what he knows is right and wrong. In the context of *Mansfield Park*, Mary Crawford is wrong. Being a dutiful son and brother, guiding one's behaviour with firm, even rigid morality, taking holy orders, and accepting the reduced portion that is his as second son, are right. Edmund's struggle is not given at great length, but the detail is fine. In a scene such as Edmund's rationalization of his decision to act and his attempt to gain Fanny's approbation, Jane Austen is at her most perceptive. In the revealing discussion in Fanny's chilly East Room, Edmund the guide and listener turns talker and tries to persuade Fanny, just as he rationalizes to himself, that his acting is the lesser of two evils, and therefore ignores the larger question of principles which is so obvious to a no less emotionally involved Fanny. This exchange is the beginning of a pattern which recurs throughout the rest of the novel: in their discussions Fanny is placed in the unwelcome position of listening to Edmund's emotional/ethical contretemps over Mary Crawford, all the while hiding her own real feelings for him, and more than once having Edmund turn a conversation which is ostensibly about her concerns over Henry Crawford's attentions into yet another opportunity to talk of himself and Mary. Not only is the psychological reality closely observed, but also the philosophical debate which is the essence of Edmund's dilemma forms a prescient commentary on the issue of finding stability in the face of change.

The third phase of the novel where Edmund is featured is his reaction to Henry Crawford's proposal to Fanny. He is oblivious to Fanny's love for him and how that insulates her heart, and this discrepancy makes his attempt to persuade

Fanny to accept Crawford all the more trenchant. Edmund's "let him succeed at last, Fanny, let him succeed at last" (*MP* 347) is the ultimate male blindness and elicits a heated and heartfelt response from Fanny of "Oh! never, never, never; he will never succeed with me" (*MP* 347), which astonishes, but does not enlighten: Edmund is not really listening. Fanny's listening becomes an endurance test of her love, and forms a part of her perseverance in right action which in the end brings her reward. It is interesting how Jane Austen manages her material here. Her ability to show Edmund's emotional life seems a marked advance over the limited access she provides to Edward Ferrars' feelings, but there are limits. The instances where Jane Austen portrays emotion directly between two people are rare. The reader's access to Edmund is through Fanny; because his turmoil is not about Fanny, Edmund's feelings are permissible to report and to the great advantage of his characterization. Part, at least, of the limited success in making Edward Ferrars work is the absence of a means for him to reveal himself without defying propriety. When Jane Austen came to write *Emma* she took the singularly successful direction of showing the suitor through the eyes of the heroine. In *Emma* she can do this because both Emma and Knightley are unconscious of the depth of their feelings for each other.

With Edmund the depth of feeling reached is not love but despair and disgust as he denounces Mary and comes home to Mansfield Park/Thornton Lacey chastened but decisive. The events in his family and Henry Crawford's illicit relationship with Maria have made no impression on Mary and he leaves her to her London ways and her London life. The final scene between Mary and Edmund is theatrical in the extreme, even in the retelling to Fanny. Mary's perception of Henry

and Maria's adultery as mere folly breaks the charm for Edmund, but he refutes Fanny's assertion that Mary's gaiety in the situation was cruel with the words:

"Cruelty, do you call it? -- We differ there. No, her's is not a cruel nature. I do not consider her as meaning to wound my feelings. The evil lies yet deeper; in her total ignorance, unsuspectingness of there being such feelings, in a perversion of mind which made it natural to her to treat the subject as she did." (*MP* 456)

The clergyman in Edmund speaks their parting and reiterates the dominant Austenian theme:

". . . I wished her well, and earnestly hoped that she might soon learn to think more justly, and not owe the most valuable knowledge we could any of us acquire -- the knowledge of ourselves and of our duty, to the lessons of affliction" (*MP* 458-59)

It is interesting that Jane Austen goes one step farther here: as if she were not yet sure that Edmund was truly denouncing Mary, she casts her as the temptress and tests Edmund's resolve once more. Edmund tells Fanny:

"I had gone a few steps, Fanny, when I heard the door open behind me. 'Mr. Bertram,' said she, with a smile -- but it was a smile ill-suited to the conversation that had passed, a saucy playful smile, seeming to invite, in order to subdue me; at least it appeared so to me. I resisted I know I was right and such has been the end of our acquaintance." (*MP* 459)

After this, the narrator tells us, "Fanny's friendship was all that he had to cling to" (*MP* 460), and the result is inevitable. What is dissatisfying in the characterization of Edmund Bertram is that even the love of these two very dissimilar women, which is clearly an indication of his attractiveness and of his more than moral and financial desirability, does not prevent him from seeming unduly puritanical and stiff, in a way that Fitzwilliam Darcy, who clearly subscribes to the same code of conduct, does not. It may be that the distinction lies in the fact that,

although Edmund makes errors in judgment and fails to be as sensitive as she could hope, he does not ever act improperly, and there is no equivalent to Darcy's ungentlemanly behaviour. The reader is deprived of seeing Edmund actively overcoming some error; instead his exertions are directed to remembering to do his duty.

Emma stands out from Jane Austen's other novels in a number of ways, not the least of which is the social and financial equality of the heroine, Emma Woodhouse, and her successful suitor, George Knightley. This equivalence, and their intimate acquaintance as both neighbours and in-laws, allows for their unquestioned general access to and influence over each other's comings and goings. No suitor, not even Edmund Bertram, is so integrated into the heroine's day-to-day life, so this too is new territory for the author. Claudia Johnson's discussion of the theme of "female authority"³² as the subject of *Emma* and Jane Miller's focus on the dynamics of young womanhood are both clear-headed readings which help relate the action in previous novels to those things which are new departures for Jane Austen in this novel. Miller in her early chapters establishes a locus for the heroines as she wishes to discuss them:

For at the very moment when a young woman is leaving the parental home for her adult life with another man, she is also discovering the extent and nature of her own freedom and dependence. She is faced by the quality of male authority and by the unreliability of many of the men who wield it. She is also learning to find in the interstices of that

³² Johnson 122.

authority the exact extent of her own possibilities for individual initiative.³³

Emma has no intentions of leaving home, but she is at a particularly interesting turning point in her life for the discovery and exploration of her own authority. Miss Taylor her governess, and later, companion, has become Mrs. Weston, and her departure to half a mile's distance leaves a gap in the life at Hartfield. Moreover, the departure marks the beginning of Emma's adult life and the lifting of some of the restrictions of girlhood as she comes, as it were, into her own estate. In a number of ways Emma's story begins where Elizabeth Bennet's leaves off; *Pride and Prejudice* closes with some assurance that Darcy and Elizabeth have achieved a degree of sharing and combined decision-making which sets them apart as a couple. In both her hint about Elizabeth teaching Darcy to laugh at himself and her reference to Georgiana's surprise at Elizabeth's relationship with her brother, Jane Austen suggests that there will be a sharing of power at Pemberley, singular in comparison with other relationships delineated. Emma's social and financial circumstances put her in an even more powerful position from the beginning, and Tony Tanner's point about Emma's wealth being in money rather than property explains even further the uniqueness of her position.³⁴ Were Emma landed she would have learned, conceivably, by this point, how to handle the responsibilities which go with wealth and position; situated as she is, there are too few outlets for her to occupy herself completely or productively.

³³ Miller 59.

³⁴ Tanner 180.

Claudia Johnson's comment that "in its willingness to explore positive versions of female power, *Emma* itself is an experimental production of authorial independence unlike any of Austen's other novels" is helpful in understanding the theme of that deceptively complex novel.³⁵ Similarly, LeRoy Smith's observation that "in a society where one's freedom and identity depend upon the possession of power, she [Emma] adopts prerogatives of the privileged male as her own" throws valuable light on the issues of gender and power in the novel.³⁶ Unlike Mrs. Ferrars or Lady Catherine, however, Emma learns through her experiences to use her power positively. Although not the kind of vision Johnson would approve, it is not misreading to look at Emma as a kind of female version of Fitzwilliam Darcy. Terms like gentleman and lady or gentlewoman are highly variant in meaning, but the process of growth which Emma goes through is like nothing else in Jane Austen's novels so much as the kind of change in behaviour which Elizabeth Bennet's rebuke to Darcy about behaving like a gentleman engenders. All consideration of sexual stereotyping aside, Emma learns, not about being a 'gentleman' or a 'lady', but about the humility and fortitude with which those who have the freedom, privilege and prestige that wealth and position endow should conduct themselves to assure harmony, and happiness. Emma learns that 'noblesse oblige.'

Where and how Emma learns is of particular interest to the discussion here because the process involves a successful suitor who is as distinct in his presentation as Emma is in hers. George Knightley is Jane Austen's most subtle portrait of a

³⁵ Johnson 126.

³⁶ Smith 132.

successful suitor. His character is drawn not with bold assertions but with an accumulation of small details which bring the reader gradually to the conclusion, not unlike Emma's realization, that he must be no one's husband but hers. Smith's discussion of how Emma is spared a conventional role also points to the relationship she has with George Knightley: "Without a mother whose loving, guiding presence might have eased her passage into conventional womanhood, Emma's most influential model is a male figure, Knightley, whose position and role she comes to wish for herself."³⁷ In the end, Emma shares that position with her one-time mentor. Before this happens, however, Jane Austen carefully delineates a process of growth and realization for George Knightley which not only emphasizes that he too needs to change some of his perceptions to be ready for marriage, but also, as Johnson asserts, daringly leaves him still in the dark about some of Emma's indiscretions:

Knightley is not nearly so wise and all seeing as he appears to think. He extols "the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other" (*E* 446), but many things -- fortunately -- have escaped his monitorship. Emma's worst faults among them. Knightley never learns, for example, that Emma did not stop with Mr. Elton, but proceeded to match Harriet and Frank; nor does he learn that Harriet, for her part, learned enough about gentility to disdain the very idea, and to prefer him instead.

. . . Austen's refusal to expose and arraign a heroine reprehensible by conventional standards shows how she parts company with conservative counterparts, and given the morally privileged position monitor figures of Knightley's ilk enjoy in their fiction, Austen's determination to establish a discrepancy between what he knows and what we know about Emma is daring.³⁸

³⁷ Smith 133.

³⁸ Johnson 141.

The manner in which Jane Austen is able to manage all this and still keep a satisfying balance and feel of reality in the novel bears further explication.

George Knightley is not boldly introduced as the conventional stuff of heroes. He drops in to console Mr. and Miss Woodhouse on the evening after the Weston wedding and makes a comfortable third around the fire. Just as he is with the Woodhouses, so is he with the rest of Highbury. Mr. Knightley is everyone's benefactor and support, "a sort of general friend and adviser" (E 59); he is all that is "sensible, kind, open, and vigorous,"³⁹ but he also has a life distinctly his own. W. A. Craik says, "Mr. Knightley is the most convincing of Jane Austen's heroes, because we see his functions as a landowner and administrator unusually clearly"⁴⁰ and goes on to take exception to Lord David Cecil's objection that "Jane Austen's men have no life away from their womenfolk"⁴¹ with her assertion that, "in fact, the observation that 'he had been walking away from William Larkins the whole morning, to have his thoughts to himself' (E 449) shows that his masculine world can be too much with him."⁴²

Nothing seems more natural than Mr. Knightley in his environment of Donwell Abbey and the community at Highbury. The sense Jane Austen is able to create of this community and these relationships in it having a long history prior to the time of the novel removes the need for lengthy introductions and allows her to

³⁹ Wright 159.

⁴⁰ Craik 133.

⁴¹ Craik 134, quoting Lord David Cecil, *Poets and Story-tellers* 104.

⁴² Craik 134.

focus on several important themes and give the first of a series of readings of the relationship between Emma and Knightley. The first chapter is a masterpiece of indirect characterization and prefigures exactly the arrangement of people around that fire which is the novel's ending. One of the other difficulties which Jane Austen surmounts in her portrayal of Mr. Knightley is to present clearly the different levels of maturity of a thirty-seven-year-old bachelor and a twenty-year-old ingenue without overdrawing the effect and making the gap between them which must eventually be bridged wider than would realistically admit of closure. Given the aim to settle them ultimately as convincing equal partners, this is no easy task. At the beginning Emma seems all head-strong and reckless beside the sensible, albeit decided opinions of her neighbour. The exchange of opinions between Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley in Chapter Five illustrates one of the ways Jane Austen manages to acquaint the reader with Knightley's feelings. Their discussion, which includes a precise history of Emma's education and her propensities, provides useful information not only about Emma, but also, by the way it is conveyed, about Mrs. Weston's and Mr. Knightley's respective roles in and attitudes to Emma's development. It is usually not apparent until subsequent readings how early in the text Mr. Knightley's feelings for Emma are established. "I confess that I have seldom seen a face or figure more pleasing to me than her's. But I am a partial old friend" (*E* 39), says Knightley qualifying his remark unnecessarily by stating the relationship; he goes on:

"I love to look at her; and I will add this praise, that I do not think her personally vain. Considering how very handsome she is, she appears to be little occupied with it; her vanity lies another way. Mrs. Weston,

I am not to be talked out of my dislike of her intimacy with Harriet Smith, or my dread of its doing them both harm." (*E* 39)

The firmness of Knightley's ideas is also quickly established here, but only a page later Jane Austen reveals part of George Knightley's charm: he is willing to listen. In this instance it is his gracious acknowledgement of Mrs. Weston's advice not to concern the whole family with his reservations about Harriet Smith. Knightley's "Not at all . . . I am much obliged to you for it. It is very good advice, and it shall have a better fate than your advice has often found; for it shall be attended to" (*E* 40) exemplifies his open attentiveness to his friends, at the same time revealing another part of his personality in his needless reiteration of the ineffectiveness of some of Mrs. Weston's advice to Emma.

Before the chapter closes, Jane Austen includes yet another exchange, and the text here is overcharged with meaning, quite as revealing in what it conceals as in what it says. Knightley's interested but exasperated exclamation "I wonder what will become of her!" is answered by Mrs. Weston's "So do I, very much" (*E* 40-41), which conceals the hope she and her husband have that something may develop between Emma and Mr. Weston's son, Frank Churchill, but clearly both Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley are thinking about Emma's marriage. There is double irony in Knightley's further remark, for, given the predisposition of her thoughts about Emma and Frank, Mrs. Weston is the last person to give Mr. Knightley a clue, whether or not he is hinting for one, when he says:

"She always declares she will never marry, which, of course, means just nothing at all. But I have no idea that she has yet seen a man she cared for. It would not be a bad thing for her to be very much in love with a proper object. I should like to see Emma in love, and in some

doubt of a return; it would do her good. But there is nobody hereabouts to attach her; and she goes so seldom from home." (E 41)

The second irony, of course, is that of the two during the course of their relationship, it is Knightley not Emma who first feels the pangs of jealousy and doubt.

In Chapter Eight, Jane Austen takes a major step in the presentation of a male-female relationship by portraying both the intimacy and the tensions between Knightley and Emma. She builds on the easy give-and-take established in the opening scene of the novel, and explores both the strength and subtlety of their bond. Knightley is shown deftly managing his father-in-law to be and happily complimenting both Harriet on her appearance and Emma on the improvement in her friend's demeanour, but his mood abruptly changes when he discovers that Emma's manoeuvring of Harriet has effectively checkmated the proposal he had so approved Robert Martin's making to Harriet: "Mr. Knightley actually looked red with surprize and displeasure, as he stood up, in tall indignation" (E 60). In the somewhat heated discussion which ensues the focus on Harriet's illegitimate birth may surprise readers who remember Lady Middleton's refusal to have a natural child mentioned in her presence; here it serves as a continuum on which to measure Emma's and Knightley's respective attitudes and leanings, and illustrates a level of intimacy which allows them to broach the topic without awkwardness. This early in the novel the equality in good common sense which later one feels has developed has not been established, and Knightley's opinions are certainly more solid and more conservative than Emma's. Knightley's judgments have the quality of aphorism about them as he declares: "Vanity working on a weak head, produces every sort

of mischief," and "Men of sense, what ever you chuse to say, do not want silly wives" (*E* 64).

There are three other significant points to be made about the content of this chapter as it relates to Jane Austen's portrayal of men in general, and of this suitor in particular. Knightley's high estimate of Robert Martin and the background context of their relationship gives a glimpse of the adult masculine world which acutely delineates Knightley's benevolent exercise not simply of his power or authority as lord of the manor, but of his respect and kind regard for his tenants and neighbours as individuals. One is reminded of the remarks by Mrs. Reynolds on Darcy at Pemberley. Second, Knightley's disclosure about Mr. Elton, "He knows that he is a very handsome young man, and a great favourite wherever he goes; and from his general way of talking when there are only men present, I'm convinced that he does not mean to throw himself away" (*E* 66), reinforces the impression that he and Emma talk freely on a whole range of topics. At the same time, this remark succinctly reiterates the presence of a man's world, a way of men's talking beyond their polite conversations with women, which is generally out of reach to Emma. Although the context is Emma's promotion of a relationship between Mr. Elton and Harriet, the revelation of Mr. Elton's more mercenary side can also serve as a hint to Emma herself. As we shall see, Mr. Elton is not the only possible suitor to Emma on whom Mr. Knightley casts mild aspersions. Finally, the intensity of feeling bears mention. With great economy of language and referential detail Jane Austen establishes beyond a doubt an intimate relationship which has only to be explored

a little further to discover its ultimate potential. Nicely, that potential entails changes for both from the stance each takes as their conversation concludes:

"Good Morning to you," -- said he, rising and walking off abruptly. He was very much vexed. . . .

Emma remained in a state of vexation too; but there was more indistinctness in the causes of her's, than in his. She did not always feel so absolutely satisfied with herself, so entirely convinced that her opinions were right and her adversary's wrong, as did Mr. Knightley. He walked off in more complete self-approbation than he left for her. (*E* 66-67)

As Emma learns judgment and confidence in a real and beneficial role for herself in Highbury society, Mr. Knightley learns not only that he does not have all the right answers, but also, and more to his absolute making as a character, that it does not matter.

Yet another of Claudia Johnson's comments is useful as a point of discussion. Her summary of the various incidents in which Mr. Knightley plays the role of monitor outlines the action for the remainder of the novel and poses such questions as where the change in his character takes place and how Jane Austen illustrates it:

Indeed, Mr. Knightley does look like the benevolent, all-seeing monitor crucial to the conservative fiction of Austen's day. Hovering like a chaperon around the edges of every major social scene -- the portrait party at Hartfield, the dinner at the Coles, the word game at the Abbey, the outing at Box Hill -- he is always on the lookout for wrongdoing and nonsense, always alert in his benefactions for the poor and innocent. . . . Alternately beaming with heartfelt approval when Emma acquits herself properly, and frowning with pain whenever she misbehaves, he has been half paternal and half pedagogical in his watchfulness.⁴³

⁴³ Johnson 140.

Undeniably, he keeps Emma from falling from grace in any serious way and will continue to do so. The transfer from fatherly teacher to lover takes place gradually and is based on the intensity of the relationship as shown above. Jealousy of the relationship he thinks Frank Churchill has with Emma, and deep loving concern as events unfold, that she not be hurt by Frank's flirtation, teach Mr. Knightley his own heart, and ironically show his misprision of what is actually transpiring in the relationships around him. LeRoy Smith summarizes the models of male excellence which Jane Austen successfully avoids:

Far from being the novel's 'normative and exemplary ideal,' an unerring mentor, Austen's representation of the 'patriarchal ideal,' or a Pygmalion who creates his wife in his own image, Knightley is, like Emma, a fallible human being moving towards an understanding of his human limitations and his human possibilities.⁴⁴

And W. A. Craik's commentary on point of view in the novels helps further to pinpoint the reason for Knightley's extraordinary credibility:

His abruptness, his steady and agreeable humour, his tact, and his age, make his invariable good sense agreeable, and his lectures to Emma tolerable, in a way, by comparison, Edmund's to Fanny are not. Mr. Knightley does not seem priggish, because his wit is part of his good sense. . . . He is one of the few, other than Emma herself, whose thoughts are reported. As with Mr. Darcy, this occurs when the heroine herself cannot tell all we need to know; in *Pride and Prejudice* this is at the beginning of the story; in *Emma* it is towards the end. For instance, when Frank, Jane and Emma play anagrams the scene is presented wholly through Mr. Knightley's eyes, and this prepares for his eventual proposal to Emma to be seen through both of them in turn.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Smith 149.

⁴⁵ Craik 149.

No other Jane Austen man is as thoroughly portrayed: both directly, through actions and speech, and indirectly, in the narrative report of his thoughts, George Knightley is presented as a vital example of the novelist's awareness of men's lives.

One aspect of *Emma*, more than any other, epitomizes the relationship which Emma and her Mr. Knightley have developed: Mr. Knightley's proposal to move to Hartfield so as to accommodate Mr. Woodhouse's well-known habit of fussy unreasonableness. This masterful stroke of plotting at once confirms Mr. Knightley's superiority in understanding and agreeableness, his self-confident good will, and offers an emblem, unlike anything else one might imagine, for Emma's being accepted as his equal. For Emma to do her acknowledged duty by her father calls for an acquiescence which Mr. Knightley willingly volunteers; his move is a fitting mark of his esteem for her unerring judgment. Put in context of the time and the social order, it is all the more impressive as the statement of a man unhampered by traditional considerations of a man's place. Smith's concluding remarks on the union are focused in a similar non-sexist vision of their happiness:

The marriage of Emma and Knightley is based on the spirit of equality and mutual respect that will permit 'truth and sincerity' to rule. It is a marriage that holds the fullest promise of life, one in which the female is openly admired and shares decisions and in which there is mutual trust and a healthy sense of companionship. It is a marriage in which each recognises the human reality of the other, accepts the other's individuality and independence, and feels right and secure enough in their relationship to want to give rather than receive. Mutual good will governs their actions, as in the decision to reside at Hartfield. . . . Emma finds in Knightley a companion for herself and a partner in the duties and cares she will eventually face.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Smith 154-155.

It is difficult to think how Jane Austen could surpass this image of "mutuality and reciprocity;" in fact, her last suitor, Frederick Wentworth, does not, but her achievement there is measured differently.

Frederick Wentworth is remarkably interesting both as a male characterization and as a representation of the heroine's future. Jane Austen's achievement in *Persuasion* is unique in her works for its tone and its vision of society. Frederick Wentworth, while similar in a number of respects to various of the other suitors, notably Darcy, is also distinctly different in his social class, his occupation, his source of wealth, and his outlook on life. He is also different in that he marks a significant advance in Jane Austen's portrayal of a man's emotional life: his feelings are more exposed (though less directly presented through his thoughts) and there is an intensity which mirrors the seriousness not only of the heroine's situation, but also of the overall theme of inexorable sea-change. The chapter which Tony Tanner devotes to *Persuasion* in his *Jane Austen* is a most cogent discussion of the theme of change in the novel. His thesis is that by the point in her life when Jane Austen was writing her final novel she was no longer convinced that the society she represented in her previous work, the society whose continuance she illustrated with variations on a theme of the power of individual moral responsibility and respect, was capable of regenerating itself. In Tanner's words, cited previously in the discussion of the fathers, "the novel shows that English society is . . . in between an old social order in a state of decline and desuetude, and some new 'modern' society

of as yet uncertain values, hierarchies and principles." ⁴⁷ Yet Tanner also notes the authorial stance:

Jane Austen does not take sides; she neither mocks the old-style nor reprobates the new. . . . she is clearly undertaking a radical reassessment and revision of her system of values. . . . A new tolerance and relativism has entered Jane Austen's tone. ⁴⁸

Certainly Frederick Wentworth's relationship with Anne Elliot reflects these changing values. Their relationship is different in one other way from those of previous suitors and heroines, in that they have been engaged prior to the action of the novel and broken off. At twenty-seven, Anne Elliot is Jane Austen's oldest heroine and her story is one of the emptiness of a woman's life, and her helplessness to change that condition by any active means. The reader shares Anne Elliot's awareness of all that goes on around her more focally than with any of the previous heroines, and in some ways *Persuasion*, while it is Anne's story, is also very much Wentworth's story; we watch him through Anne, and become as attuned to the nuances of his behaviour as is she.

Captain Wentworth's previous relationship with Anne serves to heighten the reader's interest in him from the time he is first mentioned. The possibility of returning to a relationship after a break and a long and painful separation adds a new element to the standard suitor's story as it unfolds, but also makes it essential that the reader have a firm grasp of the past events. What happened at that time, in 1806, is recounted by Jane Austen with remarkable brevity and intensity. As Tony

⁴⁷ Tanner 249.

⁴⁸ Tanner 225-226.

Tanner observes it is really the stuff of another Jane Austen novel, but she encapsulates it in a few tight pages.⁴⁹ The couple, suited in every way, met and fell "deeply in love," a love which the author takes care to describe as both strong and reciprocal, and consequently they become engaged. On the advice of her friend, Lady Russell, Anne is persuaded to break the engagement, chiefly out of concern that the financial prospects of a young naval officer were not entirely reliable. For Wentworth, "brilliant" and "headstrong," this was a tremendous blow to his pride and he left the country in consequence. When the action of the novel reopens, the strength of Wentworth's disappointment, the affront to his vanity, is reinforced, as is the impression of his character, by the fact that in the more than seven years which have transpired he has not communicated with Anne or renewed his suit. Similarly, Anne has not wavered in her feelings; though she recognizes the hopelessness of her lasting affections, she is unable to dismiss them. Unlike the stories of most of the other heroines, Anne's is not one of personal growth and moral development. As W. A. Craik says: "Her one error which makes the story . . . has been committed eight years before the action starts, when she refused Wentworth."⁵⁰ Her age if not her steadfastness make her dissimilar even from Fanny Price. At the heart of *Persuasion* lies the problem of communicating between the sexes, of surmounting not just the obstacles of decorum in addressing and receiving suit, but also overcoming the restrictive, hide-bound sense of self which is an even more powerful block to true expression. Frederick Wentworth's

⁴⁹ Tanner 211.

⁵⁰ Craik 167.

determination, when the end of hostilities puts him ashore free and wealthy, to put the past behind him quickly becomes a struggle to rid himself of his prejudices, to understand and master his injured pride and to open himself to seeing and appreciating what is really happening both around him and in his heart.

Jane Austen manages Captain Wentworth's return to the scene in stages which give Anne time to prepare herself and fire the reader's curiosity to see this man. His presence is inevitable from the time his sister and her husband lease Kellynch Hall: he visits at Uppercross Great House, then unavoidably they meet in a stiff, unspeaking exchange at Uppercross-cottage where Anne's eye "half met Captain Wentworth's; a bow, a curtesy passed, she heard his voice" (*P* 59). But another reference included just previously, the fact that Wentworth "would not be satisfied without his [Charles Musgrove] running on to give notice" (*P* 59) to Mary and by association Anne, that he was coming, is a typical, casual Jane Austen bit of detail which gives a clue to Wentworth's politeness to Mary, if not his concern for Anne's feelings that he not come upon her unannounced. If, however, it was Wentworth's intention to spare Anne's feelings, his opinion of her being much altered in looks which is unsuspectingly reported to her, certainly does not. Interestingly, Jane Austen uses this incident as a point of departure for an uncharacteristically long narrative which establishes a sort of benchmark against which Wentworth's feelings can be measured. Artistically there is no other way to present this information. Anne suspects what he has felt over the past, but clearly her point of view cannot be used for the purpose; nor are his feelings of the kind which would be likely to come out in a conversation even with his sister or a close

friend. By depicting Anne's musings over Wentworth's comment Jane Austen is also able to expose subtly their different approaches, highlighting Anne's strength, albeit ironically deprecated, and revealing both Wentworth's misunderstanding which has kept him away for so long, and his resolve, albeit misdirected, to get on with his life.

The passage in full reads:

"So altered that he should not have known her again!"
 These were words which could not but dwell with her.
 Yet she soon began to rejoice that she had heard them. They were of sobering tendency; they allayed agitation; they composed, and consequently must make her happier.

Frederick Wentworth had used such words, or something like them, but without an idea that they would be carried round to her. He had thought her wretchedly altered, and in the first moment of appeal, had spoken as he felt. He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity.

He had been most warmly attached to her, and had never seen a woman since whom he thought her equal; but, except for some natural sensation of curiosity, he had no desire of meeting her again. Her power with him was gone for ever.

It was now his object to marry. (P 61)

Jane Austen's subtext is clear: neither one is really free to think about marrying elsewhere. The author further contributes to our understanding of the real meaning of this impasse in recounting Wentworth's illogical confusion between the gallantry toward women ("idle refinement" to his sister's mind), which he thinks is expected of him and the ambiguous combination of "a strong mind, with sweetness of temper" which describes the woman he thinks he would like to marry. Without belabouring the point, Jane Austen has depicted a muddled and immature young man, badly in need of clarifying some of his beliefs and opinions. Lest there be any doubt of the

sympathy which continues between Anne and Wentworth, Jane Austen also includes a chance meeting in the cottage drawing-room. The shock of finding himself alone with Anne sends Wentworth "to the window to recollect himself, and feel how he should behave" (*P* 79). Moments later his considerate action in relieving Anne of one of her nephews who had climbed on her followed by what Anne perceives as a studied attempt not to engage in conversation with her sends her into a state of agitation and out of the room. The build-up of presumed feelings disguising others, conscious or unconscious, is in some ways similar to what Jane Austen does with Darcy and Elizabeth, but there is an intensity here, and a poignancy in Anne's dilemma which is new.

For there to be a turning point in this unhappy relationship it is necessary for Wentworth to overcome some of his blindness, to see Anne in a new light, and this comes during the accident at the Cobb. But more happens as the result of Louisa Musgrove's fall than Wentworth's re-evaluation of Anne's strength, her ability to take charge; clearly there is no weakness or timidity in her actions there. Pursuing the concept of anima, LeRoy Smith finds much more to be considered from this scene than just Wentworth's sense of Anne:

The different reactions of Anne and Wentworth . . . dramatise that the range of possible behaviour in men and women includes the traits of both stereotypes, that is that human nature is dualistic rather than bipolar. Anne shows the clear head and promptness of decision that one expects from the male. Wentworth collapses against the sea wall in shock and calls out for help as if all his strength had gone. Anne shows 'masculine' energy and presence of mind; Wentworth shows 'feminine' emotion and weakness. The episode refutes the myth that only men can be strong and resourceful in emergencies and that emotionalism is a feminine trait. Wentworth discovers Anne's true

strength of character, and he encounters a variety of feelings within himself whose existence he had not expected.⁵¹

Whether or not a man who has seen active duty as a naval officer is apt to discover "feelings whose existence he had not expected" is debatable, but the context here is not war, and the extent to which Jane Austen includes descriptions of his reactions, including sitting later with "his face concealed, as if overpowered by the various feelings of his soul" (*P* 112), show that this is clearly meant as Wentworth's epiphany. Fitzwilliam Darcy, too, may have sat this way after Elizabeth's rejection of his proposal, but if he did it was in the privacy of his own rooms at Rosings Park. Nowhere in the other five novels is a man depicted in similar emotional turmoil.

Louisa's fall not only opens his eyes to Anne's true merit and to new feelings of his own, it also puts paid to Wentworth's ideal of womanhood as unrelenting firmness casually represented for him in a hazel-nut. In a way Wentworth's pride is as tied to that symbol, rare in Jane Austen, as is Louisa to whom he enunciates his wish.⁵² Louisa crumpled on the Cobb ultimately brings to Wentworth the realization that nothing more than his masculine pride has kept him and Anne apart, blinded him to her story, her side of persuasion, and trapped him in the wilderness of "self-centeredness."⁵³ The accident on the Cobb is a turning point for Anne as well. Wentworth's approbation of her exertions and subsequent seeking of her advice corroborate her own estimation of her abilities and add to her self-confidence.

⁵¹ Smith 166.

⁵² Tanner 233.

⁵³ Smith 167.

Once it is clear that Louisa is no longer a love interest for Wentworth, Anne is free to hope and, where possible, direct the action to the prospect of communicating to him the vital information that her feelings for him have not changed.

The revised ending to *Persuasion* is where the couple finally come together, and in her revision Jane Austen demonstrates that delicacy, sensitivity, and awareness of nuance which are her ultimate achievement. The presentation of male feelings introduced in the revisions make the scene in the Musgroves' rooms at the White Hart one of the most affecting which Jane Austen ever wrote. Of particular interest is her representation of Captain Wentworth's silent agony of suspense as he listens to Anne and Captain Harville discuss the relative merits and qualities of male and female aspects of love. One is reminded of David Daiches' analogy:

It is a stately dance on the lawn -- but all around there are the dark trees, the shadows. And if you do not dance well, if you have not been able, by the end of the day, to secure a permanent partner with whom to walk off the lawn, you are left, when the sun sets, alone amid the shadows. We are never allowed to forget that possibility, never allowed to forget what a serious business this dancing is. One false step can be fatal. One must keep one's equilibrium on a razor's edge.³⁴

Here, the male too feels all the tension, all the pressure to dance winningly. The tragedy that lurks beneath this most serious comedy has nothing like the lightness with which Mr. Collins was able to turn aside Elizabeth's rejection. The tension that Jane Austen has built relentlessly over the course of the novel, particularly with her focus on the mixed and misread messages that Anne and Wentworth telegraph to each other during their various electrically charged meetings in Bath, is finally

³⁴ Daiches 115.

released in Wentworth's desperate letter. While it is typical of Jane Austen to avoid scenes of direct presentation of emotion between lovers, and Wentworth's letter in some ways continues that convention, its content is unlike anything else she has written for the force of the emotion expressed. As if to emphasize even more strongly the singular significance of the moment in relation to the path of self-discovery which Wentworth has travelled to arrive at this moment, the letter scribbled hastily to Anne records him as being "unjust . . . weak and resentful" (*P* 237), and demonstrates his awareness of the scourge his own pride has been. Further, by being a letter, a conventionally female and ostensibly passive means of communicating emotions, Wentworth's note not only represents him as dealing with a part of himself which is new, but also allows him to experience, albeit briefly, the restrictions of decorum and expression which are traditionally woman's lot. This letter could not have been written eight years earlier, nor was it written in any of the intervening time. There is hope in the challenges to new action and understanding which their love drives Anne and Wentworth to meet.

Once the lovers have established the appropriateness and decorum of redeclaring their devotion, Jane Austen allows a direct private conversation which reviews the progress of love. Here, the narrator assures us that Wentworth "had learnt to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind" (*P* 242). As one critic has pointed out, "In *Persuasion* neither giving in on the one hand, nor holding out to get one's way on the other, are very attractive options," but in the balance Anne and Wentworth come to value the human need which mediates

the two extremes.³⁵ The happiness which Anne and Wentworth find and deserve is the result not only of their separate confrontations of an existence apart from each other, which they discover by their individual routes to be untenable, but also of their acceptance of the contradictions both in self and others which are the very condition of humanity. What Captain Wentworth represents in terms of Anne's future is discussed in a previous chapter. Suffice it here to reiterate that the new order which seems to replace the old in Jane Austen's final completed work is different only in particulars from the old order. In the essentials Jane Austen does not change. Anne Elliot's reflection, "a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion" (*P* 246), is equally true in Jane Austen's work for all. Regardless of the cost in abandoning the comfortable and customary modes of behaviour, the future lies in meeting the new age challenge to do one's 'human' duty.

³⁵ Johnson 155.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion - The Achievement of the Novels

To draw conclusions about the achievement of Jane Austen's novels is to venture where many have travelled before; few, however, have looked comprehensively at the novels' portrayal of men, and it is there most appropriately that this study can make summary remarks. The novels demonstrate a clear understanding of men's action and motivation. The men in the six major works describe a range of occupations, life-styles, attitudes, and behaviours which cumulatively establish a credible portrait of the prevailing male ethos of the period: a patriarchal society in which few question the status quo. Further, as the introductory chapter illustrates, the novels display a comprehensive awareness of the details of contemporary political, economic, and social affairs, but this is presented indirectly as background to the representation of the complex interpersonal relations that constitute society in the small rural communities depicted. The novels' focus on women, marriage and women's search for a place in society elevates courtship and domestic concerns as topics worthy in their own right of extended novelistic treatment. Rather than being treated as alien beings (threatening, oppressive, beyond comprehension) men are integrated into the fabric of the novels not only as an essential part of the equation for courtship and marriage, but also as persons with motivations, aspirations and emotions as involved as those of the women portrayed. The examination of men in their professional

roles in Chapter II indicates that men's occupations in and of themselves are of less concern to the movement of the novels than is men's general behaviour and, furthermore, that a vocation such as that of clergyman is not, in the context of the novels, a reliable predictor of conduct or opinions. This leads to the exploration of men in their various personal capacities as friends and brothers, as fathers and suitors in Chapters III through VI.

What becomes manifest in this study is the novels' increasingly sophisticated representation of the complexities of life for men as well as for women in a highly restrictive society. In brotherhood and friendship men evince extremes of fraternal demeanour from faithful and supportive to negligent and deceitful. Fathers are generally presented as remiss in their responsibilities for the education and guidance of their families; some learn from their mistakes while others falter on oblivious of the effect their behaviour has on the succeeding generation. Those men who fill what is broadly described as the role of rejected suitor demonstrate a striking development over the course of the novels in the degree of their integration into the novels' respective communities. Their assimilated presence underlines the difficult task of discernment which women face where their future happiness and well-being are concerned. Only the accepted suitors, carefully delineated as non-heroic characters, offer real hope for the possibility of true, equitable dialogue between the sexes. These are men who, acknowledging their own faults and limitations, are willing to listen, to accept the other sex with a sense of mutuality, and to provide for the needs of the women they court. It is here that the novels define implicitly a responsible, non-authoritarian model of male behaviour. The problem of

communication between the sexes is not one the novels solve definitively. Given the strictures of propriety and decorum, and a seeming acknowledgement that one can not readily change society as a whole, the focus of the novels becomes the power of personal decision making.

In the opening chapter the suggestion was made that the fairness of Jane Austen's vision as a writer might well be one of the novels' crowning achievements. This assertion requires explanation. The novels are close investigations of women's lives in a restrictive society, a patriarchal society, where most of the constraints are those imposed by male-dominated families and institutions. Male authority and responsibility are exposed as frequently derelict, but the temptation to reject men outright, to condemn them, their strictures and structures, is one which the novels largely avoid. It is this fair and balanced stance characterized by an unwillingness to stereotype or generalize men's behaviour or proclivities which emerges from this study of the portrayal of men in the novels as the most salient feature of their representation. Like many of the Romantic poets who were writing contemporaneously, the novelist finds her focus in the role of the individual and the value to society as a whole of scrupulous personal action. Julia Prewitt Brown recognizes this essential concern when she writes:

Readers of Jane Austen often insist that laws, customs, social norms, and preference are the unexplained assumptions of her world -- yet are they? It would seem that Austen's very intent is to illustrate their functions, reveal their strengths and weaknesses, essentially explain or criticize their presence. As Huxley said, it is easy to convince men that they are monkeys. The real effort lies in convincing us that we are men. It is this aspect of humanity that interests Jane Austen: the inscrutable selective wisdom contained in the struggle for existence,

the capacity for improvement and the instinct to compromise, the wrestle for harmony within and among individuals.¹

In the final analysis it is this impulse toward harmony which characterizes the novels' vision. The scope is appropriate to the sphere of novels where the overthrow of society is not a consideration; one does what one can personally. The failure to do so out of ignorance is unfortunate and pathetic; the failure to do so through selfishness, oversight, or inertia is condemned. These values apply to all actions both public and private, and to all characters regardless of gender or position. The link with society as a whole is made through the understanding that for any community to function, be it a small family unit or the nation, there can be no purely private acts: all actions have consequences. As Edmund Bertram says of the clergy, as it is with the individual, so it is with the nation.

In portraying men, in representing their freedom relative to that of women, Jane Austen guards against generalizations about the nature of respective gender roles. The strength and appeal of her men lie in the accuracy of her portrait not only of the mistakes men make, the ways men get things wrong, but also in the equitable presentation of their suffering and of the restrictions on their behaviour as well. The shared middle ground is the willingness to learn from one's mistakes, to utilize experience as a basis for self-knowledge and change, for growth and development as a responsible member of society. The achievement of the novels is evident in their ability to move across gender lines, culminating in the portrayal of

¹ Brown 24.

Frederick Wentworth's emotional epiphany. It is here that the novels realize the full potential towards which they move in their course.

What is striking for the reader and critic in the present age is the way in which recent women critics and those who write trying to understand their voices have followed a movement not dissimilar to that outlined in the novels. This is not to say that Jane Austen anticipates the emergence of feminist criticism as such, but rather that the process of re-evaluating one's assumptions about one's self and others which is outlined repeatedly in the novels parallels the reassessment of the critical status quo and the movement toward understanding which feminist critics model as a process.² One begins by examining the mistakes and mistaken hypothesis of the patriarchal frame of mind and moves toward a new, non-sexist perception or comprehension. Of real lasting value are the dialogue and the discourses that have a mutuality like that reached by Darcy and Elizabeth when, man and woman, they truly begin to listen, understand and learn from each other's story. There is no indication that such processes ever reach closure, but in this willingness to harmonize may be found the novels' enduring truth.

² See: Elaine Showalter, "Introduction" to *Feminist Critics: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 3 - 17. Showalter writes: "the experience of feminist critical enlightenment seemed to transform all that went before it; it was an intellectual revolution, charged with the excitement of violating existing paradigms and discovering a new field of vision" (5). See also: Janet Todd, *Feminist Literary History: A Defence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988). Todd's conclusion, particularly her reference to male feminists is also apposite in consideration of this re-thinking process: "as for the problem of male feminists, it is right as Stephen Heath suggests that men speak of their own masculinity in light of feminism; they might also start reading women and recognizing feminist criticism. We would only be asking them to return the compliment of many centuries" (137-138).

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