

'THE DUTY OF WOMAN BY WOMAN': EXPLORING FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS IN JANE AUSTEN'S
NOVELS

by

MONICA ALVAREZ

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Date

Professor Donald Stone

Chair of Examining Committee

26 August, 2013

Date

Professor Carrie Hintz

Executive Officer

Professor Donald Stone

Professor Mario Di Gangi

Professor Anne Humpherys

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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Monica Alvarez

Adviser: Professor Donald Stone

Though men populate the pages of Jane Austen's novels, her interest is not in a male world. This dissertation argues that the central theme of Austen's oeuvre is not marriage, but the bonds forged within female same-sex networks: the three kinds of friendships in which Austen's heroines engage—defined by ties of blood, surrogate kinship, or circumstance—ease them into heterosexual society while allowing them to challenge some of the institutions and conventions that define women as nonentities. Ranging from devotion to manipulation, the three types of friendships present in Austen's six published novels allow the heroines to experience both supportive understanding and competitive hostility in a safe environment. This work argues that the attachment between each protagonist and another woman promotes a strong sense of identity that allows her to enter into the larger society surrounding her female world from a position of strength through marriage—the heroine's only venue of social recognition, visibility, and success. Here, I contend that Jane Austen's novels portray friendships between women as the strongest source of female identity because the self-awareness they advance allows the heroine to resist her culture's unwillingness to acknowledge her as a moral and intellectual agent.

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Introduction: Female Friendships in Austen's Six Published Novels

By the spring of 1816, Jane Austen not only had the dubious pleasure of dedicating *Emma* to George Augustus Frederick, England's dissolute Prince Regent, but she had skillfully dismissed two suggested topics for future novels from the Prince's librarian, James Stanier Clarke. When Mr. Clarke first suggested that she "delineate in some future Work the Habits of Life and Character and enthusiasm of a Clergyman...Fond of, & entirely engaged in Literature--no man's Enemy but his own," Austen rejected his idea, claiming that her ability to sketch only the "comic part of Character...but not the Good, the Enthusiastic, the Literary" did not make her fit for the topic he suggested.¹ Her ignorance of "Such a Man's Conversation...on subjects of Science & Philosophy" rendered her unequal to the task and confirmed her to be, in her own words, "the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress."² In his subsequent letter of 27 March, 1816, J.S. Clarke invited Austen to dedicate future novels to Leopold, Prince of Cobourg, and for a second time proposed the sort of subject matter such volumes should treat: "any Historical Romance illustrative of the History of the august house of Cobourg, would just now be very interesting."³ His proposal met with a rejection similar to the previous one, as Austen once again claimed dependence on her limited experience as a woman to covertly but firmly assert her independence to choose the province of her own novels:

You are very, very kind in your hints as to the sort of Composition which might recommend me at present, & I am fully sensible that an Historical Romance, founded on the House of Saxe Cobourg might be much more to the purpose of Profit or Popularity, than such pictures of domestic Life in Country Villages I deal in--but I could no more write a Romance than an Epic Poem.--I could not sit seriously down to write a serious Romance under

¹ Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters* ed. Deidre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 296-297, 306.

² Austen, Letters, 306.

³ Austen, Letters, 311.

any other motive than to save my Life, & if it were indispensable for me to keep it up & never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first Chapter.--No--I must keep to my own style & go on my own Way; And though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other.⁴

Jane Austen's facetiously modest yet unwavering refusal of J.S. Clarke's attempts to influence the subjects of her subsequent works shared a common denominator. According to Austen, her identity as a woman--a creature confined by her lack of learning, unable to treat important male philosophical and political pursuits, and "only" capable of laughing at herself and at others who lived in the reduced environment of country villages--made it impossible for her to delineate the lives of men, be they clergymen or heroes of historical romances and epic poems. Men certainly populate the pages of Austen's novels, but her interest was not in a male world. Therefore she "rarely shows men out of the company of women [and]...gives only passing attention to male diversions."⁵ I argue here that Austen's "own style" emerged from a world of domesticity that as a woman she knew quite well--the world of female networks.

Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, male and female same-sex networks alike were the result of the emotional segregation that arose out of the increasingly rigid "gender-role differentiation within the family and society."⁶ For those of the working class, it was the gendered division of labor that caused this dissociation. As Jane Spencer noted, the separation of the "workplace...from home" led men, "supported by a system of apprenticeship that excluded women," to take over "many jobs traditionally done by women

⁴ Austen, *Letters*, 312.

⁵ Penelope Joan Fritzer, *Jane Austen and Eighteenth-Century Courtesy Books*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), 47.

⁶ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relationships Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1.1 (1975): 9.

in the home.”⁷ While these economic changes transformed apprenticeships into public male networks of support, women--increasingly “more economically dependent on their husbands”--now found their network of support within the homes to which they were more closely confined than ever before.⁸ Though the lives of gentlewomen like Austen herself and like the heroines of her six published novels were not as directly impacted by this shift in commercial production, they were nonetheless “socially and economically dependent” on their male kin.⁹ While higher financial demands restricted women’s access to marriage, society extolled a “genteel domesticity [that] put marriage and childbearing at the center of women’s lives.”¹⁰ This ideology of domestic gentility ensured that women--both married and single--found within the private sphere of the home their own homosocial networks.¹¹

Despite the emotional segregation prompted by crystallizing gender roles, same-sex networks existed embedded within the larger, overarching heterogeneous society that prioritized male concerns and experiences, family connections, and the domestic ideology that prescribed women’s “subordination...circumscribed and cushioned by gentility.”¹² Because female same-sex networks coexisted with the larger heterogeneous society, women were other women’s first base of emotional support, yet they were closely connected to male relatives by “affective ties.”¹³ Women’s networks promoted the “domestic feminine identity” posed by mainstream society and upheld women’s values and experiences over men’s.¹⁴ Yet simultaneously, women within these networks forged “egalitarian relationships [that] made acceptable their expressions of self-concern,

⁷ Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: from Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*, (New York: B. Blackwell, 1986), 13.

⁸ Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, 13.

⁹ Deborah Kaplan, *Jane Austen among Women* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 22.

¹⁰ Kaplan, *Jane Austen among Women*, 29. Kaplan observes that these higher financial demands barring women’s ready access to marriage are caused by the “intensification of patrilineage customs [which] created greater demand for brides who were well financed by their families” (22).

¹¹ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Sedgwick defines the term “homosocial” as the “social bonds between persons of the same sex” that further the sociopolitical interests of the group (1,3).

¹² Kaplan, *Jane Austen among Women*, 52.

¹³ Kaplan, *Jane Austen among Women*, 51.

¹⁴ Kaplan, *Jane Austen among Women*, 74.

autonomy and dissent" from the predominant, androcentric society.¹⁵ By giving the intrinsic worth to their private experiences that society at large denied to them, women found in the ties they forged between themselves an identity no longer solely defined by their roles as men's wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters.

Jane Austen allowed herself to be "more self-assertive as well as more comfortable in the greater informality and equality of these [female] relationships."¹⁶ In her letter to her sister Cassandra of 11 June, 1799, Austen humorously wrote, "I would not let Martha read *First Impressions* again upon any account, & am very glad that I did not leave it in your power.--She is very cunning, but I see through her design;--she means to publish it from Memory, & one more perusal must enable her to do it."¹⁷ This teasing accusation of Martha Lloyd's cunning dishonesty in fact revealed the deep trust that existed between this close friend, an almost surrogate sister, and the writer.¹⁸ Martha Lloyd was not a tricky cheat but, quite to the contrary, an enthusiastic and supportive confidant privy to Jane Austen's secret of authorship. Austen manifested deep pride in her work as quite obviously Martha liked *First Impressions* so much that she asked to read the predecessor of *Pride and Prejudice* so many times that she was almost able to know it from memory. The support and acceptance that Austen found in this close circle of female friendship allowed her to openly identify herself as a proud author and not to resort to the persona of the ignorant female writer she advanced to her society at large.

The image she presented of herself before Cassandra and Martha Lloyd was quite different from the image that her brother Henry gave of Austen in the biographical notice prefacing the posthumous publication of *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*. Though introducing Jane Austen as the author of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*,

¹⁵ Kaplan, *Jane Austen among Women*, 65. Kaplan notes that when speaking to other women within this female network, "women distanced and distinguished themselves from men and represented those separate selves; they also gave priority to their concerns and activities over those of their menfolk."

¹⁶ Kaplan, *Jane Austen among Women*, 122.

¹⁷ Austen, *Letters*, 44.

¹⁸ Austen, *Letters*, 146-147. In another letter to Cassandra dated 13 October, 1808, Jane Austen writes of Martha Lloyd, "she is the friend & Sister under every circumstance."

Mansfield Park, and *Emma*, he obviated the private identity of the accomplished author not only by describing her as a modest woman who wrote solely out of "taste and inclination" and was never motivated by male ambitions such as "fame [or] profit."¹⁹ Presenting her as nothing more than a demure model of womanhood, Henry claimed, "It was with extreme difficulty that her friends, whose partiality she suspected whilst she honoured their judgement, could prevail on her to publish her first work."²⁰ Henry's biographical notice, in fact, mirrored the same image of a timid, diffident female writer that she herself used in life to skillfully deflect J.S. Clarke's suggestions about the topics of her novels. According to Henry, Austen wrote not to display her talent or to profit from her skill as an author: diffident of her own ability, his sister wrote out of respect for her family. This image of Jane Austen before her larger heterogeneous society clearly conformed to accepted notions of domestic womanhood while she felt free to present herself within her female network of family and friends openly as an unapologetic, gleeful writer.

While female networks were a source of support for Austen's identity as an author, I posit that they were also, in fact, the central theme of her oeuvre.²¹ It is important to recognize, however, that Austen's relationships within this female network were not identical to her heroines' female friendships. First, the relationships established by Austen's heroines were more varied in nature. While Jane Austen's female network provided her with acceptance and approval, her heroines experienced both supportive understanding and competitive hostility as they related not only to sisters or long-time friends, but--unlike Austen--with women they viewed as surrogate family members or newly acquainted friends. Second, the heroine's ties of female friendship were highly structured. Austen's network of

¹⁹ Henry Austen, "Biographical Notice of the Author" in *Persuasion*, by Jane Austen, ed. Patricia Meyer Spacks (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 192.

²⁰ Henry Austen, "Biographical Notice," 192.

²¹ Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 67. Though marriage is often considered to be the central theme of Jane Austen's novels, Fraiman posits that the "insufficient men" with whom the heroines fall in love as well as "abbreviated proposals and rushed endings" belie this assumption. Furthermore, In "Can This Marriage Be Saved: Jane Austen Makes Sense of an Ending," *ELH* 50 (1983): 695, Karen Newman points out that Austen's portrayal of "many unsatisfactory marriages" is another indication that marriage is not the novels' central theme.

support was a cluster of friends surrounding Jane and Cassandra's tightly knit relationships, but each of her heroines formed a single and especially close bond with a woman who achieved preeminent emotional importance in her life. Although the heroine may have been friendly with other women within her network, she did not share the same or even a similar degree of intimacy with them. Though Jane Austen expressed affection for male family members and even a certain yet passing interest for some men of her acquaintance, no central male figure emerged to draw her out of authorship and into marriage. Yet the dyad formed by the Austen heroine and her emotional center became triangular in structure when a potential male suitor for either or both women came into contact with them. Because the female dyads in her novels invariably incorporated a male figure, friendships between women in Austen's novels served to successfully launch a stronger heroine into a larger world of heterosexual relationships and heterogeneous values. In short, while the supportive relationships Jane Austen forged with Cassandra and Martha Lloyd allowed her to feel pride in her writing without being socially labeled and rejected as unwomanly, she was still compelled to undermine her capabilities as a writer much the way Henry Austen did in his biographical note when she presented herself before a heterogeneous audience. This thesis, however, advances a new approach to understanding Jane Austen's novels because it suggests that the attachment between each heroine and another woman was the protagonist's primary relationship since it promoted a strong sense of identity that allowed her to enter into the larger society surrounding her female world from a position of strength through marriage—the heroine's only venue of social recognition, visibility, and success.²²

²² Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 99. According to Marcus, "female friendship...bolsters the female self and thus ensures a heroine's marriage follows from her strength, not her weakness." The weakness of which Marcus speaks derives from the initial humiliation each heroine experiences as she learns that her original place in the world demands that she becomes a cipher, "a kind of currency" whose role is to bind and organize male society. According to Frainman, the emotional centrality women assume in each others' lives acts as a site of resistance, as the point of strength, that allows a heroine's "true identity" to develop in a world that wishes her to "drown out" her own voice (82).

In novels with male protagonists, critics see the hero's relationships with other men as "an obvious and instrumental element in his growth."²³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for example, sees that the male homosociality at the root of these relationships allows the hero to harness "patriarchal power" to enhance his own social status.²⁴ Yet, critics such as Marvin Mudrick consider heroines such as Emma Woodhouse, women who have a preference for "the company of women," with a certain degree of puzzled disapproval.²⁵ Even Julia Prewitt Brown who acknowledges that "in Jane Austen, the heroine is always a woman who likes other women [as] evidence of her basic health, her natural identification with those of her own sex as a means of self-awareness and growth," refuses to see these female homosocial friendships as the pivotal relationships in the novels.²⁶ Brown, like most critics, believes that only marriage indicates the heroine's "moral growth."²⁷ In contrast, I contend that Jane Austen's novels portray friendships between women, not marriage, as the strongest source of female identity because the self-awareness they animate allows the heroine to resist her culture's unwillingness to acknowledge her as a moral and intellectual agent. I further propose that Austen's novels are not narratives of marriage or even narratives of female development through marriage: while Austen's novels are indeed novels of female development, this evolution takes place not through marriage but through female friendship. Marriage, I argue, is not the means of the protagonist's personal growth but serves instead only as the visible social token of success brought about by her heightened consciousness. Although the denouement of each of Austen's novels involves the expeditious resolution of the courtship plot between the heroine and her hero, the core and substance of the

²³ Julia Prewitt Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 159.

²⁴ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 25.

²⁵ Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1952), 192.

²⁶ Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels*, 159.

²⁷ Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels*, 6-7.

narrative is devoted to the complex friendship the heroine forges with another woman.²⁸ The centrality of these relationships is hardly surprising since these are “the only social relationship [the readers] actually enter in the novel and the only one the heroine actually constructs.”²⁹ As Henry Tilney points out to a rapt Catharine Morland, men had the power to initiate a relationship while women only possessed the passive option of resisting male advances: “man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal.”³⁰ However, Austen’s heroines take the active role denied to them in heterosexual relationships when they chose to enter into female friendships and--in creating this friendship--achieve a strong, authoritative female identity.³¹ Jane Austen, then, used the “apparent innocence” of the marriage plot and its “language of sexual relations” to engage in the sociopolitical conversation about female authority.³²

According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, the tie between women related by blood--bonds between mothers, daughters, sisters, first cousins, aunts, and nieces--provided the basic support around which a larger network of distant female relatives and friends clustered.³³ Smith-Rosenberg further explains that female networks were built upon socially expanding circles having at its core close blood ties that extended to assimilate more distant ties of kinship. In turn, these ties of kinship themselves expanded to incorporate relationships between friends--women who were not related at all either by blood or more remote familial ties. For instance, Jane Austen’s female network was organized in such a manner. After Mr. Austen’s death in 1805, Jane Austen, Cassandra, and her mother met Martha Lloyd, their old friend, a year later during their visit to Worthing. Martha Lloyd, on

²⁸ Janet Todd, *Women’s Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 2. Todd points out “although the action of the novel usually takes place in the heterosexual plot, its sentiment may be centered in female friendship.”

²⁹ Todd, *Women’s Friendship in Literature*, 2.

³⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 51

³¹ Marcus, *Between Women*, 2. Sharon Marcus observes that “friendship between women...licensed forms of agency women were discouraged from exercising with men.”

³² Nancy Armstrong, “The Rise of Feminine Authority in the Novel,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 15.2 (1982): 132. Armstrong further explains that “domestic fiction...provided a way of talking about conflict and contradictions within the socio-economic sphere while remaining remote from that world” (133).

³³ Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual,” 11.

her own since her mother's death, decided to join the Austen women and the four finally settled together at Chawton Cottage in the summer of 1809. Though it is clear from her letters that Cassandra and Mary Lloyd were emotionally closest to Jane, it is equally evident that Mrs. Austen was also part of her daughter's female network.

Each of Austen's novels, however, excludes the heroine's mother from her own network of support and from effectively guiding her daughter in her journey into the self and into the heterosexual world. Although the mother's own marriage suggests her knowledge of the transition from her own homosocial network to the overarching heterosexual world, she cannot bequeath her daughter the absolute axiom of femininity that will ensure her child's success now in her own journey due to her absence. Jane Austen's "modernization of the absent mother plot," however, portrays the mother's loss not only as physical--due to death or to distance--but also as emotional and intellectual.³⁴ In turn, the "separation between mother and daughter shapes the protagonist's basic longings," forcing the heroine to reach out to other women within her female circle in her quest for self-definition.³⁵ The heroine's achievement of "rational happiness" in marriage not only depends on her ability to separate herself from her "defective origin" but on her ability to forge a meaningful relationship with an important woman in her life.³⁶

Persuasion and *Emma* portray the physical absence of the mother, playing on the traditional notion of the absent mother plot that "good mothers are more likely to die or disappear."³⁷ Once in Uppercross, *Persuasion's* Anne Elliot recalls the acknowledgment and support she experiences while her mother lived: "excepting one short period of her life, she

³⁴ Susan C. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance from Frances Burney to Jane Austen*, (Denver, Wayne State University Press, 2002), 145, 147. While Greenfield argues that Austen's "modernization of the absent mother plot" is evident because "...whereas in earlier novels mother-daughter separation and social degradation are mutually dependent narrative problems, in *Emma* the heroine's social fear can be read as an expression of her distress about her mother's death," I argue that Austen's "modernization of the absent mother plot" is evident not only in *Emma* but in her overall oeuvre because she portrays maternal loss not only as physical but as emotive and intellectual as well.

³⁵ Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters*, 19.

³⁶ Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels*, 9.

³⁷ Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters*, 79.

had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste."³⁸ Although Anne refers to her mother's encouragement regarding her taste in music in this particular instance, Lady Elliot's devotion to instilling "the good principles and instruction...she had been anxiously giving her daughters,"³⁹ conveys the mother's value for Anne--and presumably for her sisters as well--not only as a musician but as an individual, thereby making her a particularly invaluable guide to Anne, the daughter who most resembles her in appearance and character. Her untimely death, however, robs her bereaved daughter of a much-needed mentor.

In *Emma*, it is Mr. Knightley, and not Emma herself, who mourns Mrs. Woodhouse's death. As he tells Mrs. Weston, Emma's former and overly indulgent governess, "Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest in the family...She was always quick and assured...And ever since she was twelve, Emma has been mistress of the house and of you all. In her mother she lost the only person able to cope with her. She inherits her mother's talents, and must have been under subjection to her."⁴⁰ Just as her wealth and family name ensures Emma's preeminence in Highbury society, her intellect grants her equal preeminence within her family circle: the mild temperament of her sister, Isabella, and the valetudinarian concerns of Mr. Woodhouse are no match for Emma's quick intelligence. Although her governess, Miss Taylor, is cognitively closer to Emma, her inferior social standing as well as her gentleness "hardly allowed her to impose any restraint" on her young charge.⁴¹ Mr. Knightley sees what Emma cannot: though the loss of her mother leaves nothing more than "an indistinct remembrance of her caresses" in her daughter's memory, her death leaves Emma to believe

³⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, 32.

³⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 4.

⁴⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 23.

⁴¹ Austen, *Emma*, 1.

only on her own self-importance and not on the responsibilities that such an intellect must bear.⁴²

It is not death but emotional discordance that dooms *Pride and Prejudice's* Mrs. Bennett and *Sense and Sensibility's* Mrs. Dashwood to be absent mothers. Although Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Dashwood occupy opposite ends of the affective spectrum, both mothers fail to understand their daughters. Mrs. Bennett's vulgar and dogged pursuit of wealthy husbands for her daughters impedes her heart's utmost desire as she loudly informs Lady Lucas at the Netherfield ball that Jane's marriage to Mr. Bingley was "such a promising thing for her younger daughters, as Jane's marrying so greatly must throw them in the way of other rich men."⁴³ Just as Mrs. Bennett is deaf to the damage she causes Jane's chances at an advantageous match, her attention is so absorbed by her frustrated scheme that she is equally deaf to her older daughter's melancholy disappointment in Mr. Bingley. Steadfastly patient as Jane is, she cannot help but wish with a twinge of exasperation: "Oh! that my dear mother had more command over herself; she can have no idea of the pain she gives me by her continual reflections on him."⁴⁴ Careless as she is of Jane's feelings, Mrs. Bennett is even more ignorant of Elizabeth's. Not only does Mrs. Bennett insist on Elizabeth's marrying Mr. Collins, a man she finds physically, emotionally, and intellectually repulsive, but she sinks Elizabeth into the misery of shame as she snubs Mr. Darcy--the man responsible for her youngest daughter's redemptive marriage--pointedly blaming him for Mr. Wickam and Lydia's removal to Newcastle while obsequiously courting Bingley's return to Longbourne. Mrs. Bennett's disregard for Jane and Elizabeth's preference for the dignity of a companionate marriage alienates her from her daughters' affections by taxing Jane's forbearance and becoming an object of scorn to Elizabeth.

Far from being an obstacle to her daughters' romantic relationships, Mrs. Dashwood's own excessive sensibility encourages both Elinor and Marianne to enter into

⁴² Austen, *Emma*, 1.

⁴³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 68.

⁴⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 90.

dangerous emotional attachments. Months after her husband's death, Mrs. Dashwood remains at Norland despite her daughter-in-law's cold hospitality because she wishes to encourage a "growing attachment between her eldest girl and the brother of Mrs. John Dashwood, a gentlemanlike and pleasing young man."⁴⁵ When she is forced to leave Norland due to Fanny Dashwood's disapprobation of the match, Mrs. Dashwood continues to encourage Edward Ferrars's affection with a warm invitation to her new abode, Barton Cottage. Though confused by Edward's "want of pleasure and readiness" in accepting her invitation and by Elinor's self-enforced restraint when speaking of him, Mrs. Dashwood nonetheless refuses to ask her daughter the nature of her relationship to the young man she believes to be her suitor because she wishes to respect her daughter's sensibility and nurtures their inappropriate acquaintance instead.⁴⁶ Mrs. Dashwood chooses to follow the same course of action with near disastrous results when Marianne's relationship with Willoughby becomes a matter of concern. Even after Mrs. Dashwood finds her daughter distraught by Willoughby's unexpected departure from Devonshire, she refuses to ask Marianne whether she has entered into an engagement with this supposed suitor despite Elinor's concerned urging. Wishing to believe that Willoughby and Marianne's affection is a confirmation of their engagement, Mrs. Dashwood prefers to honor Marianne's sensibility to her welfare. She explains her reasoning to Elinor thus: "Supposing it possible that they are not engaged, what distress would not such an inquiry inflict!...I should never deserve her confidence again, after forcing from her a confession of what is meant at present to be unacknowledged to any one..."⁴⁷ Mrs. Dashwood's wish to preserve her daughters' confidence over their well being promotes both Elinor's and Marianne's entrance into dangerous and unsatisfactory relationships. Although Elinor does marry Edward Ferrars, she must suffer through the uncertainty and humiliation of his secret engagement to Lucy

⁴⁵ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 13.

⁴⁶ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 31.

⁴⁷ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 63.

Steele. Marianne, deeply wounded by Willoughby's desertion, must survive not only near social ruin but the severe illness brought about by disappointed passion.

It is not only physical but intellectual distance that make *Northanger Abbey's* Mrs. Morland and *Mansfield Park's* Mrs. Price absentee mothers. Mrs. Morland, "a woman of useful plain sense, with a good temper, and...with a good constitution,"⁴⁸ is nonetheless "so much occupied in lying-in and teaching the little ones, that her elder daughters were inevitably left to shift for themselves."⁴⁹ When the neighboring Allens invite Catherine, her eldest, to a six-week visit to Bath, Mrs. Morland's maternal anxiety does not "oppress her heart with sadness" but limits itself to giving her daughter advice about the value of keeping her throat warm and her account book in order.⁵⁰ As Catherine is to be the heroine of her own story, however, she meets not "the violence of such noblemen and baronets as delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farm-house" but the petty caprice of a greedy general who banishes her from Northanger Abbey without an explanation, separates her from the hero--if only temporarily--and condemns her to "a journey of several miles, to be taken by post...alone, [and] unattended."⁵¹ Mrs. Morland's sensible advice, therefore, is woefully inadequate since it does not prepare her daughter for the fickleness of the worldly dangers she encounters. Even after Catherine returns to her surprised family, Mrs. Morland simply concludes: "...perhaps there is no great harm done...now you have been forced to have your wits about you...I hope it will appear that you have not left any thing behind you in any of the pockets."⁵² When a dejected Catherine does not immediately contribute to the work to be done in the home, Mrs. Morland does not suspect that her daughter's listlessness is due to disappointed love but attributes her behavior to "growing into quite a fine lady": "Your head runs too much upon Bath; but there is a time for everything--a time for balls and plays, and a time for work. You have had a long run of amusement, and now you must

⁴⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 5.

⁴⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 7.

⁵⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 9.

⁵¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 155.

⁵² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 162.

try to be useful."⁵³ It is not until Henry Tilney himself arrives at the parsonage that Mrs. Morland realizes love is the true cause of Catherine's languid, irritated spirits. Though Mrs. Morland is an affectionate parent, it is clear that her "useful plain sense" proves inadequate to guide her imaginative daughter in her journey to Bath and into the world of romance.

Mansfield Park's Mrs. Price cannot be said to possess even this useful plain sense. Her mind, beleaguered by the evils of an imprudent match--poverty and a numerous, unmanageable family--has grown too coarse to relate to her long-absent eldest daughter. Fanny Price, whose mind is refined by her time at Mansfield and used to her Aunt Bertram's not unkind, placid treatment of her, finds herself to be painfully insignificant in her own mother's eyes: Mrs. Price's "heart and her time were already quite full; she had neither leisure nor affection to bestow on Fanny. Her daughters never had been much to her. She was fond of her sons, especially of William...William was her pride; Betsey her darling; and John, Richard, Sam, Tom, and Charles occupied all the rest of her maternal solicitude."⁵⁴ Although expecting to be of consequence with her mother and to find the repose of affection and confidence in a mind similar to her own, Fanny finds that she cannot even respect Mrs. Price:

She must and did feel that her mother was a partial, ill-judging parent, a dawdler, a slattern, who neither taught nor restrained her children, whose house was the scene of mismanagement and discomfort from beginning to end, and who had no talent, no conversation, no affection towards herself; no curiosity to know her better, no desire for her friendship, and no inclination for her company...⁵⁵

Although Fanny's disappointment in her mother is prompted by her parent's emotional coldness, her criticism is first and foremost grounded on her rational shortcomings: Mrs. Price's dull, indolent mind--better suited to Lady Bertram's lifestyle than to the "exertions

⁵³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 165.

⁵⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 264-265.

⁵⁵ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 265.

and self-denials" of her own situation--is reflected in her lack of abilities, talent, or conversation. The effects of such an ignorant mind extend to her disorderly home and her ignorant children. It is no surprise, therefore, that a serious, cultivated mind like Fanny's revolts from Mrs. Price's coarse understanding.

Because the missing mother's influence is displaced, the heroine must look to a sister, a close female friend who serves as surrogate kin, or a new female acquaintance to explore areas of authority and rearticulate notions of womanhood.⁵⁶ Although these three concentric, socially expanding relationships between women do not appear simultaneously in any one of Jane Austen's published works, each type of relationship is portrayed in two separate novels. When viewed as a whole, the six novels reflect the notion that the heroine's subjective identity as a woman begins in the family and expands beyond it as her network of female support becomes grounded in increasingly socially distant relationships.⁵⁷ For example, *Pride and Prejudice* as well as *Sense and Sensibility* portray close attachments between two pairs of sisters, Elizabeth and Jane Bennett and Elinor and Marianne Dashwood respectively. Though not related by blood, *Persuasion's* Anne Elliot and Lady Russell as well as *Northanger Abbey's* Catharine Morland and Isabella Thorpe effectively redefine their close friendship in terms of kinship: the friendship between Anne and Lady Russell is so profound that theirs is a surrogate relationship between mother and daughter. Similarly, Catharine's quickly advancing friendship with Isabella as well as Isabella's expected marriage to

⁵⁶ Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters*, 23. According to Greenfield, the absent mother plays a critical role "in determining kinship relationships."

⁵⁷ In *The English Novel in History, 1700-1870*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 7, John Richetti posits that because "the early novel tends to follow a protagonist's internal development both in relation to and in reaction against 'a nuclear family,'" the family is the origin of the individual's subjective identity. However, since Austen's novels primarily portray the world of female homosocial networks, they promote in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* the heroine's internal development in a reaction against the absent mother and in relation to another close blood tie--the tie of sisterhood. Because the family is the initial source of the heroine's subjectivity, the heroines in Austen's overall oeuvre reflect the need to search for their identity within their family and then expand to relationships with women who are no longer related by blood when familial ties become undesirable or nonexistent.

Catherine's brother leads her to think of the older girl as a surrogate sister.⁵⁸ Though the women in these two novels are not biologically related, they are nonetheless imposing their own system of organization arising out of their own female culture.⁵⁹ Because *Emma's* heroine and *Mansfield Park's* Fanny Price have neither a close sister nor an intimate friend on whom to confide, they must look beyond family affiliations--whether defined by blood or by preference--to forge their identity. Emma fashions what is ultimately a hostile attachment out of a passing acquaintance with her social inferior, Harriet Smith, while Fanny Price is compelled to balance an uneasy closeness and a rooted rivalry in her relationship with Mary Crawford.

Whether the female dyads mentioned above exist between sisters, surrogate relatives, or acquaintances, all relationships possess friendship at their core. This nucleus is social in nature since it does not consist in "pitting women against society but rather smoothing their passage within it."⁶⁰ Indeed, each heroine's friendship helps her achieve a successful marriage that eases her transition from the homogeneous world of women to an improved or raised social status within her larger heterosexual society. At the same time, all of the friendships depicted in Austen's novels are political as well because they take "some action against the social system, its institutions and conventions."⁶¹ Though none of Austen's heroines are progressive figures "seeking to change the society in which [they] live," their friendships become political because they articulate the heroines' visibility and give importance to their concerns.⁶² By stimulating the heroines' sense of self, friendships

⁵⁸ Kaplan, *Jane Austen Among Women*, 66. Deborah Kaplan observes that when women were not in fact relatives, kinship often served as a metaphor for their relationships. Many women signaled their affection by asserting family connections with women to whom they were not related or not as related as their forms of address suggested."

⁵⁹ Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy of Sex,'" in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 35. Rubin points out that "kinship is explicitly conceived of as an imposition of cultural organization upon the facts of biological creation." Typically, this cultural organization of biological ties is based on the interests of an all male society. However, Anne Elliot and Lady Russell as well as Catharine Morland and Isabella Thorpe are imposing their own cultural interpretation upon biological ties based on the interests of an all female society.

⁶⁰ Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature*, 4.

⁶¹ Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature*, 4.

⁶² Karen Newman, "Can This Marriage Be Saved: Jane Austen Makes Sense of an Ending," *ELH* 50.4 (1983): 706.

between women help them gain entry into the larger heterosexual culture not as creatures relative to men but as “morally and intellectually autonomous” individuals.⁶³ Austen’s heroines do not wish to make a radical break with the institution of marriage--the traditional means of social success for women of their social class. Yet, each heroine’s friendship with another woman allows her to improve her condition within the marriage by making her an important figure of intellectual autonomy and moral integrity within the home and the larger community rather than the silent cipher so strikingly portrayed by *Mansfield Park’s* vapid Lady Bertram.

It is essential to note that these friendships are not erotic in nature. Authors like Adrienne Rich insist on including all friendships among and between women as part of a lesbian continuum even if such women have not had or have not “consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman.”⁶⁴ According to Rich, women who engage in “forms of primary intensity...including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support” are nonetheless part of such a continuum.⁶⁵ However emotionally intense the bonds with other women forged by Austen’s heroines, there is no evidence to support that they viewed their relationships as erotic in any way.

The female friendships portrayed in Jane Austen’s novels are shaped by unique differences as well. While the relationships in which all of Austen’s heroines engage begin as social and political friendships, they are also defined by ranging degrees of emotional support and manipulation.⁶⁶ Friendships engendered within the family, friends by blood, such as those portrayed in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* display the greatest degree of emotional interdependence. The emotional centrality between the sisters

⁶³ Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, 169.

⁶⁴ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience,” in *Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 217.

⁶⁵ Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality,” 217.

⁶⁶ Todd, *Women’s Friendship in Literature*, 3-4. Todd labels friendships providing “close emotional support” as sentimental friendships while identifying as manipulative friendships those in which “one woman uses another, controls her and joys in the control.”

is evident when they share the same sentiment or when they possess the same personal characteristic. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, the profound emotional connection between Elizabeth and Jane Bennet is evident early on in the novel when "Elizabeth felt Jane's pleasure."⁶⁷ Elizabeth does not simply see Jane's pleasure or understand Jane's pleasure--their emotional connection allows Elizabeth to feel exactly what Jane feels. Although the relationship between Elinor and Marianne Dashwood is less placid, their emotional affinity is no less deep. In *Sense and Sensibility*, however, the sisters' emotional centrality in each other's lives is expressed in their shared personal traits. While it is often believed that Elinor personifies sense and Marianne sensibility, both women are tightly linked by the sense and the sensibility that both possess though they may not initially value these traits equally. In addition, both sisters share the same feelings of heartbreak and disappointment not simply when they mourn their own lover's betrayal but when each woman feels her sister's desertion as if it were her own. Just as Elizabeth Bennet feels Jane's pleasure, so does Elinor Dashwood feel Marianne's "sickness at heart" when she realizes Willoughby's betrayal and gives way to "a burst of tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne's."⁶⁸ Although the deep emotional interdependence between Elizabeth and Jane Bennet and Elinor and Marianne Dashwood is permanent throughout and beyond the pages of their respective novels, it is not based on unquestioning consensus or blind approval between them. Indeed, each woman in the dyad identifies herself as a different entity from her sister based on her own individual perspective and understanding. Both in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, the heroines' consciousness of their feminine selves grows as they see themselves through the discerning eyes of their sisters and develop an autonomous sense of self. Within the safety of these supportive relationships, each heroine questions the social circumstances surrounding her and

⁶⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 9.

⁶⁸ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 128,129.

compares and pits her own opinion against her sister, a loving critic--but a critic nonetheless.

Friendships created within surrogate kinship, friends by affinity, such as those found in *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* at first provide the heroine with emotional support but incorporate an element of manipulative control as the novel progresses. Initially, the heroine enjoys the same supportive environment protecting friendships between sisters by blood, but she gradually realizes that she must confront her friend's manipulative disapproval as she pursues her sense of self and transitions from the homosocial world of their friendship to the heterosexual world of marriage. In her preface to the Norton edition of *Persuasion*, Patricia Meyer Spacks notes that "goodness can include resistance as well as persuadability--and it by no means precludes private judgment."⁶⁹ This fine line between resistance and persuadability is one that Anne Elliot must walk as her relationship with Lady Russell, her closest friend and surrogate mother, tests her judgment. Lady Elliot's friendship not only attracts the widowed Lady Russell to Kellynch but transforms her into her daughters' substitute guardian in light of Sir Walter Elliot's empty existence. Because Elizabeth and Mary, Anne's sisters, refuse to recognize Lady Russell's role in their lives while a lonely, neglected Anne welcomes it, their friendship becomes a relationship based on kinship as Lady Russell becomes Anne Elliot's surrogate mother. Lady Russell plays upon the image of the mother to influence Anne's choice of suitor. Not only has she used her motherly influence to persuade Anne to break her engagement to the destitute Frederick Wentworth eight years before the beginning of the narrative, but she attempts to persuade her to accept her cousin, Mr. Elliot, by presenting before Anne a mirage-like image of her mother. Eight year's misery, however, have hardened Anne's persuadability into resistance. When Frederick Wentworth returns to Anne's life as a prosperous captain, gaining her affection but not Lady Russell's approval, Anne Elliot resolves to accept him defying the

⁶⁹ Patricia Meyer Spacks, introduction to *Persuasion*, by Jane Austen (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995) x.

disapproval of her surrogate mother. When Ann breaks free of Lady Russell's well-intentioned but nonetheless manipulative control, she learns that being persuaded without her own judgment leads to the loss of her own authority.

As *Northanger Abbey* illustrates, however, an incorrect surrogate relationship does not lead the heroine to the recognition of her own authority. Catherine Morland, the narrative plainly states, is a heroine in search of her place in the world. As stated above, Mrs. Morland's inability to accompany her daughter to Bath, Catherine's first incursion into the outside world, as well as her pragmatic mind makes her an absentee mother--an inadequate guide who cannot fulfill her daughter's need to define herself. Mrs. Allen, the Morland's neighbor, becomes Catherine's chaperone but--unlike Lady Russell--she is a poor substitute for a mother since she is filled with a "most placid indifference" for everyone and everything except for her own attire.⁷⁰ Catherine, then, is unable to look to Mrs. Allen as a surrogate parent and is therefore unable to establish the necessary relationship to evoke her identity and trust her own authority. Catherine does form a surrogate relationship, but it is a fallacious one. Instead of relying on a surrogate mother, Catherine looks to the duplicitous Isabella Thorpe as a surrogate sister. An inexperienced Catherine, engrossed by her own "raised, restless, and frightened imagination" and "fearful of hazarding an opinion" of her own, is no match for Isabella's manipulation.⁷¹ The older girl, a cunning young woman without many financial resources or marriage prospects, quickly spins the illusion of deep friendship almost resembling sisterhood to lure Catherine's brother, James, closer to a proposal. Through contradictory statements and the vapid, stale conventions of sentimental friendship, Isabella blinds Catherine to her designs on her brother and then to her desire for Frederick Tilney. Because Catherine mistakenly defines Isabella as her surrogate sister, she is not capable of defining herself as her own source of truth and authority. Though Catherine becomes critical of her former friend when Isabella reveals her treachery, she is

⁷⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 40.

⁷¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 31.

unable to extrapolate her knowledge of duplicity in her dealings with General Tilney. As the heroine of her own tale, Catherine must know her own mind, but she allows her surrogate sister to define her reality.

Lastly, friendships existing beyond the realm of the family--whether this family is biologically or socially constructed--or friends by circumstance, such as those present in *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* are predominantly defined by manipulation and not by support. The heroine, bereft of a confidante on whom to depend, settles into a precarious friendship with a woman of her acquaintance. Instead of affinity, she finds herself and her unsatisfactory companion locked into a cycle of manipulation she must override in order for her moral and social self to blossom. As a result of the inherent tension in these relationships, these volatile friendships either degenerate into hostility or have rivalry at their very core.

In *Mansfield Park*, the relationship between Fanny Price and Mary Crawford is certainly shaped by the heroine's resistance to her companion's manipulation. The increasing familiarity between the Bertrams and the recently arrived Crawfords brings Mary Crawford and Fanny Price into close contact. Mary Crawford, a sophisticated, self-assured addition to Mansfield, and Fanny Price, the Bertram's impoverished, oft-neglected relative, occupy such disparate positions within this acquaintance that a friendship between them seems impossible. Though Mary finds a semblance of companionship among her social equals, the Bertram daughters, she soon turns a friendly eye towards a reluctant Fanny. After her cousins' departure, Fanny Price's social value increases not only with the Bertrams but with the Crawfords as well. Although Fanny has gone previously unnoticed by Henry Crawford, he now sees she is "indescribably improved" and cannot be content until he makes "a small hole in Fanny Price's heart."⁷² Similarly, though previously Mary has felt pity for Fanny's treatment at the impertinent hands of Mrs. Norris, Fanny now becomes a most acceptable companion to Mary Crawford on gloomy November walks. As their relationship

⁷² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 157.

progresses, Fanny's poor opinion of Mary's corrupted mind is confirmed, yet she is "obliged to submit" to Mary's friendship just as she is forced to accept her unwanted attentions after she is overtaken by a storm close to the parsonage.⁷³ Indeed, Mary desires to be close to Fanny not only because her brother has enlisted her help in currying the resisting girl's favor, but also because Fanny brings her closer to Edmund Bertram. In an initial gesture of self-interested friendship during the doomed theatricals at Mansfield, Mary seeks Fanny's room to rehearse the lines of the bold Amelia and notices Fanny's resemblance to her cousin: "You must rehearse with me, that I may fancy *you* him, and get on by degrees. You *have* a look of *his* sometimes."⁷⁴ Fanny can conjure Edmund before Mary not only in memory but in fact as well when Edmund himself seeks Fanny's help and appears in the room. It is no coincidence then, that Mary coerces Fanny's friendship even as she refuses to accept Edmund's decision to take religious orders. As her relationship with Edmund becomes much more uncertain, Mary relies on Fanny to bring him closer to her. During Fanny's first reluctant visit to the parsonage alone, for example, Mary oppressively fixes her in place with memories of Edmund: "...you must not set forward while it is so threatening. And besides, I want to play something more to you--a very pretty piece--and your cousin Edmund's prime favourite. You must stay and hear your cousin's favourite."⁷⁵ And similar to the previous scene at Mansfield, Edmund himself is not long in following Mary's memories of him. As a dejected Edmund returns to Mansfield expecting the Crawfords to be many miles away, he enjoys an unexpected and compounded pleasure: he not only finds Mary Crawford at the parsonage, but he finds Fanny her beloved's friend as well. This coerced friendship "between two so very dear to him," is what continues drawing him to the parsonage and to Mary's company despite his best judgment.⁷⁶ Fanny Price, compelled to observe the outward semblance of friendship, cannot enter into a genuine relationship with Mary because of her

⁷³ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 142.

⁷⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 117.

⁷⁵ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 142.

⁷⁶ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 145.

clandestine love for Edmund. This prevailing feeling, then, not only protects Fanny from Henry Crawford's fickle advances but tinges her relationship with Mary with hues of rivalry and not of affection.

Emma opens its narrative to show a heroine who delights in her benevolent manipulation of Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor, her governess, into marriage: "Every body said that Mr. Weston would never marry again...but I believed none of it...If I had not promoted Mr. Weston's visits here, and given many little encouragements, and smoothed many little matters, it might not have come to any thing after all."⁷⁷ Emma disregards Mr. Knightley's almost prophetic warning that she is likely to harm herself instead of doing good to prospective lovers and plans a match for Highbury's curate, Mr. Elton. Miss Taylor quits Hartfield to become Mrs. Weston, and Emma selects Harriet Smith as her companion after a short acquaintance and despite her clearly inferior faculties. Though progressively fearful of loneliness and contempt, of being "an old maid at last, like Miss Bates," Emma assures Harriet that she "shall not be a poor old maid" because "it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be ridiculous, disagreeable old maid! the proper sport of boys and girls."⁷⁸ Nonetheless, Emma unwittingly attempts to ensure Harriet's own celibacy and thereby her companionship when she manipulates her friend's affection away from Robert Martin, the young farmer who is Harriet's only valid suitor and directs it towards men who will not stoop to marry a young woman without fortune or known parentage. After she dictates a vacillating Harriet's refusal of Mr. Martin's written proposal of marriage, Emma revels over her companion's possession, stating, "Now I am secure of you forever."⁷⁹ Moments later, she further bars Harriet from marriage by hinting at Mr. Elton's imagined regard: "The attentions of a certain person can hardly be among the tittle-tattle of Highbury yet. Hitherto I fancy you and I are the only people to whom his looks and manners have explained

⁷⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 6.

⁷⁸ Austen, *Emma*, 56.

⁷⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 33.

themselves."⁸⁰ The cycle of manipulation that bonds Emma and Harriet finally breaks when Emma can no longer control the direction of Harriet's affections: despite her explicit refusal to interfere in the direction of her friend's feelings, Emma subtly attempts to guide her companion's hopes to a future marriage to Frank Churchill while Harriet herself has pinned her own hopes on a match to Mr. Knightley that Emma simply cannot endorse.

In this world populated by mothers, daughters, and sisters as well as by female friends and acquaintances, the Austen heroine, then, is attached to a woman who becomes her emotional center. For Austen and her contemporaries, the female relationships in which they engage validate their experience by creating a "secure and empathetic world" free of "hostility and criticism" where they "could develop a sense of inner security and self-esteem" as they shared their "sorrows, anxieties, and joys."⁸¹ To the contrary, in Austen's novels the emotional centrality of a woman in the heroine's life is never completely free of criticism. While criticism and hostility are present in greater degree in manipulative friendships, disagreement is part even of the friendships providing the most emotional support. For example, the friendship between Elizabeth and Jane Bennett and between Elinor and Marianne Dashwood is never based in an unquestioning acceptance of the heroine. Even in these relationships where the sisters create a "secure and empathetic world" with their mutual love, trust, and support, the heroine's sense of identity and self-esteem is based on her ability to question her expected role in the larger heterosexual culture and to express "self-concern, autonomy, and dissent," especially when this dissent expresses an opinion contrary to her sister's. Despite this dissent, however, their relationship remains intact.

In the female dyads present in Austen novels, the heroine's friend derives her importance from her ability to help the heroine achieve a sense of self. We have already

⁸⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 35.

⁸¹ Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," 14.

seen that all relationships between women in these texts begin as friendships that emerge from and extend beyond the family and that develop each heroine's consciousness either through disagreement, criticism, or hostility. It is important to note as well, however, that each friendship's change in dynamics is also contingent upon a central male figure. This male character serves to shape the initial friendship, to motivate it, so to speak, out of a utopian complacency of emotional support--whether permanent or temporary--with which each relationship begins and into conflict between the friends. Therefore, when the male term comes into contact with this original female dyad, the structure now becomes triangular in nature. It is equally important to note that the male term chosen to be connected to the female dyad is a character who acts as an "emotional point of reference" for at least one woman in the dyad.⁸² That is to say, the male term must be united by desire to at least one woman in the dyad. For example, the element of disagreement between Elizabeth and Jane Bennett is introduced when Mr. Darcy is incorporated into their relationship. Equally, the element of stronger criticism is introduced into the friendship between Anne Elliot and Lady Russell when Captain Wentworth, Anne's former suitor, comes into their lives once again. When the male term is joined by desire to both women in the dyad, then the women's attachment is defined by rivalry and hostility since both must compete for his affection. For example, Mr. Knightley activates the undercurrent of rivalry between Emma and Harriet while Edmund Bertram prompts Fanny Price Mary Crawford's thinly veiled opposition. In truth, it is not that female relationships in Austen's novels may only exist in the presence of a male. I argue that friendships between women predominantly exist away from the male gaze, but it is an important male figure--the hero--who changes the dynamic of this relationship, allowing it to facilitate the heroine's successful passage from the homosocial world of female networks to the heterosocial world of marriage.

Whereas varying degrees of support and hostility join the two female companions, the male figure is attached to this relationship by romantic love and so transforms the

⁸² Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 38.

female dyad into a triangular relationship. Although this female dyad comes into contact with several men of their acquaintance, it is the hero alone who can enhance the friendship's potential to stimulate the heroine's empowering knowledge of self. When female friendship is sustained mainly through support, it is the mutual attraction the heroine and the hero feel for each other that incorporates the male into the female dyad. When female friendship is sustained mainly through rivalry, it is the attraction both the heroine herself as well as her friend feel for the hero as well as the hero's real or perceived attraction for one or both women that includes him into this dyad. The male figure's transformative potential is explained by more than his preeminent presence in the narrative or even by the moral, intellectual, or social superiority he exhibits in comparison with other men.⁸³ In most of Austen's novels--*Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma*, the hero's ability to transform the heroine's female friendship into a vehicle of her identity is wholly dependent on whether his moral, intellectual, or social superiority is able to improve the heroine. As Julia Prewitt Brown observes, these heroines are women who seek "to know themselves and control their lives...marry the men who have helped them most in this struggle, who have been the most critical of them and most conscious of their compelling need for honesty."⁸⁴ Mr. Knightley, for instance, is the only person in Highbury who is socially superior to the class-conscious Emma. Additionally, his intellectual and moral superiority leads him not only to warn Emma against manipulating Mr. Elton to be Harriet's suitor and later in the novel to dance with Harriet to save her from the Eltons' intended humiliation at the Crown Inn ball but to remind Emma of the social responsibility she bears. When Emma gives in to temptation during the Box Hill outing and humiliates Miss Bates by reminding her that she is limited to say only three very dull things, Mr. Knightley reprimands her thus:

⁸³ Charles H. Hinnant, "Jane Austen's 'Wild Imagination': Romance and the Courtship Plot in the Six Canonical Novels," *Narrative* 14.3 (2006): 294.

⁸⁴ Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels*, 14.

How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation?...She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done indeed!--You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honour, to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her...⁸⁵

Alive to the shame of her actions, a blushing Emma nonetheless attempts to diminish the significance of her words, but she cannot escape the justice of Mr. Knightley's reproach. Because of him, Emma realizes the severity of her blunder: her words are not simply the result of the thoughtless unease of a bored afternoon--they represent a deep breach in the social contract of Highbury. The advantages of her status are not free from consequences: as one of the foremost member of the village, Emma is to be the benefactress easing the discomfort of those beneath her. Resolved to mend her error, then, Emma visits the Bateses and accords them the respect due.

Although it is also the case in *Pride and Prejudice* as well, it is *Persuasion* that presents a certain reversal in the choice of the transformative hero. This essential male figure does possess moral, intellectual, or social superiority--especially when compared to other men, but he requires further improvement by the heroine. Captain Frederick Wentworth is certainly superior to the boorish Charles Musgrove in intellect, to the duplicitous Mr. Elliot in morality, and even to his poor and sick naval brothers in social standing, yet he must learn to understand and appreciate Anne Elliot's resolute mind. Blind to his own bitterness, he returns to Somersetshire eight years after Anne dissolves their engagement at the urging of Lady Russell. He is resolved to find a suitable bride and

⁸⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 245-246.

believes that in Louisa Musgrove he has found the “strength of mind” lacking in Anne.⁸⁶ As Louisa falls from the steps at the Cobb, however, this fortitude of mind crumbles before Frederick Wentworth to reveal only a foolish, dangerous obstinacy. At this very moment, it is Anne’s mind that begins its ascendancy over him once again. Amidst the panic of those assembled at the scene, it is Anne who, “attending with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, still tried, at intervals, to suggest comfort to the others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth.”⁸⁷ But it is the overheard conversation between Anne and Captain Harville, when she reveals a mind resigned to “loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone,” that Wentworth conclusively realizes how unjust he has been “to her merits.”⁸⁸ He openly acknowledges at this point, “her character was now fixed on his mind as perfection itself, maintaining the loveliest medium of fortitude and gentleness.”⁸⁹ Captain Wentworth returns to Anne’s society basking in the pride of his newfound social and economic mobility and in what he believes to be his emotional independence. Nonetheless, it is only when he has Louisa Musgrove’s intractable mind before him that he may begin to understand Anne’s cultivated mind and realize that it was not weakness but fortitude that allowed Anne to break their previous engagement. As the narrative concludes, Wentworth’s intellectual, moral, and social superiority is no longer obstructed by the bitterness of anger.

When the female couple embraces a male figure and becomes triangular in nature, it becomes an accurate reflection of the role female networks played within the larger heterogeneous culture. According to Julia Prewitt Brown, “the feminist depreciation of Jane Austen hinges on the question of marriage...did she or did she not advocate traditional, patriarchal marriage? Feminists tend to argue that she did: despite the irony and satire, all

⁸⁶ Austen, *Persuasion*, 58.

⁸⁷ Austen, *Persuasion*, 75.

⁸⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, 157, 161.

⁸⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 161.

the novels end in marriage, affirming her allegiance to what is called the established order."⁹⁰ Nina Auerbach, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Claudia Johnson, for example, take Jane Austen to task for "failing `extensively to consider female friendship as an important alternative to the marital relationship."⁹¹ In contrast, I suggest that looking at a closer look at friendships between women in Austen's novels reveals how unproductive it is to view relationships between women as an alternative to marriage because it ignores the social reality that the heroine inhabits. The marriage with which each of her six novels closes is not "a romantic love story in which social and economic realities of nineteenth-century women's lives are exposed but undermined by comedy, irony, and marriage,"⁹² nor are they "a metaphor for self-knowledge, the overcoming of egoism and the mark of psychic development."⁹³ These marriages "reflect the social and legal limitations that women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries faced."⁹⁴ Marriage, in other words, was the only viable means of social survival and success open to Austen's heroines. However, because the institution of marriage itself was part of the larger heterogeneous society that did not value women's experience, female friendships allowed women to develop a strong sense of self, a safe emotional space where they exerted "willful self-making" and were motivated by their growing sense of identity as they "reconceive a girl's progress as the building of [ties] between women."⁹⁵ In Austen's novels, the bonds heroines forge with other women allow them to "live powerfully within...the limitations imposed by late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English society"⁹⁶ as they transition from their homogeneous present to a heterogeneous future.

⁹⁰ Julia Prewitt Brown, "The Feminist Depreciation of Austen: A Polemical Reading," review of *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, by Claudia Johnson, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 23.3 (1990): 305.

⁹¹ Brown, "The Feminist Depreciation of Austen," 311.

⁹² Newman, "Can This Marriage Be Saved," 693.

⁹³ Newman, "Can This Marriage Be Saved," 694.

⁹⁴ Newman, "Can This Marriage Be Saved," 694.

⁹⁵ Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women*, 10.

⁹⁶ Newman, "Can This Marriage Be Saved," 705.

Chapter One: Friends by Blood--Sororal Friendships in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*

Death and oftentimes parental negligence make the world inhabited by the two eldest Bennet and Dashwood sisters a dangerous place. The entailment of the family's estate on the male line and the father's failure to provide effective financial support deprive these heroines of an essential resource necessary to make marriages ensuring their economic, social, and emotional survival. Despite expectations, however, these four women refuse to be marginalized by their circumstances and, by the end of their respective narratives, have not only escaped a life of impoverished spinsterhood but have made good marriages--some have even made brilliant matches--that defy the identities of expendable women socially assigned to them at the beginning of their stories. Neither plummeting standards like Charlotte Lucas' nor base tricks like Lucy Steele's result in the heroines' improved fortunes, however. It is their own strong sense of self, forged at the core of their family that allows them to redefine their social worth. The sisterly dyad existing between Elizabeth and Jane Bennet and Elinor and Marianne Dashwood respectively creates a safe haven in which they may openly voice their opinions, be heard, and even experience "the compliment of rational opposition."¹ As each heroine views herself in her sister's eyes, her "imagination flexes its muscles and critical thinking is born."² This critical thinking, then, allows the heroine to re-imagine herself. In providing a kind yet critical audience, the sister becomes an indispensable friend as well. However, the hero must mediate this self-image. It is the hero, with his particular faults and virtues, who not only stands out from the gentlemen of the heroine's acquaintance, but who prompts active discussion and differentiation within the sisterly dyad. The heroine's triangulated friendship first promotes a

¹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 178.

² Hina Nazar, "The Imagination Goes Visiting: Jane Austen, Judgment, and the Social," *Nineteenth Century Literature* 59.2 (2004): 159.

conversation with the self in order to project it to others. In this manner, the heroine elides the negative social identity imposed upon her.

Pride and Prejudice

Pride and Prejudice opens with the “universally acknowledged” truth that “a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.”³ Nonetheless, this apparent absolute is promptly undermined: “However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.”⁴ Although the novel’s initial statement presents the single gentleman as a desiring subject in search of a spouse, the local families expeditiously transform him into a coveted object that will soon belong to one of their daughters.

The dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet that immediately follows the previous statements further reveals that it is the mothers of such families in particular who turn an acquisitive eye to the wealthy newcomer. Mrs. Bennet not only informs her apathetic husband that Netherfield Park is “let at last” but urges him to visit the young man to initiate a much-desired acquaintance.⁵ Mrs. Bennet assumes with ill-disguised glee the possibility that Mr. Bingley will be the potential property of one of her daughters: “A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!”⁶ Though Mrs. Bennet does not directly mention marriage, her words mirror the hope that this as of yet unseen young man will not only marry one of her daughters, but that this marriage will benefit all of her “girls.” When Mr. Bingley’s marked attention to Jane seems to fulfill Mrs. Bennet’s sanguine expectations, she makes her views painfully explicit at the Netherfield ball. Much to Elizabeth’s surprise and shame, she loudly shares with Lady Lucas her

³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 3.

⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 3.

⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 3.

⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 3.

ambition that Jane's marriage "must throw" all of her daughters "in the way of other rich men."⁷ While the novel, then, appears to introduce a young man's matrimonial quest, the narrative opens to a world of women--a sphere where women may exercise a degree of social agency. Most women in the novel exert their authority through the traditionally feminine power of influence. Though her efforts at first seem to be in vain, Mrs. Bennet does persuade her husband to wait on Mr. Bingley in order for her daughters to be introduced to the coveted gentleman at the next ball. Mr. Bennet's facetious suggestion that his wife may visit Bingley bearing a note authorizing his paternal consent to the young man's marriage to any one of his daughters ridicules Mrs. Bennet's attempt to appropriate the male prerogative of initiating the direct introduction of her family to the new arrival, yet his wife nonetheless induces him to make the visit.

Similarly, Elizabeth's friend, Charlotte Lucas, brings about her own marriage to the pompous Mr. Collins through the power of manipulation. Aware that Mr. Collins has been humbled by Elizabeth's rejection of his marriage proposal, she assures the relieved Elizabeth of her "satisfaction of being useful" as she draws the parson's vapid conversation to herself in order to secure an offer of matrimony.⁸ Being twenty-seven years old and possessing little beauty and no family fortune, Charlotte is well aware of the impecunious life of spinsterhood that will be her lot shortly. Rather than being a drain on her family's resources, yet "without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony," Charlotte shows tolerable encouragement and quietly but skillfully soothes Mr. Collins's vanity into marriage.⁹ She knows, of course, that he is "neither sensible nor agreeable" because his "society was irksome, and his attachment to her...imaginary."¹⁰ Nonetheless, he is able to provide her the respectable home she seeks. Though pleased at having gained her objective and with so little comparable effort, Charlotte does not look forward to sharing her news

⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 68.

⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 82.

⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 83.

¹⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 83.

with Elizabeth: her friend “would wonder, and probably would blame her; and though her resolution was not to be shaken, her feelings must be hurt by such disapprobation.”¹¹

And indeed, Elizabeth’s incredulity and subsequent disapproval of what she considers to be a most humiliating match is born out of the belief that though “Charlotte’s opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage.”¹² Although Elizabeth condemns Charlotte’s marriage because it confirms her friend’s mercenary motives, she also censures the indirection and subterfuge by which she brings about the proposal. Once before, as both Elizabeth and Charlotte look upon Jane’s placid reception of Mr. Bingley’s attentions, the friends disagree on the best method for bringing about a declaration of love. Charlotte believes that “very few of us...have heart enough to be in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten, a woman better shew more affection than she feels.”¹³ Elizabeth sees this plan practicable only if the goal is simply to obtain a husband without any regard to his nature or character. A woman, she argues, must not act “by design” but may allow her encouragement to be guided not only by the degree of her feelings but also by their “reasonableness.”¹⁴ Yet, Charlotte insists, it is best to secure male affections first before inquiring into his character since “it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life.”¹⁵ Though Elizabeth laughingly dismisses Charlotte’s words saying, “...it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself,” she is astounded when her friend does indeed act according to her words.¹⁶ Using her power of influence--acting by self-serving design--Charlotte has not only accepted but prompted a marriage proposal feeling little but contempt for a man she has known for less than a week.

¹¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 84.

¹² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 85.

¹³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 15.

¹⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 15.

¹⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 16.

¹⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 16.

Though Elizabeth's prospects are as bleak as Charlotte's, her objective is not to gain a husband--any husband--and so, Mr. Collins's marriage proposal to her is doomed to failure. With peculiar abject self-assurance, Mr. Collins begins to push his suit by assuring a thoroughly uncomfortable Elizabeth that he would have found her "less amiable," less desirable, if there "had not been [a] little unwillingness" to hear his suit.¹⁷ As he is to provide for Elizabeth's future, however, Mr. Collins expects his proposal "to be received and even sought for."¹⁸ Before enumerating the mundane litany of reasons for his seeking matrimony, he attempts to flatter Elizabeth by acknowledging that her "natural delicacy" may cause her to "dissemble."¹⁹ According to him, "it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or even a third time."²⁰ Undeterred by Elizabeth's assurance that her refusal is not the practice of an "elegant female" but the judgment of a rational being, Mr. Collins concludes that her words are merely calculated to "encourage my suit as would be consistent with the true delicacy of the female character."²¹

Twice throughout this ill-fated proposal, Mr. Collins uses the word "delicacy" to delineate Elizabeth's character, and although he attempts to use the term to connote softness of temperament, his understanding--such as it is--equates female delicacy with moral frailty.²² In order to obtain a husband, he believes, the elegant woman calculatingly inflames her admirer's ardor by dabbling in deceit--she rejects him repeatedly, hoping to

¹⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 72.

¹⁸ Judith Lowder Newton, "'Pride and Prejudice': Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen," *Feminist Studies*, 4.1 (1978): 31.

¹⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 72.

²⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 72, 73.

²¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 74.

²² Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 33. Mellor explains that the eighteenth century's "gender definition of the female" was "as innately emotional, intuitive, illogical, capable of moral sentiment but not of rational understanding." Mr. Collins's proposal demonstrates that he views women as deeply illogical and incapable of rational understanding--women will reject the man they secretly mean to marry multiple times. Additionally, he is unwilling to see them as capable of moral sentiment--women's natural delicacy is really a propensity to dishonesty and mercenary self-interest.

increase her worth as a woman by displaying inordinate false modesty. Mr. Collins--like his dearest Charlotte Lucas--concludes that a young woman in search of a husband will naturally dissemble to manipulate male perception. What Mr. Collins does not perceive, however, is that though Charlotte displays none of that unwillingness he appeared to admire in Elizabeth, she acts the part of the "elegant female." She does not inflame his passion but soothes his bruised vanity to secure an establishment for herself.²³

Charlotte's opinion of matrimony is not exactly like Elizabeth's, and neither is their view on how to best enter into this state. For Charlotte, marriage is solely the means of obtaining a respectable establishment, and she uses her influence to obtain any husband who is able to provide her with one. But because for Elizabeth marriage is the confirmation of her primary identity not simply as a wife but as a social agent, she rejects exerting a manipulative degree of influence over a would be lover. Instead, Elizabeth Bennet seeks a husband who ultimately helps her know herself in the world of men and women, and she begins this journey not looking for a man but looking for her self. And it is a closely-knit friendship with her sister, Jane, that is the best vehicle for the heroine's quest for self-awareness. This emotional connection between the two eldest Bennet sisters enables Elizabeth to define herself as an actor capable of decisive, direct action on the social stage. This attachment subsisting between Elizabeth and Jane demonstrates the potential for self-definition extant in the Bennet sisters' female network.

At first, the five Bennet daughters are identified as almost interchangeable members of this network. Robert Polhemus notes, "Elizabeth is favored and loved by Mr. Bennet but

²³ Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 192. Poovey observes that "in order to win the husband necessary to their social position, women must gratify both of men's desires by concealing whatever genuine emotions they feel so as to allow men to believe that they have the power. Women must use indirection, in other words, the allure of 'romantic refinements,' and the subterfuges of manners and modesty in order to arouse male desires and assuage male anxieties." While Charlotte uses whatever 'romantic refinements' are at her disposal--namely a suitable tolerance for Mr. Collins' conversation--Elizabeth refuses his suit, and in doing so refuses to assume expected female behavior.

demeaned as a female."²⁴ Indeed, Mr. Bennet harshly observes that his daughters "have none of them much to recommend them...they are all silly and ignorant like other girls."²⁵ However, he distinguishes Elizabeth as having "something more of quickness than her sisters."²⁶ Mrs. Bennet, with whom Elizabeth is far from being a favorite, characterizes Jane as "handsome," Lydia as "good humoured," and Kitty as a mere annoyance for "coughing so," yet neither of the traits mentioned by their parents are sufficient to delineate each sister's characters.²⁷ At best, the neighboring community views the Bennet sisters as young ladies of renowned beauty. At worst, as their father points out, they are as common and ignorant as other young women. As *Pride and Prejudice* progresses, the sisters are further categorized into two separate groups: the foolish and the respectable. Though Mr. Darcy cites the "causes of repugnance" that make him disapprove of Mr. Bingley's match with Jane and, by extension, of his own feelings for Elizabeth, he is nonetheless careful to make a distinction between the ill-advised, indiscreet members of the family and the eldest Bennet sisters.²⁸ He dwells on "that total want of propriety" betrayed not only by Mr. and Mrs. Bennet but by the "three youngest sisters."²⁹ Despite his anger and humiliation at Elizabeth's unceremonious rejection of his proposal, Darcy then calls attention to her and her sister's own laudable behavior: "to have conducted yourselves so as to avoid any share of the like censure, is praise no less generally bestowed on you and your eldest sister, than it is honourable to the sense and disposition of both."³⁰ Mr. Darcy is not the only one to make this distinction. When Elizabeth unsuccessfully attempts to persuade her father not to allow Lydia to go to Brighton with Mrs. Foster and her husband's regiment, Mr. Bennet awakens from his habitual indolence long enough to reassure his daughter of the clear

²⁴ Robert M. Polhemus, *Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D.H. Lawrence*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 36.

²⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 4.

²⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 4.

²⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 4, 6.

²⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 130.

²⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 130-131.

³⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 131.

difference between Elizabeth and Jane and their younger sisters: "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."³¹

Out of the female network composed by the women of two consecutive generations-- Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Phillips, and the more distant Mrs. Gardiner as well as Charlotte Lucas and the Bennet sisters--Elizabeth and Jane emerge as its central dyad: the two young women are not only joined by their beauty and exemplary conduct but by their powerful and mutual emotional attachment. Their strong relationship grows even more steady after Charlotte's acceptance of Mr. Collins: Elizabeth's "disappointment in Charlotte made her turn with fonder regard to her sister" Jane.³² Because her friend's confirmed self-interest and her own aggrieved disapproval of the match forbid the continued existence of any "real confidence" between them, Elizabeth further turns to Jane, certain of her sister's "rectitude and delicacy."³³ Nonetheless, Jane and Elizabeth do not hold equivalent positions both within their relationship or within the narrative itself. While Elizabeth's innermost emotional struggles shape the novel and therefore identify her as its foremost heroine, Jane is her sister's emotional center--her primary source not only of comfort and understanding but also of opposing opinions.³⁴ While it is true that "no other character in the novel" achieves Elizabeth's "measure of self-knowledge or potential for self-rule," it is equally certain that Elizabeth's relationship with Jane allows her to freely exercise the qualities that enable her to succeed in society.³⁵

The sisters' mutual unreserve as well as their individual differences is immediately apparent as they exchange their impressions about the recently arrived party from Netherfield. Though "the Miss Lucases and the Miss Bennets...meet to talk over a ball" as a

³¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 152.

³² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 87.

³³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 87.

³⁴ Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, 188.

³⁵ Newton, "'Pride and Prejudice': Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen," 39.

matter of course, it is only when Jane and Elizabeth are alone that they freely exchange their opinions.³⁶ With the exception of a few divergent assessments of Miss Bingley and her sister Mrs. Hunt at the end of their discussion, Mr. Bingley himself wholly engrosses their conversation. It is with Elizabeth alone that Jane, previously "cautious in her praise of Mr. Bingley," enthusiastically expresses her admiration for him.³⁷ She sees this young man not only as "sensible, good humoured, [and] lively," but she also admires "such happy manner!-so much ease, with such perfect good breeding."³⁸ Jane also openly demonstrates her surprise and her pleasure at Mr. Bingley's singling her out from all the other young women present by asking her to dance a second time. Playfully, Elizabeth counters Jane's comments about Bingley's perfections of character with a more tangible quality: "He is also handsome...which a young man ought to likewise be, if he possibly can. His character is thereby complete."³⁹

Because this conversation between the sisters is an unguarded exchange of opinions, it reveals the sisters' distinct individuality: as Elizabeth reflects on Jane's tractable and candid personality, she simultaneously reveals her own disposition. Elizabeth first displays the sharp critical mind of which she is so proud as her witty response deflates Jane's idealized view of Bingley and emphasizes his sexual appeal. When Elizabeth observes that Bingley's captivating appearance completes his superb character, she is satirically commenting as well on the superficiality with which a young man's character is judged: a desirable young man is understood by the manners he displays at one evening ball and by his physical appearance. Furthermore, Elizabeth answers her sister's modesty, expressed by her surprise at Bingley's second invitation to dance, with confidence not only on Jane's account, but also on her own behalf: "Did not you? I did for you. But that is one great

³⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 13.

³⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 10.

³⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 10.

³⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 10.

difference between us. Compliments always take you by surprise, and me never."⁴⁰ Furthermore, Elizabeth underscores Jane's guileless nature when she tells her sister that she is "a great deal too apt...to like people in general. You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life."⁴¹ With superior "quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper," Elizabeth recognizes that she is apt to censure and criticize her neighbors because she plainly perceives and comments freely on their faults.⁴² The sister's opposite personalities are further presented when Jane responds to her sister's observation: "I would wish not to be hasty in censuring anyone; but I always speak what I think."⁴³ Elizabeth marvels at Jane's ability "to take the good of every body's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad" because this is an aptitude she neither has nor wishes to possess.⁴⁴ Elizabeth's emotional interest in her sister's concerns, then, deepens her judgment as she defines herself against Jane's opinions. As Hina Nazar observes, the heroine's self-awareness flourishes when she sees "others as participants in dialogue, representatives of standpoints that are not identical to [her] own but that are productively engaged in determining [her] own standpoint."⁴⁵

This conversation, however, is designed not only to showcase Elizabeth and Jane's individuality but to demonstrate the transformation of the emotional dyad into a triangular relationship. In the conversation analyzed above, Mr. Bingley's image mediates the sisters' dyad. Jane's attraction for him transforms him into an object of deep discussion, and, by extension, as a sounding board each sister utilizes to delineate her own personality. Elizabeth's praise of her sister not only reveals Jane's tranquil temper, but also her own pride in her observant, critical nature. As the sisters discuss Mr. Bingley, Jane and Elizabeth

⁴⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 10.

⁴¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 10.

⁴² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 11.

⁴³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 10.

⁴⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 11.

⁴⁵ Nazar, "The Imagination Goes Visiting," 173.

emerge as two very different individuals who, in exercising the power of judgment towards a significant male, understand themselves. Mr. Bingley's qualities--not only this acknowledged good looks and equally attractive gentle manners but his less recognized ability to improve Jane's social standing as his wife--are the ideal qualities to prompt the sisters' conversation, cements the intimacy existing between them, and transforms this intimacy into each woman's ability to assess him first and, in the process, to identify themselves. This first emotional triangle in which Elizabeth is involved, however, is not the most consequential since the male term's desire is not for herself but for her sister. As a result, this relationship helps Elizabeth to define herself but neither challenges her own perception of herself nor of her understanding of others.

For Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy is the most significant male term triangulating her relationship with Jane, and effectively enabling her to carve out her own identity in a hostile social landscape.⁴⁶ Not only is he strongly linked to Elizabeth by genuine desire, but as the dance at Netherfield demonstrates, his superior social standing imbues Elizabeth with superior consequence and social visibility. Resentful at what she perceives to be his power to keep Mr. Wickam away from the ball and reluctant to be his dancing partner, Elizabeth cannot help noticing "the dignity to which she was arrived in being allowed to stand opposite to Mr. Darcy."⁴⁷ Though her ability to elicit such a man's attention prompts her neighbors' admiration, not everyone looks upon Elizabeth with quite the same approbation. As Lady Catherine De Bourgh attempts to discern whether Elizabeth is likely to be married to her nephew, she reminds the young woman with little tact but with much truth that she is just as likely to be viewed as an ambitious young upstart who, though lacking "family,

⁴⁶ Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel: Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, and Pride and Prejudice*, (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1983), 88. Fergus observes "Bingley seems to be the hero until Chapter VI, when Darcy's interest in Elizabeth is discovered."

⁴⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 62.

connections, or fortune," wishes to ensnare a young aristocrat and so quit her own inferior sphere.⁴⁸

Although Mr. Darcy himself is not as openly disdainful as Lady Catherine, he understands Elizabeth to be his clear social inferior. Despite his professed admiration for her, Darcy canvasses at length "his sense of her inferiority--of its being a degradation--of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination."⁴⁹ Though Darcy's feelings for her are expressed almost as a putrid fever impossible to master, Elizabeth's inferior rank indicates that she "could not be insensible to the complement of such a man's affections."⁵⁰ Darcy is not only a superbly handsome man--he is also well above the other men of Elizabeth's acquaintance because he is the wealthy heir of a powerful Derbyshire family. Elizabeth, on the other hand, is only the second daughter of a country gentleman at the lower end of the economic spectrum. To make matters worse, his wife's family has degrading connections to trade that "must very materially lessen [his daughters'] chance of marrying men of any consideration in the world."⁵¹ Further sinking Elizabeth and her sisters into certain destitution is the fact that the Longbourne estate is entailed away from the female line so that Elizabeth--along with her sisters and her mother--risk being turned out of their home after Mr. Bennet's death. Despite the fact that marriage to "such a man" as Darcy would save Elizabeth from this despairing future, she rejects his proposal with even more acrimony than she rejected Mr. Collins's earlier one: "If I could feel gratitude," she exclaims, "I would now thank you. But I cannot--I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly."⁵²

While claiming that such an unequivocal refusal does not matter to him, a stunned Darcy haughtily inquires as to the reason for her uncivil response. In addition to her dislike of his proud demeanor and offensive proposal, Elizabeth gives him two more reasons: his

⁴⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 232.

⁴⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 125.

⁵⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 125.

⁵¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 25.

⁵² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 125.

role as “the principal, if not the only means of dividing” Mr. Bingley from Jane and his infliction of Mr. Wickham’s “present state...of comparable poverty.”⁵³ In Elizabeth’s eyes, however, these two reasons are not equally valuable. While she certainly scorns Darcy’s active role in frustrating Wickham’s fortunes, it is his role in preventing Jane’s happy marriage that she cites first, most passionately, and at most length: “Had not my own feelings decided against you, had they been indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?”⁵⁴ Because Elizabeth’s affection and concern for Jane supersedes any benefits of an advantageous match for herself, she challenges Darcy’s “assumed tranquility” by pressing him for an answer: “You dare not, you cannot deny that you have been the principal, if not the only means of dividing them from each other, of exposing one to the censure of the world for caprice and instability, the other to its derision for disappointed hopes.”⁵⁵

It is no coincidence that Jane is uppermost in Elizabeth’s mind as she confronts Darcy. In a previous and final walk with Colonel Fitzwilliam, he relates “a circumstance which Darcy would not wish to be generally known...that he congratulated himself on having lately saved a friend from the inconvenience of a most imprudent marriage.”⁵⁶ Elizabeth’s assumption that it had been Miss Bingley who had been responsible for Bingley and Jane’s separation is challenged as she now realizes that Darcy “was the cause, his pride and caprice were the cause of all that Jane had suffered, and still continued to suffer.”⁵⁷ When Elizabeth returns to the parsonage, she chooses to bring Jane’s presence closer to her by examining her sister’s letters that had been written since her visit to Kent. In these letters, Elizabeth seeks and finds confirmation of Darcy’s wrongs towards Jane. Though these missives “contained no actual complaint,” Elizabeth finds on this second perusal evidence of

⁵³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 127.

⁵⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 126.

⁵⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 126.

⁵⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 122.

⁵⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 123.

Jane's unhappy, perturbed mind: "there was a want of that cheerfulness which had been used to characterize her style, and which, proceeding from the serenity of a mind at ease with itself, and kindly disposed towards every one, had been scarcely ever clouded."⁵⁸ As she reads, Elizabeth gains an ever deeper understanding of Jane through her antagonistic interpretation of Darcy: his "shameful boast of what misery he had been able to inflict, gave her a keener sense of her sister's sufferings."⁵⁹

In turn, Elizabeth's attachment to Jane--her concern for her sister's suffering and her direct anger on her sister's behalf--fuels her confidence to define herself not only as Mr. Darcy's equal but as a superior arbiter of true gentility: in rejecting marriage to Darcy, Elizabeth in fact rejects his definition of who she is. Mr. Darcy erroneously assumes that his "pretensions" are sufficient "to please a woman worthy of being pleased," and he infers that Elizabeth's precarious standing will guarantee her grateful, submissive assent.⁶⁰ When Elizabeth not only refuses to acquiesce to his proposal but even to acknowledge gratitude for his unsought offer, she simultaneously denies her assigned social standing. Darcy assumes that Elizabeth's identity as a lady is tenuous; however, she affirms her own character as a gentlewoman when she calls into question Darcy's own status as a gentleman: "You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner."⁶¹ With this arch statement, Elizabeth dismisses Darcy's notion of social standing--it is neither wealth, nor social status, nor powerful connections but behavior alone that defines an individual's genuine social worth.

In addition to mediating Elizabeth's external identity as a social equal, Darcy's triangulation of her relationship with Jane leads to an irrevocable self-awakening. The

⁵⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 124.

⁵⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 124.

⁶⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 241.

⁶¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 127.

morning after Elizabeth's rejection of Mr. Darcy brings a letter resentfully announcing no "repetition of those sentiments, or renewal of those offers, which were last night so disgusting."⁶² As the letter progresses, however, it brings not only a softening of Darcy's wounded pride in his acknowledgement that her "resentment has not been unreasonable," but also dawning realizations that crash against an initially incredulous Elizabeth. Her first perusal of his letter is tinted with the certainty of decided disbelief and downright anger:

...steadfastly was she persuaded that he could have no explanation to give, which a just sense of shame would not conceal. With a strong prejudice against every thing he might say, she began his account of what had happened at Netherfield...His belief of her sister's insensibility, she instantly resolved to be false, and his account of the real, the worst objections to the match, made her too angry to have any wish of doing him justice. He expressed not regret for what he had done which satisfied her; his style was not penitent, but haughty. It was all pride and insolence.⁶³

As Darcy relates his dealings with Wickham, however, Elizabeth's perturbation gives way to somewhat impartial hesitation as she attempts to objectively consider her former favorite's conduct: Wickham's "countenance, voice, and manner had established him at once in the possession of every virtue. She tried to recollect some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence, that might rescue him from the attacks of Mr. Darcy...But no such recollection befriended her."⁶⁴ Because Elizabeth's sentiments for Wickham are not nearly as powerful as her feelings for Jane, she is willing to believe Darcy's account of their acquaintance and in so doing, Elizabeth experiences a first revolution of mind: "...vanity, not love, has been my folly...I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away...Till this moment, I never knew myself."⁶⁵ Allowing a just

⁶² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 129.

⁶³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 135.

⁶⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 135, 136.

⁶⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 137.

perspective to prevail in regard to Wickham, the subject of one of the accusations leveled at Darcy, Elizabeth now feels the need to apply the same clearheaded perspective to the subject of her second accusation--Jane:

From herself to Jane...her thoughts were in a line which soon brought to her recollection that Mr. Darcy's explanation there, had appeared very insufficient...Widely different was the effect of a second perusal.--How could she deny that credit to his assertions, in one instance, which she had been obliged to give in the other?--He declared himself to have been totally unsuspecting of her sister's attachment...Neither could she deny the justice of his description of Jane.--She felt that Jane's feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and that there was a constant complacency in her air and manner, not often united with great sensibility.⁶⁶

Mr. Darcy's letter effects a powerful change in Elizabeth: after his words make an impression on her mind, her perception of three people and, most importantly, of herself significantly change. The person whom Elizabeth resented as a blight not only on Mr. Wickham's but on her own sister's future is, in reality, a man who is "esteemed and valued" as a friend and brother.⁶⁷ The cloak of charm in which Wickham clothes himself falls now to reveal not only a rake and a spendthrift, but a man desperate enough to seduce a very young Georgina Darcy for money and revenge. Darcy's words are so powerful that even Elizabeth's thorough understanding of Jane is not left intact: for the first time in the novel, she is openly critical of her sister's placid temperament. Indeed, Elizabeth considers that Jane's disappointment is not only due to her own seemingly indifferent conduct and the indiscreetly vulgar behavior of her family. Most importantly, a contrite Elizabeth reaches a deeper understanding of herself. She is no longer the young woman who jokingly owns that "follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies do divert me...and I laugh at them

⁶⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 137.

⁶⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 137.

whenever I can."⁶⁸ Elizabeth, who previously "prided" herself on her "discernment" is now judging herself and others accurately.⁶⁹

The powerful relationship that Elizabeth shares with Jane becomes triangular in nature when Mr. Darcy's desire unwittingly absorbs him into this dyad: the emotional centrality that Jane occupies in her sister's life propels Elizabeth to successfully struggle against the inferior social identity Mr. Darcy wishes to assign her even as he wishes to marry her. Therefore, it is not the manipulation of the elegant female but genuine self-awareness that changes Elizabeth into a transformative agent both for her family and for herself. Because the power and attraction of her consciousness changes Darcy's opinions and, in so doing, his behavior as well, Elizabeth ensures her own social mobility as well as that of her family.⁷⁰ Darcy, a man taught "good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit," internalizes the painful lesson Elizabeth taught him months before at the Hunsford Parsonage: gentility is not a matter of birth or wealth but predominantly of conduct.⁷¹ Darcy welcomes to Pemberley Elizabeth's Aunt and Uncle Gardiner--people whom he knows to be in trade, who live in the unfashionable district of Cheapside, and whom he saw as materially lessening their nieces' prospects of marriage to "men of any consideration in the world"⁷²--not only with civility but with genuine desire to extend the acquaintance. Darcy gratifies Elizabeth by introducing him to Georgiana, his sister, as well as her relatives by inviting Mr. Gardener to fish at Pemberley's stream. Aunt and Uncle Gardiner, then, cannot help but pronounce him to be "infinitely superior to any thing they ever expected": his behavior was "more than civil; it was really attentive."⁷³ And although the Gardiners see "no necessity for such attention" since "his acquaintance with Elizabeth was very trifling," it

⁶⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 39.

⁶⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 137.

⁷⁰ Judith Lowder Newton observes that Elizabeth possesses a "mobile intelligence" that allows her to improve her social standing (41). My argument is that Elizabeth's "mobile intelligence" is activated first and foremost in her relationship with Jane.

⁷¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 241.

⁷² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 25.

⁷³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 167.

is precisely his feelings for her that lead him to adopt and act upon her understanding of true gentility.⁷⁴

Furthermore, Darcy's love for Elizabeth is instrumental in improving her family's rapidly plummeting fortunes. When thoughtless Lydia elopes with Wickham, the Bennet sisters have more pressing concerns than their fates out of Longbourn at their father's death. Lydia's disgrace, as Mr. Collins triumphantly points out, is "injurious to the fortunes of all the others, for who...will connect themselves with such a family."⁷⁵ Although their marriage prospects were never brilliant, the chances of the Bennet sisters to make even respectable marriages since Lydia's elopement are obliterated. It is through Darcy's intercession alone that Lydia and Wickham marry. He finds the reprobate pair and attempts to persuade Lydia "to quit her present disgraceful situation, and return to her friends as soon as they could be prevailed on to receive her."⁷⁶ When Lydia refuses to abandon Wickham, it is Darcy who pays Wickham's debts of honor both within the regiment and at Meryton, and who purchases his new commission in the regulars at Newcastle. Although he certainly has "another motive" for his generosity, as Mrs. Gardiner pointedly observes in her letter to her curious niece, Darcy's efforts to preserve a modicum of Lydia's respectability display his willingness to correct the former character faults criticized by Elizabeth. Mrs. Gardiner writes,

From what I can collect, he left Derbyshire only one day after ourselves, and came to town with the resolution of hunting for them. The motive professed, was his conviction of its being owing to himself that Wickham's worthlessness had not been so well known, as to make it impossible for any young woman of character, to love or confide in him. He generously imputed the whole to his mistaken pride, and confessed that he had before thought it beneath him, to lay his private actions open to the world.

⁷⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 167.

⁷⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 193.

⁷⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 209.

His character was to speak for itself. He called it, therefore, his duty to step forward, and to endeavor to remedy an evil, which had been brought on by himself.⁷⁷

Though Darcy expects his actions to remain private, they nonetheless demonstrate a desire to behave in a manner concordant with Elizabeth's expectations of the true gentleman--a man who is not overpowered by his pride, vanity, or resentment. A further indication of Darcy's willingness to admit and correct former errors is his involvement in bringing about the much more advantageous marriage of Jane to Mr. Bingley. Although we as readers are not privy to the conversation between Darcy and Bingley in which the former encourages the latter to return to Longbourn, the fact that both Darcy and Bingley visit the Bennet women for the first time since the Netherfield ball is certainly symbolic of Darcy's approval of the match. Confirmedly, it is through Darcy's love for Elizabeth that "the Bennets were speedily pronounced to be the luckiest family in the world, though only a few weeks before, when Lydia had first run away, they had been generally proved to be marked out for misfortune."⁷⁸

How much luckier, then, the Bennets' neighbors think them when Elizabeth marries Mr. Darcy is not difficult to imagine. With each subsequent marriage, the Bennets display increased social mobility: Lydia is certainly lucky to marry Wickham, not only "one of the most worthless young men in Great Britain" but a man who while living with her still "cherished the hope of more effectually making his fortune by marriage, in some other country."⁷⁹ The beautiful Jane is certainly lucky to marry Mr. Bingley, the gentlemanlike young man coveted by the neighborhood mamas upon his arrival, with five thousand pounds a year and searching for an estate of his own. But it is Elizabeth who is the most fortunate--not only does she marry a gentleman with twice Mr. Bingley's fortune and a patrician estate of his own, but he is the sort of landlord, master, and brother upon whom

⁷⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 209.

⁷⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 228.

⁷⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 200, 210.

others may pin their livelihood as well as their respect. As Darcy's housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, shows Pemberley to the Gardiners and their niece, she points the visitors' attention to "the subjects of the pictures, the dimensions of the rooms, and the price of the furniture," her words reveal a far more alluring image of their owner: Mr. Darcy was not only the "sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted, boy in the world," but in adulthood is "affable to the poor...the best landlord, and the best master...that ever lived...There is not one of his tenants or servants but what will give him a good name."⁸⁰ In addition, Mr. Darcy is indeed a good brother: "On reaching the spacious lobby above, there were shewn into a very pretty sitting-room, lately fitted up with greater elegance and lightness than the apartments below; and were informed that it was but just done, to give pleasure to Miss Darcy."⁸¹ Elizabeth, however, is not interested in the objects that comprise Pemberley for their own sake but only so far as they confirm that he is indeed a good landlord, master, and brother. In Pemberley's portrait gallery, Elizabeth is finally able to truly take Mr. Darcy's likeness in a manner in which she was not able to do at the Netherfield ball. As she stands before Mr. Darcy's portrait, she reflects that "As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship!--How much of pleasure or pain was in his power to bestow!--How much of good or evil must be done by him!"⁸² In becoming Mr. Darcy's wife and mistress of Pemberley, Elizabeth becomes a similar social agent: in her hands rests the felicity and cohesiveness of her newly acquired family circle as well as the welfare of her servants and tenants. Elizabeth's agency, then, expands beyond the home into her broader community.

Sense and Sensibility

The Dashwood sisters inhabit a much more somber universe than the Bennets. While the shadow of destitution only threatens Jane and Elizabeth before they make loving and

⁸⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 161.

⁸¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 162.

⁸² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 162.

lucrative marriages, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood are left to experience the harsh “economic facts” following the loss of their beloved father.⁸³ The fickleness of male promises opens the novel’s pages--Norland Park’s late owner is an elderly gentleman who repays ten years of care and affection at the hands of his nephew, his wife, and their daughters by settling his estate on John Dashwood’s young son, “a child, who, in occasional visits with his father and mother...had so far gained on the affections of his uncle, by such attractions as are by no means unusual in children of two or three years old.”⁸⁴ Because the old gentleman “meant not to be unkind,” he bequeaths a thousand pounds on each of the Dashwood daughters. At his nephew’s unexpected and early demise, however, this old gentleman’s will prevents Henry Dashwood from settling Norland on his wife and daughters and effectively leaves the four Dashwood women bereft of any significant financial support. Because of the old gentleman’s capriciousness, Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters are left desperately clinging to gentility while adding Norland to little Harry’s stockpile of wealth. But this old gentleman, never “individuated enough to have a Christian name...--a modest gentry Everyman,” becomes not so much a person but a symbol of institutionalized male carelessness and irresponsibility detrimental to the Dashwood women throughout the novel.⁸⁵

John Dashwood, Elinor and Marianne’s half-brother, “exemplifies the new economic man and,...unwilling to assume the traditional role of the male guardian,” further ensures his sisters’ indigence.⁸⁶ While at his father’s deathbed he promises to take care of his stepmother and sisters, he easily allows his wife Fanny to whittle away his already feeble intentions. Though John Dashwood adds Norland to the large fortune left to him by his mother and to the fortune brought to him by his wife upon their marriage, he is only willing to give his sisters one thousand pounds each--the worth of John Dashwood’s promise,

⁸³ Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, 188,

⁸⁴ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 6.

⁸⁵ Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 51.

⁸⁶ Nazar, “The Imagination Goes Visiting,” 153.

therefore, is exactly equal to the old gentleman's affections. Fanny Dashwood, a more "exaggerated and excessive" reflection of her avaricious husband, effectively corrodes the "social and economic relations" existing between John and his sisters.⁸⁷ Mrs. John Dashwood's play on the word "half" skillfully exerts her power to define domestic relationships and further curtails her husband's illiberal designs when she exclaims: "What brother on earth would do half so much for his sisters, even if really his sisters! And as it is--only half blood!"⁸⁸ John Dashwood easily allows his wife to gradually convince him to give them a "present of fifty pounds, now and then."⁸⁹ In the end, his promise to his father only encompasses the women's six-month stay at Norland.

After leaving Sussex, the impoverished Dashwood women encounter emotional devastation, again due to a lack of male honor. The diffident Edward Ferrars and the dashing John Willoughby, Elinor and Marianne's respective suitors, appear to have little in common. In fact, "Edward is often regarded as the positive foil to Willoughby."⁹⁰ Edward Ferrars is the eldest son of a wealthy and domineering woman who wishes to see him distinguished in politics, in the navy or at least in the law. Because his own notion of fulfillment, a quiet career in the church, is not nearly fashionable enough for the mother who tightly controls his purse strings, "idleness was pronounced on the whole to be the most advantageous and honourable" course of action for him.⁹¹ As a result, he presents himself before others as a morose, dissatisfied young man without genius or passion for anything or anyone--including Elinor. On the other hand, John Willoughby is a young gentleman possessing abundant "manly beauty and more than common gracefulness."⁹² Although he confesses himself to be the "poor dependant cousin" of Mrs. Smith of Allenham, Willoughby has a degree of financial autonomy due to the eight hundred pound income

⁸⁷ Michie, *The Vulgar Question of Money*, 27, 28.

⁸⁸ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 10.

⁸⁹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 11.

⁹⁰ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 57.

⁹¹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 75.

⁹² Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 33.

brought by his estate, Combe Magna. Instead of wishing for a profession to relieve him of a life of idleness, Willoughby compromises whatever degree of independence he possesses in his pursuit of wild game and young women.

Despite these differences, the two young men momentarily become one in Marianne's eyes. After Willoughby's sudden departure from Barton, a dejected Marianne walks with her sisters. Upon spying a gentleman on horseback, she blithely rushes towards the rider exclaiming, "It is he; it is indeed;--I know it is!"⁹³ The "he" Marianne so rapturously awaits turns out not to be Willoughby but Edward Ferrars. At first, Marianne's perception appears to be decidedly incorrect. After all, Willoughby is a serial seducer who, having abandoned Colonel Brandon's ward without a second thought, sets his nefarious sights on Marianne. Edward, on the other hand, is a young man who is willing to forsake the love and good opinion of Elinor Dashwood, the woman he loves, as well as the pecuniary advantages of a marriage to a certain Miss Morton to honor an engagement to the vulgar Lucy Steele. Yet, Marianne's initial identification of Edward as Willoughby is not quite so misguided. As Claudia Johnson suggests, "different as Edward and Willoughby are individually, as English gentlemen many of their failures are identical... No sooner does Edward, like Willoughby, bind himself to one woman than he proceeds to engage the heart of another" and thereby expose her to the impertinence of others.⁹⁴

Both Edward and Willoughby show their respective preference for Elinor and Marianne openly enough for their regard to be evident to others around them. The widowed Mrs. Dashwood decides to remain in her disdainful daughter-in-law's household because of the "growing attachment between her eldest girl and the brother of Mrs. John Dashwood."⁹⁵ Surely, it is not the cautious Elinor who promotes this attachment; indeed, it is Elinor herself who is skeptical about Edward's feelings for her because "the longer they were together the more doubtful seemed the nature of his regard; and sometimes, for a few

⁹³ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 64.

⁹⁴ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 58.

⁹⁵ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 13.

painful minutes, she believed it to be no more than friendship."⁹⁶ While it is true that this attachment could have been figments of Mrs. Dashwood's and of Marianne's imaginations since with them "to wish was to hope, and to hope was to expect," the same quality may not be attributed to Fanny Dashwood.⁹⁷ Yet she, too, observes "enough...to make her uneasy; and at the same time...to make her uncivil."⁹⁸ Thereby, she takes the first opportunity to offend her mother-in-law by informing her of "Mrs. Ferrar's resolution that both her sons should marry well, and of the danger attending any young woman who attempted to draw [Edward] in."⁹⁹

Willoughby is certainly more obvious in his courting of Marianne than Edward is in courting Elinor, yet the result of his behavior is the same: the public expectation of their engagement. When Willoughby shows Mrs. Smith's house to Marianne, he cements this assumption made by not only by her mother and sisters, but by their neighbors as well. Even Colonel Brandon comes to expect this painful event. The staid Colonel's first visit to Mrs. Jennings' London home is purposefully to inquire of Miss Dashwood whether the engagement between Willoughby and Marianne is "finally settled."¹⁰⁰ In response, even the ever-prudent Elinor "acknowledged...that though she had never been informed by themselves of the terms on which they stood with each other, of their mutual affection she had no doubt, and of their correspondence she was not astonished to hear."¹⁰¹

The kind but gossipy Mrs. Jennings certainly expects the marriage between Marianne and Willoughby despite Elinor's attempts to dissuade her of an engagement between them when she suspect Willoughby's inconstancy. To Mrs. Jennings' very pointed question of "Pray, when are they to be married?" Elinor responds, "And have you really, Ma'am, talked yourself into a persuasion of my sister's being engaged to Mr. Willoughby? I thought it had

⁹⁶ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 19.

⁹⁷ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 18.

⁹⁸ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 19.

⁹⁹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 19.

¹⁰⁰ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 123.

¹⁰¹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 123.

been only a joke, but so serious a question seems to imply more...I do assure you that nothing would surprise me more than to hear of their going to be married."¹⁰² Mrs. Jennings, however, rapidly discredits Elinor's disingenuous claim by recalling the couple's behavior at Barton: "For shame, for shame, Miss Dashwood! how can you talk so! Don't we all know that it must be a match, that they were head and ears in love with each other from the first moment they met? Did I not see them together in Devonshire every day, and all day long...?"¹⁰³ Mrs. Jennings' refutation presents the idea that the public expectation of an engagement between parties is not brought about only by words but by behavior: Willoughby's conduct towards Marianne and her unguarded responsiveness to his advances indeed comprise an engagement.

After Willoughby's callous desertion and after learning of Edward's secret engagement to Lucy Steele, "Edward seemed a second Willoughby" to Marianne once again.¹⁰⁴ This time, it is not the young men's figure that she transposes but their very characters. And once again, she does not appear to be incorrect. Despite Elinor's sincere vindication of Edward, the weakness, duplicity, and selfishness of both men expose both Dashwood sisters to the impertinence and disrespect of others.¹⁰⁵ Marianne's relationship with Willoughby exposes her not only to the officious though well-meaning attentions of Mrs. Jennings but transform her into an object of curiosity, pity, and malice for the likes of John Dashwood and the Miss Steeles. Although Marianne leaves the room when the young women first visit Mrs. Jennings, she is not wholly free of their morbid curiosity. Though Elinor assures the eldest Miss Steele that Marianne is unable to see her due to nervous headaches and is "perhaps laid upon the bed, or in her dressing gown," she is not so easily denied:¹⁰⁶ "Oh, if that is all...we can just as well go and see her," she impertinently

¹⁰² Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 128.

¹⁰³ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 128.

¹⁰⁴ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 184.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 58.

¹⁰⁶ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 155.

insists.¹⁰⁷ Lucy rebukes her uncouth older sister, but she is not above alluding to Marianne's disappointment to vent her own anger. Marianne breaks the uncomfortable trio composed by Lucy, Edward, and Elinor with her earnest entreaties for Edward to accompany them to Barton and playfully chides him for not attending his Fanny's rather disagreeable dinner. Lucy, desirous to take revenge on Marianne for her efforts to establish further intimacy between Elinor and Edward, responds with a pointed pun on the word "engagement": "Perhaps, Miss Marianne...you think young men never stand upon engagements if they have no mind to keep them, little as well as great."¹⁰⁸ Lucy's ill-natured barb underscores Willoughby's unfulfilled engagement to Marianne and, thereby, to her status as a jilted woman. Similarly, though Marianne is as insensible to John Dashwood's perfunctory pity for her as she is of Lucy's hostility, she is nonetheless its mark. John translates Marianne's diminished looks--what he considers to be her intrinsic self-worth--into depreciated monetary value, the only quality he is capable of appreciating: the "nervous complaint" of which Elinor tells him makes him question "whether Marianne now, will marry a man worth more than five or six hundred a-year."¹⁰⁹

Elinor is subject as well to the unequivocal resentment and insolence though she is not publicly rejected like Marianne but privately loved. Even though Elinor has been more properly guarded in her conduct towards Edward, it is her sense of social duty that makes her brave others' ill will without the refuge that music and an active, solicitous sister provide for Marianne. Elinor, too, must withstand the stale witticisms of Mrs. Jennings and of Sir John Middleton as they observe that "the name of Ferrars begins with an F. and that this prepared a future mine of raillery" against her.¹¹⁰ Elinor must further bear as well the constant snubs of Fanny Dashwood and her mother, Mrs. Ferrars, while Edward's secret fiancée, Lucy Steele, basks in the glow of their misguided attentiveness. Elinor herself

¹⁰⁷ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 155.

¹⁰⁸ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 172.

¹⁰⁹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 161.

¹¹⁰ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 72-73.

"could not but smile to see the graciousness of both mother and daughter towards the very person...whom of all others, had they known as much as she did, they would have been more anxious to mortify; while she herself, sat pointedly slighted by both."¹¹¹

Additionally, Elinor must endure her rival's malice. She relates with relative calm to Marianne that she had known of Edward's secret engagement to Lucy for many long, agonizing months. Marianne, suffering under Willoughby's recent betrayal, doubts the strength of Elinor's love and finally splinters her sisters' calm demeanor. For the first time, Elinor openly acknowledges not only the shocking, unwelcome news of Edward's engagement but the spite with which Lucy informed her of it:

For four months...I have had all this hanging on my mind, without being at liberty to speak of it to a single creature...--It was told me,---it was in a manner forced on me by the very person herself, whose prior engagement ruined all my prospects; and told me, as I thought, with triumph.--This person's suspicions, therefore, I have had to oppose, by endeavoring to appear indifferent where I have been most deeply interested;--and it has not been only once;--I have had her hopes and exultation to listen to again and again.¹¹²

Elinor's fragmented expression reflects the strain she has had to endure since her rival's confession. Because, as Lucy admits, she is of a jealous temper, her purpose in inquiring of Elinor the nature of Mrs. Ferrar's character is merely a vehicle to expose to her rival her engagement to Edward and so decisively dash her hopes. In that first conversation, Lucy triumphantly assures Elinor of this betrothal as she methodically produces Edward's miniature portrait and his latest letter to her. To further convince Elinor of Edward's love for her, Lucy repeats, again and again, the trials and tribulations Edward is willing to suffer for

¹¹¹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 165.

¹¹² Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 186.

her as well as the happiness subsisting between them as long as they "must always be in one another's love."¹¹³

It is precisely the rather un-heroic qualities shared by John Willoughby and Edward Ferrars--their weakness, their duplicity, and their selfishness--that make them the alternate mediators of Elinor and Marianne's relationship. Each "hero" promotes each sister's greater self-awareness as individuals and as social agents. Unlike *Pride and Prejudice*, however, *Sense and Sensibility* does not rely on sisterly confidences to build a reciprocal connection between Elinor and Marianne Dashwood but on what Tony Tanner identifies as "the loving tension between them."¹¹⁴ For example, after a deeply concerned Elinor observes a sobbing Marianne writing a letter and attempts to elicit some intelligence about her sister's frustrated correspondence with Willoughby, she observes: "You have no confidence in me."¹¹⁵ Marianne, however, accuses Elinor of the same offense: "Nay, Elinor, this reproach from you--you who have confidence in no one!...We have neither of us anything to tell; you, because you communicate, and I because I conceal nothing."¹¹⁶ Marianne is partly right: unbeknownst to her, Elinor is keeping from her Edward's engagement to Lucy. However, Marianne, too, has not communicated the standing of her relationship with Willoughby. While there is no doubt of her affection for him, it is far from clear whether she is engaged to him. This lack of transparency as to each other's emotional involvement is difficult to imagine between Jane and Elizabeth Bennet, yet it is not uncommon between Elinor and Marianne Dashwood in the first two volumes of the novel.

Indeed, the connection forged between Elinor and Marianne is based on contrast, not on opposition. The sisters are not antithetical "ciphers for passion and reason, impulse and restraint, feeling and form..."¹¹⁷ At the close of its first chapter, the novel delineates each sister's character: Elinor "had an excellent heart...her disposition was affectionate, and her

¹¹³ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 196.

¹¹⁴ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 96.

¹¹⁵ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 120.

¹¹⁶ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 120.

¹¹⁷ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 99.

feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them: it was a knowledge which...one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught."¹¹⁸ This sister is described as "sensible and clever; but eager in every thing; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was every thing but prudent."¹¹⁹ Elinor's discretion and Marianne's impetuosity are the most significant differences between them--Elinor's feelings are quite as strong as Marianne's, just as Marianne's discernment is "quite equal to Elinor's."¹²⁰ Critics such as Jan Fergus have observed that "in both, behaviour proceeds from principles or judgments, that is, from rational notions about emotional life...Both assign feeling to the realm of value, judgment and sense."¹²¹

The sisters possess sense and sensibility in equal measure, but they do not extol them in equal degree. Although there are three Dashwood sisters, the narrator places a dual spotlight on Elinor and Marianne while relegating the youngest, Margaret, to insignificance: she "was a good-humored well-disposed girl; but she did not, at thirteen, bid fair to equal her sisters at a more advanced period of life."¹²² While casting Margaret aside as an inferior replica of Marianne, imbibing too much of her feeling but not enough of her sense, the statement highlights Marianne's full possession of both faculties. It can even be argued that at times, Marianne's judgment is more severe than Elinor's.¹²³ For example, she is unwilling to make any allowances for her sister's suitor upon first meeting him. Marianne does not find him to be "the kind of man who could seriously attach [her] sister": "his eyes want all that spirit, that fire, which at once announce virtue and intelligence...he has no real taste. Music seems scarcely to attract him, and though he admires Elinor's drawings very much, it is not the admiration of a person who can understand their worth...He admires as a lover,

¹¹⁸ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 8.

¹¹⁹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 8.

¹²⁰ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 8.

¹²¹ Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, 45.

¹²² Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 8.

¹²³ Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels*, 61.

not as a connoisseur. To satisfy me, those characters must be united."¹²⁴ On the other hand, "Elinor's continual exertions to control her feelings, to appear cheerful when she is unhappy and to be considerate of her mother and sister in order that they be 'spared much solicitude on her account'" denote an understanding of her own feelings as well as genuine care for those of others.¹²⁵ The key difference, then, between Elinor and Marianne is not the character traits they possess but the value each sister assigns to and the attitude with which each woman acts upon each quality: because Elinor values prudence above excessive sensibility, she exercises discretion, while Marianne prizes emotion above repressive reason, and, therefore, seeks sensibility at every turn. Ultimately, although Elinor's external behavior is more prudent than Marianne, her internal compass is not radically different from her sister's. As Claudia Johnson notes, "Elinor's behavior has turned out to differ from Marianne's only in degree and not in kind. She has neither smothered her dreams nor even, with all her heroic efforts at screening and concealment, really masked her attachment."¹²⁶

Elinor and Marianne's dyad becomes triangulated when Edward Ferrars and John Willoughby come into contact with the sisters at different times in the novel. The failings of these men--the duplicity, weakness, and selfishness discussed above--as well as the attraction the sisters feel for them stimulate each woman's understanding of each other and of her own self. Their distinct feelings for both Edward and Willoughby transform the men into the topic of deep discussion, and, by extension, as mirrors each sister utilizes to delineate her own figure as she exercises her ability to understand both men first and then herself.

While Edward Ferrars is not the most powerful mediator of the sister's relationship, he is certainly the first. Elinor and Marianne's discussion on his first visit to Norland serves to identify the quality with which each sister identifies most and, in the process, differentiates each woman's perspective and understanding from her sister's, proving that

¹²⁴ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 15.

¹²⁵ Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, 41.

¹²⁶ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 63.

"independent judgment or thinking for oneself is not independent of listening to others."¹²⁷ For instance, Marianne's observation that it is a pity Edward should have no taste for drawing" prompts Elinor's rebuttal: "Why should you think so? He does not draw himself, indeed, but he has great pleasure in seeing the performances of other people, and I assure you he is by no means deficient in natural taste, though he has not had opportunity of improving it."¹²⁸ And so, a conversation beginning with an examination of Edward's drawing abilities turns into a discussion of his personal merits. This discussion, in turn, reveals more about each sister's system of values than about the perfections--or lack thereof--of the gentleman in question.

Marianne, unwilling to offend the man with whom Elinor is in love, offers what to her is but lukewarm praise: "I have the highest opinion in the world of his goodness and sense. I think him every thing that is worthy and amiable."¹²⁹ With satisfaction, Elinor reflects, "his dearest friends could not be dissatisfied with such commendation as that. I do not perceive how you could express yourself more warmly."¹³⁰ Elinor further notes that "the excellence of his understanding and his principles can be concealed only by that shyness which too often keeps him silent...His abilities in every respect improve as much upon acquaintance as his manners and person."¹³¹ This conversation accentuates Elinor's satisfaction with Edward's intellectual understanding and moral principles, qualities that she prizes most, while overlooking Marianne's lackluster response to his emotional abilities. Conversely, Marianne begins this conversation with her sister not by praising but by delicately criticizing his capacity for intuitive feeling, and eventually, his lack of physical charms. However, Marianne soon betrays what for her is the primordial importance of genuine emotion when she warmly declares that Edward's "imperfections" will be erased in her eyes when Elinor asks

¹²⁷ Nazar, "The Imagination Goes Visiting," 149.

¹²⁸ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 16.

¹²⁹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 17.

¹³⁰ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 17.

¹³¹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 17.

her to love him "as a brother."¹³² Her older sister, however, is far from prepared to make this request. Instead, Elinor retreats into prudent reserve as she confesses "that I think very highly of him--that I greatly esteem, that I like him."¹³³ Edward, then, is a mediating figure for Elinor and Marianne because he establishes a connection that allows each sister to delineate her personality as it is shaped either mostly by prudence or feeling.

It is Willoughby who is the most effective mediator for Elinor and Marianne. Once again, he appears to be similar to Edward even as a mediator. With him, Marianne's sensibility is further refined since her "love for Willoughby is an extension of her love for herself."¹³⁴ As Hina Nazar suggests, "the 'strikingly alike' taste and 'general conformity of judgment' that she discovers with Willoughby denote only an ambivalent consensus, because she has not really permitted him to reveal his taste and judgment."¹³⁵ Marianne falls in love with Willoughby because she transforms him into a magnified reflection of herself. Simultaneously, Willoughby makes Elinor feel the need to rely even more on her solid, good sense. As his acquaintance with the sisters deepens, Elinor "saw nothing to censure in him but a propensity in which he strongly resembled and delighted her sister, of saying too much what he thought on every occasion...in hastily forming and giving his opinion of other people...he displayed a want of caution which Elinor could not approve."¹³⁶ By mirroring Marianne's idea of sensibility in his open displays of quick, impulsive feeling and wit, Willoughby emboldens Marianne's same qualities while strengthening Elinor's reliance on her own judgment.

As all three speak of Colonel Brandon, Willoughby remarks that "Brandon is 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" only to be echoed by Marianne's "That

¹³² Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 17.

¹³³ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 18.

¹³⁴ Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels*, 61.

¹³⁵ Nazar, "The Imagination Goes Visiting," 167.

¹³⁶ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 38.

is exactly what I think of him."¹³⁷ Willoughby seems to lead the discussion of Brandon's faults and Marianne only seems to acquiesce, but he is really magnifying Marianne's opinion of Brandon spurred by his own animosity. While the two focus on Brandon's inability to elicit strong emotions from those around him, Elinor openly praises him as "a sensible man...He has seen a great deal of the world; has been abroad; has read, and has a thinking mind."¹³⁸ Willoughby, however, will not be quelled and repeats his objection to Brandon once again: "I consider him...as a very respectable man, who has very body's good word and nobody's notice..." and Marianne once again as she offers her own criticism: "Add to which...that he has neither genius, taste, nor spirit. That his understanding has no brilliancy, his feelings no ardour, and his voice no expression."¹³⁹ To Elinor's continued defense of the older man, Willoughby shrewdly identifies the core difference in their argument when he juxtaposes Elinor's effort to "disarm [him] by reason" to his own--and by extension, to Marianne's--untamed "will."¹⁴⁰

Nonetheless, Willoughby proves to be a dangerous mediator especially for Marianne. As he inflames Marianne's senses, he anesthetizes her ability to think for herself and leads her on a path of self-destructive solipsism as her unmitigated feelings "disrupt and undermine her body."¹⁴¹ After months of neglect and suspense, Marianne finally receives confirmation of Willoughby's repudiation. As she dejectedly sits at the foot of her bed, Marianne thinks in bewilderment about Willoughby's fiancée and, unwittingly expresses the true charm Willoughby held for her: "Who is she?--Who can she be?--Whom did I ever hear him talk of as young and attractive among his female acquaintance?--Oh! no one, no one--he talked to me only of myself."¹⁴² And so, in speaking to her only of herself, Willoughby reflects a false, overly romanticized version of Marianne that her over stimulated mind is

¹³⁷ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 39.

¹³⁸ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 39.

¹³⁹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 40.

¹⁴⁰ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 40.

¹⁴¹ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 87.

¹⁴² Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 135.

powerless to resist. In Willoughby, Marianne erroneously believes that she has found the answer to her every romantic impulse and is therefore unwilling to study him as closely as Elinor does. For her, Willoughby is not only the man who embodies perfection but the distorted mirror that alluringly reflects her image as a sentimental heroine.

However, when the romantic impulses of the sentimental heroine are thwarted by betrayal and disappointment, the price exacted from her is annihilation. Colonel Brandon's first love, Marianne's precursor in his affections, and his protégé are plain examples of this precept. Both women share not only the name of Eliza but a similar fate as well: the first Eliza falls prey to illicit extramarital relationships after an abusive marriage to Brandon's brother and ultimately dies, but not before being "so altered--so faded--worn down by acute suffering."¹⁴³ Her daughter suffers not a physical death but social extinction as she finds herself and her illegitimate child with Willoughby relegated to the country where she will forever disappear from polite company as quickly as natural children disappear from Lady Middleton's polite conversation. Marianne's wan appearance after Willoughby's abandonment indicates that she, too, is on the path to oblivion. As the callous John Dashwood comments to Colonel Brandon, the last person to whom he should make this observation, "Marianne was remarkably handsome a few months ago; quite as handsome as Elinor.--Now you see it is all gone."¹⁴⁴ Yet, John's words do foreshadow his sister's close contact with death. Once in the Palmers' Cleveland estate, Marianne, "oppressed by anguish of heart which she had neither courage to speak of, not fortitude to conceal," falls prey to an infectious fever and seems likely to fulfill the tragic fate of the disappointed sentimental heroine.¹⁴⁵

"Instead of falling sacrifice to an irresistible passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself," Marianne emerges from her illness as a stronger, more disciplined woman. Elinor nurses her sister through her heartsickness and simultaneously embraces the tumultuous

¹⁴³ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 147.

¹⁴⁴ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 168.

¹⁴⁵ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 268.

feelings intruding upon her imposed logic. As Jan Fergus notes, "Elinor's feelings are increasingly insisted on and increasingly rendered" from this point in the novel on.¹⁴⁶ Yet, it is through Willoughby's noxious influence on Marianne that each Dashwood sister acknowledges the neglected, undervalued quality in herself by genuinely understanding her sister's suffering. In "a night of almost equal suffering to both," reason and emotion equally temper Elinor's and Marianne's characters as both sisters' amplified differences meld in Marianne's raging fever.¹⁴⁷ On the third morning of Marianne's illness, Elinor rejoices that "in her letters to her mother, she had pursued her own judgment rather than her friend's, in making very light of the indisposition which delayed them at Cleveland."¹⁴⁸ By the end of the day, however, Elinor's sanguine expectations of her sister's improved health are dashed as a restless, delusional Marianne calls for her mother. The worried girl now reproaches herself "for having trifled with so many days of illness,...fancied herself that all relief might soon be in vain...and pictured herself her suffering mother arriving too late to see this darling child."¹⁴⁹ As she continues her vigil over Marianne, Elinor's judgment is mitigated by deep despair: she is

almost hopeless...scarcely stirring from her sister's bed, her thoughts wandering from one image of grief, one suffering friend to another, and her spirits oppressed to the utmost by the conversation of Mrs. Jennings, who scrupled not to attribute the severity and danger of this attack, to the many weeks of previous indisposition which Marianne's disappointment had brought on. Elinor felt all the reasonableness of the idea, and it gave fresh misery to her reflections.¹⁵⁰

For the first time in the novel, it is not only reason that is uppermost in Elinor's mind as it freely mingles with the anguish of her heart. Elinor's reason is further alloyed by the

¹⁴⁶ Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, 49.

¹⁴⁷ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 221.

¹⁴⁸ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 219.

¹⁴⁹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 221.

¹⁵⁰ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 222.

hope that refuses to be squelched as she observes her sister's "slight amendment."¹⁵¹ The idea of "Marianne restored to life, health, friends, and to her doating mother, was an idea to fill her heart with sensations of exquisite comfort and expand it in fervent gratitude...All within Elinor's breast was satisfaction, silent and strong."¹⁵² It is not reason that floods over Elinor at the moment of Marianne's safety but powerful, exquisite emotion. From this moment forth, Elinor's reactions to stressful situations are amalgams of rationality and feeling. As Marianne is recovering, Willoughby presents himself at Cleveland as an almost tortured apparition though he does not quite "find the prospect of an abandoned woman's death displeasing."¹⁵³ Elinor follows "the first impulse of her heart in turning instantly to quit the room."¹⁵⁴ She obeys Willoughby's command, nonetheless, and remains a captive audience to his efforts of self-exoneration. Elinor's efforts to convince Willoughby of the impropriety of his unwelcome visit are met with an impassioned rebuff: "I mean to offer some kind of explanation, some kind of apology, for the past; to open my whole heart to you, and by convincing you, that though I have been always a blockhead, I have not always been a rascal, to obtain something like forgiveness from Ma--from your sister."¹⁵⁵ The earnest warmth of his answer "brought all the former Willoughby to her remembrance, and in spite of herself make her think him sincere."¹⁵⁶ Willoughby's emotional appeal softens Elinor's perception of him and makes her a more empathetic listener. Yet, she remains a critical one as well: when Willoughby claims that Marianne's tastes and opinions are better known and dearer than his own, Elinor recoils at the impudence of his words: "Elinor's heart, which had undergone many changes in the course of this extraordinary conversation,

¹⁵¹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 222.

¹⁵² Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 223.

¹⁵³ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, 67. Johnson observes, "given a society that does not officially condone polygamy, death simultaneously preserves the heroine exclusive to the hero's sentimental dominion and disposes of her tidily when he moves on to his chosen life of horses and sport."

¹⁵⁴ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 224.

¹⁵⁵ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 226.

¹⁵⁶ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 226.

was now softened again;--yet she felt it her duty to check such ideas in her companion..."¹⁵⁷

Like Elinor, Marianne emerges from that night of suffering transformed. The deathly pallor of disappointed love is replaced with favorable symptoms: "Her breath, her skin, her lips" are all "signs of amendment."¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, from the moment of her awakening on what was supposed to be her deathbed, Marianne opens her eyes, both literally and figurative, with a "rational though languid gaze" as she leaves behind the impulsive, solipsistic emotions and tempers reason with more propitious sentiments. "In fact," Claudia Johnson notes, "Marianne's semicomatose reflections recur to the women in her life, particularly to a beloved mother, a sister she fears she has wronged."¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, as Marianne recovers, "at her own particular request, for she was impatient to pour forth her thanks to him for fetching her mother, Colonel Brandon was invited to visit her."¹⁶⁰ In this first act, Marianne retains the force and impetuosity of her feelings, but they are no longer for herself--she now actively thinks of others who have been a source of succor: Elinor, foremost, her mother and Colonel Brandon. Likewise, Marianne unites emotion and reason when she takes leave of Mrs. Jennings upon her departure from Cleveland, "one so earnestly grateful, so full of respect and kind wishes as seemed due to her own heart from a secret acknowledgement of past inattention."¹⁶¹ Marianne's gratitude reflects her own growing awareness of other's worth and she displays this dawning realization by reaching out to Colonel Brandon and Mrs. Jennings, mocked and belittled by her up to this point, with feelings of respect and appreciation.

The morning after her return to Barton Cottage offers further testimony both to Marianne's attention to others and to her growing command over her former unchecked sensibility: "with a mind and body alike strengthened by rest, she looked and spoke with

¹⁵⁷ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 231.

¹⁵⁸ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 222.

¹⁵⁹ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 68.

¹⁶⁰ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 241.

¹⁶¹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 241.

more genuine spirit, anticipating the pleasure of Margaret's return, and talking of her dear family party which would then be restored."¹⁶² However, Marianne's natural eagerness returns unabated as she makes sensible plans for the improvement of her body and her mind. Elinor notices her sister's "same eager fancy which had been leading her to the extreme languid indolence and selfish repining, now at work in introducing excess into a scheme of such rational employment and virtuous self-control."¹⁶³ Yet, Marianne's emotional courage and fortitude is nowhere more evident than on her walk with Elinor a few days later when she views the all-important hill where, both physically and emotionally, she first fell and "saw Willoughby."¹⁶⁴ Marianne opens this painful topic of discussion as she exhorts Elinor herself not to allow her feelings to override her reason:

Do not, my dearest Elinor, let your kindness defend what I know your judgment must censure. My illness has made me think--It has given me leisure and calmness for serious recollection. Long before I was enough recovered to talk, I was perfectly able to reflect. I considered the past; I saw in my own behaviour since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself, and a want of kindness to others. I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave.¹⁶⁵

In effect, Marianne's meditation on her own unsatisfactory behavior reveals her complete acceptance of the axiom Elinor had earlier applied to her own self when she learned of Edward's engagement to Lucy Steele: "I owed it to my family and friends, not to create a solicitude about me, which it could not be in my power to satisfy."¹⁶⁶ Though at the time Marianne is struck by Elinor's appeal for self-control in consideration of her loved ones,

¹⁶² Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 242.

¹⁶³ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 243.

¹⁶⁴ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 243.

¹⁶⁵ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 244.

¹⁶⁶ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 185.

it is not because she will implement it in her life, but because she believes Elinor's tepid love for Edward is a feeble shadow of her own consuming passion for Willoughby and, therefore, easier to conquer. It is only upon her recovery that Marianne truly incorporates the moral of Elinor's example in her own life.

Willoughby's callous and selfish deceitfulness provokes the feverish night of suffering in which the Dashwood sisters both come to equally embrace reason and emotion. Willoughby is the medium that unintentionally empowers Elinor and Marianne to negotiate the social challenges and male depredations two destitute young women must face by forming a community where, by uniting reason and emotion, they survive. This emphasis on the importance of women's community is underscored in the last paragraph of the novel. The narrator observes that "among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands."¹⁶⁷ That sisters living close to one another should live in harmony and should promote the same amity between the husbands is a source of some surprise for the narrator, yet it is the culminating achievement of the Dashwood sisters. The novel does not end by celebrating Elinor's marriage to Edward nor Marianne's to Colonel Brandon, but by praising the community that Elinor and Marianne, two impoverished women, have woven around themselves.

When the whole of Jane Austen's published oeuvre emerges, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, two novels of sororal friendship, invite the notion that for her heroines, influential self-identification begins within the family. It is neither fathers nor mothers who help forge the heroine's self but a sister. However, when sisterly friendship is not a possibility for the heroine, her quest for identity leads her to expand her familial ties and reach further into her female network.

¹⁶⁷ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 269.

Chapter Two: Friends by Affinity--Same-Sex Relationships in *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*

Sisters, friends within the family, help the heroines of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* to find their own self-awareness and to project it as an active social presence. Because heroines such as *Northanger Abbey's* Catherine Morland and *Persuasion's* Anne Elliot lack these fundamental relationships within their families, they recreate these missing but crucial kinships within friendships outside of their domestic circle. Similar to the attachments discussed in the previous chapter, the surrogate relationships that are discussed here have the potential for the heroines to obtain the moral authority of self-awareness. This attachment creates the possibility for each protagonist to "exercise powers of choice and expression" that appraises the family from which she is originally dislodged and regulates the family she forms when she becomes a wife.¹ Nonetheless, in order for her friendship to effectively aid the heroine in her quest for self, it must stand for the tie of kinship the heroine most needs. In the case of Catherine Morland as well as of Anne Elliot, it is not a sororal relationship but a guiding maternal friendship that she requires. While Anne Elliot's attachment to Lady Russell fulfills her need for such a filial tie, Catherine Morland's friendship with Isabella Thorpe and then with Eleanor Tilney only provide an unnecessary sisterly surrogate. When seen together, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* illustrate the importance of creating relevant relationships and the consequences of forging misguided connections: Catherine Morland's friendships attest to the fact that the same-sex friendships a heroine forges may either encourage or hinder a development of the "sense of her own cognitive and ethical powers."² Without the adequate friendship, then, the heroine is unable to sustain her own identity and enact the moral authority she gains by it.

¹ Marcus, *Between Women*, 56.

² Terry Castle, *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!: Essays on Women, Sex, and Writing*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 36.

Northanger Abbey

The narrator of *Northanger Abbey* presents Catherine Morland as a heroine in training distinct from other protagonists in her very commonality. Hailing from a village in Wiltshire, Catherine is nothing more than the daughter of a respectable clergyman “of considerable independence” and “a woman of useful plain sense.”³ She spends the first fifteen years of her life not only being as “plain as any” of the unremarkable Morland clan but exhibiting a clear lack of judgment. Catherine possesses good sense and, like most people, “never could learn or understand any thing before she was taught,” yet she is “often inattentive, and occasionally stupid” because she disregards the lessons already learned.⁴ Nonetheless, Catherine’s future as a heroine seems to be confirmed both by her newly improved appearance and by her choice of reading materials--novels and smatterings of Pope, Gray, Thompson, and Shakespeare. Despite the lack of traditionally female traits such as extraordinary beauty or exceptional intellect, the narrative provides Catherine with the opportunity to be the heroine of her own story by prompting her to “live in the complicated world of moral perception and moral choice.”⁵ Catherine Morland must first develop her internal compass and trust her own judgment in order to recognize the duplicitous motives of figures of familial authority “on whom innocence such as her own ought to rely.”⁶

Catherine leaves behind the routine of her family life to embark into “all the difficulties and dangers of a six weeks’ residence in Bath.”⁷ Although a lively imagination leads her to eagerly anticipate masked robbers, terrifying tempests, and the similarly trite vicissitudes a typical heroine must endure, Catherine is unaware that the lack of a reliable maternal figure will expose her to difficulties, dangers, and deceptions lying in wait outside the tranquility of Fullerton. Miss Morland, of course, is no orphan. Though Reverend Morland teaches his daughter “writing and accounts,” an affectionate Mrs. Morland is the most

³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 5.

⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 5, 6.

⁵ Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, 16.

⁶ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 47.

⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 8.

present parental authority in her life. It is she who teaches French and an array of didactic literature to a rather reluctant Catherine. However, Mrs. Morland's example as an unpretentious woman of sense is of no real use to her daughter as she encounters the petty selfishness, deceit, and coercion of people such as the Thorpes, General Tilney, and occasionally even of her own brother, James. Mrs. Morland is so "preoccupied with the physical burdens of motherhood, [that] she is...too distracted to...[give] her daughter...even the most rudimentary advice."⁸ Before Catherine departs for Bath, for example, Mrs. Morland exhorts her daughter to use her judgment only insofar as keeping her throat warm and her account book in order. Since Mrs. Morland "knew so little of lords and baronets, that she entertained no notion of their general mischievousness, and was wholly unsuspecting of danger to her daughter from their machinations," at no point does she enjoin Catherine to use her understanding to interpret the actions of those around her.⁹ And though it is true that Catherine does not meet any noblemen "as delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farm-house," she does eventually come to be at the mercy of General Tilney, a powerful man who not only succeeds in getting her away from the protection of the Allens but who places her in real danger by unceremoniously ousting her from his home without even a single servant.¹⁰

Mrs. Allen, Catherine's guardian while in Bath, is of even less help to the budding heroine. Absorbed solely by the state of her own dress, Mrs. Allen is incapable of ascertaining the degree of impropriety of young men and women driving in open carriages to public places and can only vacuously observe that "open carriages are nasty things. A clean gown is not five minutes wear in them. You are splashed getting in and getting out; and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction. I hate an open carriage myself."¹¹ Because Catherine lacks "the guidance and support--the directive and

⁸ Castle, *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!*, 34.

⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 9.

¹⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 9.

¹¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 71.

constructive authority--which she, as any child needs," the search for her conscious development requires that she forge a relationship with an older woman who could act as a surrogate mother.¹² The world of *Northanger Abbey* offers no such friendships, and Catherine must search for guidance elsewhere. Therefore, she relies on novels and on a rapidly growing friendship with Isabella Thorpe to expand beyond the parameters of her own mind and desires.

Novels excite Catherine's imagination and play a pivotal role in her gradual and accurate understanding of herself and of others. At first, novels awaken within Catherine a sense of self-awareness because they allow her to understand herself as the protagonist of her own story instead of being one more indistinguishable young woman in Bath. When Catherine unhappily finds herself engaged to dance with an absent John Thorpe, busy elsewhere proposing an exchange of terriers with a friend, she contemplates her mortifying situation:

She could not help being vexed at the non-appearance of Mr. Thorpe, for she not only longed to be dancing, but was likewise aware that, as the real dignity of her situation could not be known, she was sharing with the scores of other young ladies still sitting down all the discredit of waiting for a partner. To be disgraced in the eye of the world, to wear the appearance of infamy while her heart is all purity, her actions all innocence, and the misconduct of another the true source of her debasement, is one of those circumstances which peculiarly belong to the heroine's life, and her fortitude under it what particularly dignifies her character. Catherine had fortitude too; she suffered, but no murmur passed her lips.¹³

Although the narrator certainly parodies the commonplace event of being disappointed and vexed with a dance partner by imbuing it with the hyperbolic language of sensibility, this

¹² Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 46.

¹³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 34-35.

reflection allows Catherine to differentiate herself from those faceless droves of sitting girls in want of a dancing partner not only because she does have a partner--albeit a thoroughly boorish one--but because the dignity of her own character allows her to conduct herself with patience and with a degree of grace. The exaggerated language of sentimental novels is a tool Catherine uses to reject the social insignificance to which John Thorpe's inattention consigns her. By equating the rather mundane event of being neglected by a dancing partner with the trials of a heroine whose tribulations are due to the infamy of others, Catherine is effectively redefining herself as someone worthy, even if this importance is unperceived by others.

Novels also cement Catherine's important friendship with Isabella Thorpe, a relationship that "circumscribe[s] and direct[s] Catherine's affective life, including her relation to both men and the male-dominated culture at large."¹⁴ Mrs. Allen's oft-repeated wish of meeting an acquaintance in Bath unexpectedly comes true upon meeting with Mrs. Thorpe, a former acquaintance, and her three daughters. After being introduced to Catherine, the eldest and handsomest, Isabella, observes how much Catherine resembles her brother James and speaks of her own brother's friendship with him. Though all of the Miss Thorpes express "their wish of being better acquainted with her; of being considered as already friends, through the friendship of their brothers," Catherine is "soon invited to accept an arm of the eldest Miss Thorpe, and take a turn with her about the room," effectively beginning a friendship between the two young women.¹⁵ Susceptible to the very novels she is unwilling to interpret, Catherine is unable to see both the differences and the similarities between what she reads and what she lives. As a result, she mistakes Isabella not only as the heroine of a sentimental novel, "full of warm, generous, uncontrollable

¹⁴ William H. Galperin, *The Historical Austen*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 144.

¹⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 19.

feelings, loyal to her friends, [and] uninterested in money," but as her own emotional center.¹⁶

The "easy gaiety of Miss Thorpe's manners and her frequent expressions of delight on this acquaintance" as well as the mention of the absent James Morland draw a bored and lonely Catherine into an immediate relationship.¹⁷ Very soon, both young women are engaged in an affectionate sentimental attachment further nurtured by their reading: "they passed...through every gradation of increasing tenderness...They called each other by their Christian name, were always arm in arm when they walked, pinned each other's train for the dance, and were not to be divided in the set; and if a rainy morning deprived them of other enjoyments, they...shut themselves up, to read novels together."¹⁸ Indeed, novels are part of their friendship not only during rainy days. When Isabella meets Catherine in the Pump-room one morning, she asks her, "But, my dearest Catherine, what have you been doing with yourself all this morning?--Have you gone on with *Udolpho*?"¹⁹ When Catherine responds that she has been reading it "since I woke; and I am got to the black veil," Isabella further spurs Catherine's already strong involvement in the novel when she exclaims, "How delightful! Oh! I would not tell you what is behind the black veil for the world! Are you not wild to know?"²⁰ Catherine not only acknowledges her satisfaction with the book but also the strong ties of friendship that binds them when she exclaims, "Oh! I am delighted with the book! I should spend my whole life in reading it. I assure you, if it had not been to meet you, I should not have come away from it for all the world."²¹ In return, Isabella thanks Catherine and promises a continuance of their friendship because she promises the continuance of their reading of Gothic novels together: "Dear creature! how much I am obliged to you; and when you have finished *Udolpho*, we will read the

¹⁶ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 70.

¹⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 20.

¹⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 22.

¹⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 24.

²⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 24.

²¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 24.

Italian together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you."²²

This conversation about Gothic novels between Catherine and Isabella is indicative of their overall friendship. Isabella's is the leading voice--she is the one who informs Catherine's reading, not only by providing her with a list of novels to be read but by guiding Catherine's attention to specific details within the text such as Udolpho's black veil. In their daily interactions, Isabella lets down her own linguistic veil to disguise her intent to pervert reality as she instructs Catherine to pay attention to her words and not to her actions. For example, Isabella entreats Catherine to "move away from this end of the room...there are two odious young men who have been staring at me this half hour...Let us go and look at the arrivals. They will hardly follow us there," yet as soon as Catherine informs her of the gentlemen having left the Pump-room, Isabella hastily suggests leaving as well to go to Edgar's Buildings to show her friend a new hat.²³ When Catherine innocently observes that this plan will have them "overtake the two young men" and instead suggests "if we only wait a few minutes, there will be no danger of our seeing them at all," Isabella disguises her desire to pursue the gentlemen, "one...a very good-looking young man" she notices, by arguing that they will "pass by them presently" and that she "shall not pay them...[the] compliment" of waiting the few minutes Catherine suggested.²⁴

Because Isabella manipulates the language of the independent, spirited sentimental heroine to flirt with and follow these two attractive young men, Catherine is blithely unaware of the stark contrast between her friend's words and their actual meaning. Just as she unquestioningly accepts Isabella's reading recommendations, Catherine takes Isabella's interpretation of her duplicitous behavior at face value. To the detriment of Isabella's original hidden agenda since their first meeting--her marrying James Morland--Catherine remains impervious to the implied significance of her friend's words. She is oblivious to her

²² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 24.

²³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 27.

²⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 27.

friend's not-too-thinly-veiled allusion to her supposed feelings for James, following in his father's footsteps and destined for the Church, when Isabella confesses herself "very partial to the profession" of clergyman as "something of a sigh escaped her."²⁵ Catherine is ignorant that she is meant to betray to James Isabella's attached heart and preference for "light eyes" and a sallow complexion to her brother. Therefore, when Isabella asks Catherine to "not betray me, if you should ever meet with one of your acquaintance answering that description...I believe I have said too much. Let us drop the subject," Catherine does not slyly hint at James' answering to that description and instead, "in some amazement, complied" with Isabella's request.²⁶

Although Isabella's mercenary interest in James Morland, not sincere affection, is what draws Catherine into friendship with her, the relationship nonetheless acquires the tones of sisterhood. Unlike the heroines of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Catherine's self-awareness is not prompted by a close attachment to an actual biological sister, but to a sister-to-be, a relationship decreed by social norms. As such, the friendship that both young women construct serves as the basis for what Catherine believes is their future relationship as sisters. James Morland is the first male figure who not only brings the two young women together but who triangulates Catherine and Isabella's dyad. At first, James Morland joins Catherine and Isabella in name only since he is brother to one and of financial/romantic interest to the other, but he is not physically present in Bath. After his arrival, however, Catherine, typically "afraid to judge and act for herself," finds she must use her own understanding to uphold not only her own desires but her sense of right.²⁷

Upon James' arrival, Catherine is too "engrossed by her own" feelings to notice the "mixture of joy and embarrassment" with which her brother greets Miss Thorpe and to conjecture that his pleasing her will be the sole compass of his behavior while in Bath: "In a private consultation between Isabella and James, the former of whom had particularly set

²⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 21.

²⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 27.

²⁷ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 70.

her heart upon going, and the latter no less anxiously placed his upon pleasing her" agree that their postponed excursion to Clifton would take place the following morning.²⁸

Expecting Catherine's happy acquiescence to the plan, Isabella is displeased to find that her friend will not go due to a previous engagement with Eleanor Tilney. Both Thorpes eagerly press her to retract such a promise, yet Catherine is "distressed, but not subdued" because she knows her conduct to be in the right.²⁹ Catherine rejects the Thorpes' suggestion to break her engagement to Miss Tilney and, for the first time in her friendship with Isabella, does not allow herself to be influenced by her friend's manipulative use of language. When Isabella calls on her "dearest, sweetest" friend "in the most affectionate manner" to tell her that she knows that "her beloved Catherine to have so feeling a heart, so sweet a temper, to be so easily persuaded by those she loved," Catherine remains unyielding not because it would be more pleasurable to walk with Miss Tilney than to visit Clifton with Isabella-- though it *would* be--but because she knows her conduct to be just: "Catherine felt herself to be in the right, and though pained by such tender, such flattering supplication, could not allow it to influence her."³⁰ Later, Catherine reflects on her own conduct:

Setting her own inclination apart, to have failed a second time in her engagement to Miss Tilney, to have retracted a promise voluntarily made only five minutes before, and on a false pretence too, must have been wrong. She had not been withstanding them on selfish principles alone...no, she had attended to what was due to others, and to her own character in their opinion.³¹

In this refusal, Catherine becomes an independent entity who is able to estimate her own behavior and to interpret others' motivations. When the thwarted Isabella replaces her tender requests with the resentful observation that "these Tilneys seem to swallow up

²⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 28, 66.

²⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 66.

³⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 66.

³¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 69.

everything else," Catherine questions Isabella's very friendship and thinks "this reproach equally strange and unkind. Was it the part of a friend thus to expose her feelings to the notice of others? Isabella appeared to her ungenerous and selfish, regardless of everything but her own gratification."³² Though the verb "appears" indicates some hesitation on Catherine's part to reach such a conclusion, she cannot help but see that because Isabella is driven by pure self-interest, she is hardly a loyal friend. As Jane Nardin suggest, Catherine apprehends that although her friend's "own rules of propriety...are drawn from sentimental fiction...she interprets the significance of other people's social behavior...in a totally idiosyncratic fashion."³³ Although Isabella enjoys playing the part of the romantic heroine to "give some interest and significance to her own trammled existence," she applies such rules of conduct to other people's emotions only as when it suits her purposes. Although Catherine does not return Isabella's reproaches with these "painful ideas," it is clear that her mind is no longer "fearful of hazarding an opinion of its own" whether in opposition of her friend or of her own brother.³⁴

Not able to stand the lovely Isabella's pressing of her handkerchief to her eyes, James unfeelingly takes aim not only at Catherine's ability to be a good friend, but at her willingness to be a good sister: "the sacrifice is not so much; and to oblige such a friend--I shall think you quite unkind, if you still refuse...you were not used to be so hard to persuade; you once were the kindest, best-tempered of sisters."³⁵ Though James is fully aware of the rules of propriety to which Catherine is bound, he prefers to play the lover who values his beloved's caprice over his sister's rectitude. James not only sides with Isabella's wishes but actively pressures Catherine by attempting to redefine her: according to James, a single act of stubborn "unkindness" towards a friend effectively effaces her past identity as a good sister. Although much more grieved by her brother's unfounded accusation than

³² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 67.

³³ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 66.

³⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 67, 31.

³⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 67.

by her friend's constant pressure, Catherine continues to assert her own judgement by repeating once again the simple phrase, "I am doing what I believe to be right."³⁶ By fusing Catherine's identity as a friend to her identity as a sister, James not only underscores the bonds of surrogate sisterhood existing between Catherine and Isabella but, by granting an opportunity for the first significant difference of opinion between the two young women, "provides a catalyst which arranges all Catherine's earlier vague suspicions of her friend in a clear and ordered pattern."³⁷

Though a profound attachment on Catherine's part, her sisterly friendship with Isabella is not of long duration as she "goes through a learning-process, both discarding fantasies and facing facts."³⁸ Catherine's affection for James leads her to observe with concern and indignation Isabella's brazen flirtation with Captain Tilney. Jealous for her brother, Catherine leaves the pair after overhearing one of their conversations, hoping rather than believing that Isabella is "unconsciously encouraging him" to fall in love with her.³⁹ Because James' heart "to her was always an object," Catherine can no longer fully excuse her friend.⁴⁰ After observing Isabella's continued admittance of "Captain Tilney's attentions, Catherine is still willing to believe that "Isabella could not be aware of the pain she was inflicting; but it was a degree of wilful thoughtlessness which Catherine could not but resent."⁴¹ However, the small comfort of Isabella's lack of awareness regarding her behavior to which Catherine clings evaporates after James's letter in which he relates Isabella's duplicity: "till the very last, if I reasoned with her, she declared herself as much attached to me as ever, and laughed at my fears...I cannot understand even now what she would be at, for there could be no need of my being played off to make her secure of

³⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 67.

³⁷ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 79.

³⁸ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 48.

³⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 100.

⁴⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 101.

⁴¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 101.

Tilney."⁴² Catherine has no choice but to learn not only that Isabella Thorpe is not the person she pretended to be but also that other's motivations must be "consciously and continually questioned" in order to prevent her being imposed upon again.⁴³

It is no surprise, then, that when Catherine receives Isabella's last letter in which she claims to be "quite uneasy about your dear brother, not having heard from him since he went to Oxford; and am fearful of some misunderstanding" and requests that Catherine's "kind offices will set all right...he is the only man I ever did or could love, and I trust you will convince him of it."⁴⁴ However, Catherine neither is blind to the letter's true purpose nor to its author's "shallow artifice...inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood."⁴⁵ Catherine, once quite a literal reader, is now able to comprehend Isabella's deceptions: "She was ashamed of Isabella, and ashamed of having ever loved her. Her professions of attachment were now as disgusting as her excuses were empty, and her demands impudent."⁴⁶ Indeed, Catherine's impression of Isabella is now so negative and forceful that she resolves to act on her brother's behalf as well: "Write to James on her behalf!--No, James should never hear Isabella's name mentioned by her again."⁴⁷

Her friendship with Isabella is not the only triangulated relationship where a brother acts as a catalyst of change for Catherine. Almost at the same time that she questions Isabella's friendship as the frustrated Clifton scheme unfolds, Catherine begins a friendship with Eleanor Tilney, the kind of heroine Catherine aspires to be as the novel opens.⁴⁸ In this relationship, it is Henry Tilney who prompts Catherine's further self-awareness.

⁴² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 139.

⁴³ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 79.

⁴⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 149.

⁴⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 150.

⁴⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 150.

⁴⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 150.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels*, 56. Julia Prewitt Brown observes, "Eleanor Tilney is a far more suitable heroine than Catherine Morland. Indeed, she is precisely the heroine whom Catherine fails to be on the first page of the novel. Her mother is dead and her father is tyrannical. She is effectively 'locked up' at Northanger Abbey. She is graceful and attractive, with a mind that, unlike Catherine's, is propitious for heroism. What is more, she is in love with a man who is not permitted to address her. Elegant, sensitive, and withdrawn, she is made interesting to us by her 'habitual suffering.'"

Although Catherine is not deceived in the worth of this second friend, her attachment to Eleanor Tilney not only promotes her understanding of deceiving appearances but, most importantly, causes her to value her judgment over a beloved's, even if only momentarily. Unlike James Morland, Henry Tilney is a much more facetious lover. Henry's affection for Catherine, strong and sincere enough by the end of the novel to cause him to defy General Tilney, does not originate in the strong attraction that elicits that mixture of joy and embarrassment from James Morland upon seeing Isabella Thorpe again. It is based "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."⁴⁹ Though Henry Tilney does come to be "delighted in all her excellencies of her character and truly loved her society," he views Catherine's understanding on subjects as wide ranging from novels to his own father's character as too uninformed and naive to be taken seriously.⁵⁰ In addition to being Catherine's romantic interest, his critical skepticism makes Henry the appropriate catalyst in this triangulated friendship.

When the long-awaited walk with Henry and Eleanor Tilney finally takes place and the subject turns to novels, Catherine asks of Henry, "But now really, do not you think *Udolpho* the nicest book in the world?" He responds by interpreting the word "nice" with literal semantic precision: "The nicest;--by which I suppose you mean the neatest. That must depend on the binding."⁵¹ Though Catherine attempts to defend her use of the word by stating "I did not mean to say any thing wrong; but it is a nice book, and why should I not call it so?" Henry retaliates with his observation that the word in question "does for everything. Originally perhaps it was applied only to express neatness, propriety, delicacy, and refinement...But now every commendation on every subject is comprised in that one word."⁵² It is Eleanor who frees Catherine from Henry's verbal constraints: "in fact...it ought

⁴⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 168.

⁵⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 168.

⁵¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 73.

⁵² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 74.

only to be applied to you, without any commendation at all. You have more nice than wise. Come, Miss Morland, let us leave him to meditate over our faults in the utmost propriety of diction, while we praise Udolpho in whatever terms we like best."⁵³ Eleanor's play on the word "nice" shows an elastic command of language rivaling Henry's and uses it to empower Catherine's opinion of novels.

Henry's fastidiousness silences Catherine by focusing on her general use of the word "nice" but without any interest in her interpretation of said novel. Eleanor's vindication of her friend's use of language encourages Catherine to give her judgment not only of literature but of history as well--and rather forcefully, too: "it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me...the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all--it is very tiresome...The speeches that are put into the heroes' mouths, their thoughts and designs--the chief of all this must be invention, and invention is what delights me in other books."⁵⁴ Instead of truncating her thinking, as Henry does with his sole emphasis on diction, Eleanor encourages Catherine to explain her relationship with various genres of texts and to reveal her concern over women's relationships with the narratives they read; history, she insists, is but poorly written fiction further depleted by its erasure of women's lives from their pages. In this triangulated relationship between the two young women, Eleanor not only brings Henry and Catherine into a closer private acquaintance by allowing them to spend more time together. Because of Henry's mediation, Catherine learns from Eleanor how to verbally spar with him and stand by her own judgment.

As Jan Fergus suggests, however, "any reading of [Catherine's] development as continuous is untenable."⁵⁵ Independence of--as well as reliance on--her own perception is a lesson that Catherine does not easily learn since she consistently defers her increasingly insightful understanding in favor of Henry's often flawed judgment. When Catherine resolves to speak with him about his brother's unscrupulous flirtation with an engaged Isabella,

⁵³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 74.

⁵⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 74.

⁵⁵ Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, 18.

Henry systematically erodes her assessment about the severe damage Captain Tilney inflicts on James Morland's feelings. At first, Henry seeks to turn Catherine's censure wholly on Isabella by assuming that James is not troubled by Frederick Tilney's attentions, but by Isabella's acceptance of such admiration: "No man is offended by another man's admiration of the woman he loves; it is the woman only who can make it a torment."⁵⁶ Though Catherine's blush acknowledges Isabella's reprehensible conduct, she nonetheless examines Frederick's motivation for his actions: "If he knows her engagement, what can he mean by his behavior?...---Sure, if your father were to speak to him, he would go."⁵⁷ Made uncomfortable by her keen observations, Henry comes close to recognizing while simultaneously criticizing Catherine's solid understanding when he observes that she is "a very close questioner."⁵⁸ However, when Catherine comes too close to his own family's strained dynamics, Henry skillfully turns her attention not only by suggesting that her loyalty to James clouds her judgment but that this same brother would be displeased by Catherine's allusion to his fiancée's reckless conduct: "In this amiable solicitude for your brother's comfort...Are you not carried a little too far? Would he thank you...for supposing that her affection, or at least her good-behaviour, is only to be secured by her seeing nothing of Captain Tilney?"⁵⁹

Being "more glib than acute," Henry excuses his brother while attempting to reassure Catherine of her brother's relationship.⁶⁰ Excusing Captain Tilney as being only "a lively, and perhaps sometimes a thoughtless young man," he erroneously advises Catherine to think that because she has "no doubt of the mutual attachment of your brother and your friend...real jealousy never can exist between them; depend upon it that no disagreement between them can be of any duration...you may be certain, that one will never tease the

⁵⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 103.

⁵⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 103.

⁵⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 103.

⁵⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 103.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 48.

other beyond what is known to be pleasant."⁶¹ Although Catherine clearly sees that Isabella is "teasing" James beyond what is pleasant, she only signals her dissent from Henry's fallacious statement with "doubtful and grave" looks instead of voicing her own disagreement. Catherine's judgment completely gives way to Henry's assurance that Frederick's "leave of absence will soon expire, and he must return to his regiment.-And what will then be their acquaintance?--The mess-room will drink Isabella Thorpe for a fortnight, and she will laugh with your brother over poor Tilney's passion for a month": she can "contend no longer against comfort. She had resisted its approaches during the whole length of a speech, but it now carried her captive. Henry Tilney must know best."⁶² Instead of trusting to her own understanding of her own brother and to the observations that accurately predict the permanent rupture between James and Isabella, Catherine accepts Henry's incorrect interpretation and "blamed herself for the extent of her fears, and resolved never to think so seriously on the subject again."⁶³

The discussion over Isabella's conduct with Captain Tilney is not the most serious situation of Henry's reproaching Catherine's judgment for going too far. Neither is this the most important instance of Catherine allowing herself to be led astray by Henry's incorrect perceptions. Because Catherine continues to "[submit] her understanding to fiction," her judgment is susceptible to the narratives of an amused Henry.⁶⁴ On their journey to Northanger Abbey, Henry tells Catherine a dark, Gothic tale in which she is the protagonist: "...your eyes will be attracted towards a large, old-fashioned cabinet of ebony and gold. Impelled by an irresistible presentiment, you will eagerly advance to it, unlock its folding doors, and search into every drawer...a roll of paper appears...when your lamp suddenly

⁶¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 103, 104.

⁶² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 104.

⁶³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 104.

⁶⁴ Katrin Ristkok Burlin, "The Pen of the Contriver: the Four Fictions of Northanger Abbey," in *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. John Halperin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 107. Burlin suggests that as Isabella's friend, Catherine submits her understanding to sentimental novels while she later surrenders her judgment to the thrill of Gothic fiction as a guest of the Tilneys.

expires in the socket, and leaves you in total darkness."⁶⁵ Catherine--predisposed by Henry's story--notices a black and yellow Japan in her room and like the Catherine of Henry's tale, she searches all the drawers of the cabinet and even manages to open an inner lock and find a roll of paper. Though not holding a lamp, Catherine snuffs her dim candle and is left in complete darkness. The divide between Henry's fantasy and Catherine's reality is fully revealed the next morning when, instead of finding the written account of a doomed heroine, she finds an inventory of linens. Though Catherine clearly recognizes that her imagination is ignited by Henry's narrative, she is thankful he will never know the extent of her foolishness. To Catherine's mortification, however, Henry Tilney does discover her most serious Gothic concoction.

Catherine's mind, already predisposed to Gothic plots, fuses General Tilney's tyrannical oppression of both his children's conduct and of her own spirits with the typical behavior of Gothic villainy: "the probability that Mrs. Tilney yet lived, shut up for causes unknown, and receiving from the pitiless hands of her husband a nightly supply of coarse food, was the conclusion that necessarily followed."⁶⁶ Determined to unravel the mystery of Mrs. Tilney's fate, Catherine makes her way to her room not only to find a modern apartment instead of an ancient chamber but also some "ray of common sense" leading her to be ashamed of her own suppositions.⁶⁷ Still, she does not give up easily on them: "whatever might have been the General's crimes, he had certainly too much wit to let them sue for detection."⁶⁸ Upon finding herself face to face with Henry Tilney, however, she is forced to allude to her suspicions of General Tilney's character only to have her judgment severely called into question:

Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the

⁶⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 109.

⁶⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 129.

⁶⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 133.

⁶⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 133.

country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you--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 footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies, and where road and newspapers lay every thing open?⁶⁹

Rather than trust to her understanding of the General's character even while admitting the impossibility of imprisoning his wife, Catherine once again takes upon herself Henry's perception: "The liberty which her imagination dared to take with the character of his father, could he ever forgive it? The absurdity of her curiosity and her fears, could they ever be forgotten?"⁷⁰ His "guidance" undermines Catherine's judgment because "she does not answer Henry or defy him, rather she accepts and defines her behavior according to his accusations."⁷¹

Despite Henry's reprimanding assurances not about his father's good character but about the civilizing restraint spying neighbors exert upon him, Catherine soon experiences the General's villainy firsthand. Once more, it is Eleanor Tilney who corrects Henry's self-assured conjectures--this time not by her sprightly word play but by her inability to act against her father's orders. Engaged by the responsibilities of his curacy at Woodston, Henry absents himself from Northanger Abbey; in his place, a furious General Tilney returns from London and forces his daughter to be a most unwilling messenger of his resentment: "My dear Catherine, we are to part. My father has recollected an engagement that takes our whole family away on Monday...To-morrow morning is fixed for your leaving us, and not

⁶⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 136.

⁷⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 137.

⁷¹ Maria Jeniric, "In Defense of the Gothic: Rereading *Northanger Abbey*," in *Jane Austen and the Discourses of Feminism*, ed. Devoney Looser, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 146.

even the hour is left to your choice."⁷² Catherine tries to alleviate the General's pointed insult for Eleanor's sake by saying that though she wishes the engagement were to be recollected sooner so she could have informed her parents, "it is of very little consequence."⁷³ Eleanor herself is fully aware of her father's misconduct: "I earnestly hope that to your real safety it will be of none; but to everything else it is of the greatest consequence; to comfort, appearance, propriety, to your family, to the world. Were your friends, the Allens, still in Bath, you might go to them with comparative ease; but a journey of several miles, to be taken post by you, at your age, alone, unattended!"⁷⁴ Contrary to Henry's assurances, neither the fact that General Tilney is a Christian and an English gentleman nor that the laws of the land or common decency in the eyes of others prevent him from persecuting Catherine, a young woman in his charge, by exposing her to very real danger to her person and to her character. Eleanor, a "nominal mistress" in her father's home, is unable to shield Catherine from the General's nature, and helps Catherine reflect that "in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character or magnified her cruelty."⁷⁵ Although Eleanor enables Catherine to rely on her own judgment instead of on Henry's understanding, Catherine's attraction for him overrides this vital lesson.

Terry Castle observes that "Catherine...is defined by a series of 'no's,' 'not's,' 'neither's,' and 'nor's,' the story Austen tells about her is also fraught with negatives."⁷⁶ These oft-repeated negatives at the opening of the novel hint at Catherine Morland's inability to sustain meaningful cognitive self-awareness and to effectively project her presence upon the world. Her inability to replicate the maternal relationship she most needs hinders her ability to understand the social pitfalls that await her. Because there is no suitable maternal figure to replace the physically and intellectually distant Mrs. Morland or

⁷² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 154.

⁷³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 155.

⁷⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 155.

⁷⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 170.

⁷⁶ Castle, *Boss Ladies Watch Out!*, 25.

the innocuous Mrs. Allen, Catherine has not one but two triangulated friendship defined by hopes of kinship. Although not related by blood, she expects and wishes that both Isabella Thorpe and Eleanor Tilney respectively will be her sisters by marriage--thus these friendships will be cemented when the young women become part of a family circle. In a friendship with Isabella and Eleanor, therefore, Catherine mistakenly attempts to structure the external social realm of friends with the emotional intimacy of familial ties. As a result of these erroneous relationships, Catherine cannot become an active agent. Isabella Thorpe and Eleanor Tilney, of course, are not analogous: while Isabella seeks to serve her own self-interest by weaving the fiction of romantic, sentimental friendship around Catherine, Eleanor, the true romantic heroine, shows Catherine how to use language transparently and directly. Though these two surrogate sisters have different motives, Catherine's friendships with Isabella and Eleanor compel her to develop her own judgment. However, they cannot teach Catherine to fully trust her evolving understanding: both at Bath with Isabella Thorpe or at Northanger Abbey with Eleanor's father, General Tilney, Catherine displays a sustained "inability to look below the surface of social pretence."⁷⁷ Claudia Johnson points out that Catherine is unable to see that "General Tilney and Isabella Thorpe are similar characters who cause disorder because they never mean what they say...But Isabella's faithlessness, like the General's, results not from a change of heart, but from a choice of policy favoring wealth."⁷⁸ Although Catherine is wisely able to perceive both of these characters as villains, she allows Henry Tilney and her attraction for him to dissuade her from trusting the judgment she has finally formed. Because Catherine has the ability of accurate perception but abandons it to appease Henry, she can neither gain a permanent self-awareness nor act according to it. Though Catherine's action is circumscribed by social expectations--she has no choice but to leave Northanger Abbey at the overbearing command of the General--she does not avail herself of the only option for moral action available to her: the vocal

⁷⁷ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 75.

⁷⁸ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 45.

denunciation of those whose social duty it is to protect her. Yet, Catherine remains as incognizant about James Morland's selfish behavior when he tried to coerce her acquiescence to Isabella's will as when General Tilney exiles her from Northanger. Catherine Morland, then, is not the conventional heroine of sentimental literature she hopes to be at the opening of the novel, but neither is she the self-aware protagonist of her own common, mundane existence. While Catherine's female friendships help her achieve marriage, they do not ultimately enable her to achieve permanent cognitive certainty or to present herself before others as a moral agent capable of social critique.

Persuasion

Claudia Johnson observes that the relationship between *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* is "deeper than the accident of their copublication."⁷⁹ In addition to being preoccupied with the dissociative effects of time, both novels "attempt to delimit the legitimate boundaries of authoritative interference."⁸⁰ I would like to take this point further and argue that in their delineation of the limits of parental authority in particular, both *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* present a heroine whose quest it is not only to develop her judgment but to act upon the moral authority such an aptitude confers. As I have proposed in the previous section of this chapter, Catherine Morland is largely unsuccessful in the pursuit of empowering self-awareness: it takes the novel's complete narrative journey and two ultimately ineffective triangulated friendships with young women she sees as sisters for the youngest of Austen's heroines to finally acknowledge it is only steely self-interest and not the welfare of others under their care that guides figures of authority. However, this realization is nothing more than a passing glimpse that leaves no lasting impression on Catherine as she allows her attraction for Henry Tilney to wash away her hard-won consciousness. Unlike Catherine, *Persuasion's* Anne Elliot, the most mature of

⁷⁹ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 146.

⁸⁰ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 155.

Austen's heroines, recognizes the social inadequacy and moral bankruptcy of authority figures and learns to act solely on her own judgment eight years before the main events of the novel take place. And I argue that as Anne's relationship with Lady Russell, her surrogate mother, becomes triangulated by the presence of Frederick Wentworth, the friendship allows her to act more visibly as an agent of her own felicity and as a critic indicting the vacuousness of the social sphere from whence she originates.

At the beginning of the novel, Anne Elliot inhabits a shadowy world of empty ciphers. Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall, Anne's father, is guilty of being no more than just a "foolish, spendthrift baronet."⁸¹ Sir Walter Elliot's "unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs" and exponentially increasing since his "growing distressed for money," placidly melt away when he takes up the Baronetage.⁸² The volume does not remind him of the duties and responsibilities which his title and rank confer upon him but, quite to the contrary, it simply serves to arouse feelings of pity for himself and contempt for his obligations: "he now took up the Baronetage...to drive the heavy bills of his tradespeople, and the unwelcome hints of Mr. Shepherd, his agent."⁸³ Indeed, the book only reflects back to Sir Walter an aggrandized version of his own importance and seems to excuse his irresponsible financial excesses: "It had not been possible for him to spend less; he had done nothing but what Sir Walter Elliot was imperiously called on to do; but blameless as he was, he was not only growing dreadfully in debt, but was hearing of it so often, that it became vain to attempt concealing it longer."⁸⁴ Sir Walter's unalloyed enjoyment of the respect and benefits of rank and disregard for the genuine authority property and a responsibility towards his tenants confer upon him is confirmed by his willingness to rent Kellynch Hall to the highest bidder--a not-too-weather-beaten Admiral Croft--and speedily

⁸¹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 165.

⁸² Austen, *Persuasion*, 3, 7.

⁸³ Austen, *Persuasion*, 7.

⁸⁴ Austen, *Persuasion*, 7.

remove to Bath, where he "might...be important at comparatively little expense."⁸⁵ His eldest daughter, Elizabeth, is a female replica of Sir Walter. For thirteen years since her mother's death "laying down the domestic law at home," Elizabeth is equally willing to quit the responsibilities of Kellynch for the empty pleasures of Bath.⁸⁶ Her inattention to the welfare of dependents is evident not only in the smallness of "the happy thought of taking no present down to Anne" but in her willingness to "cut off some unnecessary charities" rather than do without expenses that would "[compromise] their dignity, or [relinquish] their comforts."⁸⁷ Even Mr. Elliot, Sir Walter's cousin and initially recalcitrant heir, "cannot [now] bear the idea of not being Sir William."⁸⁸ As the penniless but observant Mrs. Smith points out, Mr. Elliot, "having long had as much money as he could spend, nothing to wish for on the side of avarice and indulgence,...has been gradually learning to pin his happiness upon the consequence he is heir to."⁸⁹ Although clearly Mr. Elliot no longer believes that "if baronetcies were saleable, any body should have his for fifty pounds, arms and motto, name and livery included," he is only attracted to the importance rank will confer to his already existing wealth and not to the social duties it conveys.⁹⁰ Indeed, his callous treatment of Mrs. Smith foreshadows the neglect those dependent on him will experience. In Anne Elliot's world, "the normal sources of stability and order...social position, property, place, family, manners and propriety...generating a web of duties and responsibilities which together should serve to maintain the moral fabric and coherence of society" give way to an obsession with 'rank', 'connexions,' money and private relationships."⁹¹

Although Mr. Elliot is attracted to Anne, her more significant qualities--"an elegance of mind and sweetness of character" as well as a strong sense of social duty and moral responsibility--render her invisible within her family: she is "nobody with either father or

⁸⁵ Austen, *Persuasion* 10.

⁸⁶ Austen, *Persuasion*, 5.

⁸⁷ Austen, *Persuasion*, 8.

⁸⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, 137.

⁸⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 137.

⁹⁰ Austen, *Persuasion*, 134.

⁹¹ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 215-216.

sister: her word had not weight; her convenience was always to give way;--she was only Anne."⁹² In this world of meaningless pageantry, Anne Elliot "is perpetually displaced...The story of her life consists precisely in having had her own way blocked, refused, negated."⁹³ Because she is "only Anne," neither Sir Walter nor Elizabeth thinks of consulting her measures to economize family expenses. Doubtless, these suggestions would not be to their liking: "She considered it as an act of indispensable duty to clear away the claims of creditors, with all the expedition which the most comprehensive retrenchments could secure, and saw no dignity in anything short of it. She wanted it to be prescribed, and felt as a duty."⁹⁴ However, Anne's usual fate attends her, and her wishes not only go unheeded--they remain unknown. Never like Sir Walter in looks or temperament, Anne loses whatever little worth she holds in her father's eyes when she loses her looks and the bloom of happiness: even at the height of youth, her father "had found little to admire in her...there could be nothing...now that she was faded and thin, to excite his esteem. He had never indulged much hope, he had now none, of ever reading her name in any other page of his favorite book."⁹⁵ It is almost as if "until she is...reborn in terms of writing in the Baronetage, she does not exist--not to be in the book is thus not to be."⁹⁶ It is not so much her appearance but her advice that her sister Elizabeth resents. Elizabeth is happy to extend an invitation to the insinuating Mrs. Clay, Mr. Shepherd's daughter, to go to Bath "as a most important and valuable assistant...in all the business before her" while leaving Anne behind at Uppercross Cottage with their sister Mary, yet Anne cannot help but warn her sister about the imprudence of such a plan.⁹⁷ Anne, "with a great deal of quiet observation, and a knowledge, which she often wished less, of her father's character, she was sensible that

⁹² Austen, *Persuasion*, 5.

⁹³ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 210.

⁹⁴ Austen, *Persuasion*. 9-10.

⁹⁵ Austen, *Persuasion*, 5.

⁹⁶ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 210.

⁹⁷ Austen, *Persuasion*, 23.

results the most serious to his family from the intimacy, were more than possible."⁹⁸

Choosing not to be forewarned, Elizabeth is demonstrably angry at her sister's interference and "could not conceive how such an absurd suspicion should occur to her; and indignantly answered for each party's perfectly knowing their situation."⁹⁹

It is not only Anne but Lady Russell as well who disapproves of Elizabeth's growing acquaintance with Mrs. Clay. Lady Russell, a woman of "steady age and character," is more than a friend of the family--she is the maternal guide the dying Lady Elliot entrusted with all of her daughters' welfare.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the friendship between the two women had been so strong that Lady Russell had "been brought, by strong attachment to [Lady Elliot], to settle close by her in the village of Kellynch."¹⁰¹ Out of this attachment with a woman so similar to her in understanding and character, Lady Elliot hopes to provide a strong, sensible basis for her daughters' female network of support:

Three girls, the two eldest sixteen and fourteen, was an awful legacy for a mother to bequeath; an awful charge, rather to confide to the authority and guidance of a conceited, silly father. She had, however, one very intimate friend, a sensible, deserving woman...and on her kindness and advice, Lady Elliot mainly relied for the best help and maintenance of the good principles and instruction which she had been anxiously giving her daughters.¹⁰²

Although Lady Elliot clearly intends for Lady Russell to be a surrogate parental influence in the face of an absent mother and a selfish father for all of her daughters, the friendship between the older woman and Anne is the one that most closely models itself after a bond between mother and daughter. Elizabeth disdains everything from Lady Russell's mode of dress and the "new poems and states of the nation" which the older woman periodically

⁹⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, 23.

⁹⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Austen, *Persuasion*, 4.

¹⁰¹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 4.

¹⁰² Austen, *Persuasion*, 4.

gives her to the more substantial advice as to how to retrench the Elliot's compromised economy and abandon her rapid intimacy with Mrs. Clay.¹⁰³ Lady Russell, therefore, has "scarcely any influence with Elizabeth, and seemed to love her, rather because she would love her, than because Elizabeth deserved it."¹⁰⁴ Although Mary's attitude toward Lady Russell appears to be driven by excessive respect, it is motivated by a wish for self-importance similar to Elizabeth's. Upon visiting Lady Russell and Anne at Kellynch after their stay in Lyme, Mary and her husband Charles discuss Captain Benwick's opinion of Anne. Charles believes that Benwick did not accept his invitation to come to Uppercross because he would not be close to Anne, a woman the captain believes embodies "elegance, sweetness, beauty."¹⁰⁵ But Mary, "whether from not considering Captain Benwick's entitled by birth and situation to be in love with an Elliot, or from not wanting to believe Anne a greater attraction to Uppercross than herself," reminds all present of the recent death of Benwick's fiancée and, appealing to Lady Russell for greater authority, states that "such a heart is very little worth having; is it, Lady Russell? I am sure you will agree with me."¹⁰⁶ The older woman, however, rebuffs Mary when she responds that she must see Captain Benwick before making her decision. In such a seemingly mundane conversation, Mary betrays her ignorance of Lady Russell's real judgment when she states that the older woman will dislike Benwick for his lack of good breeding: "He will sit poring over his book, and not know when a person speaks to him, or when one drops one's scissors. Do you think Lady Russell will like that?"¹⁰⁷ Yet it is Anne, the only one of the Elliot sisters who truly knows and values Lady Russell, who calls attention to one trait of Benwick's that her friend will appreciate: "I think Lady Russell would like him. I think she would be so much pleased

¹⁰³ Austen, *Persuasion*, 143.

¹⁰⁴ Austen, *Persuasion*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Austen, *Persuasion*, 86.

¹⁰⁶ Austen, *Persuasion*, 86.

¹⁰⁷ Austen, *Persuasion*, 87.

with his mind, that she would very soon see no deficiency in his manner."¹⁰⁸ It is Anne who knows Lady Russell enough to know she will value true sense over superficial manners.

Lady Russell does not trouble herself with Mary--indeed, the episode discussed above is the only scene in the novel shared by both characters. Out of all three of Lady Elliot's daughters, it is Anne to whom she is the closest: "she was a most dear and highly valued goddaughter, favourite and friend...it was only in Anne that she could fancy the mother to revive again."¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the older woman's affections are triply engaged--unlike Sir Walter or Elizabeth, Lady Russell appreciates Anne's elegance of mind and sweetness of character. Furthermore, Anne's physical appearance, her "delicate features and mild dark eyes," make Lady Russell's beloved friend revive before her.¹¹⁰ As a godmother, she becomes the young woman's strongest and--indeed only--advocate: even though Anne is inured to being only a convenient attendant to Mary when she fancies herself ill and a nonentity with either Sir Walter or Elizabeth, it is Lady Russell who feels and attempts to correct pointed slights against her. The older woman "had been repeatedly very earnest in trying to get Anne included in the visit to London, sensibly open to all the injustice and all the discredit which shut her out" and opposes Elizabeth's growing friendship with Mrs. Clay, surprised that she should be "turning from the society of so deserving a sister to bestow affection and confidence on one who ought to have been nothing to her but the object of distant civility."¹¹¹

Although the close friendship between them assigns to Lady Russell the role of mother "as educator and moral guide, as the provider of spiritual and emotional comfort" and to Anne Elliot the role of dutiful daughter, Anne must learn that not even the best-intentioned maternal authority is infallible.¹¹² The inadequacy of Lady Russell's counsel is hinted at early in the novel as Anne recalls that "excepting one short period of her life, she

¹⁰⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 5.

¹¹⁰ Austen, *Persuasion*, 5.

¹¹¹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 12.

¹¹² Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, 83.

had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste."¹¹³ Although in this particular instance Anne refers to her mother's encouragement in music, this nostalgic remembrance hints at "the sensation of feeling her own presence as an object worthy to be held as 'listened to' and 'encouraged' by an equally worthy consciousness of 'just appreciation' and 'real taste.'" ¹¹⁴ Since her mother's death, Lady Russell attempts to provide this sensation of consciousness for Anne--not just to be encouraged in appreciation and taste but also to provide worthwhile, rational opposition. Of course, it is not possible to ascertain whether Lady Elliot would have encouraged her daughter in that other "short period" of happiness, but Lady Russell's adamant disapproval of it is evident. At nineteen, Anne Elliot is "an extremely pretty girl, with gentleness, modesty, taste, and feeling" who falls "rapidly and deeply in love" with "a captain Frederick Wentworth...a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy" but with "no hopes of attaining affluence."¹¹⁵ While Anne loves the qualities that define and set apart Captain Wentworth from others, Lady Russell not only mistrusts but detests these same traits of unbridled self-confidence. Certainly, she is "more sincere... than Mr. Elliot and...more generous and reasonable...than Sir Walter and Elizabeth...[yet] nonetheless [she] resembles this unattractive trio in that she regards outwardly proper behavior as very important."¹¹⁶ The intelligence, spirit, and brilliancy that Wentworth expresses in his hopes of improved fortunes and that Anne finds so "bewitching," Lady Russell interprets otherwise: "his sanguine temper, and fearlessness of mind operated very differently on her. She saw in it but an aggravation of the evil. It only added a dangerous character to himself."¹¹⁷ Because Lady Russell disapproves of Anne and Wentworth's relationship, she presents her young friend and charge with all the evils of such a marriage. Although Sir Walter himself

¹¹³ Austen, *Persuasion*, 32.

¹¹⁴ Kay Young, "Feeling Embodied: Consciousness, Persuasion, and Jane Austen," *Narrative* 11.1 (2003): 83.

¹¹⁵ Austen, *Persuasion*, 18.

¹¹⁶ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 133.

¹¹⁷ Austen, *Persuasion*, 19.

gives the match "all the negative of great astonishment, great coldness, and great silence, and a professed resolution of doing nothing for his daughter," it is Lady Russell who with "almost a mother's love, and mother's rights," finally persuades Anne "to believe the engagement a wrong thing--indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it."¹¹⁸ A dutiful Anne does not respect her father's authority enough to allow his refusal to change her wish to marry Captain Wentworth, but Lady Russell's steady judgment and nourishing affection convinces her gives up the engagement: "Young and gentle as she was, it might yet have been possible to withstand her father's ill-will...but Lady Russell, whom she had always loved and relied on, could not, with such steadiness of opinion, and such tenderness of manner, be continually advising her in vain."¹¹⁹

By allowing Lady Russell to persuade her to relinquish Frederick Wentworth, Anne Elliot simultaneously abandons Lady Russell as her mother-surrogate to become "the central intelligence of the novel."¹²⁰ Disillusioned by "the absence of any real centre or principle of authority," Anne never again allows her friend's advice to influence her decisions.¹²¹ The seed of Anne's judgment is evident in the very moment of her break with Wentworth. While Lady Russell believes the engagement an evil because it would sink her promising young friend "into a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependance," Anne persuades herself that the engagement is without merit for more altruistic reasons: "...it was not a merely selfish caution, under which she acted, in putting an end to it. Had she not imagined herself consulting his good, even more than her own, she could hardly have given him up."¹²² It is her concern not only about her own welfare but her belief that an inopportune marriage and a rapidly increasing family would materially damage Wentworth's chances to rise in the navy and make his fortune causes Anne to end their relationship and to support his unyielding resentment: "the belief of being prudent, and self-denying principally for *his*

¹¹⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, 18, 19.

¹¹⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 19.

¹²⁰ Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels*, 130.

¹²¹ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 210.

¹²² Austen, *Persuasion*, 19.

advantage, was her chief consolation, under the misery of a parting--a final parting; and every consolation was required, for she had to encounter all the additional pain of opinion, on his side, totally unconvinced and unbending, and of his feeling himself ill-used by so forced a relinquishment."¹²³ It is certainly worth noting, as Claudia Johnson does, that "Wentworth's tenacity in holding 'unbending' opinions, his tendency to remain 'unconvinced' by and inaccessible to opposition, and most alarmingly of all, his readiness to feel 'ill-used' place him in the unflattering fellowship of none other than the Elliot themselves."¹²⁴ Because his own rejection of Anne is born out of a sense of wounded pride, it seems to adumbrate the affronts she is to endure--and eventually to ignore--in her father's house.

Ironically, it is not in marrying Wentworth but in relinquishing him that Anne sinks into the "wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependance" Lady Russell dreaded: "Her attachment and regrets had, for a long time, clouded every enjoyment of youth; and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effect."¹²⁵ As if a depressed emotional state were not enough to confirm Lady Russell's advice as terribly mistaken, Frederick Wentworth's fulfilled expectations of improved fortune confirm it: "All his sanguine expectations, all his confidence had been justified...He had, very soon after their engagement ceased, got employ; and all that he had told her would follow, had taken place. He had distinguished himself, and early gained the other step in rank--and must now, by successive captures, have made a handsome fortune."¹²⁶ Although this event does not cause Anne to blame either Lady Russell or herself, it complicates the nature of their friendship. On the one hand, Lady Russell continues to be Anne's staunch supporter, protector, and friend. Although after the severe disappointment of the broken engagement Anne recedes within herself, "Lady Russell's capacity to see [her] still and hold her in

¹²³ Austen, *Persuasion*, 19

¹²⁴ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 157.

¹²⁵ Austen, *Persuasion*, 20.

¹²⁶ Austen, *Persuasion*, 20.

esteem offers Anne's being some internal room in which to reside as herself."¹²⁷ Yet, the older woman's perilous mistake in judgment and her "feelings that all communications ought to be made within the bounds of propriety prevents Anne from making Lady Russell a real confidante during her eight years suffering."¹²⁸ Anne's continued reliance on her own understanding is strengthened by events subsequent to the termination of the engagement: "she was persuaded that under every disadvantage of disapprobation at home and every anxiety attending his profession, all their probable fears, delays and disappointments, she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, than she had been in the sacrifice of it."¹²⁹ By giving up her relationship with Frederick Wentworth, Anne Elliot learns the painful lesson that neither maternal affection nor solicitude should supersede her own feelings and understanding. In so doing, she becomes "the best judge of right and wrong" in the novel.¹³⁰

The chill in the confidence subsisting between Anne and Lady Russell allows the younger woman to look within her own self and steadily consult her own inclinations as the final arbiter of her conduct. Three years after her broken engagement to Frederick Wentworth, Anne refuses an offer of marriage from Charles Musgrove. Lady Russell's value for rank and consequence leads her to simply see this new suitor as "the eldest son of a man, whose landed property and general importance, were second, in that country, only to Sir Walter's, and of good character and appearance."¹³¹ Yet, Anne perceives a man who does "nothing with much zeal, but sport," and whose time "was otherwise trifled away, without benefit from books, or any thing else."¹³² Lady Russell "had lamented her refusal...she would have rejoiced to see her at twenty-two, so respectably moved from the

¹²⁷ Young, "Feeling Embodied," 83-84.

¹²⁸ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 134.

¹²⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 20.

¹³⁰ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 136.

¹³¹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 20.

¹³² Austen, *Persuasion*, 29.

partialities of her father's house, and settled so permanently near herself."¹³³ However, Anne's accurate discernment of Charles Musgrove's weak character is confirmed by his subsequent rapid selection of her sister Mary. Unlike in her relationship with Wentworth, Anne "had left nothing for advice to do."¹³⁴ Similarly, Anne simply follows her own judgment when Lady Russell urges her to accept her cousin and her father's heir, Mr. Elliot, in marriage: "I own that to be able to regard you as the future mistress of Kellynch, the future Lady Elliot--to look forward and see you occupying your dear mother's place, succeeding to all her rights and all her popularity, as well as to all her virtues, would be the highest possible gratification to me."¹³⁵ Because Lady Russell knows Anne well, she is able to excite her friend's emotions momentarily in favor of this match by conjuring an exalted image of the past--and the future--Lady Elliot. Anne, now an invisible and ignored presence in her family, would be closer to her deceased and beloved mother not only by her physical resemblance but by the occupation of her very place, exercising her very rights, and living her very virtues. In addition to reviving the worthy Lady Elliot, Lady Russell further places her own gratification and delight as another incentive for the match. Quite skillfully, the older woman weaves the illusion that not only her surrogate mother but also the specter of her deceased mother lead Anne to join her hand to Mr. Elliot's.

However alluring, this mirage lasts but briefly. Once again, Anne's perception of Mr. Elliot override the vision of maternal satisfaction Lady Russell places before her:

Though they had now been acquainted a month, she could not be satisfied that she really knew his character...Mr. Elliot was rational, discreet, polished,--but he was not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others. This to Anne was a decided imperfection...She prized the frank,

¹³³ Austen, *Persuasion*, 20.

¹³⁴ Austen, *Persuasion*, 20.

¹³⁵ Austen, *Persuasion*, 106.

the open-hearted, the eager character beyond others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still.¹³⁶

And although unbeknownst to Anne, it is Frederick Wentworth who is before her as she praises an open, eager and somewhat impulsive temperament, her steady reliance on her own authority is vindicated in this third proposed match. Anne's description of William Elliot is but a softened representation of the hardened rake Mrs. Smith knows. She portrays Mr. Elliot as "a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; who, for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk to his general character."¹³⁷ And although Mr. Elliot now has the wealth and independence he formerly wished for and has acquired a new respect for the title of baronet, he is still ruled by the same adherence to the strictest self-interest. The tale of Mr. Elliot's mercenary first marriage and of his cunning maneuvers to prevent Mrs. Clay from marrying Sir Walter do not surprise Anne but clarifies and hardens her original opinion of him. After her visit to the impoverished Mrs. Smith, Anne cannot help but reflect on the danger of being persuaded by affection but without the use of one's own judgment: she "could just acknowledge within herself such a possibility of having been induced to marry him, as made her shudder at the idea of the misery which must have followed. It was just possible that she might have been persuaded by Lady Russell!"¹³⁸ It is certainly interesting to note that although Anne remains in love with Captain Wentworth, Mr. Elliot's charms in combination with Lady Russell's approval of him would have been powerful enough to induce Anne to marry him after all. Although only Anne herself knows just how narrowly she escapes this fate, the episode cements her reliance in her own opinion even more.

Other than confirming Anne's authority, Mr. Elliot serves another purpose when he unwittingly directs Captain Wentworth's first admiring glance to Anne. Upon their first

¹³⁶ Austen, *Persuasion*, 106.

¹³⁷ Austen, *Persuasion*, 132.

¹³⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, 140.

meeting in Uppercross almost eight years after their failed engagement, Anne readily acknowledges that the same years “that had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages. She had seen the same Frederick Wentworth.”¹³⁹ A deeply resentful Wentworth harshly observes that Anne was “so altered he should not have known [her] again.”¹⁴⁰ His desire to not know Anne, to distance himself from her is not born out of her changed physical appearance but out of what he sees as an abominable trait, the weakness of a mutable mind: “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 shown a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure.”¹⁴¹ Wentworth does think Anne wretchedly altered in retribution for her wretchedly altered commitment to him years ago. Now returned to England a wealthy man, he casts about for a wife with “a heart for either of the Miss Musgroves, if they could catch it; a heart, in short, for any pleasing young woman who came in his way, excepting Anne Elliot.”¹⁴² Yet at Lyme, a gentleman who is later revealed to be Mr. Elliot himself is momentarily captivated by Anne, as “he looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration, which she could not be insensible of...It was evident that the gentleman...admired her exceedingly.”¹⁴³ It is only when Anne Elliot becomes an object of desire for a gentleman that Frederick Wentworth sees her immediately and as if for the very first time: he “looked round at her instantly in a way which shewed his noticing it. He gave her a momentary glance,--a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, ‘That man is struck with you,--and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again.’”¹⁴⁴ As Kay Young points out, “when Frederick sees the stranger admire her, his own

¹³⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 41.

¹⁴⁰ Austen, *Persuasion*, 41.

¹⁴¹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 41.

¹⁴² Austen, *Persuasion*, 41.

¹⁴³ Austen, *Persuasion*, 70.

¹⁴⁴ Austen, *Persuasion*, 70.

seeing shifts from seeing her 'altered beyond his knowledge' to altered to his knowledge. She is something like Anne Elliot again. But the shift requires more than seeing the object again--it demands being in relation for a full re-representation to occur."¹⁴⁵ Although Anne had been before Frederick Wentworth since his return to England, it is not until Mr. Elliot admires her that he finally sees Anne. In Wentworth's eyes, Anne ceases to be a pale shadow of her former self and becomes embodied again. From this moment on, Anne's physical bloom returns.

Immediately after Mr. Elliot's glance teaches Captain Wentworth to appreciate Anne Elliot, her judgment--the source of guidance for herself since her break with Frederick Wentworth years ago--also becomes a source of authority for him and for others. During an earlier conversation with Louisa Musgrove as they walk among the Uppercross lanes, Captain Wentworth openly praises her decisiveness of character. After she overrides Mary's snobbish objections, Louisa convinces a reluctant Henrietta to visit their cousins, the Hayters, and thereby reconcile with her intended suitor, Charles. She then turns to Wentworth and exclaims: "What!--would I be turned back from doing a thing that I had determined to do, and that I knew to be right by the airs and interference of such a person?...No, I have no idea of being so easily persuaded. When I have made up my mind, I have made it." In admiring her fortitude of mind, Wentworth also unwittingly chooses to court Louisa over Henrietta: "Your sister is an amiable creature; but yours is the character of decision and firmness, I see." Absorbed in his own painful and disappointing past with Anne, he is blind to the fact that it is the attraction she feels for him that prompts Louisa to push Henrietta towards another man. With thinly veiled resentment, Wentworth reveals his interpretation of Anne Elliot's character as weak and undependable while mistaking Louisa's unyielding temper as decisive and firm: "It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on--you are never sure of a good

¹⁴⁵ Young, "Feeling Embodied," 87.

impression being durable...let those who would be happy be firm."¹⁴⁶ In a unfortunate and rather unromantic allegory, Wentworth directs Louisa's attention to a glossy hazelnut and supposes it to be "still in possession of all the happiness that [it] can be supposed capable of" because it "has outlived all the storms of autumn." As an object of his interest, Wentworth encourages Louisa to resemble such a nut and resist any external influence with "all her present powers of mind" if she "would be beautiful and happy in her November of life."¹⁴⁷

Yet, Louisa's "powers of mind" turn out to be nothing more than frivolous, thoughtless obstinacy as she single-mindedly pursues the delightful pleasure of being jumped from the steps of the Cobb by Captain Wentworth. Because Louisa proves to be unyielding about her own caprice, Wentworth cannot dissuade her from a second attempt to jump: "he advised her against it, thought the jar too great; but no, he reasoned and talked in vain; she smiled and said, 'I am determined I will.'"¹⁴⁸ As Louisa Musgrove lies lifeless at the foot of the Cobb steps, Anne Elliot rises to take command of the bewildering scene. At Wentworth's despairing plea of "Is there no one to help me?" Anne, a "no body" until then, not only gives instructions for Louisa's care but wisely redirects Wentworth's hasty impulses when she suggests it is Captain Benwick and not him who should find a doctor for the ailing girl. Amidst a fainting Henrietta, a screaming Mary, and lethargic Charles Musgrove and Captain Wentworth, it is Anne alone who displays fortitude of mind--the ability to make an important decision when all is in disarray: "Anne, attending with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, still tried...to suggest comfort to the others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth."¹⁴⁹ The profound ineffectiveness of male authority is evident as Charles turns to Anne with childlike dependence and asks her "What, in heaven's name, is to be done

¹⁴⁶ Austen, *Persuasion*, 58-59.

¹⁴⁷ Austen, *Persuasion*, 59.

¹⁴⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, 74.

¹⁴⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 75.

next?"¹⁵⁰ Captain Wentworth himself--by all accounts an active, decisive man--helplessly turns his eyes to Anne. His dependence on her at this moment is evident as he is reduced to repeating the instructions Anne gives to take the unconscious Louisa to the inn where they had been residing. At this point, Louisa Musgrove falls--not only on the pavement at the Cobb but also as an example of firm, decisive temperament in Frederick Wentworth's mind. Instead, Anne Elliot's ascendancy in his heart begins as his long established notions about the weakness of her mind crumble under her gentle but firm judgment in times of true crisis.

By the end of the novel, Anne's active agency prompts Wentworth's declaration of love and their second lasting attachment. It is in Bath at the concert given by Lady Dalrymple, that Anne consciously attracts and maintains Frederick Wentworth's attention. Although he is defensively prepared "only to bow and pass on" the haughty Elliot party, Anne advances a little to meet him and with "a gentle 'How do you do?' brought him out of the straight line to stand near her, and make enquiries in return, in spite of the formidable father and sister in the background."¹⁵¹ Anne does not wait for Sir Walter's distant bow or Elizabeth's ungracious slight curtsey to openly take up her acquaintance with Wentworth. Their conversation, thawing previous constraints as both enjoy their proximity to each other, turns to Louisa Musgrove's unexpected engagement to Captain Benwick, and Wentworth confesses himself surprised. Although Louisa Musgrove is "a very amiable, sweet-tempered girl," the loss of the superior Fanny Harville had left Benwick a shattered man, "with a heart pierced, wounded, almost broken!...A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman!--He ought not--he does not." Because his interpretation of Benwick's attachment to Fanny Harville is a reflection, a recognition so to speak, of his own more lasting feelings for Anne, Wentworth is subtly but effectively

¹⁵⁰ Austen, *Persuasion*, 74.

¹⁵¹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 120.

confessing that he has not recovered from his own devotion to Anne. She understands his allusion perfectly:

His opinion of Louisa Musgrove's inferiority, an opinion which he had seemed solicitous to give, his wonder at Captain Benwick, his feelings as to a first, strong attachment,--sentences begun which he could not finish--his half averted eyes, and more than half expressive glance,--all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at last. That anger, resentment, avoidance, were no more; and that they were succeeded, not merely by friendship and regard, but by the tenderness of the past...She could not contemplate the change as implying less.--He must love her.¹⁵²

In a flurry of happiness, Anne takes her seat and looks around for Captain Wentworth, effectively visually creating "a space" for him next to her with her gaze. It is not Wentworth, however, but the contriving Mr. Elliot who takes a seat by her. As Tony Tanner points out, Anne "can create a space for the man but cannot invite him to take it. Man has to initiate, and if there is any hesitation the wrong (and more assertive) male may take advantage of that space."¹⁵³ While it is true that Anne can "only" create a space for Wentworth but the rules of conduct prohibit her from openly invite him to take it, Anne's actions are nonetheless remarkable in their agency. While she exercises the more passive "power of a refusal" to reject Charles Musgrove and William Elliot, she actively seeks to draw Wentworth's affection to herself.

However, while Anne discusses with Captain Harville men and women's capability for emotional constancy, Anne subtly but clearly creates a space for Wentworth in her life and invites him in. In a quiet and seemingly private conversation with a dejected Captain Harville, Anne reveals her unchanging love for Wentworth when she claims that

¹⁵² Austen, *Persuasion*, 123.

¹⁵³ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 236.

forgetfulness is not in "the nature of any woman who truly loved."¹⁵⁴ She makes this pronouncement not so much with pride but with pity: "We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is perhaps our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us."¹⁵⁵ It is men's forced exertions, "a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or another to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation" that weaken their former impressions much like Frederick Wentworth's time in the war she believes have lessened his feelings for her.¹⁵⁶ She allows Captain Harville's assertion that men may love the strongest, but it is women like her who love the longest. At this point, Wentworth's attention is so engrossed by her words that the pen he holds falls from his hands. This incident, however, is far from innocuous not only because it indicates that Wentworth's close physical proximity to Anne has enabled him to listen to her argument, but because it also signifies his inability to sustain the script he had written about Anne's weakness as it was displayed seven years ago. Anne's covert admission of her continued love for him in the claim that "all the privilege I claim for my own sex...is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone," forces Wentworth's resentment to finally recede and he becomes fully receptive to her once again.¹⁵⁷ Oppressed by what he hears her pronounce, he is nonetheless obliged to finally confess his long oppressed emotions:

I can no longer listen in silence...I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight and a half years ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant...For you alone I think and plan...I had not waited even these ten years, could I have read your

¹⁵⁴ Austen, *Persuasion*, 155.

¹⁵⁵ Austen, *Persuasion*, 155.

¹⁵⁶ Austen, *Persuasion*, 155.

¹⁵⁷ Austen, *Persuasion*, 157.

feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine...You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of your voice, when they would be lost on others...Too good, too excellent creature! You do us justice indeed. You do believe that there is true attachment and constancy among men.¹⁵⁸

As this emotive letter indicates, while Anne speaks to Captain Harville, Frederick Wentworth is himself closely responding to her words: he is not only refuting her claim that man's love is of short duration, but he admits that her understanding has finally overcome his own. Bringing closure to the narrative and to their own story, just as Anne's judgment broke them asunder almost a decade ago, it brings them together at last. Even as they go over their painful past, Anne confirms herself to be her own authority by refusing to say that she had been mistaken in her decision to break their first engagement: "I have been...trying impartially to judge of the right and wrong...with regard to myself; and I must believe I was right...I was right in submitting to her [Lady Russell], and that had I done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience."¹⁵⁹ Because not even in the sweetness of their reunion does Anne relinquish her own moral authority--her desire to stand unashamed before her own conscience--she does enter into the married state from a position of strength since "Frederick Wentworth comes to respect his fiancée as a woman more than most if not all of his predecessors had done theirs."¹⁶⁰

As Sir Walter Elliot's daughter, an aristocracy that has long outlived its purpose defines Anne as a nobody. As Captain Frederick Wentworth's wife, Anne Elliot defines herself as an agent whose choices "have led her away from tradition and into a new social milieu."¹⁶¹ The transfer of her familial loyalties from a stagnant community to the new rising

¹⁵⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, 158.

¹⁵⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 164.

¹⁶⁰ Magee, "Instrument of Growth," 205.

¹⁶¹ Magee, "Instrument of Growth," 203.

social class of the navy signals more than her induction into a worthier social circle--it confirms her self-awareness as a moral agent capable of effecting change within her domestic sphere. Her friendship with Lady Russell is the vehicle through which Anne indicts the authority of her family. Because Sir Walter is an empty cipher of the baronetcy but of fatherhood as well, he never possesses the parental power to shape Anne's judgment. It is only in Lady Russell's surrogate maternity that Anne can find a respectable semblance of familial influence and affection. When Anne Elliot acknowledges the older woman's friendship but rejects her advice as fallible, she is divesting the family of its authority over her own discernment. Simultaneously, Anne asserts her own authority as she begins her own family with Frederick Wentworth. It is her judgment, after all, that reforms Wentworth's resentment and revives his affection.

Anne Elliot's self-awareness, then, identifies her as the heroine of her own story. But Catherine Morland has no maternal Lady Russell to prompt her moral and intellectual self-reliance. She is only able to form friendships with young women as powerless as herself in many respects. A penniless Isabella is dependent on a good marriage for her survival while the more morally and intellectually refined Eleanor Tilney is dependent on her father's tyranny. Like the sororal friendships of the previous chapter, Catherine's relationships with Isabella and Eleanor help her achieve self-awareness: Isabella's influence over James Morland and Catherine's kinship to him teaches Catherine that she must not rely on her brother's compromised opinion but on her own judgment to conduct herself appropriately not only with the Tilneys but with all. Similarly, Eleanor's kinship to Henry and Catherine's attraction to him teaches her to rely on her own perception to understand and protect herself against General Tilney's anger and avarice. Yet, the narrative calls for Catherine to do more than become a self-aware entity: it demands that she apply her judgment to reevaluate the family structure--not just her own family in Wiltshire but the family at Northanger Abbey into which she will marry and in which she would shape. Nonetheless, Catherine's surrogate relationships are not the bonds she needs to forge, and as a result

she cannot make the moral and intellectual distinctions she is called on to make. Her critical observations about the patriarchal family's shortcomings and abuses of power slip from her consciousness and are subsumed by her attraction for Henry Tilney--the husband who is moved neither by her moral perceptions nor by her intellectual judgments but by the childlike naiveté he enforces from the moment of their very first dance.

Chapter Three: Friends by Circumstance—Female Rivalry in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*

In Jane Austen's published novels, Fanny Price and Emma Woodhouse have no equal except for each other. At first, this statement seems rather counterintuitive. After all, Emma Woodhouse is the wealthy heiress who--even after recognizing several serious errors of judgment on her part--unabashedly claims that she always deserves the best treatment. On the other hand, Fanny Price is the neglected dependent who is overpowered by gratitude when her uncle, Sir Thomas, orders a fire to be kindled in her room after many years of wintry, solitary occupation. And yet, profound similarities override these obvious differences: although Fanny Price finds a companion in her younger sister, Susan, during her unhappy stay in Portsmouth and Emma forges a friendship with an older woman, her governess Miss Taylor, both women fail to form a strong tie of friendship either with a sister or with a surrogate mother figure similar to the relationship existing between Jane and Elizabeth Bennett or Anne Elliot and Lady Russell respectively: neither Susan nor Miss Taylor are significant emotional centers for the heroines. Instead, Mary Crawford and Harriet Smith--initial friends and eventual rivals--are the women who become central figures in each heroine's life. Because Fanny Price's and Emma Woodhouse's friendships are not based on kinship--whether biological or surrogate--, but on rivalry, their capacity for intimacy and attachment is limited.¹ Simultaneously, these hostile friendships formed outside of the family circle enable the heroines to look beyond the regulation of the self and of the family to the regulation of society at large.

Mansfield Park

Mansfield Park opens its pages with the redistribution of the Ward family of Huntingdon into three different strata of society:

¹Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 78.

Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon...had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram...and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady...Miss Ward, at the end of half a dozen years, found herself to be attached to the Rev. Mr. Norris, a friend of her brother-in-law...But Miss Frances married...to disoblige her family, and by fixing on a Lieutenant of Marines, without education, fortune, or connections, did it very thoroughly.²

As Lady Bertram, Miss Maria Ward belongs to the lower ranks of the landed gentry while her two sisters occupy rather unequal positions within the professional class. Though both Miss Ward and Miss Frances marry professional men--a Reverend Norris and a Lieutenant Price respectively, Mrs. Norris occupies the respected position of efficient manager of her husband's rectory while he lives and of her own comfortable cottage after she is widowed. On the other hand, a coarsened Mrs. Price may only boast of being the mistress of a noisy, impoverished home and a humbled dependent of her sisters' charity for the welfare of her numerous children.

In turn, the families--or lack of families, in Mrs. Norris' case--formed by each of these three sisters are a reflection of their social strata's most negative traits. Lady Bertram's lower gentry family suffers the moral paralysis embodied by her own "sofa-bound inertia."³ Because she transforms the traditional Burkean aesthetic of female delicacy into "pampered somnambulance," Lady Bertram does not evoke her children's expected civilizing solicitude but only a polite indifference towards her.⁴ A consummately feminine Lady Bertram is the ornamental mother to the four inheritors of Mansfield's social prestige but none of its social responsibility: Tom, the eldest, is the family's selfish, spendthrift heir who thinks nothing of whittling away his younger brother's living on frivolous amusements. Maria and Julia's bloated sense of self-importance lead to their respective elopements and the near-ruin of their family's reputation. And even Edmund, the most earnest and morally

² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 5.

³ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 152.

⁴ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 98.

upright of the four, sacrifices some of his principles to his desire for the alluring Mary Crawford. Lady Bertram's indolence is in itself an indication that "the moral welfare of the great house has been subject to the self-will, the bad judgment, or the mercenary projects of those appointed to govern it."⁵

There is no one more mercenary at Mansfield Park than Mrs. Norris--it is her own lack of children and officious devotion to her sister Bertram's offspring that embody solipsistic avarice. According to Mrs. Norris, her widowed status requires her to drastically reduce expenses even more and, of course, makes it impossible for her to assume charge of the fifteen-year-old Fanny Price. For her, a child of her own--whether adopted or biological--is not a source of comfort but an unnecessary and unwelcome drain on her tightly controlled finances. Mrs. Norris justifies this rapacity to her sister Bertram by assuring her that such extreme frugality is solely for the sake of her already wealthy nephews and nieces: "I have nobody to care for, but I should be very glad to think I could leave a little trifle among them, worth their having."⁶ As it is customary with her, Aunt Norris' actual actions run contrary to her words: the legacy she leaves behind--not at her death but at her expulsion from Mansfield--is not money but misfortune. Years of sycophantic dedication to ensure her continued presence at the Park encourage her young charges' vanity. Because Mrs. Norris has "assisted to form her nieces' minds," Julia and Maria Bertram grow up "entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility."⁷ In leaving Mr. Rushworth to elope with Mr. Crawford, Maria, "her first favourite, the dearest of all," acts according to the principles of selfishness and conceit instilled by Aunt Norris and is doomed to share the same fruitless existence with her.⁸

Mrs. Price, the last of the Ward sisters to marry, sinks under the hardships of her imprudent marriage. As Fanny herself is pained to observe, her mother is "a partial, ill-

⁵ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 115.

⁶ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 23.

⁷ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 16.

⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 304.

judging parent, a dawdle, a slattern, who neither taught nor restrained her children, whose house was the scene of mismanagement and discomfort from beginning to end."⁹ Indeed, her family epitomizes the iniquities of want. As Tony Tanner observes, "it is the 'impropriety' not the 'poverty' of Portsmouth which is stressed. It serves as a model of everything which society ought not to be and to emphasise the profound social--and political--importance of 'propriety.'"¹⁰ Nowhere is this impropriety more evident than in Mr. Price's expression of coarse and at times even violent sexuality. After many years of absence, he only notices Fanny's body and its possible desires: he "observed that she was grown into a woman, and he supposed would be wanting a husband soon."¹¹ Furthermore, Mr. Price hints at barely controlled sexual violence when he observes that if the disgraced Mrs. Rushworth had been his daughter, he would have given her "the rope's end as long as I could stand over her."¹²

Yet, it is Fanny Price--the apparent "submissive ideal for a woman: gentle, modest, sweet-tempered and obedient"--who ultimately regulates the Ward sisters' flawed families into a greater measure of moral respectability and financial stability.¹³ Fanny not only improves the Price's family fortunes by quitting the home at ten years of age to reside at Mansfield Park, or even by taking her sister Susan with her upon leaving Portsmouth for a final time. It is because of Henry Crawford's attraction to her that William, her cherished older brother, is finally promoted from midshipman to lieutenant. However, it is the wealthy Bertrams who benefit the most from Fanny Price's moral authority. Because her absence from Mansfield Park coincides with the multiple crises of Tom's near-fatal illness as well as Julia's and Maria's devastating elopements, it is significant that only upon her return the

⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 265.

¹⁰ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 147.

¹¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 258.

¹² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 298.

¹³ Jane McDonell, "A Little Spirit of Independence': Sexual Politics and the Bildungsroman in 'Mansfield Park.'" *NOVEL* 17.3 (1984): 201.

place is made whole again.¹⁴ As Tanner notes, "We can see her as a lonely conscience-- ignored, despised, bullied, at times besieged by the forces of worldly persuasion, yet finally recognised as the true preserver of the values represented by Mansfield."¹⁵ It is Fanny's triangulated, rivalrous friendship with Mary Crawford that changes this forlorn young woman, unwanted and neglected by most of the Bertram family, into the transformative moral force effecting change both at Mansfield Park and its surrounding community. Mary is Fanny's emotional center, "the most significant source of the heroine's subjectivity as a desiring adult."¹⁶

Of course, Fanny's relationship with Mary Crawford is not the only triangulated relationship in the novel. As it has already been mentioned, the novel opens with the sisterhood of the three Ward sisters and portrays the flirtations between Mr. Crawford and the Bertram sisters as well as between Maria, Mr. Rushworth, and Mr. Crawford. Even Fanny Price is a reluctant participant in an affective triangle because she "appeals both to Henry Crawford and Edmund and must reject the former to remain free to accept the latter."¹⁷ Nonetheless, she forms an integral part of the novel's most pivotal triangulated relationship when "Edmund attracts the love of both Mary Crawford and Fanny and must choose between the two."¹⁸ Nonetheless, Fanny's rivalrous friendship with Miss Crawford is the most important relationship in the novel because it is the only triangulated connection that develops the heroine's self-awareness in a way that allows her to effect positive social change. In contrast, the other emotional triangle involving a young woman--Maria Bertram's--ultimately leads to social dissolution as her behavior destroys not only her prestige as the promising and glittering Mrs. Rushworth but also the community to which she ostensibly belongs. Because Maria embodies the disintegration of the values that hold

¹⁴ Margaret Lenta, "Androgyny and Authority in 'Mansfield Park.'" *Studies in the Novel*, 15.3 (1983): 180.

¹⁵ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 157.

¹⁶ Misty G. Anderson, "'The Different Sorts of Friendship': Desire in Mansfield Park," in *Jane Austen and the Discourses of Feminism*, ed. Devoney Looser, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 167.

¹⁷ McGee, "Instrument of Growth," 202.

¹⁸ McGee, "Instrument of Growth," 202.

society together, she must be contained lest her corruption taint the community to which she belongs. Sir Thomas, the embodiment of traditional authority, must then relegate his daughter to "an establishment...in another country--remote and private...shut up...with little society" with the embittered Mrs. Norris as her only companion.¹⁹ However, Fanny's friendship with Mary Crawford eventually leads to the cohesion of the family and the community damaged by the worldly ineffectiveness of its leaders. Because Fanny's relationship with Mary pushes her to become the sole moral judge and critic of Mansfield Park, it empowers the heroine to shape the originally unwelcoming Mansfield Park to her own image, a quiet, introverted place where she is loved not only Edmund but by Sir Thomas himself. In being accepted as Edmund's wife, Fanny is also accepted as the regulator of proper social behavior because she "promises to bring an outreaching moral strength as minister's wife to a parish that has languished under her two predecessors, the greedy and shrewish Mrs. Norris and the privately oriented, gourmet-minded Mrs. Grant."²⁰

The most superfluous member of her indigent and child-ridden Portsmouth home, a young Fanny is easily parted with and sent to Mansfield Park to feel herself the object of well-meaning but daunting charity: "Afraid of every body, ashamed of herself, and longing for the home she had left, she knew not how to look up, and could scarcely speak to be heard, or without crying."²¹ Far from being a network of female support, the women surrounding Fanny find her to be a social and intellectual inferior and relegate her to the status of a privileged servant. Instead of a peer and playmate, the Bertram girls consider her an "occasionally...acceptable companion...though unworthy, from inferiority of age and strength, to be their constant associate."²² Lady Bertram, the only adult of whom Fanny is not in awe, finds the new addition to her family less appealing than one of her pugs but

¹⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 315.

²⁰ McGee, "Instrument of Growth," 206.

²¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 12.

²² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 15.

"very handy and quick in carrying messages, and fetching what she wanted."²³ Even after the little girl's improvement of her initially timorous "appearance and spirits," Mrs. Norris, Sir Thomas assiduous assistant, agrees with him and reaches the tepid conclusion that their niece is "far from clever" but possesses "a tractable disposition, and...likely to give them little trouble."²⁴ Because Fanny Price does not have the opportunity to enjoy the openness of sororal friendships or the support of surrogate female friendships, she "does not have the capacity for intimacy and attachment" to other women that other Austenian heroines do possess.²⁵ As a result of this lack of female support, it is of little surprise that Fanny is not only inured to the Bertram's wholesale neglect but internalizes her insignificance and condemns her own "loneliness and grief...as a form of ingratitude."²⁶

Although Edmund never suspects the depth of Fanny's feelings for him, it is he alone who appreciates her voracious intellect, sterling character, and capacity for gallant affection. Though never ostentatiously, Edmund is "always true to her interests, and considerate of her feelings, trying to make her good qualities understood...giving her advice, consolation, and encouragement."²⁷ His regard for Fanny not only leads to her comfort in an otherwise oppressive home but allow him to mold her mind and her disposition: Edmund's attentions were otherwise 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 attraction by judicious praise.²⁸

Before Mary Crawford's arrival, the sole difference in opinion existing between Edmund and Fanny is the sense of her own inconsequence. After being informed that she will be living

²³ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 17.

²⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 17.

²⁵ McDonnell, "A Little Spirit of Independence," 211.

²⁶ McDonnell, "A Little Spirit of Independence," 202.

²⁷ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 18.

²⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 18.

with Mrs. Norris, an adolescent Fanny shares the news with Edmund with the opening phrase, "though you have often persuaded me into being reconciled to things that I disliked at first, you will not be able to do it now."²⁹ Her prediction proves to be correct. Although Edmund attempts to show a reticent Fanny that the plan is an acceptable one, she confesses how uncomfortable she feels with aunt Norris, and it is little wonder, since Fanny has never received any kindness from the older woman. Edmund, however, praises the plan as being exactly suited to raise Fanny in social importance as her aunt's companion. It is at this point that the conversation shifts from Fanny's possible happiness living with Mrs. Norris to her possible increased preeminence in the newly contracted family circle. Though Edmund sees his cousin's "good sense...sweet temper, and...grateful heart," Fanny sees her own inferior situation and her "foolishness and awkwardness" as insurmountable obstacles to her own importance.³⁰ Where Edmund appreciates a wonderful opportunity for Fanny to be socially visible, Fanny dreads life with a woman who cares nothing for her and she ponders, "If I could suppose my aunt really to care for me, it would be delightful to feel myself of consequence to any body!"³¹ For Fanny, the importance and consequence for which she so wishes is not due to her qualities but in spite of them. In fact, she shies away from social advancement and recognition and only desires the validation of Mansfield's tightly knit family circle. Though Fanny Price recognizes that she is of consequence to none, her desire to be of primary importance to those she loves comes true not as Mrs. Norris' companion but, ultimately, as Mary Crawford's reluctant "friend" and covert rival.

Tom Bertram's departure for the horse races effectively removes Mary Crawford's prime object of attraction and ambition. Because he is just the sort of young man to attract Miss Crawford due to his significant wealth, sophisticated manners, and future baronetcy, she fully expects to find "a most melancholy difference" when Mr. Bertram's sparkling wit is

²⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 20.

³⁰ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 21.

³¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 21.

replaced by his younger brother's earnest conversation.³² During the first dinner at Mansfield without Tom, however, Mary quickly finds Edmund to be a gentleman. Yet it is as she meets Fanny Price in unexpected conversation that Mary makes her most significant discovery. Still in speculative quest of the future baronet, Mary's flirtatiously asks Edmund to write to his older brother and unexpectedly draws Fanny into their conversation. His polite yet blunt refusal to acquiesce to her request prompts Mary to playfully deprecate brotherly correspondence and inadvertently leads to Fanny's interjecting contradiction of "When they are at a distance from all their family...they can write long letters."³³ Naturally, the painfully timid Fanny Price would rather have Edmund tell a curious Miss Crawford her brother's story, but his "determined silence obliged her to relate her brother's situation."³⁴ Although this exchange appears to be nothing more than inconsequential dinnertime conversation, it is the beginning of the novel's most valued triangulated relationship between Fanny Price, Edmund Bertram, and Mary Crawford--the medium of Fanny's consequence and authority not only over Mansfield Park but also over the extended community dependent on its moral, social, and financial patronage.

At first, Fanny Price and Mary Crawford certainly belong to widely divergent spheres. A fashionable newcomer occupying the same social importance as the Bertram sisters and an heiress in her own right, Miss Crawford utilizes her wealth not simply to "[possess] objects that others would envy" but to fulfill her own desires.³⁵ By contrast, Miss Price--the most easily and frequently forgotten member of Mansfield--has neither the means nor the inclination to even admit a consciousness of her own longings. Although it seems that Fanny is not even willing to embrace self-awareness and much less of exerting power over other more influential members of her social circle, Mary Crawford's ability to pursue her wishes is a power that Fanny possesses by the end of the novel--the power to shape her world

³² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 35-38.

³³ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 44.

³⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 44.

³⁵ Michie, *The Vulgar Question of Money*, 41.

according to her needs and views. Though Fanny notices Mary and pays her own "tribute of admiration to Miss Crawford's beauty" like all of Mansfield's young people, it is little likely that Mary Crawford's interest in Fanny Price would have extended beyond a cursory, passing interest in her being socially in or out.³⁶ However, Edmund's refusal to tell the story of Fanny's brother facilitates the first conversation between both young women. As Fanny relates her brother's story, "her voice was animated...but she could not mention the number of years that he had been absent without tears in her eyes."³⁷ Mary Crawford responds to this heartfelt narrative only with the polite yet paltry wish of "an early promotion" for the beloved William Price.³⁸ In this brief exchange, Fanny's sincere candor is juxtaposed with Mary's polished, perfunctory civility. Through Edmund's mediation, then, Fanny's character begins to be socially delineated as it is contrasted with Mary Crawford's.

Mary Crawford's unwitting ability to sketch Fanny Price's character has the unintended consequence of portraying Fanny as an increasingly individual, separate entity from her cousin Edmund. The day after the aforementioned dinner, Edmund asks, "Well Fanny, and how do you like Miss Crawford now?"³⁹ Not surprising since he has "formed her mind and gained her affections," Edmund has "a good chance of [Fanny] thinking like him."⁴⁰ Fanny reflects Edmund's opinion of this young woman when she responds, "Very well--very much. I like to hear her talk. She entertains me, and she is so extremely pretty, that I have great pleasure in looking at her."⁴¹ Edmund, only partially satisfied with this answer, asks her a second, more pointed question: "But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you Fanny, as not quite right?"⁴² She responds like a dutiful, attentive pupil in search of her mentor's approval: "Oh! yes, she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did...An uncle with whom she has been living so many years, and who,

³⁶ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 36.

³⁷ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 44.

³⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 44.

³⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 46.

⁴⁰ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 47.

⁴¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 46.

⁴² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 46.

whatever his faults may be, is so very fond of her brother, treating him, they say, quite like a son."⁴³ Fanny's insightful reflection of Edmund's perception of Mary Crawford is rewarded by his casual assent: "I thought you would be struck. It was very wrong--very indecorous."⁴⁴ From this point forth, however, the opinions of the two cousins no longer coincide. When Fanny adds the charge of ingratitude to Edmund's initial list of Miss Crawford's faults, he immediately recoils from this more serious accusation, saying,

Ungrateful is a strong word...it is the warmth of respect for her aunt's memory which misleads her here...I do not pretend to know which was most to blame in their disagreements...but it is natural and amiable that Miss Crawford should acquit her aunt entirely. I do not censure her *opinions*: but there certainly is impropriety in making them public.⁴⁵

Edmund's increasing attraction to Mary Crawford leads him to see a possible serious character flaw merely as the "natural" and "amiable" defense of a beloved aunt while Fanny openly sees ingratitude.

Furthermore, while Edmund only censures Miss Crawford's impropriety in making public her opinions about her licentious uncle, Fanny--in this case patriarchy's loyal spokesperson--censures the mind itself that could produce such an opinion not only when she labels it as ungrateful but also when she challenges Mary Crawford's right to make certain assertions. Returning to the topic of brotherly correspondence, Fanny observes, "And what right had she to suppose, that you would not write long letters when you were absent?"⁴⁶ Once again, Edmund's defense of Miss Crawford's mind leads to a further divergence in the cousins' opinions: "The right of a lively mind, Fanny, seizing whatever may contribute to its own amusement or that of others; perfectly allowable, when

⁴³ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 46.

⁴⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 46.

⁴⁵ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 46.

⁴⁶ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 47.

untinctured by ill humour or roughness."⁴⁷ Although Edmund opens the floodgates of Fanny's criticism, he ultimately reassures himself of Miss Crawford's moral as well as physical loveliness when his cousin's perception proves to be too damaging as he states that she is "perfectly feminine, except in the instances we have been speaking of."⁴⁸ And despite evidence to the contrary, despite Fanny's harsh reflection of Mary Crawford and Edmund's rejection of this image, he abruptly ends their conversation by asserting an obvious untruth: "I am glad you saw it all as I did."⁴⁹

Due to their different interpretations of Mary Crawford's conduct, "there began now to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration...which might lead him where Fanny could not follow."⁵⁰ Though at times herself enthralled by Mary Crawford's charms, Fanny does not share Edmund's affection for her. Blinded by Mary's "surface attractiveness," Edmund reveals that "he too is flawed" and is therefore an unfit moral guide for Fanny.⁵¹ Though Miss Crawford is not a physical presence in this conversation between Edmund and Fanny, she is nonetheless a third of this triangulated relationship. Again, Edmund Bertram facilitates an exchange between the actual Fanny Price and the image of Mary Crawford. Once Edmund prompts Fanny's opinion of Mary, he begins a dialogue where Fanny's is the leading critical voice and her character finally becomes more clearly delineated against Mary Crawford's. Because she is not blinded by Edmund's admiration for her but impelled by jealousy, Fanny's criticism of Mary Crawford ignites her identity as separate from Edmund.

Both Fanny and Mary's affection for Edmund, dampened respectively by prohibition and ambition, transform these two young women into unacknowledged but very real rivals. With Mary Crawford as Fanny Price's foil, the most humble and almost invisible member of Mansfield Park is sketched in greater detail as a thinking and deeply feeling individual.

⁴⁷ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 47.

⁴⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 47.

⁴⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 47.

⁵⁰ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 47.

⁵¹ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 153.

Without Miss Crawford, Fanny is a lonely, forlorn creature easily lost upon a drawing room sofa, suffering from headaches and neglect. Yet inside the carriage conveying them to Mr. Rushworth's estate, Sotherton, and in Mary Crawford's presence, Fanny Price is portrayed as an observant woman who is not empty of self. Fanny

was not often invited to join in the conversation of the others, not did she desire it. Her own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions; and in observing the appearance of the country...she found entertainment that could only have been heightened by having Edmund to speak of what she felt.⁵²

A desire for Edmund's presence is the only point of resemblance between her and Mary Crawford; in everything but their attraction to Edmund, Miss Crawford is diametrically opposed to Fanny: "She had none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling; she saw nature...with little observation; her attention was all for men and women, her talents for the light and lively."⁵³ In looking back on the road after Edmund, "...there were united, and a 'there he is' broke at the same moment from them both, more than once."⁵⁴ Both young women are brought together as their attention converges on Edmund's distant figure only to have the vast difference between them underscored. While Mary belongs to the sparkling but superficial world of society--of men and women--Fanny's superior taste, feeling, and overall mind is presented as various scenes of nature touch it. However, Fanny's character is only revealed before the reader when it is compared with Mary's as both women's glances are united in Edmund.

Once in the family chapel at Sotherton, not only the two young women's glances but also their very words intermingle with Edmund to further reveal their strikingly different characters. After viewing the family chapel, Fanny turns to Edmund to confess her disappointment with the chapel's mundane appearance. A moment later, she labels it a pity

⁵² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 58.

⁵³ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 58.

⁵⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 58.

that the custom of morning and evening prayers has been discontinued. Mary Crawford ridicules Fanny's opinion that "A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer, is fine," with her own interpretation of family prayer: "Very fine indeed!...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 twice a day, while they are inventing excuses for themselves for staying away."⁵⁵ While Fanny understands family prayer as a revered, unifying tradition, Mary's vitiated mind views family prayers as another opportunity for figures of authority to hypocritically enforce customs in which they themselves do not believe. While for Mary customs are of no consequence, Fanny views them as important repositories of family history and pride.

The two young women's comments showcase their characters by displaying their attitude not only towards religion and towards tradition, but also towards Edmund himself. Upon realizing that Edmund is to be ordained as a clergyman upon Sir Thomas' return from Antigua, Miss Crawford expresses her surprise with his choice of profession and cajolingly suggests him to "go into the law" since he is "really fit for something better."⁵⁶ Edmund correctly understands Miss Crawford's opinion of the clergy as men who, even at their best, have little social impact: "One does not see much of this influence and importance in society, and how can it be acquired where [clergymen] are so seldom seen themselves?"⁵⁷ Because Miss Crawford understands manners only as superficial social behavior regulating the fashionable world, Edmund clarifies the good clergyman's impact on true manners with his own notion of "a religion of conduct":⁵⁸

...with regard to their influencing public manners, Miss Crawford must not misunderstand me, or suppose I mean to call them the arbiters of good breeding, the regulators of refinement and courtesy, the masters of the

⁵⁵ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 62.

⁵⁶ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 67.

⁵⁷ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 66.

⁵⁸ In *Jane Austen's Novels*, Julia Prewitt Brown asserts that Edmund's idea of religion is "like Arnold's 'morality touched by emotion,' a religion of 'conduct,' which asserts nothing of the personality of God" (85).

ceremonies of life. The *manners* I speak of, might rather be called conduct,...the result of good principles; the effect...of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and to recommend.⁵⁹

Though Fanny has been physically present in this conversation between Edmund and Mary, she has been verbally absent from their exchange up to this point. After Edmund explains his understanding of the clergyman's true role not only as a moral but as a social monitor, Fanny supports his assertion with a simple "certainly." Mary, however, flippantly rejects both Edmund's notions and Fanny's support by once again observing facetiously: "There...you have quite convinced Miss Price already."⁶⁰ Though Fanny is a quiet, almost unnoticed part of this triangle, it is Mary who once again places attention on her and unwittingly rescues Fanny from the invisibility threatening her through the taunt sexual tension between Edmund and Mary.

After Mrs. Rushworth's and Julia Bertram's removal to the more fashionable streets of Brighton and London, the triangulated relationship between Fanny, Edmund, and Mary intensifies. Despite Mary Crawford's open disapproval of Edmund's profession in the church and despite the frequent evidence of the excesses of her lively, cynical, and worldly mind, Edmund's attraction for Mary increases. At the same time, Fanny's consequence itself increases not only at the Park but at the Grant's parsonage itself: "In that house which she had hardly entered twice a year since Mr. Norris' death, she became a welcome, an invited guest, and in the gloom and dirt of a November day, most acceptable to Mary Crawford."⁶¹ Fanny, reluctant to establish this intimacy, nonetheless enters into it because "it seemed a kind of fascination; she could not be easy without going, and yet it was without loving her, without ever thinking like her, without any sense of obligation for being sought after now when nobody else was to be had."⁶² Fanny Price's "fascination" hints at an intimacy that

⁵⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 66-67.

⁶⁰ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 67.

⁶¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 141.

⁶² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 143.

may be termed homoerotic because it is prompted by their common desire for Edmund.⁶³ Though wounding, being Mary Crawford's preferred companion allows Fanny to experience Edmund as a lover, even if it is by proxy. On her first visit to the parsonage, captive by a threatening storm and Miss Crawford's eagerness to remember an absent Edmund Bertram with a musical piece, Fanny remains because she fancied this same Edmund "sitting in that room again and again, perhaps in the very spot where she sat now, listening with constant delight to the favorite air..."⁶⁴ With this elevated standing brought about by her secret affection for Edmund and reluctant friendship with Mary, Fanny is now called upon to act upon her own conviction and judgment.

That Fanny's worth is recognized and raised by her triangulated relationship between Mary and Edmund is evident when Edmund observes Fanny and Mary speaking together:

It was the first time of his seeing them together since the beginning of that better acquaintance which he had been hearing of with a great satisfaction. A friendship between two so very dear to him was exactly what he could have wished; and to the credit of the lover's understanding be it stated, that he did not by any means consider Fanny as the only, or even as the greater gainer by such a friendship.⁶⁵

Edmund's pleasure in seeing the two young women together not only "betray[s] his desire to have elements of both the characters in one composite love object," but helps him consciously value the intrinsic worth in Fanny's character and mind because he believes it will help raise and mold Mary Crawford's.⁶⁶ For the first time in the novel, the oft-forgotten Fanny is raised as a model, and it occurs because of her friendship with her beloved's lover. As the two women discuss Mary Crawford's suitability--or lack thereof--for country life, the approaching Mrs. Grant and Edmund catch their attention. Once again, Edmund's approach

⁶³ Anderson, "The Different Sort of Friendship," 167, 177.

⁶⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 142.

⁶⁵ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 145.

⁶⁶ Anderson, "The Different Sorts of Friendship," 176.

activates their rivaling opinions. Miss Crawford expresses her relief at Tom Bertram's departure because it allows Edmund to be Mr. Bertram again and adds: "There is something in the sound of Mr. *Edmund* Bertram so formal, so pitiful, so younger-brother-like, that I detest it."⁶⁷ Because it is only with Mary that Fanny can speak as openly as she dares in the safety of their tenuous friendship, she gently but clearly states her opposition: "How differently we feel!...To me, the sound of Mr. Bertram is so cold and nothing-meaning--so entirely without warmth or character!--It just stands for a gentleman and that's all. But there is nobleness in the name of Edmund..."⁶⁸ Though Miss Crawford remains unconvinced of the worth of the name of Edmund and of the character of the young man himself, it is significant that Fanny, up to this point typically bending to others' opinions, is able to clearly express an opinion contrary to that of her secret rival and avowed friend. Fanny's love for Edmund leads her to form a clear, unequivocal judgment of his name, and her own low opinion of Mary Crawford's character allows Fanny to assume a degree of authority over her "friend." Fanny's profound knowledge of Edmund's goodness and Mary's worldliness leads her to exercise her judgment as the moral authority in her relationship with a young woman corrupted by ambition, unable to see Edmund's worth.

A more social recognition of Fanny's value is not long to follow. Her position as Mary Crawford's friend leads not only to dinner invitations at the parsonage but to the increasingly marked attentions of Henry Crawford who, at first only meaning to make "a small hole in Fanny Price's heart" by having her fall in love with him within the space of a fortnight, finds in her cultivated mind and open affection towards her brother William a deeper, more serious interest.⁶⁹ No external change occurs in Fanny's timid nature--she still trembles at the possibility of her being noticed or discussed by others--yet Fanny's triangulated friendship with Mary brings about a quiet but unmistakable revolution in her mind: for the first time, Fanny Price is now able to trust her judgment despite others'

⁶⁷ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 145.

⁶⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 145.

⁶⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 157.

opposing, more authoritative opinion. Henry Crawford neither makes a small hole in her heart nor gains her hand in marriage because Fanny steadily relies on her own understanding, first formed during Mansfield's fateful theatrics and confirmed upon his return of his having a "corrupted mind."⁷⁰ It is Fanny's rivalrous friendship that first brings her Henry's unwanted attention. Mary herself observes to her brother: "...you will have opportunities enough of endeavoring to recommend yourself, for we are a great deal together."⁷¹ At the same time, Fanny's heart rejects Henry Crawford because it has been "engaged elsewhere" in her cousin Edmund. But this triangulated relationship also leads Fanny to rely on her own opinion. Since the judgment of her former moral compass, Edmund, has been compromised by his clouded affection for Mary, and since Fanny is thrown into a friendship with Mary due to her own love for Edmund, Fanny is repeatedly called upon to exercise her own judgment and express her own opinion to shield and separate herself from Miss Crawford's noxious worldly influence. Even in the two young woman's mundane conversation, their opposing opinion and Fanny's free self-expression is evident.

Fanny's development as her own moral authority leads her to oppose Mansfield's ultimate power and, as a result, to transform Mansfield itself. Fanny's increased reliance on her own opinion is evident the night of the ball at Mansfield when Fanny opposes Sir Thomas for the first time:

Sir Thomas brought [Mr. Crawford] to her, saying something which discovered to Fanny, that *she* was to lead the way and open the ball...though her uncle spoke the contrary, she could not help an exclamation of surprise, a hint of her unfitness, an entreaty even to be excused. To be urging her opinion against Sir Thomas's, was a proof of the extremity of the case, but such was her horror at the first suggestion,

⁷⁰ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 157.

⁷¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 158.

that she could actually look him in the face and say she hope it might be settled otherwise.⁷²

Though in this instance Sir Thomas eventually carries his point of Fanny's opening the ball and even gets to show Mr. Crawford Fanny's "persuadableness" as a wife by sending her to bed at his benevolent command, this scene is significant because it is the first time that Fanny opposes Sir Thomas and because it foreshadows Fanny's second and more effective refusal of Henry Crawford's marriage proposal, urging her own opinion against Sir Thomas'. At the same time that Fanny Price's copious tears show her contrition at opposing Sir Thomas' approval of the match, they simultaneously wash away her "persuadableness" and reveal that "his domestic instincts are corrupted by mercenary considerations."⁷³ Like Edmund, Sir Thomas too is blinded by the Crawford's charms, and therefore, like Edmund, he loses his moral and social authority over Fanny. Where she knows herself to be morally right, Fanny inexorably follows her own beliefs. Going as far as telling Sir Thomas "that he was wrong" when he fails to understand Fanny's objections to the marriage and braving his cold displeasure and accusations of being "willful and perverse," Fanny dissolves into tears of shame and regret at her inability to obey Sir Thomas' desire for the first time in her life, yet her resolve remains unshaken as she attempts to explain to her uncle through choking sobs that "I am so perfectly convinced that I could never make him happy, and that I should be miserable myself."⁷⁴ Fanny's resolve to reject Henry Crawford is so strong, in fact, that it is able to surmount the gratitude she feels for him due to his influence exerted to obtain William's promotion, Edmund's tender but misguided entreaties to "let [Henry Crawford] succeed at last" and her exile from Mansfield to--as Sir Thomas himself puts it-- "bring her mind into a sober state, and incline her to a juster estimate of the value of that home of greater permanence, and equal comfort, of which she had the offer."⁷⁵

⁷² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 189.

⁷³ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 151.

⁷⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 213, 216, 217.

⁷⁵ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 235, 250.

And though Fanny Price is indeed "heartily sick" of her parents' squalid, disorderly Portsmouth home, her resolve to reject Crawford remains.⁷⁶ It is Mansfield itself that suffers alarming alterations due to the lack of principles in Henry Crawford to which Fanny firmly and consistently objects: piqued by Mrs. Rushworth's apparent indifference, he seduces and elopes with her, plunging all of the inhabitants of Mansfield into shame and despair. Although Fanny herself feels deep empathy for the Bertram's pain, her mind remains untouched by regret and her moral authority is confirmed by the clamor of her presence at Mansfield. Indeed, the Park's "prospects in the landscape reflect the prospects in Fanny's life."⁷⁷ Her unexpected return to Mansfield and release from Henry Crawford's unwelcome courtship as well as the secretly budding hope of an irreparable breach between Edmund and Mary places Fanny "in the greatest danger of being exquisitely happy while so many were miserable."⁷⁸ Indeed, though Fanny Price is far from insensible of the evil befallen Mansfield, she is not prostrated by it: this "evil which brought such good to her" allows Fanny to return to the Bertram family as a source of support, redemption, and authority.⁷⁹ Fanny Price returns to Mansfield not only to succor an inconsolable Lady Bertram, but to sooth Edmund's disappointed expectations in Mary Crawford and eventually to supplant her in his affections. And indeed, it is in Fanny Price that a remorseful Sir Thomas, humbled by the misguided management of both his daughters' education, finds satisfaction and redemption. Joyfully consenting to Edmund and Fanny's marriage, Sir Thomas reflects on how "the high sense of having realised a great acquisition in the promise of Fanny as a daughter, formed just such a contrast with his early opinion on the subject when the poor little girl's coming had been first agitated."⁸⁰ Fanny is "the daughter that he wanted."⁸¹ Indeed, Fanny earns the right to regulate Mansfield and its surrounding community because

⁷⁶ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 250.

⁷⁷ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 148.

⁷⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 301.

⁷⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 301.

⁸⁰ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 320.

⁸¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 320.

it is only her "stubborn tenacity that prevents [the Crawford's] complete usurpation and demolition of that world."⁸²

The reversal of fortunes at Mansfield brought about by Fanny Price's moral authority brings about a reversal of fortune for her as well. When Fanny first arrives at Mansfield at ten years of age, she is a timid, lonely wraith; however, when she returns to Mansfield at eighteen after a three-month absence, it is the formerly proud inhabitants of Mansfield who find themselves "solitary, helpless, and forlorn alike" and who depend upon Fanny's moral uprightness for their physical and emotional welfare.⁸³ At first, Fanny Price is the perennial outsider looking down at the young inhabitants of Mansfield as they pursue their own flawed happiness. After her friendship with Mary and her accurate assessment of Henry, Fanny Price returns and makes Mansfield after her own image: Fanny's desire to feel herself "of consequence to anybody" expressed at the beginning of the novel becomes a reality as she becomes indispensable to Lady Bertram, Edmund, and Sir Thomas. Fanny's endogamic vision of Mansfield--a morally pure haven free of the worldly, corrupting influence of outsiders like the Crawford's--is finally enshrined when Sir Thomas himself, "sick of ambitions and mercenary connections, [and] prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper," accepts Fanny as Edmund's wife. In the end, Fanny's contentious triangulated friendship with Mary Crawford is the central vehicle for Fanny Price's both expressed and subconscious desires to be Edmund's beloved, and by extension, to reform Mansfield Park's as a place no longer to be feared.⁸⁴

Emma

Emma Woodhouse, "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition," seems to have very little in common with Fanny Price.⁸⁵ Unlike the timorous

⁸² Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 149.

⁸³ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 304.

⁸⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 304.

⁸⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 1.

Fanny, Emma "is a woman who possesses and enjoys power, without bothering to demur about it."⁸⁶ She has "no financial anxiety: Emma is an 'heiress of thirty thousand pounds.' Rank is no problem: Emma is herself of an 'ancient family,'...Precedence is no problem: for Emma reigns alone at Hartfield and over Highbury, unencumbered by sisters, aunts, tyrannical parents or guardians, or petty nobility."⁸⁷ Indeed, her quick, confident disposition and sharp intellect is nurtured by the steadfast devotion of her doting governess, Miss Taylor, and by her intellectual, physical, and even morally ailing father, a man who she's been "obliged to manage...almost from her childhood."⁸⁸ It is hardly surprising, critics argue, that being of preeminent importance with her governess and her father, Hartfield's unopposed mistress, Emma "wishes to dominate elsewhere as well" by reigning supreme over Highbury society.⁸⁹

But Emma's sovereignty is not only due to her emotional ascendancy over Miss Taylor and Mr. Woodhouse but to her intellectual superiority--she is guided solely by her own judgment alone. Though quick, Emma's understanding is nonetheless clouded by the despotic strains of stubbornness and conceit: "the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself."⁹⁰ Although Emma meets in Miss Taylor "a much higher degree of consciousness" than in Mr. Woodhouse and esteems her opinions, she is not led by the older woman's judgment.⁹¹ After sixteen years at Hartfield and after "the shadow of authority" passes away, Miss Taylor ceases to be Emma's gentle governess and both women live "together as friend and friend very mutually attached."⁹²

⁸⁶ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 125.

⁸⁷ Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 182.

⁸⁸ Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, 182.

⁸⁹ Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, 182. Howard Babb concurs: in *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue*, he observes that Emma's "complete reliance on her own convictions and her ready publication of them mark her need to dominate. Out of her own brain she fabricates a reality which she imprints on the world around her." Emma, he continues, possesses the "compulsion to assert herself, indeed to prove herself unique" (177).

⁹⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 1.

⁹¹ Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels*, 178.

⁹² Austen, *Emma*, 1.

The intimacy existing between Miss Woodhouse and Miss Taylor confirms the former governess not only as Emma's "friend and companion" but as a complimentary reflection of the younger woman's better traits and nearest interests: "intelligent, well-informed, useful, gentle, knowing all the ways of the family, interested in all its concerns, and peculiarly interested" in Emma.⁹³ Indeed, conversations with Miss Taylor duplicate Emma's monologues with herself. Miss Taylor is "one to whom she could speak every thought as it rose."⁹⁴ Additionally, Miss Taylor's fondness for Emma mirrors her own self-love: the young governess possesses "an affection...as could never find fault."⁹⁵

Miss Taylor, then, mirrors the best in Emma--her intelligence and her kindness as she makes herself useful to those in need as well as her deep attachment to Hartfield that softens dear Emma's most obvious flaws. When Mr. Knightley speaks to her of his disapproval over the growing intimacy between Emma and Harriet Smith, Miss Taylor, now the newly married Mrs. Weston, defends Emma's budding friendship. While Mr. Knightley sees that this relationship will only serve to reinforce Emma's sense of superiority and weaken Harriet's sense of her inferior "situation in life," Mrs. Weston expresses her belief in the positive results of such a friendship due to Emma's innate virtues: "With all dear Emma's little faults, she is an excellent creature. Where shall we see a better daughter, or a kinder sister, or a truer friend? No, no; she has qualities which may be trusted...where Emma errs once, she is in the right a hundred times."⁹⁶ Although Mrs. Weston's abilities are inferior to Emma's and though she can never fully take the place of Emma's mother, "the only person able to cope with her" and the only person to whom the young woman "must have been in subjection," her affectionate nature and sound intellectual abilities make her Emma's indispensable companion and a loyal defender of Emma's best qualities.⁹⁷ It is no

⁹³ Austen, *Emma*, 2.

⁹⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 2.

⁹⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 2.

⁹⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 24.

⁹⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 23.

surprise that Emma misses the older woman's companionship when she marries Mr. Weston, a neighboring widower, and moves half a mile to Randalls.

Emma's intellectual solitude prompts her to seek another companion though she knows full well that "such a friend as Mrs. Weston was out of the question."⁹⁸ Emma, therefore, is happy to take notice of Harriet Smith, "the natural daughter of somebody."⁹⁹ After a single evening spent at Hartfield, Emma is pleased by Miss Smith's "so proper and becoming a deference" as well as her "seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield, and so artlessly impressed by the appearance of everything in so superior a style to what she had been used to."¹⁰⁰ Emma's interest in Harriet, in fact, assumes an air of masculine authority and thereby usurps male social prerogatives:¹⁰¹ Emma selects Harriet as her friend because she unwittingly "feeds Emma's vanity...Harriet has neither the inclination, nor the ability, to criticize her in the smallest particular."¹⁰² Miss Woodhouse knows of Miss Smith before this first encounter "very well by sight and had long felt an interest in, on account of her beauty."¹⁰³ It is Emma's appreciation for Harriet's beauty that ultimately leads her to begin her intimacy with the younger woman: "Those soft blue eyes, and all those natural graces should not be wasted on the inferior society of Highbury and its connections...she would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners."¹⁰⁴ Attracted solely by Harriet's beauty, Emma enters into a vastly unequal friendship with her because of the disadvantaged girl's need of improvement: Emma's

⁹⁸ Austen, *Emma*, 2, 15.

⁹⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 13.

¹⁰¹ Claudia Johnson points out that "Sir Thomas' principal activities are much the same as Emma's: he manages his household--with less aplomb--and he oversees the destinies of those around him. This he accomplishes principally by encouraging or discouraging specific marriages" (131). Johnson further observes that Mr. Knightley "oversees the personal affairs of his neighbors more closely than Emma does, and his indignation over Emma's 'interference' with Harriet Smith is due in part to the embarrassment he feels for his own, now futile interference with Robert Martin" (131).

¹⁰² Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 110, 111.

¹⁰³ Austen, *Emma*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 13-14.

interest in Harriet is proportional to Miss Smith's potential for improvement and supposed upward social mobility. Though Emma knows that Harriet Smith lacks the "strength of understanding" that Miss Taylor possessed and may only have the "power of appreciating what was elegant and clever" instead of being well-informed herself, Emma believes that an intimate friendship with Harriet casts a benevolent reflection on her person that would fill the void left by Miss Taylor's marriage: "It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking, highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers."¹⁰⁵

Because Emma allows herself to be seduced by Harriet's beauty and sweet docility, she is not dissimilar from those men of whom she speaks who are not "philosophic on the subject of beauty" and "fall in love with handsome faces."¹⁰⁶ Harriet's claims to exceptional beauty and sweetness of temper combine with Emma's own visions of power and social influence to blind her to the obstacles of Harriet's birth and simple-mindedness. Indeed, Emma behaves like a jealous suitor: Miss Woodhouse's "infatuation about that girl" leads her to persuade Harriet to reject an offer of marriage from Robert Martin, a respectable young farmer.¹⁰⁷ Once this is done, Emma juxtaposes herself against the figure of the rejected suitor as she tells Harriet that entrance into Abbey-Mill Farm as Mr. Martin's wife would have necessarily meant her exile from Hartfield and from Emma's friendship: "I could not have visited Mrs. Robert Martin...I must have given you up."¹⁰⁸ Harriet, horrified by the deprivation of a relationship with Emma, finally and fully makes up her mind to reject Mr. Martin. Although with disingenuousness at best and dishonesty at worst Emma claims to have no desire to "influence" her malleable young friend, she tells Harriet of her forcible change in society as she sees her friend wavering between an acceptance and a refusal of Mr. Martin. Banishment from Emma's friendship makes up Harriet's weak mind against this most respectable match: "That would have been too dreadful!--What an escape.--Dear Miss

¹⁰⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 15, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 40.

¹⁰⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 38.

¹⁰⁸ Austen, *Emma*, 33.

Woodhouse, I would not give up the pleasure and honour of being intimate with you for anything in the world."¹⁰⁹ And Emma, of course, approves of the decision to which she has led Harriet because it confirms Emma's jealous possession of another woman: "Now I am secure of you forever," she tells Harriet.¹¹⁰ Contrary to Marvin Mudrick's contention that the root of all of Emma's "unpleasant qualities" is "the fact...that Emma prefers the company of women," I would like to suggest quite the opposite. It is not that Emma's preference for the company of women leads to "unpleasant qualities": it is because Emma does not truly engage in friendship with an intellectual, emotional, or social equal that her relationship with Harriet denies Emma the possibility of self-knowledge almost until the end of the narrative.¹¹¹ As Jane Nardin observes, "Emma never accords Harriet fully human (or adult) status, [and]...regards her as an object, in fact, as a toy."¹¹²

Emma's masculine interest in Harriet corrupts the tenants of female friendship because it denies both women self-awareness: Harriet's infantile dependence on Emma does not enable her to speak freely because Emma not only forms and manipulates her scant judgment but actually speaks and acts for her as well. In writing the letter of rejection to Robert Martin, "Emma continued to protest against any assistance being wanted" yet she influenced "the formation of every sentence" because "the looking over his letter again, in replying to it, had such a softening tendency, that it was particularly necessary to brace her up with a few decisive expressions."¹¹³ Emma's perversion of her friendship with Harriet ultimately leads her to reject her own judgment and exposes her to Mr. Elton's unwelcome advances, Frank Churchill's deception, Mr. Knightley's acute censure, and, what is worst for Emma still, the profound disapproval of her own self.

The possibility of being Mr. Elton's object of affection instead of Harriet fully dawns upon Emma during the Christmas dinner at Randalls. Although Emma disparages her

¹⁰⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 33.

¹¹⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 33.

¹¹¹ Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, 192.

¹¹² Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums*, 111.

¹¹³ Austen, *Emma*, 34.

brother-in-law's sly observation of Mr. Elton's "good will" toward her and of her own "encouraging" manners, and although Emma muses about the blunders--her brother-in-law's in particular--"which often arise from a partial knowledge of circumstance, of the mistakes which people of high pretensions to judgment are for ever falling into," Emma herself is blind to the ironic situation in which she will shortly be herself.¹¹⁴ Having high pretension to judgment herself, especially in regard to Harriet's marital prospects as well as to Mr. Elton's inclinations, Emma is blind to her mistaken assumption of Mr. Elton's growing attachment to Harriet until his unwelcome attentions forcibly intrude themselves first during the Westons' party and then, even more inescapably, on their solitary carriage ride back to Hartfield and to Vicarage Lane. At Randalls, Mr. Elton's "continually obtruding his happy countenance on her notice, and solicitously addressing her upon every occasion," makes Emma seriously question for the first time whether it is possible "for this man to be beginning to transfer his affections" from Harriet to herself.¹¹⁵ Even after Mr. Elton requests Mrs. Weston's "kind support and aid" to urge Emma to avoid the danger of Harriet's sore throat and openly "assuming to himself the right of first interest in her," Emma is willing to believe in his drunkenness rather than in his interest in her.¹¹⁶ It is only when Emma finds herself openly accosted by the vicar's farcical devotion that she can no longer ignore the mistake into which her "high pretensions to judgment" have led her.

Mr. Elton's gentle veneer slips further and further away not only when he disdainfully rejects Harriet as "a very good sort of girl" who might marry one of those men who might not object to her degrading situation of birth, status, and education. With hypocritical hauteur, Mr. Elton expresses his hope of finding himself not in such total despair "of an equal alliance, as to be addressing [himself] to Miss Smith" and presumes to find such an equal match in Emma Woodhouse, his social superior.¹¹⁷ The seed of Emma's mistaken

¹¹⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 73.

¹¹⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 77.

¹¹⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 82.

¹¹⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 86.

judgment first noticed by John Knightley--her encouraging manners--bears full fruit when Mr. Elton reproaches Emma for "the encouragement...received."¹¹⁸ What Emma construes as subtle, clever contrivances to bring Harriet and the vicar together--his invitations to Hartfield, the request to frame Harriet's portrait, Emma's contrivance to enter the Vicarage--are all interpreted by Mr. Elton as signs of personal encouragement. Emma's "high pretensions to judgment" crash around her as she confesses her ignorance of his true character and views: "So far from having understood you, I have been in a most complete error with respect to your views, till this moment," she confesses to Mr. Elton.¹¹⁹

The triangular relationship in which Emma unwittingly and very reluctantly finds herself is one of profound mortification because it does not spring naturally from daily social intercourse but from Emma's forced and besotted imagination. Infatuated herself with Harriet's beauty and sweetness, Emma willingly abuses her own understanding and willfully ascribes to Mr. Elton her own attachment to Harriet. She sees herself as the facilitator of feeling between Harriet and her supposed admirer. As a result of this illusory bond, Emma finds herself harassed by an undesirable heterosexual connection that threatens to shatter the trust Harriet deposited in her judgment and their friendship. This first severe misunderstanding between the two friends only foreshadows others even more essential to Harriet's eventual dismissal from Hartfield. Emma's artificial triangulated relationship nonetheless yields some revelatory morsels of self-knowledge. Because Emma's assurances of Mr. Elton's regard for Harriet have been quite mistaken, Harriet's "peace" will be "cut up for some time."¹²⁰ Emma, indeed, is also forced to acknowledge to herself that she has been "but half a friend" to Harriet.¹²¹ Despite these regrets, Emma continues to be half a friend because she remains willfully blind to Harriet's desires and interests and very much in tune with her own predilections. In her self-reproach for encouraging Harriet's affection for Mr.

¹¹⁸ Austen, *Emma*, 86.

¹¹⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 86.

¹²⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 89.

¹²¹ Austen, *Emma*, 89.

Elton, Emma reflects on her influence over Mr. Martin's refusal: "Oh! that I had been satisfied with persuading her not to accept young Martin. There I was quite right...I am sure I have not an idea of any body else who would be at all desirable for her;--William Coxe-- Oh! no, I could not endure William Coxe--a pert young lawyer."¹²² Even while the intention of her thoughts is Harriet's welfare, Emma's taste quickly and effortlessly supersedes her concern for her friend. And though Emma stops "to blush and laugh at her own relapse" to take up a "more dispiriting cogitation...of her having blundered most dreadfully" and resolves "to do such things no more," she still fails to recognize Harriet as anything but a doll to twist to her own desires.¹²³ Although this imaginary triangulated relationship between Emma, Mr. Elton, and Harriet does provide the dawning realization that "she had taken up the idea...and made every thing bend to it," Emma is still willing to be easily deceived by her own desires instead of Harriet's true interests.¹²⁴

Nowhere is Emma's self-deception more evident than in her dealings with Frank Churchill. Chastened yet exasperated by Harriet's unvarying devotion to Mr. Elton as an unwelcome reminder of her own folly, Emma welcomes the arrival of Mr. Weston's dashing son because the young man offers a fresh opportunity to raise her own preeminence with the Westons and overall social importance in Highbury. Even before Frank Churchill's actual presence, Emma's fancy prompts her to perceive Mr. and Mrs. Weston's desire for a match between them. "The worn-out past was sunk into the freshness of what was coming," Emma reflects with enthusiasm.¹²⁵ She does not have long to wait in order to enjoy the speculations of others upon her meeting Frank Churchill. The very next morning after this evening's arrival at Randalls, Mr. Weston and his son pay a visit to Hartfield. As she converses with his son, Emma feels Mr. Weston's expectant, happy eye upon them and wonders "whether the same suspicion of what might be expected from their knowing each

¹²² Austen, *Emma*, 89-90.

¹²³ Austen, *Emma*, 89.

¹²⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 87.

¹²⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 121-122.

other, which had taken possession in her mind, had ever crossed" Frank Churchill's.¹²⁶ At the same time, Emma "had no doubt of what Mr. Weston was often thinking about. His quick eye she detected again and again glancing towards them with a happy expression; and even, when he might have determined not to look, she was confident he was often listening."¹²⁷ Frank Churchill is attractive to Emma, therefore, because he stimulates her wounded vanity. In fact, Emma entertains the idea of marriage to Frank Churchill, but only "as long as it remains an idea, a neat, appropriate, socially approved arrangement."¹²⁸ Her quick, penetrating insight informs her sentiments. After Frank's first visit to Hartfield, Emma is aware of his propensity to speak "in fine words or hyperbolic compliment," indications of possible untrustworthiness.¹²⁹ By the end of his stay, Emma realizes that she "could not be very much in love" with him: "the conclusion of every imaginary declaration on his side was that she refused him. Their affection was always to subside into friendship."¹³⁰ It is not long before Emma's refusal grows "more interesting by the addition of a scheme for his subsequent consolation and happiness": "His recollection of Harriet, and the words which clothed it, the 'beautiful little friend,' suggested to her the idea of Harriet's succeeding her in his affections."¹³¹ Though Emma does perceive this to be an incredibly advantageous match for Harriet, she is once more thinking of bestowing Harriet in marriage to enhance her own social position.

Although Emma encourages Harriet's first match with Mr. Elton because she cannot bear the reflection her chosen friend's marriage to a farmer would cast on her, Emma now delights in making this new, higher match for Harriet to solidify her own friendship with Frank Churchill: Emma delights in reframing her supposed relationship to him in her own non-sexual terms: "...and when we cease to care for each other as we do now, it will be the

¹²⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 124.

¹²⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 124-125.

¹²⁸ Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, 191.

¹²⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 127.

¹³⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 171.

¹³¹ Austen, *Emma*, 173.

means of confirming us in that sort of disinterested friendship which I can already look forward to with pleasure."¹³² To Emma, Frank Churchill's marriage to Harriet would allow her to maintain what is good and tender in the friendship--that is, this marriage would allow for Frank Churchill's continued presence and for Emma's being his foremost friend--while removing the dangers of a sexual relationship in marriage and placing them squarely on Harriet's lovely shoulders. Although Emma's quick powers of perception, blinded by her equally quick fancy, prevent her from falling in love with Frank Churchill, they do not save her from being an easily manipulated pawn in his deception. Secretly engaged to the very reserved and long-suffering Jane Fairfax, Frank cloaks his relationship with his fiancée in Emma's impetuous, unfounded, and unjust suspicions. When Miss Fairfax mysteriously receives a new pianoforte, Emma's speculations regarding Mr. Dixon's illicit and corresponded feelings for his wife's closest friend completely draw suspicion away from Frank Churchill himself as the sender of such a secretive present.

At the Coles' dinner party when the gift of the pianoforte breaks upon the community's most prominent members, Mr. Churchill smiles at the liberality of his gift and at the ripple of curiosity it provokes and quickly credits it to Colonel Campbell, Jane's guardian and benefactor. However, Emma's ingenious explanation provides a more efficient facade for his actions. "I do not mean to reflect upon the good intentions of either Mr. Dixon or Miss Fairfax but I cannot help suspecting," Emma begins her indulgently wicked speculation, "that, after making his proposals to her friend, he had the misfortune to fall in love with her, or that he became conscious of a little attachment on her side."¹³³ She confidently concludes that the instrument "is not from the Campbells...I am perfectly convinced myself that Mr. Dixon is a principal in the business."¹³⁴ Though Frank Churchill at first attempts to refute these arguments, he not only accepts them but uses them to safely approach Jane Fairfax from this point forth to supposedly tease her about her Irish friends.

¹³² Austen, *Emma*, 173.

¹³³ Austen, *Emma*, 140.

¹³⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 141.

Most importantly, Emma's later fancied attachment between Harriet Smith and Frank Churchill prevents her from seeing Harriet's gratefully romantic feelings for Mr. Knightley. In addition to Emma's avowed wish to avoid the manipulative, officious interference she exercises earlier in Mr. Elton's case, her ignorance to the true nature of her friend's emotions finally prevents Emma from manipulating Harriet's identity as her chosen man's wife. As a result, Harriet finally becomes an independent--if oscillating--actor in the theater of her own emotional life. When Emma observes Harriet's admiration for a certain nameless man who is her vast social superior, she only advises her friend to "be observant of him. Let his behavior be the guide to your sensations."¹³⁵ This and the observation that "more wonderful things have taken place, there have been matches of greater disparity" is the only encouragement Emma now offers because henceforth, she states "I shall never speak to you again on the subject. I am determined against all interference...Let no name pass our lips."¹³⁶ Emma refuses to openly guide Harriet's naive understanding and shifting emotions, leaving her young little friend as an independent agent of her destiny. Harriet's independence is evident in her choice of love object. While Emma assumes that Frank Churchill's rescue of Harriet from the gypsies make him the object of her interest, Harriet herself views her own rescue from the Eltons' spite and humiliation at the Westons' ball at the hands of Mr. Knightley as the beginning of her admiration for him.

Indeed, because Harriet begins to be an independent entity at this ball, a true triangulated relationship leading to Emma's true awareness of herself begins between Emma, Mr. Knightley, and Harriet.¹³⁷ At the Westons' ball, Emma's enjoyment of dancing and of Frank Churchill's company is threatened by the Eltons' malice:

The last two dances before supper had begun, and Harriet had no partner;--the only young lady sitting down;--and so equal had been hitherto

¹³⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 223.

¹³⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 223.

¹³⁷ In " 'Emma' and the Democracy of Desire," Beatrice Marie writes that although "Emma's intention is to form Harriet's tastes and opinions by setting her own before her as an example," in reality Emma teaches Harriet "to become her own rival" (3, 5).

the number of dancers, that how there could be anyone disengaged was the wonder!--But Emma's wonder lessened soon afterwards, on seeing Mr. Elton sauntering about. He would not ask Harriet to dance if it were possible to be avoided.¹³⁸

But here Emma is wrong. Mr. Elton does not seek to avoid dancing with Harriet. Quite to the contrary, the vicar openly displays his willingness to dance not only by sauntering by the sitters-by but by offering to readily dance with Mrs. Weston or even with a Mrs. Gilbert but pointedly refusing to dance with Miss Smith alone. Mr. Elton rejects Mrs. Weston's suggestion of dancing with Harriet claiming, "...my dancing days are over, Mrs. Weston. You will excuse me. Anything else I should be happy to do, at your command, but my dancing days are over."¹³⁹ Since he has previously claimed his ability to dance with other women, Mrs. Weston concludes, the excuse that his marriage has ended his dancing days is clearly meant to indicate his pointed refusal to dance with Harriet alone. As if this behavior were not a confirmed slight of her, the "smiles of high glee [that] passed between him and his wife" are further confirmation of their conspiratorial malice not only against Miss Smith but against Miss Woodhouse as well.¹⁴⁰

After saving Harriet from this very public humiliation by gracefully dancing with her, Mr. Knightley's subsequent exchange with Emma reveals his full understanding of the Eltons' intentions: "They aimed at wounding more than Harriet...Emma, why is it that they are your enemies?"¹⁴¹ However, Mr. Knightley does not need Emma's actual words to confirm his suspicions: "...but confess, Emma, that you did want him to marry Harriet."¹⁴² Emma's admission of her dashed hopes does not prompt Mr. Knightley's triumphant derision but an *eclaircissement* that brings the two closer in their opinions and feelings. Emma then confesses herself "to have been completely mistaken in Mr. Elton. There is a littleness about

¹³⁸ Austen, *Emma*, 213.

¹³⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 213.

¹⁴⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 213.

¹⁴¹ Austen, *Emma*, 215.

¹⁴² Austen, *Emma*, 215.

him which you discovered, and which I did not..."¹⁴³ Mr. Knightley, in turn, gratifies Emma by admitting Harriet's merits: "...you would have chosen for him better than he has chosen for himself.--Harriet Smith has some first-rate qualities, which Mrs. Elton is totally without. An unpretending, single-minded, artless girl--infinitely to be preferred by any man of sense and taste to such a woman as Mrs. Elton. I found Harriet more conversable than I expected."¹⁴⁴

At this ball, when Harriet is not so closely under Emma's guidance and protection, she is finally able to have an impact on Emma. This new level in their friendship is evident in that an insult such as the Eltons' is perpetrated on Harriet and fully meant for Emma as well. Equally, as Mr. Knightley fully understands and intends, an honor done to Harriet is also an honor done to Emma. Therefore, because the Eltons intended to mortify Emma through Harriet, Mr. Knightley dances with Harriet to save Emma from humiliation. The later conversation between Emma and Mr. Knightley also reveals Harriet's purpose as a friend in a triangulated relationship: her ability to bring self-understanding to the heroine, which, in turn brings her closer to the hero himself.¹⁴⁵ Harriet's dance with Mr. Knightley helps Emma finally acknowledge Mr. Elton's pettiness and admit her error in judgment to herself and to Mr. Knightley openly. In return, Mr. Knightley condemns the Eltons and praises Harriet in equal measure, thereby bringing him much closer to Emma's perspective: by the end of this conversation, the unity existing between both is represented by the dance they share afterwards.

But if Harriet's more egalitarian position as a friend in Emma's triangulated relationship between herself and Mr. Knightley affords Emma more clarity in her understanding of others, her shifting position as Emma's rival within the same relationship gives Emma a clarity of her self previously unknown to her. Harriet's increasing equality

¹⁴³ Austen, *Emma*, 215.

¹⁴⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 216.

¹⁴⁵ Although Beatrice Marie posits, "Harriet's desire can be said to create Emma's where before only feeling of friendship existed," I contend that Harriet does not create Emma's desire for Mr. Knightley. Instead, Emma's own desire for Mr. Knightley is illuminated by Harriet's love. It is recognition, not creation, that Harriet's desire causes.

within her friendship with Emma is at one point acknowledged even by Emma herself. After learning of Frank Churchill's secret engagement to Jane Fairfax and reassuring the anxious Mrs. Weston of her own disengaged affections, Emma believes that she must perform for Harriet the very same office that Mrs. Weston had just done for her: "The intelligence, which had been so anxiously announced to her, she was now to be anxiously announcing to another...Could the event of the disclosure bear an equal resemblance!--But of that, unfortunately, there could be no change."¹⁴⁶ Ironically, Harriet's reaction to Frank Churchill's engagement is similar to Emma's since she, too, is surprisingly indifferent to the young man in question.

To Emma's dawning dismay, Harriet reveals with a degree of hauteur previously unknown to her that it is not for Mr. Churchill for whom she cares: "Mr. Frank Churchill, indeed! I do not know who would ever look at him in the company of the other."¹⁴⁷ The object of her affection, she tells Emma, is none other than Mr. Knightley himself. Instead of thinking of Frank Churchill's rescue from the gypsies, Harriet thinks "of a much more precious circumstance--of Mr. Knightley's coming and asking me to dance...that was the service which made me begin to feel how superior he was to every other being upon earth."¹⁴⁸ To further compound Emma's horror at her friend's sentiments, Harriet points out that it was Emma herself who had given her hope: "I am sure, but for believing that you entirely approved and meant to encourage me in my attachment, I should have considered at first too great a presumption almost, to dare to think of him."¹⁴⁹ However, even when it is evident to Harriet that her friend disapproves of her hopes in Mr. Knightley's affection, she insists that Emma's very own words taught her to think that "matches of greater

¹⁴⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 265.

¹⁴⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 266.

¹⁴⁸ Austen, *Emma*, 267.

¹⁴⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 266.

disparity had taken place than between Mr. Frank Churchill and me; and, therefore, it seems as if such a thing even as this, may have occurred before."¹⁵⁰

And in fact, Emma's former words to encourage her friend's second attachment sows the seeds of their rivalry. When Harriet asks Emma not to "set yourself against [the match], and try to put difficulties in the way," she is effectively recognizing Emma as her friend no longer but as her opponent.¹⁵¹ Harriet Smith's now complete independence from Emma's approval and friendship finally makes her Emma Woodhouse's rival. From this moment of its inception, the antagonism between the two young women leads to Emma's true self-knowledge. The realization that Harriet is in love with Mr. Knightley acquaints Emma with her own feelings: "Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley, than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself."¹⁵² Since both women desire Mr. Knightley, the friends quickly then become adversaries. And although Harriet's mind is weak and does not even suspect Emma's feelings, she immediately and fully recognizes her as an opponent.

Harriet's clear acknowledgment of her admiration for Mr. Knightley prompts Emma's foremost realization--that she herself loves Mr. Knightley and that it is she and not Harriet whom he must marry. This same realization that now entangles Emma in a triangulated rivalry quickly results in further insights both about who she is and about her true role in Highbury society, leading her on a rapid journey into the "development of self."¹⁵³ "The blunders, the blindness of her own head and heart" finally stand aside and allow Emma to see further into the state of genuine reflection that she has never loved Frank Churchill at all.¹⁵⁴ Although after his short stay in Highbury Emma believes that she must be in love--though slightly and passingly--with him, her heightened honest emotional state makes her

¹⁵⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 267.

¹⁵¹ Austen, *Emma*, 267.

¹⁵² Austen, *Emma*, 267.

¹⁵³ Austen, *Emma*, 268.

¹⁵⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 270.

see that "there never had been a time when she did not consider Mr. Knightley infinitely superior, or when his regard for her had not been infinitely most dear...she had been entirely under a delusion, totally ignorant of her own heart--and, in short, that she had never really cared for Frank Churchill at all!"¹⁵⁵

In addition, Emma is now fully aware of her blindness' negative impact on herself and on those closest to her:

With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny. She proved herself to be universally mistaken and she had not quite done nothing--for she had done mischief. She had brought evil on Harriet, on herself, and...on Mr. Knightley.--Were this most unequal of all connections to take place, on her must rest the reproach of having given it a beginning; for his attachment, she must believe to be produced only by a consciousness of Harriet's.¹⁵⁶

The jealous, wounded feelings that make her wish that she had "never brought Harriet forward [and] prevented her from marrying the unexceptionable young man who would have made her happy and respectable in the line of life to which she ought to belong."¹⁵⁷

However, Emma now sees that her friendship with Harriet has made the younger, malleable woman "vain" and desirous of unmerited "self-consequence."¹⁵⁸ This line of thinking about friendship itself also allows Emma to appreciate Jane Fairfax duly for the first time: "...had she endeavored to find a friend there instead of in Harriet Smith; she must in all probability be spared from every pain which pressed on her now.--Birth, abilities and education, had been equally marking one as an associate for her, to be received with gratitude."¹⁵⁹ Instead, Emma's vain rejection of Jane Fairfax because of her superior abilities has lead her not only

¹⁵⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 271.

¹⁵⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 271.

¹⁵⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 272.

¹⁵⁸ Austen, *Emma*, 272.

¹⁵⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 276.

to harbor “abominable suspicions of an improper attachment to Mr. Dixon” but to have them “unpardonably imparted” as well.¹⁶⁰

Emma’s thoughtless impudence has been made “a subject of material distress to the delicacy of Jane’s feelings, by the levity or carelessness of Frank Churchill.”¹⁶¹ Instead of well-deserved friendship, Emma offers a young woman already tortured by financial circumstances and poor personal choices nothing but additional mortification since Emma not only imparts ideas of Jane’s supposed forbidden attachment to Mr. Dixon but encourages Frank Churchill’s meaningless intimacy. Emma finally recognizes that “of all the sources of evil surrounding the former, since her coming to Highbury, she was persuaded that she must herself have been the worst. She must have been a perpetual enemy. They never could have been all three together, without her having stabbed Jane Fairfax’s peace in a thousand instances.”¹⁶²

The story of Emma Woodhouse traces the education of her willful misjudgment. With grandiose self-delusion, Emma simultaneously perverts the social responsibility that accompanies her privileged social position as well as her own superb understanding. She threatens to overturn Highbury’s placid hierarchy when she raises the lowly Harriet Smith, a tradesman’s illegitimate daughter, to be her own companion. Though at first Harriet is overcome with gratitude and awe at Hartfield’s dignity, Emma’s friendship unwittingly teaches her not only to hope, but to feel certain of Mr. Knightley’s love for her. Though her aspirations remain unspoken, Harriet believes that she can be the mistress of Donwell Abbey--the only estate in Highbury surpassing Hartfield because, as she boldly states, “now I seem to feel that I may deserve him; and that if he does choose me, it will not be any thing so very wonderful.”¹⁶³ It is only then that Emma realizes her own love for her ever-patient mentor as well as her own grave social transgressions.

¹⁶⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 276.

¹⁶¹ Austen, *Emma*, 276.

¹⁶² Austen, *Emma*, 276-277.

¹⁶³ Austen, *Emma*, 270.

And yet, *Emma* traces much more than the heroine's humiliation—it is the reaffirmation of female rule within the larger patriarchal society. Although Emma eventually regrets her selection of Harriet as the friend intended to augment a complementary social reflection of herself, it is her eventual rivalry with Harriet that challenges not only Emma's understanding of her own self but of the true "duty of woman for woman" her position in Highbury society demands.¹⁶⁴ At the beginning of her friendship with Harriet Smith, Emma confidently claims to be independent of marriage: "I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry," she tells Harriet,

Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! but I never have been in love...And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's.¹⁶⁵

Just as young prosperous farmers such as Robert Martin are outside of the scope of her curiosity and notice, Emma's rejection of marriage for herself is, in fact, her tacit acknowledgment that women's primary concerns--their incentives for marriage--are contemptible and similarly unworthy of her attention. Although Emma claims to be a match-maker, an improver of women's inferior lot as potential spinsters, her own attitude towards marriage is one of disdain: matrimony is of absolutely no consequence to Emma not only because she is endowed with wealth and social preeminence but because she is of foremost significance to the central male figure in her life, her father. Emma further denies the power of marriage in her life by ridiculing Miss Bates, the only spinster of her acquaintance, and then forcefully placing her large income to distance herself the older woman: "I am

¹⁶⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 150.

¹⁶⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 55.

convinced there can never be any likeness, except in being unmarried...and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! the proper sports of boys and girls."¹⁶⁶

At the same time, Emma's rejection of marriage foretells that love alone can change her perspective. And indeed, it is with the powerful immediacy of self-revelation that Emma's love for Knightley smites her. However, this transformative realization dawns upon Emma only because Harriet Smith discloses her own desire for the same man. It is at this moment, when Mr. Knightley's heart may very well be taken by another, that Emma is finally aware that it is she, and no one else, who must be of primary importance to him. Just when Emma cannot have the marriage she desires, she wants matrimony the most. And in desiring marriage, she finally understands--and validates--women's most pressing concerns.

Because Emma is Highbury's first and foremost social authority, her journey into the self does not allow her to stop at the private boundaries of her person but prompts her to be the representative of women's concerns. Just as Fanny Price's moral authority holds sway over her community, Emma's social authority gives true preeminence to women's matrimonial pursuits. Her own union with Knightley is a case in point. Instead of following the patriarchal tradition of the bride's removal to the groom's home to symbolize the total and complete absorption of her identity into his own, a married Emma remains at Hartfield--her own concerns for a dependent, aging parent and the preservation of a peaceful domestic circle taking precedence over male convention. In addition to keeping the smaller comforts of a joint of pork and the greater comforts of genuine respect that single women such as Miss Bates need, Emma finally honors other women's need to marry. The fortune, employment, consequence, and importance that she initially disdains, Emma realizes, are simply multiple names not just for women's economic survival but also for their dignity and

¹⁶⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 55-56.

respect. It may be assumed that even after her own marriage, Emma will continue to usurp the male prerogative of overseeing the personal destinies of those around her, of arranging and discouraging specific marriages in Highbury. However, Emma's self-awareness leads to a significant difference in exercising the power she wields: she will no longer be informed by her own arrogant prejudices and thoughtless impulses, but by the sincere appreciation of women's uncertain—even fragile—social condition.

Though Fanny Price shrinks from the power Emma Woodhouse embraces, both heroines' hostile friendships enable them to shape their communities in their own images. For some, these closely-knit societies modeled by female desires presupposes a stifling retreat into the family. Just as Mansfield Park closes its doors to the pernicious influence of strangers after Fanny's arrival and marriage to Edmund, Hartfield is bereft of all society, as only Emma and Mr. Knightley remain to keep watch over a valetudinarian Mr. Woodhouse, they argue.¹⁶⁷ However, the social reach of both heroines extends far beyond their home. It is true that the doors of Mansfield Park are shut against fashionable and relativist urban notions of honor and duty, yet it is equally true that as Edmund's spouse--the wife not only of a minister but of the youngest son of the preeminent Bertram family supervising their local community--Fanny's moral authority extends not just into her first parish of Thornton Lacy but to the more sizable congregation at Mansfield. Just as Edmund exerts his guidance from the pulpit, it is Fanny's behavior itself regulates the manners and moral impulses not only of the Bertrams themselves but also of her community as a whole. It is not by exerting moral authority but by maintaining her social preeminence that Emma reshapes Highbury. First and foremost, it is little likely that the woman formerly known as Emma Woodhouse in her own right and as the wife of Mr. George Knightley, the most prominent landowner of the community, will cease to exert her influence over the community. When her social power

¹⁶⁷ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 153.

combines with her newly acquired understanding of women's values, Emma redefines marriage for Highbury and effectively fulfills "the duty of woman for woman." Emma's newfound emotional solidarity with Jane Fairfax and even with Harriet Smith, women occupying lower social strata, is not only expressed in her own marriage to Knightley as her own concerns are placed before male privilege but as she ceases to be an obstacle to Jane's and Harriet's respective marriages. Her own desire for marriage now prompts Emma no longer to see women's concerns and fates as being beyond her notice. Emma finally understands that her social duty is to safeguard women's interests: she is not to be the jealous obstacle to women's marriages, but to facilitate propitious unions that ensure women's successful entrance into a treacherous heterosexual world. It is the rivalry sown early in Fanny and Emma's respective friendships that enables these heroines to extend their self-recognition into significant social action. The lack of supportive ties of sisterhood or of surrogate kinship ultimately compel Fanny Price and Emma Woodhouse to find female relationships that, though deeply hostile, are instrumental in helping the heroines leave an indelible mark on their larger social sphere.

Conclusion

The heroine of Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine Hanna--an English major who writes her senior thesis on the role of marriage in the novels not only of Henry James but of female novelists such as George Eliot and Jane Austen--finds herself in a romantic triangle between Leonard Bankhead, the man to whom she is intensely attracted despite and because of his mental and emotional instability, and Mitchell Grammaticus, the man who loves her through years of adverse circumstances. After their first and only sexual encounter at the end of the novel, Mitchell cannot help but intuit that this long-awaited connection is devoid of lasting meaning for him because Madeleine is not actively choosing him but emotionally leaving Leonard. The question he asks her reflects his dawning realization of her desire for freedom: "From the books you read for your thesis...the Austen and the James and everything--was there any novel where the heroine gets married to the wrong guy and then realizes it, and then the other suitor shows up, some guy who's been in love with her, and then they get together, but finally the second suitor realizes that the last thing the woman needs is to get married again, that she's got more important things to do with her life?"¹ Though it is Madeleine who is liberated at long last from being Leonard's wife or Mitchell's girlfriend, it is she who mediates Mitchell's sense of liberating self-awareness: previously haunted by the envy, jealousy, and intermittent hatred of Leonard embedded in his desire for Madeleine, he realizes that she is only "his ideal, but an early conception of it, and he would get over it in time...He was feeling a lot better about himself, as if he might do some good in the world."² While Madeleine is left to shift for herself to find those amorphous "important things to do with her life," Mitchell becomes fully aware of his power to effect change in the world.

Although Madeleine Hannah studies the marriage plot in Austen's novels, she is enmeshed in a marriage plot of her own, where male triangulated desire relegates her to

¹ Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Marriage Plot* (New York: Picador, 2011), 406.

² Eugenides, *The Marriage Plot*, 406.

the role of object, of “mediatrix of peace and serenity after mediating desire, anguish, and vanity.”³ In assuming this circumscribed role, Madeleine plays a much more passive part in her own development than Austenian heroines play in the evolution of their self-awareness: though she avoids Mitchell’s eye contact just as she hopes to avoid a relationship with him, it is he, and not Madeleine, who clearly articulates her need to remain emotionally unattached in order to do “important things.” In spite of her marriage to Leonard and her connection to Mitchell, Madeleine does not gain a greater consciousness of her identity—and unlike Grammaticus—of the possible impact she may have on the world. Naturally, it is hardly surprising that differences exist between Jeffrey Eugenide’s Madeleine Hannah and Jane Austen’s Elizabeth Bennett, Anne Elliot, or Emma Woodhouse. Not only is Madeleine Hannah’s sexual life much more overtly presented than Marianne Dashwood’s, for example, but she is able to escape marriage entirely if she so wishes. However, one of the most significant differences is not marked by such sociopolitical alterations in women’s lives but in their ability to forge significant relationships to other women.

Because Madeleine isolates herself from her mother and sister as well as from female college friends, she cannot escape being characterized and consumed as a commodity by male desire. In contrast, Austen’s heroines secure for themselves a female emotional center, the friendship of a sister, a surrogate relative, or even a rival, out of a typically ample female network. When Jane Austen’s six published novels are taken as a whole, female friendships emerge as the means for the protagonists to expand their own self-

³ Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1965), 22. Girard hypothesizes that “jealousy and envy, like hatred are scarcely more than traditional names given to internal mediation” where the rival is both the igniter of and the obstacle to the hero’s desire (12). In turn, this triangular desire “is the desire which transfigures its object” and “confers upon it an illusory value” (17). In this manner, the initial attraction Mitchell feels for Madeleine in their first year of college is transformed into triangular desire when Leonard Bankhead ignites it, simultaneously becoming an obstacle to this relationship. Leonard, then, confers upon Madeleine an illusory value that Mitchell discards when Leonard is no longer in her life. Because Mitchell engages in this triangulated relationship, he is capable of finding the self-awareness, the purpose for his life, which has eluded him throughout the extent of the narrative while Madeleine cannot do so because she does not possess a triangular relationship where she is its subject. She is defined only as an object of Leonard and Mitchell’s desire.

awareness and thereby reconstruct their own subjectivity.⁴ In so doing, these relationships enable the heroines to extend their consciousness, their experience and power, into their families and into their communities. These friendships originating first in familial affections transform the protagonists into representatives of women's moral, intellectual, and social power. The attachments forged within "the domestic sphere" bestow on women the power of self-definition, "a power, unrecognized by male standards, which constituted a femininity independent of male authorization."⁵ Nonetheless, because Austen's heroines must navigate a patriarchal society that privileges male concerns and interests above their own, it is not until their friendships incorporate their male beloved that they are able to present themselves as sources of genuine authority. The marriage plot with which the heroines must inescapably engage does not reduce them to the silent ciphers their society expects but designates them as actors who shape their environment according to their needs. When the female dyads become triangulated as they incorporate a male lover, the existing friendships between the women create a plasticity in expected female roles from which the protagonists invariably profit: Austen's heroines operate within the social norms of femininity, yet they transform the impact of women's authority within their immediate communities without the radical ruptures of completely new forms.⁶ Though these triangulated friendships do not allow the heroines to command the public stages of business, politics, religion, and the military alongside their heroes, they represent a progressive paradigm: "men and women of

⁴ In *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond*, Nancy Chodorow observes that "woman as subject expands into woman as subject-object: she becomes the object to her own subjectivity as she internally relates to and identifies with or against another internally experienced woman" (3).

⁵ Anna Despotopoulou, "Fanny's Gaze and the Construction of Feminine Space in 'Mansfield Park,'" *The Modern Language Review* 99.3 (2004): 569.

⁶ Claudia Johnson observes, "among the least doctrinaire of all her contemporaries, Austen from the outset took on the materials which political controversy endowed with such importance, without inviting or aggravating partisan impulses. During a time when all social criticism, particularly that which aimed at the institution of the family in general and the place of women in particular, came to be associated with the radical cause Austen defended and enlarged a progressive middle ground that had been eaten away by the polarizing polemics of the 1790's" (166).

the same rank are capable of equal association and that power and influence in society ought to be allowed to individuals who merit them, irrespective of their sex."⁷

Critics note that triangular relational structures accurately reflect a "calculus of power."⁸ However, it is typically assumed that this calculus of power relegates one sex to the subservience of the other. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for example, notes that because it is women who banish the forbidden, solipsistic specter of male homosexuality, they become subservient to male fears and needs, the "exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men."⁹ Conversely, Terry Castle argues for the inherent inferiority of the male character. According to her, in a triangulated structure where "two female terms are conjoined...the male term occupies the subjugated position of the mediator."¹⁰ Castle further argues that the strength of the female bond eventually vanquishes the male figure, renders him obsolete, and so cements the lesbian bond between the remaining women. However, I argue throughout this dissertation that while the triangulated female friendships present in Austen's novels certainly present a female "calculus of power," they do not call for the subjugation of one sex over the other: they neither present women as exchangeable commodities nor men as subservient objects to women. Though her novels do not call for the social equality of the sexes, they do indeed claim intellectual and moral equality between men and women as their lives play on the social stage.

For critics like Rene Girard, however, triangulated structures are only defined by the envy, jealousy, and hatred one rival feels for the other. According to him, these powerful emotions connecting the rivals are as strong as--if not, in fact, stronger than--the love that connects the beloved to either of the rivals.¹¹ The root of such potent antagonism is not

⁷ Margaret Lenta, "Androgyny and Authority in 'Mansfield Park,'" *Studies in the Novel* 15.3 (1983): 169.

⁸ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 21.

⁹ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 25-26.

¹⁰ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and the Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 73.

¹¹ Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 12-13.

simple hatred but a profound admiration for the rival that leads his opponent to desire what he desires.¹² Though the beloved may genuinely inspire the affection of the model, the rival only loves her because she has acquired the “illusory value” conferred by his opponent. Girard also observes that great writers intuitively apprehend and impose this triangular structure upon their work because it reflects human relations within their cultural system. I propose that because Austen is certainly one of the great writers and because her texts privilege “a specifically female form of familial and moral power,” it is not surprising that her novels illustrate women’s authority through triangular structures.¹³ Among Austen’s novels there is a representation of the imitative desire Girard describes: Emma Woodhouse wishes to present herself as Harriet Smith’s external mediator--a distant model of open admiration who forms “Harriet’s tastes and opinions by setting her own before her as an example: Harriet is to desire what she desires.”¹⁴ However, when Emma can no longer direct Harriet’s desire, she finds that “from being her imitator, Harriet has become Emma’s mediator, and her own love for Mr. Knightley is revealed to her by her pupil-turned-rival.”¹⁵ Exemplified not only in *Emma* but also in *Mansfield Park*’s hostile friendship shaped by Fanny Price and Mary Crawford’s attraction to Edmund Bertram, triangular desire between rivals is certainly present in Austen’s oeuvre.

Yet I observe that desire between rivals is not the only connection transforming the traditionally binary marriage plot into triangular structures of female authority. Support between biological sisters as well as guidance between friends who define themselves as kin are two additional defining emotions that shape the heroines’ most important relationship

¹² As Girard notes, in the internal mediation of which such acrimony is a mark, the rival “can no longer act the model without also acting or appearing to act the role of obstacle...the model shows his disciple the gate of paradise and forbids him to enter with one and the same gesture” (7-8). It is the desire not only to imitate the rival but to also triumph over him that links the opponents so firmly. In explaining Girard’s model of triangulated structures, I use the male pronoun with the intention of denoting that for Girard, the terms engaged in internal mediation are always male. As stated previously, women are assigned the single role of “mediatrix of peace and serenity.”

¹³ Susan Greenfield, “Fanny’s Misreading and the Misreading of Fanny: Women, Literature, and Interiority in *Mansfield Park*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 36.3 (1994): 314.

¹⁴ Beatrice Marie, “‘Emma’ and the Democracy of Desire,” *Studies in the Novel* 17.1 (1985): 2.

¹⁵ Marie, “‘Emma’ and the Democracy of Desire,” 5.

with another woman. Equally important, the male beloved need not be loved by both women. Although personal attraction links him to the heroine, the male term may be connected to the heroine's friend by a myriad of feelings ranging from hostility--as is the case with Lady Russell and Captain Wentworth--to a passing interest--as is the case with Isabella Thorpe and Henry Tilney. I further observe that this beloved is incorporated into the female dyad of friendship due to the unique qualities that set him apart from other men and to the potential that these traits have to prompt the heroine's agency, not simply because he attracts an opponent's affection. Indeed, I propose that female friendships in Austen's novels are not simply shaped by the single force of desire but both by the friend's capacity to prompt the heroine's consciousness and by the beloved's capacity to translate this self-awareness into active agency. This is not to say, of course, that these attachments between women are static replicas of each other: the nature of the feelings bringing together the female dyad depends heavily on whether these relationships are forged within or outside the protagonist's familial circle.

Friendships formed between biological sisters within the bosom of their family provide the heroine with the unconditional support that enables the heroine to bolster herself and, through marriage, enter society "from her strength, and not her weakness."¹⁶ The sororal friendships existing in *Pride and Prejudice* as well as in *Sense and Sensibility*, transform young women whom their own communities view as expendable due to their precarious or impoverished socioeconomic status into influential benefactresses of their husbands' estates. Elizabeth Bennet's friendship with her sister Jane allows her to exercise her imagination and her critical thinking in the safety of their loving friendship so that she can assert her identity as a gentleman's daughter.¹⁷ It is her heightened consciousness, in turn, that allows Elizabeth to demand from a self-assured but ungentlemanly Mr. Darcy a

¹⁶ Marcus, *Between Women*, 99.

¹⁷ Though Sharon Marcus observes that female friendships "licensed forms of agency women were discouraged from exercising with men," I contend that it is precisely the self-awareness promoted within sororal friendships that encourages women's agency in their relationships with men (2).

courtship based on respect and admiration, and not on mortified embarrassment. Similarly, Marianne Dashwood's friendship with her sister Eleanor allows her to claim a successful life as Colonel Brandon's wife instead of succumbing to the tragic fate of the sentimental heroine as John Willoughby's discarded lover. Instead of passively suffering the erasure of their interests, their social existences, and their identity, heroines supported by sororal friendships such as Elizabeth Bennet and Marianne Dashwood lean on the support provided by their respective sisters to form marriages that recognize and value their personal authority.

Because a sororal friendship is not within the grasp of the protagonists of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, their quest for a powerful sense of self leads them to expand their familial ties by reaching further out into her female network. Though both Catherine Morland and Anne Elliot have biological sisters, their distant--and at times, even hostile--relationships with their siblings prohibit the supportive friendships existing between the Bennet and Dashwood sisters. Therefore, these heroines attempt to recreate familial ties by connecting with friends whom they see as surrogate sisters or mothers. These alternate kinships have the potential to help the heroines gain the moral and intellectual authority of self-awareness and to use such an authority to challenge the negative patriarchal influences within their families. Because these attachments temper a lesser degree of support with a greater degree of the friends' manipulation, they challenge the heroines to find the surrogate relationship that will prompt them to extend their consciousness, their self-acquired sense of right and wrong--into their families. Catherine Morland's lack of moral and intellectual authority is confirmed by her inability to forge the maternal relationship she requires and is unable to overcome Isabella Thorpe's manipulation. In addition, though she marries Henry Tilney, Catherine is unable to displace General Tilney's noxious hold over the family she is to join because she is ultimately too diffident to become a source female authority. Anne Elliot, on the other hand, quickly recognizes her father's vacuous but nonetheless harmful force within her family. However, because she does not only forge the

necessary maternal relationship but also overcome the surrogate mother's well-intended but misguided manipulation, Anne is an agent of transformation as she makes her own match and transmutes her allegiance from a decaying aristocracy to the vibrant family of the English navy.

While Anne Elliot, the heroine who both benefits from the support of and successfully challenges manipulative aspects of the surrogate friendship she forges, confirms her intellectual and moral authority within her family by choosing kinship within a new community, the heightened consciousness of the protagonists of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* lead them to modify their own communities according to their values. Because neither Fanny Price nor Emma Woodhouse have siblings who can be their emotional centers, and because they are either socially inferior or superior to those women around them, both heroines look beyond their family or their known friends to forge the attachments of female friendship. In creating--as in Fanny's case-- or expanding--as in Emma's case--their female network in search of an emotional center, both women extend the sphere of their authority into the community where they find this rivalrous friend. These friendships, devoid of the emotional support present in relationships between sisters, are infused with a much greater degree of manipulation than friendships of surrogate kinship. In fact, the grade of manipulation in the attachments between Fanny Price and Mary Crawford as well as between Emma Woodhouse and Harriet Smith erupts into competitive hostility. Even though the friendships in these two novels are closest to the triangular desire described by Girard, they do not exactly fit his definition of imitative desire since, though rivals for the affection of the same man, the love one rival feels for the hero does not actually inform her rival's desire for the same man. Mary Crawford's attraction to Edmund does not fuel Fanny's, just as Harriet Smith's ephemeral love for Mr. Knightley does not provoke Emma's. However, this friendship and the rivalry that lies beneath it impel the heroine's sense of true self and, in so doing, her potential to transform society in order to vanquish her rival. Fanny Price, therefore, remodels not only Mansfield Park itself but the community around it when she

exposes Mary Crawford's corruption and presents herself as her moral antidote. As Emma Woodhouse, Highbury's social leader, vanquishes without much effort her misguided foe on the private stage of their former friendship, her consciousness about herself as a woman at the mercy of marriage prompts Emma to use her social authority to place women's experience and women's concerns at the forefront of her community.

Marriage. Jane Austen's novels have been widely understood to be novels about marriage. According to this accepted interpretation, the harmonious union between the hero and heroine not only concludes each narrative but simultaneously brings closure to the personal and social fissures that the progress of their courtship has revealed. Furthermore, the genteel domesticity which each marriage promises is seen as the ultimate recompense bestowed on each heroine after she undergoes the moral growth caused by the pain and humiliation of her former ignorant obstinacy. Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse-- Austen's most sparkling, self-confident heroines--must first be shamed into realizing that their willful arrogance alone has caused the misunderstandings that endangered the most important attachment in their lives--their relationship with an eligible patrician suitor. Equally, Marianne Dashwood's and Anne Elliot's marriages both restore their bloom as they recover from their fall in judgment while Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Catherine Morland are raised from their anguished mortification by marriage to men they have loved almost since the beginning of their acquaintance. In this interpretation of Austen's novels, her heroines, then, enter marriage only from a position of weakness: as the story goes, it is only after they recognize their most serious deficiency that they are worthy of the hero. The hero, in turn, proves to be the heroine's most significant instrument of the protagonist's growth and identity.

Yet, I advance a different approach to understanding Austen's novels by arguing that while the portent of matrimony--not marriage itself--is certainly present at the resolution of

each narrative's plot, it is not heterosexual love but complex female friendship that occupies the heart of each and every novel. Certainly, these texts delineate the gradual moral and intellectual development of their female protagonists; however, it is not through marriage but through the emotional attachment to another woman that each heroine achieves a greater consciousness. In turn, the self-worth that results from these female friendships encourages the protagonists to resist the social limitations placed on women's identities defining them solely as men's wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. When Jane Austen's six published novels are surveyed, I offer, the oeuvre as a whole reveals that the emotions present in female friendships--emotions ranging from the loving support present in attachments between sisters to the competitive hostility in relationships between rivals--simultaneously create an intimate, nurturing sphere in which the heroines may cultivate a strong sense of self and challenge them to act according to this heightened consciousness in the public heterosexual stage. The fluid dynamics of female attachments enable the protagonist of each novel--with the notable exception of *Northanger Abbey's* Catherine Morland--to enter into marriage with a man who recognizes her as his moral and intellectual equal. In this manner, I contend, female friendship transforms marriage, formerly a symbol of women's compulsory social survival, into an emblem of women's individual and collective authority.

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