NOVEL FORMS: READING AND READERS IN FICTION BY BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS

by

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(Under the Direction of Roxanne Eberle)

ABSTRACT

This project argues for the importance of reading novels by women writers in conjunction with one another. By recognizing allusions and echoes of one text in another, I argue, readers recontextualize and reconceive their ideas about the characters whose lives they experience through reading, as well as their ideas about the world at large.

INDEX WORDS: Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Inchbald, Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Gaskell, British literature, novel, narrative structure

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DEDICATION

To my parents, who introduced me to Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Eyre, Jo March, Laura Ingalls, Anne Shirley, and Éowyn, and taught me that reading really can change your life.

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INTRODUCTION

> "Works in any medium are both created and received *by people*, and it is this human, experiential context that allows for the study of the *politics* of intertextuality." – Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (xiv)

In a letter to her sister Cassandra regarding her "own darling Child," *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen makes the following claim: "'I do not write for such dull Elves' / 'As have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves'" (*Letters* 210).[1] Although the allusion is set off in the letter by quotation marks, Austen provides no reference for its origin, which is not unusual; allusion was a common technique amongst persons of letters in the eighteenth century, and more often than not the origin text was left uncited – an assumption that the reader, as an educated individual, would share a certain network of textual references with the author and thus need no prompting.[2] Austen's fondness for allusion has already been the subject of numerous critical studies.[3] Nevertheless, this seemingly small moment is worth lingering on because, as Virginia

[1] Letter to Cassandra Austen, dated Friday 29 January 1813 from Chawton.

[2] See, for example, the special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Life* focused on rewriting and allusion in eighteenth-century British literature (Vol 32.2, Spring 2008); Susan Harlan, "'Talking' and Reading Shakespeare in Jane Austne's *Mansfield Park*," *Wordsworth Circle* 39.1-2 (2008): 43-46; Joe Bray, "Embedded Quotations in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: Journalism and the Early Novel," *Journal of Literary Semantics* 31.1 (March 2002): 61-75; Peter Hughes, "Allusion and Expression in Eighteenth-Century Literature," *The Author in His Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism*, eds. Louis L. Martz, Aubrey Williams, and Patricia Meyer Spacks (New Haven: Yale UP, 1978): 297-317.

[3] The examples of this type of scholarship are too numerous to comprehensively list. Among book-length monographs, see Kenneth Moler's landmark study *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1968), as well as, more recently, Jocelyn Harris's *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge: UP, 2003), which extends and complicates Moler's work; Clara Tuite, *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (Cambridge: UP, 2002); William Deresiewicz, *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets* (Columbia: UP, 2005); Janine Barchas, *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location, and Celebrity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2012); and Olivia Murphy, *Jane Austen the Reader: the Artist as Critic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Woolf once famous noted, Austen "stimulates us to supply what is not there" (Woolf 138). Austen's quotation, it turns out, is actually a *mis*quotation. The original is found in Sir Walter Scott's long 1808 poem *Marmion*: "I do not rhyme to that dull elf / Who cannot image to himself" (374). In the original, the line begins the poem's final canto and sets off an extended conceit of the poet's imagined audience, which he continues with "Nor sing I to that simple maid / To whom it must in terms be said" what occurred during the final battle and "[w]ho cannot, unless I relate / Paint to her mind the bridal's state" (375). Scott imagines his audience as individuals, a male "dull elf" and a female "simple maid" (though the female reader, perhaps in keeping with critiques of the era, does get twice as much criticism). His lines reveal that he envisions himself in a pact with his readers, who must exercise their own imaginative powers to supply part of the action rather than rely on him for every detail.

Austen's employment of this allusion achieves several effects. First, it affirms that, like Scott (whom Austen revered as a writer and allusions to whose works frequently appear in her own), Austen imagines herself in a mutual relationship with her readers, who cannot be complacent and passive but must bring something to her work themselves. Second, as Katie Halsey persuasively argues, this (mis)quotation reveals how Austen's conception of her readers differs from Scott's: she "writes" rather than "rhymes," thereby incorporating all genres of literature into her purview, and she imagines a "plurality" of readers to Scott's lone individual (39). Further, she changes the verb "image" to the noun "Ingenuity," suggesting an inherent quality of skill and cleverness within the reader rather than simply the ability to perform an action of envisaging what the writer has already laid forth in the text. The subtlety of this transformation is lost, however, if one does not recognize the origin of Austen's verse and place it in context with Scott's.

This dissertation examines fiction by Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Inchbald, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Elizabeth Gaskell, authors who experiment with intertextual play throughout their works. As with Austen's expectation that her readers not be "dull Elves," these novelists create communities of reference for their readers, envisioning reading not as a single interchange between one author, one novel, and one reader, but as a matrix of shared images and allusions that readers must actively recall and incorporate to attain the full benefit of any text. As the following section will demonstrate, intertextual reading was quite common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and examining novels written by women writers during this period together rather than in isolation deepens and complicates our understanding of their function.

Reading and Readers in the Eighteenth Century

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Britain experienced a sharp and steady surge in literacy.[4] The significance of reading was everywhere made clear in England during this era, as the preponderance of conduct books, books of sermons, education manuals, political pamphlets, and, not least, novels, sought to propose best practices for reading and to monitor those that could be dangerous. Reading, especially in private, sparked suspicion; particularly amongst female readers, social reading was considered far safer for a young lady's industry and morality. Events such as those in the turbulent 1790s highlighted the political element of reading for the public: the British government issued a proclamation against "seditious writings" in 1792, thanks in significant part to the impact of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) and other radical texts in promoting the formation of radical revolutionary societies in Great Britain (Barrell and Mee xii). In the aftermath of the resulting "Treason Trials" of 1794, severe curtails on what could be

[4] For a brief but useful summary of this phenomenon, see William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), particularly Chapters 1 and 6; and Anthony Mandal's introduction to his *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

published were introduced, emphasizing again the power of the printed word and its "momentous influence on readers" (Newlyn 5). As the print culture surrounding the Treason Trials also demonstrates, reading for eighteenth-century readers was often highly intertextual. The "pamphlet wars" sparked by the 1789 publication of Richard Price's sermon *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* and Edmund Burke's 1790 response with *Reflections on the Revolution in France* reveal that writers voraciously read each other and expected their reading audience to have done the same. The volley of pamphlets and books that followed these two texts often referred to (and attacked) previous arguments without much summary or quotation, assuming that their readers would be familiar with the entire context of the reading. Intertextuality is a presumed and political mode of reading and writing in this era.

That women, and particularly young women, of the eighteenth century were considered an "at-risk" readership is practically a commonplace in literary criticism.[5] Eighteenth-century texts were full of advice for young female readers, much of it warnings regarding their appetite for the "dangerous" sorts of reading. Satirical essayists Joseph Addison and Richard Steele admonished the "female Sex" against a variety of dangers, including "Romances, Chocolate, and the like Inflamers" in the *Spectator* in 1712 (187-188). John Fordyce decried novels as "utterly unfit" for young women readers in his widely influential volume of *Sermons for Young Women* (1766)[6] because "Instruction they convey none" and instead they "paint scenes of pleasure and

[5] For further discussion, see among others Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History and the Waverly Novels* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991); Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Sabine Augustin, *Eighteenth-Century Female Voices: Education and the Novel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); and Katharine Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011).

[6] As the British Library points out, while Fordyce was widely read and highly influential in the mid-to-late eighteenth century (Mary Wollstonecraft singled him out for criticism in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* [1792]), by the early nineteenth century he had begun to fall out of fashion ("Sermons"). In *Pride and Prejudice,* Jane Austen has the deadly dull popinjay Mr. Collins reject a book "from a circulating library…protest[ing] that he never read novels" and choose instead to read to the Bennet family from Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (76) – a clear sign that Fordyce found little favor with Austen.

passion altogether improper for you to behold, even with the mind's eye" (149). Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, which was first published in 1770 and remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, warns that readings other than divinity and poetry are dangerous for young ladies, and "any thing of the sentimental kind" is entirely out of the question: "I am persuaded that the indiscriminate reading of such kind of books corrupts more female hearts than any other cause whatsoever" (189). Mary Wollstonecraft, a formidable writer herself, voices dismay in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that young women, "confined to trifling employments…are necessarily dependent on the novelist for amusement" instead of serious reading that would educate them (220). Writing in her *Moral Sketches* (1819), Hannah More equates the effects of reading novels on young women with drunkenness on young men, asserting that "[t]he imagination, that notorious corruptor of the heart…by indulgence of seducing images….prepares for surrender of virtue" (247). An awareness of such suspicions is often evident in the novels themselves. Maria Edgeworth explicitly acknowledges the dangers of fiction in the "Advertisement" prefacing *Belinda* (1801), in which she insists on distinguishing her book from novels in general:

> The following work is offered to the public as a Moral Tale – the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel. Were all novels like those of madame de Crousaz, Mrs. Inchbald, miss Burney, or Dr. Moore, she would adopt the name of novel with delight: But so much folly, errour, and vice, are disseminated in books classed under this denomination, that it is hoped the wish to assume another title will be attributed to feelings that are laudable, and not fastidious. (3)

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* famously satirizes bad reading habits in Catherine Morland and her friend Isabella, who are at least initially unable to distinguish between their "reality" and the

Gothic tropes with which their reading has saturated their imaginations. (Isabella is equally unable to distinguish "good" Gothic novels from pulp fictions.)

Of course, voices of dissent were plentiful, as were novel-readers. Unlike many literary critics of the era, Clara Reeve does not roundly dismiss the novel genre, which she describes in *The Progress of Romance* (1785) as "equally entitled to our attention and respect, as any other works of Genius and literature" (xvi). Although the popular criticism is that "books of the last age, were of worse tendency than any of those of the present," Reeve notes that "there were bad books at all times, for those who sought for them" (120). Reeve writes that the real danger of the novel is not that readers "will be disgusted with everything serious or solid," but that "seeds of vice and folly are sown in the heart,− the passions are awakened, − false expectations are raised. −A young woman is taught to expect adventures and intrigues" (78). Anna Letitia Barbauld, in her introduction to her massive fifty-volume edited collection of *The British Novelists*, defends the "humble" form as "always ready to enliven the gloom of solitude, to soothe the languor of debility and disease, to win the attention from pain or vexatious occurrences" (119). French writer Germaine de Staël, in her "Essay on Fictions" (1795), perceives a general trend in criticism that claimed "[n]ovels give a false idea of mankind" (73), but vehemently disagrees with society's rejection of the form. Society distrusts novels, she writes, "because novels are considered to be exclusively devoted to the portrayal of love – the most violent, universal, and true passion of them all, but also the passion which inspires no interest at any other time of life than youth, since youth is all it influences" (71). While she acknowledges that the novel's emphasis solely on romance is damaging to the genre overall, she refuses to abandon the novel as a site of potential. Novels are valuable, she argues, because they allow an understanding of "private life and natural circumstances" and "ordinary, habitual feelings" in a way that other

forms of art such as drama cannot, for "life is not concentrated" as it is in plays, and "is not really theatrical in the way plays have to be written" (70). Novels have the power to "gather around man everything in nature that might be useful to him as a lesson or model" (71). "If fictions please nothing but the eye, they do nothing but amuse," de Staël argues, "but if they touch our hearts, they can have a great influence on all our moral ideas. This talent may be the most powerful way there is of controlling behavior and enlightening the mind" (60-61).

That readers would be "taught to expect" particular experiences by their reading, as Clara Reeve asserts, and that those experiences exert "great influence on all our moral ideas," as de Stäel argues, form the crux of my argument: if books teach readers to expect and predict certain elements, then denying or altering those elements may have a significant impact on readers' ideas. Conduct manuals and other materials designed to shape young female minds and enforce cultural norms abounded in the era, but despite their ubiquity, they were not necessarily the primary sources of instruction that their authors wished. In fact, Barbauld's argument in favor of novels is that, although they have "a better chance of giving pleasure than of commanding respect," novels also have a better chance of *actually* being read than their dryer counterparts: "their leaves are seldom found unopened, and they occupy the parlour and the dressing-room while productions of higher name are often gathering dust upon the shelf" (119). Although Barbauld describes her hypothetical reader in the passage with male pronouns, the spaces she describes are feminine and domestic: the parlour and the dressing-room. They also span the range of contexts in which young women readers read: while the parlour is a public, social space and thus offers a degree of safety from moral corruption, the dressing-room is a private and intimate space – precisely the type of space so many critics of women's reading decried as morally dangerous. Barbauld, however, does not appear to see it that way.

My study builds upon the growing interest in and reclamation of novels by Romantic women writers and the increasingly large body of scholarship about the role and operations of reading communities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[7] I want to consider what happens when we think of readers not only as participants in a larger community of other readers, but as active participants in the act of reading itself. For the writers I examine here, as indeed for most women writers of the era, the personal was inherently political. Claudia Johnson notes as much, arguing in reference to Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1792) that "women's 'business with politics' is not indirect, undertaken simply out of concern for closely related male agents in the public arena. On the contrary it shows that every major aspect of women's lives already serves a political agenda" (*Women* 2). To be a woman writer was to submit oneself to public judgments, many of them directed not at the work itself but at the very idea of its creation by a female mind. Reviewers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often express surprise when women writers write powerfully, and even when offering compliments generally attribute such power to "masculine" qualities; for example, the *Monthly Review* (1796) praised Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* as demonstrating the author's "strong—or, if the fair traveler will accept the epithet as a compliment…*masculine* mind" (251, emphasis original).[8] The political, however, was also often personal. Charlotte Smith, for example, wrote herself into many of her novels as an older mentor figure to her heroines, often beset by financial difficulties due to imprudent marriage and having to use her intellect to support herself and her family (for example, Mrs. Stafford in *Emmeline*). In

[7] For discussions of this phenomenon on a broad cultural scale, see particularly Lucy Newlyn's *Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (OUP, 2000) and Jon Mee's *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762-1830* (OUP, 2011).

[8] For many other examples of contemporary women writers praised for their "masculine" qualities, see William Stafford, "Unsex'd females and proper women writers," *English Feminists and Their Opponents in the 1790s: Unsex'd and Proper Females* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002): 1-35.

eroding this boundary between her public persona and personal experience, she reminded her reading public of the injustices she herself faced and demanded their sympathy. Austen's narrator's famous outburst in *Northanger Abbey* envisions authors as an "injured body," and it is not coincidental that the titles named – Frances Burney's *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* – are all the products of women writers.

Thus, both writing and reading in England during this era were intensely and inherently political. Charlotte Smith explicitly acknowledges the political value of reading fiction in a 1791 letter to her publisher Thomas Cadell, in which she states that she plans to write an intensely political novel about the French Revolution "under the illusion of a Love story" – the novel in question being *Desmond*, which she had begun to write just before leaving for Paris in September 1791.[9] Smith's letter acknowledges that readers have particular tastes, and that playing to those tastes will allow her to comment on subjects which might otherwise prove unpalatable. Smith demonstrates awareness and intentionality in her craft here: she will have a political message in her novel, she wishes to prompt her readers to consider that message, and she will deliver it to her readers in the most effective way she knows how, via familiar fictional structures.

In this project, I begin from the premise that reading is a political act, even if unconsciously so. The writers I discuss tend to share this view; Smith's political activism is well-documented, and both of Elizabeth Inchbald's novels comment explicitly on political issues of the era. Charlotte Brontë also engages with political ideologies, and in the novel I discuss here, *Shirley*, she deliberately engages with reading practices as well. Elizabeth Gaskell's novels have political motivations and sentiments that were recognized in her own era. These women writers

[9] This uncollected letter is from the British Library's manuscripts collection.

use their fiction to address social injustices and urge change, both societal and of the heart. The novelist in this study who is most difficult to pin as political is, in fact, Jane Austen. Enough has been written on Austen's politics to fill libraries dozens of times over, and critics have argued that Austen is subtly radical, that Austen is deeply conservative, and that she occupies any number of positions in between. The reason Austen forms the center of this study is precisely that interpretive instability. Because she works with familiar tropes and entered the ranks of esteemed writers fairly early in her career, it is easy to read her, as Charlotte Brontë did, as fairly conservative, a force against which to react. But as the first half of this dissertation argues, Austen's novels are semiotically complex and often unstable, and she in fact performs the same re-envisioning with her own allusions that I argue later writers such as Brontë and Gaskell did in re-envisioning Austen. Defining one's reader(s) was of vital significance in the decades this dissertation examines, partly due to the rapid increases in print technology that caused a sharp incline in the number of books being published in the 1790s. A host of other concerns raised themselves too: Where, and under what circumstances, were people reading? *What* were they reading, and what did that say not only about their tastes but about those of society at large?

It is safe to say that, for as long as there have been novels, there have been critical complaints about novels. By the end of the eighteenth century, it had become fashionable to decry the present state of literature, and this trend continued well into the nineteenth century. For example, the reviewer of Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788) for the *European Magazine* laments the "multiplicity of dull and dangerous productions, which…arise, like the fogs of literature, incessantly from the press," stating that the "generality of novels are calculated to inflame the passions and deprave the understanding" (348); however, the reviewer praises *Emmeline* as a welcome exception. Despite her defense of novels in *The Progress of Romance*,

Clara Reeve is obliged to admit that "[a] Circulating Library is indeed a great evil,−young people are allowed to subscribe to them, and to read indiscriminately all they contain; and thus both food and poison are conveyed to the young mind together" (77). Germaine de Staël feels compelled to defend novels in her *Essay on Fictions* precisely because the "art of novel-writing does not have the reputation it deserves because of a throng of bad writers overwhelming us with their colourless productions" (71). Even by the time of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, published posthumously in 1817 but completed for publication in 1803, the narrator still reserves ire for "Reviewers" who "over every new novel…talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans" (59).

Just a few years before Austen completed her initial draft of *Northanger Abbey*, Wordsworth's second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, and his poetic manifesto in the form of its Preface, appeared in print. The Preface serves as ideal an example because it is a turning point in Romantic discourse about writing and reading, an agenda declared in such a vocal way that any well-read person would likely have encountered it. It was also republished several times, increasing its potential exposure. Wordsworth devotes a great deal of space in this preface to conjecturing about his Readers: their tastes, their judgments, their abilities. He argues, as I do, that writing for readers is a type of contract between author and audience: "by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association, that he not only thus apprizes the Reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded" (172). He also, famously, sets up his work in contradistinction to the "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" that dominate the public taste of the era (177). Given that Wordsworth's idea of poetry is "a man speaking to men," it is perhaps not

surprising that the genres he demeans as "blunt[ing] the discriminating powers of the mind" (177) are strongly associated with women writers. Robert Miles helpfully defines the "Wordsworthian reader" as "an imagined, isolated individual whose scene of instruction is the inner recreation of the poet's own struggle with nature's noumenal hieroglyphics" (195) – in other words, rather the opposite of the female reader as often depicted in novels of the era, who reads in company (as with Austen's Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe) and, due to their domestic situations, rarely in isolation.

Wordsworth's accusation, that readers are driven to read these inferior productions by their "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" (177), seems initially borne out by Catherine Morland's story in *Northanger Abbey*; desperate for the excitement that her home life does not provide, Catherine's tastes in novels run to the Gothic and grotesque. A central issue in Austen's novel is Catherine's projection of the "outrageous stimulation" provided by her favorite Gothic novelists into the everyday world, which causes her to make inaccurate assumptions and unwise choices. And yet, although *Northanger Abbey* is on the one hand a cautionary tale of the dangers of allowing one's imagination to run unfettered, it is also a celebration of that unfetteredness. As numerous critics have discussed, *Northanger Abbey* is full of sly references to and parodies of Gothic fiction,[10] and readers who are uninitiated into this community of texts and allusions – readers who protest that they "seldom look into novels," let alone *trashy* ones – miss out on a

[10] See, among others, Susan Allen Ford, "A Sweet Creature's Horrid Novels: Gothic Reading in *Northanger Abbey*," *Persuasions On-Line* 33.1 (Winter 2012); Tenille Nowak, "The Gothic Novel and the Invention of the Middle-Class Reader: *Northanger Abbey* as Case Study," *Alien Contact* 21.2 (July 2010): 1-45; Miriam Rheingold Fuller, "'Let me go, Mr. Thorpe; Isabella, do not hold me!': *Northanger Abbey* and the Domestic Gothic," *Persuasions* 32 (2010): 90-104; Natalie Neill, "'The Trash with Which the Press Now Groans': *Northanger Abbey* and the Goth Best Sellers of the 1790s," *Eighteenth-Century Novel* 4 (2004): 163-92; Ellen Moody, "'People that marry can never part': An Intertextual Reading of *Northanger Abbey*," *Persuasions On-Line* 31.1 (Winter 2010); Albert C. Sears, "Male Novel Reading of the 1790s, Gothic Literature and *Northanger Abbey*," *Persuasions* 21 (1999): 106-112; several chapters in Devoney Looser's edited collection *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995); and Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914 (*Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

great many pleasures of the text. Austen's novel declares itself immediately as familiar with genre conventions and expectant that the reader will have the same familiarity. Its opening line, "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an [sic] heroine" (37), is less famous than the opening line of *Pride and Prejudice*, but achieves similar goals. The idea that "no one" would have supposed Catherine to be a heroine implies that those people know what a heroine *is* born to be, what she looks like, and how she may be expected to progress – and this familiarity with the generic conventions comes from reading. Catherine Morland's trajectory from naïve overeager consumer of Gothic romances to chastened (but not entirely subdued) educated woman is all the more satisfying because it occupies a dual position in readers' consciousness: first, as the "natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (to quote *Persuasion*), but second, as the familiar narrative of education that nearly all heroines of the era had to undergo. Austen is thus able to have her narrative cake and eat it too: she both subverts novelistic conventions and confirms them. Austen's treatment of her readers reproduces this narrative of education. As the allusion that began this chapter demonstrates, Austen conceived of her readers not as isolated individuals but as active participants in a community that included the author herself. As Robert Miles argues, Austen "invited an intense identification with her heroines while undermining the reader's ability to do so through the irony inherent in free indirect speech" (196). The effect of this technique recreates in the reader the very challenge that Austen's heroines always face: how to "[read] manners for moral clues" (196). The educative processes that Austen's heroines undergo are mirrored by the reader, who cannot be a "dull Elf" but must actively interpret the texts in front of her.

To speak monolithically of "the reader" or even a "community" of readers posits an entity that never existed, as Anthony Mandal and William St. Clair make clear; reading operated

along class lines and certainly along gendered and racial ones.[11] Novels could occasionally transcend these lines, as the list of subscribers for Frances Burney's *Camilla* indicates: as published at the beginning of the first edition, the list spans 37 pages and ranges from Her Royal Highness the Duchess of York, His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester, and the Right Honorable Edmund Burke (who subscribed for 5 sets), to "Miss J. Austen, Steventon."[12] While reading was rarely so democratic in practice, such a list was nevertheless a physical reminder to readers that they were part of a larger reading community that included people very different from themselves. While it is sometimes possible to prove that one author read another (as is the case with Austen, who read both Smith and Inchbald), establishing a direct line of influence is not the central project of this dissertation. In speaking of readers, I envision potential rather than actuality. Given the authors' stated beliefs that their readers bring an active imagination and certain narrative expectations to their readings, it seems logical to construe what those frameworks of expectation might have looked like. Yet I acknowledge that as a reader of these novels myself, my own reactions to placing these texts in conjunction inform my conjectures about the reactions of others; this project thus operates from a standpoint epistemology, which values individual experience but places it within a relational framework. I do not argue that these interpretive acts are the only or best way to approach these texts, nor do I argue that all readers are created equal or approach a text in the same way or with the same framework. Instead, I present here a way of reading texts that I found to enrich and complicate readings of these authors.

[11] See St. Clair's chapter "Reading Constituencies" in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: UP, 2004): 235-267

[12] My thanks to the Chawton House Library, where I examined a first edition (1796) of Burney's *Camilla.*

Novel traditions

The history of the novel is still being (re)written. When Ian Watt wrote his foundational *The Rise of the Novel* in 1957, he focused largely on the acknowledged titans of the eighteenth century: Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. These three he saw as the origins of realism, where his study begins, and formative influences on Austen, whom he saw as building and improving upon the traditions of her (male) predecessors:

> Jane Austen faces more squarely than Defoe, for example, the social and moral problems raised by economic individualism and the middle class quest for improved status; she follows Richardson in basing her novels on marriage and especially on the proper feminine role in the matter; and her ultimate picture of the proper norms of the social system is similar to that of Fielding although its application to the characters and their situation is in general more serious and discriminating. (298)

Watt does acknowledge that Austen was also "the heir of Fanny Burney, herself no inconsiderable figure in bringing together the divergent directions which the geniuses of Richardson and Fielding had imposed upon the novel" (296), and he extends his critique forward to include George Eliot's works of realism. Yet Burney merits only three mentions in Watt's mammoth study; other important and popular female novelists of the era, such as Maria Edgeworth or Charlotte Smith, merit no attention at all. Contemporary scholarship has in recent decades begun to acknowledge the vitality and significance of Romantic fiction, particularly by women writers. [13] As the editors of the *Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*

[13] Scholarship of the "Romantic novel" per se arguably began with J.M.S. Tompkins' *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800* (1932; Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1961), in which Tompkins filled in gaps in the "large body of fiction which fed the appetite of the reading public" written by authors whom posterity has not "consented to call great" (v). Robert Kiely's *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972) examines just twelve

(2008) point out, however, "Romantic fiction has only occasionally been treated as an integral subject" (7), making it more difficult to discuss the critical field as a whole. Critics such as Anne Mellor, Eleanor Ty, Adriana Craciun, and Jacqueline Labbe have "recovered" works by female novelists who have not traditionally benefited from intense critical discussion. Writers such as Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mary Hays, and Mary Robinson, along with fiction by authors more familiar for their nonfiction, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, now enter critical conversations with far more frequency than they did even a few years ago.

Nevertheless, particularly when discussing intertextuality or influence, these women writers tend not to be discussed together. When examining allusions within Jane Austen's fiction, for example, it is still fashionable to look back to Johnson, Fielding, even Milton, rather than to the women writers with whom we know she was equally familiar. Jocelyn Harris, among others, has extensively noted the references to works by Richardson in Austen's works, particularly the juvenilia.[14] Yet despite Austen's documented fondness for Richardson and his fiction, he does not appear by name in any of the juvenilia manuscripts. In contrast, the young Austen specifically mentions Charlotte Smith's novels twice, once in her *History of England* and

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novels, published largely between 1786-1824 (with two exceptions: Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* [1764] and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* [1847]), but seeks to define of what impulses a "Romantic novel" consists. Gary Kelly's *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (1989) included strong discussion not only of Austen and Scott but also a plethora of less-considered novelists, including feminist writers of fiction in the era. The monumental bibliography *The English Novel, 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, edited by Peter Garside, Rainer Schöwerling, and James Raven (Oxford: UP, 2000), lists 3,677separate books (including translations) published in Britain during the period, along with reviews and publishers. Their collection allowed for Anthony Mandal's examination of Jane Austen within a far broader context of late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century fiction in *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[14] See Harris's book *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge, 1989) for a full discussion, including the many references to *Sir Charles Grandison* in "Jack and Alice." Other studies of Richardson's influence on Austen include Olivia Murphy, "From Pammydiddle to *Persuasion*: Jane Austen Rewriting Eighteenth-Century Literature," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 32.2 (Spring 2008): 29-59; Elaine Bander, "'O Leave Novels': Jane Austen, Sir Charles Grandison, Sir Edward Denham, and Rob Missgiel," *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 30 (2008): 202-215; and Yuko Ikeda, "The Development of the Playful Mind: Samuel Richardson's Grandison and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*," *Kumamoto Studies in English Language and Literature* 53 (2010): 23-39.

once in *Catharine, or the Bower*. Nevertheless, Smith and other lesser-known authors do not appear alongside Austen in critical discussion with nearly the same frequency as the grand (usually male) masters. Jacqueline Labbe accurately summarizes the general trend in critical discussion of Austen and lesser-known authors as similarities "noted in passing, one or two sentences in a chapter dwelling on Burney, or Richardson, or Johnson, or someone else; or else [they] appear as 'notes' style articles, plotting plot similarities" (Labbe n.pag.).[15]

This project is an attempt to extend the discussion past simply pointing out plot similarities or moments of potential allusion. As Mary Poovey notes in her monumental study *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984), texts "help to 'explain' each other" (xiii). Acknowledging resonances and allusions between texts serves to elucidate not only how individual novels function, but also how they may operate in conjunction with one another in a reader's consciousness. In choosing to write about largely noncanonical authors Elizabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith alongside Jane Austen, one of the most famous and enduringly popular authors in English literary history, I necessarily have made choices that excluded many other authors who would be equally at home in this discussion of intertextuality. For example, the relationship between Fanny Burney's novels and those of later women writers has been the subject of many excellent studies.[16] Two of Burney's novels, *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796) are specifically referenced by name in Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), as is Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), another novel that bears distinct similarities to Austen's books. However, the position of Burney and Edgeworth in the canon is more solidified than that of the

[15] See Eleanor Ty, "Ridding Unwanted Suitors: Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5.2 (Autumn 1986): 327-29*;* Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998); Olivia Murphy, *Jane Austen the Reader* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan , 2013).

[16] See, for example, Claudia Johnson's *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) and Stephanie Russo's *Women in Revolutionary Debate: from Burney to Austen* (Houten: Hes & Degraaf, 2012).

novelists I examine here, as suggested by the fact that the *Oxford World's Classics* series – self-described as a collection of the "world's greatest literature" – has published multiple novels by both Burney and Edgeworth, but only one by Inchbald and none at all by Smith. (Maria Edgeworth also received her own chapter in Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* [1975].) Other noncanonical novels could also have been discussed here; for example, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary, a Fiction* (1788) was published the same year as Smith's *Emmeline*. The list of novels which ought to be examined is too long to fit within the scope of the present study, but my goal is that the way of reading texts together that I propose here will help to prompt further necessary and useful discussions. I have chosen to examine novels by Smith and Inchbald because they were well-known during their era and, in keeping with my focus on readers' shared knowledge and perceptions, we know that Austen read both authors; her early fragment "Catharine" praises "Mrs Smith's novels," specifically *Emmeline* (1788) and *Ethelinde* (1789), while Inchbald's play *Lover's Vows* plays a critical part in *Mansfield Park*. Nevertheless, the relationships between their novels and hers have rarely been discussed.

Critical Contexts

Asserting that the Romantic novel undermines established conventions is not new. Robert Kiely's landmark *The Romantic Novel in England* (1972) asserts that "romantic novels do have structural patterns, character types, and situations in common," but that "their primary tendency is to destroy (or, at the very least, undermine) particular narrative conventions. Romantic novels thrive like parasites on structures whose ruin is the source of their life" (2). For Kiely, however, these tendencies are generative but often negatively so, resulting in novels that "[serve] to point up the sterility of the fragmented conventions and the ineptitude" of the authors, or works that are "the literary counterpart of Frankenstein's monster, a phenomenon not without interest but

particularly grotesque when measured against the intention of its creator" (3). Kiely's assertion that a significant number of Romantic novels are fascinated by the undermining of narrative conventions seems correct; Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1799), for example, reveals the instabilities latent within the (by then traditional) epistolary form. However, his assessments focus on destruction, failure, and assertions of "originality," which he determines Romantic novelists wished to claim "without really departing from the familiar" (10). These elements are less interesting to me than the potential for collaboration and subversion that comes with ignoring originality as the determining measure of quality.

Gary Kelly's *English Fiction of the Romantic Period* (1989) examines the Romantic novel more broadly than Kiely's rather eclectic discussion. As many other critics have done, Kelly asserts that "Romantic fiction [is] a product, or rather articulation of major social and cultural issues and changes of the Romantic period" (xi), a period that formatively shaped how novels were read into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. Kelly argues for the "social function of fiction," but he sees this happening in terms of "literariness" – in essence, the employment of various apparatuses such as "footnotes, appendices, and glossaries" as well as quotation, citation, and literary allusion, to attain "full literary status" (17-18).[17] In addition to this possibility, I suggest another purpose for citation and allusion: to deliberately encourage reader prospection, or the act of "foretelling" what will happen based on past experience, and provide the potential for moments of cognitive dissonance.[18]

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[17] Like Kelly's work, Jillian Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman's *Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction, 1780-1830* examines the crucial link for Romantic writers between fiction and culture. For Romantic authors, "experimentation was never simply aesthetic, but the result of the way Romantic fiction, like Romantic poetry, struggled to find innovative strategies for representing the social and intellectual upheaval of its times" (42). Their discussion, however, focuses largely on the Romantic novel's disdain for preserving generic distinctions and its interest in hybridity.

[18] As the next section will explain, these terms are drawn from psychology. Social science research on prospection identifies it as a type of ubiquitous "mental time travel," the ability to simulate future experiences through the use of

Robert Miles acknowledges in his essay "What Is a Romantic Novel?" that the frequent hesitance and "embarrassment" over the Romantic novel from critics is "connected with the form's capture by women writers….the reception of the Romantic-era novel is studded with glaring examples of male critics dismissing the form on account of a feminine inability to respect appropriate boundaries" (181). Nevertheless, he consciously resists including gender in his definition, because, in his words,

> I think it is misleading to the degree that it reinforces a stereotype of women writers colonizing the romance while male writers got on with the masculine tradition of the novel inherited from Richardson and Fielding. Such a stereotype, it seems to me, is wrong in nearly every respect. The philosophical romance was public and political…and it was written by women as well as by men. (198)

Miles's assertion that women also wrote "public and political" fiction is undeniably accurate, and forms a crucial part of my argument in this study. My project, however, is less interested in defining novels by genre, and thus I view Austen's fiction not as "inward" vs. the "outward" trajectory of Miles's philosophical romance. For Miles, the "anxieties of social misreading and moral failure" represented in Austen's fiction and the "matters self-evidently belonging to the public sphere" in the philosophical romance are mutually exclusive, but I see no reason why this should be. In a world where women's social and moral behavior are matters for public consumption and judgment, it is difficult to justify why these matters would *not* belong in the public sphere. Certainly prominent female philosophers of the 1790s, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Germaine de Stäel, would place them there.

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imagination and past experience as a reference. (See, for example, Philip Gerrans and David Sander, "Feeling the Future: Prospects for a Theory of Implicit Prospection," *Biology and Philosophy* 29.5 (September 2014): 699-710.)

Theoretical framework

The structure of this project is in two parts. In the first part, I discuss works by two lesser-known eighteenth-century writers, Charlotte Smith and Elizabeth Inchbald, in conjunction with Austen's repurposing of those works in her own novels. Austen, a self-described "voracious" reader of novels, was familiar with these authors' work and employs allusions and resonances with their fiction in her own to emphasize both her continuity with them and her differences. Although Smith and Inchbald were immensely popular and well-respected in their own time, they fell from canonical grace after the turn of the nineteenth century and have only recently been acknowledged and recuperated as significant, vital contributors to the English literary landscape.

The second part presents two chapters on women writers from the nineteenth century whose names are far more familiar to the canon: Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell. In this section, I examine how Brontë and Gaskell wrestle with the legacy of women's writing that Austen had come to embody by the time they were writing their own fictions. Although more canonical than Smith or Inchbald, like them, Brontë and Gaskell use their novels to make political commentaries. Their appropriation and deployment of familiar elements from Austen's fiction mirror Austen's own willingness to play on readers' familiarity with other texts in order to increase the payoff of her own. In reading these works and seeking to understand their potential to operate on their readers, I draw upon two concepts from cognitive psychology: prospection and cognitive dissonance.

Prospection

Prospection refers to "our ability to 'pre-experience' the future by simulating it in our minds" (Gilbert and Wilson 1352). Specifically, it deals with the ability of humans to predict

"hedonic consequences," or the potential pain or pleasure of an act or experience. As explained in *Science*, the "mental representation of a past event is a memory, the mental representation of a present event is a perception, and the mental representation of a future event is a simulation." "People use their immediate hedonic reactions to simulations as predictors of the hedonic reactions they are likely to have when the events they are simulating actually come about" (1352). Furthermore, "our future hedonic experience…will be influenced both by our perception of the event…and by contextual factors" (1352). Memory, however, is elusive and deceptive. According to *Science*, "research suggests that people often use unrepresentative memories as a basis for simulation" (1353) – for example, remembering the most unusual experience and quantifying it as representative of their general experience. Also a part of simulation is *essentializing*, the act of remembering the most essential and unique features of an experience and omitting inessential features. Research has also revealed that prospection is "largely shaped by exemplars, archetypes, schemes, scripts, and other generalized beliefs about what an event is prototypically like" (Kane et al. 355).

While research on social cognition examines the act of prospection in terms of our ability to forecast our expectations of general experiences (watching a sports event, eating a meal, conducting a task, etc.), understanding prospection is also quite useful when considering why and how humans read. As Wolfgang Iser remarks in *The Act of Reading*, readers bring a framework of experience to any text that includes past reading experiences and contextual information from their own life experiences. Iser notes that eighteenth-century authors such as Fielding and Scott used metaphors

> whereby the reader is likened to a traveler in a stagecoach, who has to make the often difficult journey through the novel, gazing out from his moving viewpoint.

> Naturally, he combines all that he sees within his memory and establishes a pattern of consistency, the nature and reliability of which will depend partly on the degree of attention he has paid during each phase of the journey. (16)

Consistency functions as a "structure of comprehension" that relies upon the "habitual orientations of the reader" (Iser 18). According to Iser, reading is an act of communication between author and reader, and such communication has the power to effect the "reorganization of those thought systems and social systems invoked by the repertoire of the text" (ix). Furthermore, reading "brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader, in order to make him adjust and even differentiate his own focus" (x). Speaking in reference to Austen, Iser writes: "What is missing from the apparently trivial scenes, the gaps arising out of the dialogue—this is what stimulates the reader into filling the blanks with projections" (168). Iser's assertions are supported by research on prospection, which demonstrates that humans take this contextual approach to all experiences; we cannot help but do so. Of particular value when considering reading and readers is the idea of simulation: readers will attempt to predict the pleasure or pain they will gain from experiencing a text by "pre-feeling" (to borrow a term from Gilbert and Wilson) that experience through recalling their reactions to previous texts. If readers have enjoyed a certain type of novel before, the likelihood that they will seek out another novel of the same type increases, because they expect to gain a similar, familiar pleasure from the experience. Thus, playing to familiar types and tropes – as with Charlotte Smith's casting of her political novel *Desmond* "under the illusion of a Love Story" – increases the probability that an author's novel will be read. Furthermore, the sense of a familiar plot or scenario encourages readers to engage in prospection within the novel itself, forecasting which events and outcomes are likely to ensue based on past experiences with similar scenarios.

Cognitive Dissonance

Invoking familiar patterns, however, is only half the puzzle. Once these familiar patterns are established, a great deal can be accomplished by undermining them. In addition to the excitement and pleasure that recognition of a previously encountered element provides, allusive encounters offer didactic possibilities. The presence of striking similarities allows a reader to project her expectations for the previous novel onto the current one – the act of prospection – making deviations from the expected pattern more conspicuous than they might otherwise be by evoking cognitive dissonance. According to psychological research, persons faced with a moment of cognitive dissonance, or encountering something in a familiar environment which does not accord with their expectations of that environment, are offered two basic options: to reject the new knowledge in order to keep their existing frameworks intact, or rework their intellectual frameworks to accommodate the new knowledge. The political value of such a moment in a reader's experience seems clear: creating such hesitation or discomfort requires the reader to reconsider, if only for a moment, what she knows and why she thinks she knows it.

Defining Intertextuality

This dissertation presents four case studies in support of an intertextual model of reading fiction. As Wolfgang Iser argues, readers carry with them, not even consciously, a "repertoire of the text" that consists of the reader's prior knowledge not only of earlier texts but of "social and historical norms" and indeed the whole culture from which the text has emerged" (69). "Intertextuality," however, is a notion with a loaded and complex history, and in this section I provide a short overview of its intellectual ancestry and my own use of the term.

Coined in 1969 by Julia Kristeva, "intertextuality" is a relatively young term in literary theory. Nevertheless, intertextuality has a complex history that would require its own volumes to recite. A necessarily cursory overview would show that along with Kristeva and her inspiration Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Jonathan Culler, Michael Riffaterre, and Wolfgang Iser helped set the terms of debate in the 1960s and 1970s, while feminist interventions by Elaine Showalter and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar challenged the male-centric focus of many such studies. In the 1980s Fredric Jameson emphasized the political significance of narrative. In *Palimpsests*, Gérard Genette offered a set of subcategories for what he preferred to call "transtextuality," enumerating the multiple sorts of intertextuality he perceived in texts as broadly "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (2). More recently, Linda Hutcheon has made a focus on intertextuality a central component of modern adaptation studies.

"Intertextuality" for Kristeva has several definitions, such as the text as "a mosaic of quotations" and "the absorption and transformation of another" text; for her, ultimately, the only reader is the writer, and "text" refers not only to a literary work but to social and historical systems as well ("Word" 37).[19] Crucially, intertextuality for Kristeva has political consequence: it "situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them" (*Desire* 65). As Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein note, later theorists have expanded and modified Kristeva's ideas.[20] For example, Roland Barthes eschews the idea of an "author" altogether, focusing on the hypothetical reader as "the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost"

[19] See Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and the Novel." In *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. 34-61; and *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art.* New York: Columbia UP, 1980. Print

[20] Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality." In *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History.* Eds. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991. Print. 3-36. 21.

(148). Michael Riffaterre's intertextuality actually serves as a "constraint upon reading (as a set of restrictions upon the reader's freedom, as a guide for him in his interpreting)" (628). Wolfgang Iser also maintains focus on the reader, discussing how contextual reading practices come to bear on the interpretation and experience of the text.

Perhaps one of the most famous theorists of intertextuality is Harold Bloom, whose foundational work, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), takes an intertextual approach to explicate his theory of poetic influence. As Bloom writes in his introduction, his work focuses on "strong" (for which read "canonical male") poets who "wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death" (5). In their essay "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality," Clayton and Rothstein neatly summarize Bloom's central notion of influence; for him, they write, "[i]nfluence is a personal agon, a struggle of one individual with a strong precursor, modeled on the son's conflict with the father in the Oedipus complex" (9). Deirdre Lynch is perhaps less kind in her summation: Bloom's "paradigmatic instantiation" of literary authorization and canonization "models literary intertextuality as a form of pederastic eros suspended on a generational power differential" in which the younger poet must command, dominate, and triumph over his predecessor (121). It is no coincidence that Bloom's concept is often referred to as "seminal" in the theory of poetic/literary production.

Bloom's construction has since largely fallen out of fashion, for reasons which Clayton and Rothstein helpfully summarize: the moral baggage in originality's attempts to assign value based on tenuous ideas of genius (13); a critical turn away from author-centered or biographical studies (14); the rise of ideologies that challenge the patriarchal dominance of a single cohesive literary tradition (16). Yet Bloom's insistence on the "anxiety of influence" has accumulated so much cultural capital that it is nearly impossible to discuss intertextuality without reference to

the phrase, as even the most cursory of library searches reveals.[21] As scholars such as Deirdre Lynch and Claire Knowles acknowledge, Bloom's hegemonic patriarchal construction does not work with women writers of the era, who were often denied positions of authority in the literary community even when their works were popular. Furthermore, the very anonymity of most women writers of the period goes against the notion of a personal struggle against the oppressive precursor/poet; "A Lady" was by far the most widely published and widely read author of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, subsuming and uniting under that one title a variety of writers.

The way books, particularly books by women writers, were marketed also contradicts the idea of influence as a negative struggle by later authors for freedom from their predecessors. As mentioned above, books were often published simply as by "A Lady," or, if the author had had success with her previous books, as "the Author of" whatever works of hers had been well-received by readers. Thus the title page of the first edition of *Emma* (1816) refers to Jane Austen not by name (although by that time it was known), but as "the Author of 'Pride and Prejudice,'" already Austen's most popular novel. The title-page's attribution directly relies on readers' impressions of an author's previous work to sell new books. The lists of books newly available from the publisher often printed in the backs of editions further help to create a community of writers, books, and readers by associating them in readers' minds. The idea that a novel by

[21] To cite every study that builds upon Bloom's would be impossible. A cursory survey of books published only within the last 15 years reveals the phrase's continued cultural authority, however. See, for example, Deirdre Lynche's *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* (2000), Umberto Eco's essays *On Literature* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), Herbert Grabes' edited collection *Literature, Literary History, and Cultural Memory* (2005), Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television* (2006), Astrid Eril's *Memory in Culture* (2011), Claire Knowles' *Sensibility and the Female Poetic Tradition, 1780-1860* (2013), and Harold Bloom's own *Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* (2011).

Author X would be similar to one they had already read was not a signal that the author had failed to create a work of original genius, but a sign of new works the readers might also enjoy.[22]

My concept of influence is thus vitally distinct from the term as popularized by Harold Bloom, who considers influence as a "matrix of relationships…ultimately defensive in their nature," and the product of such influence as a "misreading" producing anxiety (xxiii). With the writers I examine, defensiveness against one's influences is not key to creative production, and the rather patriarchal notion that authors must overthrow their predecessors is also less germane. The concept of influence as communal and intertextual rather than linear and individual aligns with Anne Mellor's claims that Romantic women writers, for the most part, were less concerned with the "development of an autonomous self" (3) than male writers and "grounded their notion of community on a cooperative rather than a possessive interaction" (4).

"Intertextuality" as I use it in this project focuses specifically on literary works of fiction as they relate to one another; in this way, it is narrower than the concepts of Mikhail Bakhtin or Julia Kristeva, which also include speech, history, and even culture itself. It is also not quite akin to Gérard Genette's intertextuality, in which his primary area of interest is the "actual presence of one text within another" (*Palimpsests* 3) – an explicit presence which, with the novels I examine, cannot always be determined. Tilottama Rajan's definition of intertextuality as one of the "cultural categories that describe the way we relate text and reader, and thus the way we conceive of texts within a cultural hermeneutic that causes them to participate in the 'self'-formation of the reader or of the writer considered as her own reader" (61) helps clarify what the

[22] This trend continues into modern bookselling, in which online retailers offer suggestions for "books you may like" based on past browsing and purchase histories. Online reading communities such as Goodreads also offer recommendation tools, and most e-readers' software will recommend books similar to the one a reader just finished when she reaches the end of a book. While intended to drive sales, these techniques also acknowledge that reading is not done in isolation, but is in fact participation in a vast network of preferences and relationships.

term signifies in the present project. For Rajan, the "source of influence" is not an original to be fetishized or to cause anxiety, but "a text that is already within a chain of textual substitutions" (61).

While focusing on literary texts, my idea of intertextuality – like those of Jameson, Iser, and Rajan – is informed by the social, historical, and cultural norms with which reader and author would inevitably interact. Rather than following post-structuralism's insistence on eliminating the author, however, I locate the author *as* reader, much as several recent studies of Austen have done.[23] As Lucy Newlyn points out, this focus was already familiar to writers in the eighteenth century; one of the criticisms frequently aimed at female novelists was that they were "passive readers turned would-be writers" (4). An approach acknowledging that authors were also readers does not require a return to the earlier idea of author as god-like maker of singular meaning, but instead examines readers as active participants in a larger community of shared references, familiarities, and expectations, which together with the books they read form an intertextual matrix. As Katie Halsey explains, the relationship between Austen and her readers can be thought of as a "kind of conversation: a dynamic two-way process wherein readers respond to the novels, but the novels and characters are also brought to life, re-imagined, re-created and re-invented in and through the reading experience in its totality" (3). In including lesser-known and noncanonical female authors in this study, I extend this conversation.

[23] See, for example, Anthony Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel* (2011) and Olivia Murphy, *Jane Austen the Reader* (2013).

CHAPTER 2

SENSES OF SENSIBILITY: CHARLOTTE SMITH AND JANE AUSTEN

> "Fictions do not find obstacles in passions: they make use of them. Philosophy may be the invisible power in control of fictions, but if she is the first to show herself, she will destroy all their magic." – Germaine de Staël, "Essay on Fictions" (61)

Sense and Sensibility, as Claudia Johnson has argued, presents what initially appears to be a set of "tropic antithetical contrasts" in its title (*Women* 23). The novel's project is to destabilize these antitheses, revealing them to be more similar than previously anticipated (24). Although Johnson does not mention Charlotte Smith's "courtship novels" – *Emmeline* (1788), *Ethelinde* (1790), and *Celestina* (1791) – in her discussion,[24] they share a similar re-interpretive project with Austen's fiction. *Celestina*, in particular, is also keenly interested in interrogating the ideas of "sense" and "sensibility" and their relationship to issues of gender and power.

In this chapter, I first give a necessarily brief sketch of the many resonances which the terms "sense" and "sensibility" bore in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the time during which Smith and Austen were writing. These words referred to unstable and polyvalent but crucial and widely debated concepts, thus providing the perfect starting ground for both Smith's and Austen's critiques of entrenched power structures. From there, I discuss the reasons

[24] Like many scholars of Smith's work, Johnson's discussion of Smith in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988) focuses primarily on Smith's later "political" novels, such as *Desmond* (1792) and *The Old Manor House* (1794). Johnson does discuss similarities between *The Old Manor House* and *Pride and Prejudice* in her article "A 'Sweet Face as White as Death': Jane Austen and the Politics of Female Sensibility," *Novel* 22 (1989): 159-74.

why it is beneficial and necessary to read Smith's fiction alongside Austen's. I argue that by reading their novels in conjunction, and specifically Smith's *Celestina* with Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, the pedagogical value to readers of Austen's allusions to Smith becomes clear. Far from being the product of mere influence, *Sense and Sensibility*'s resonances with *Celestina* evoke a familiar narrative even as they fracture it, asking readers to remember what they have already read, consider what they have thought of it, and to question why the new text may be uncomfortably both recognizable and divergent.

Using the resemblances between Smith's *Celestina* and Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* as a model, I discuss here how familiarity with Smith's novels can nuance readers' responses to Austen's and vice versa.[25] Although *Sense and Sensibility* is widely acknowledged for its complex engagement with its titular terms – two of the most loaded of the eighteenth century – *Celestina* also actively participates in the debate over "sense" and "sensibility." And like its successor, *Celestina* actively works to complicate the tidy binaries often cited in contemporary discussions of these concepts, rejecting characterizations or plot structures that clearly side with one over the other. This complication requires active interpretation on the part of readers, who cannot assume that concepts or characters are what they initially seem.

What follows in this chapter is not an attempt to exhaustively catalogue resonances between Smith's *Celestina* and Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, for several reasons. First, such a foolhardy project could never be completed because the perspective and context that each reader brings to a text may illuminate something different for her than for others. Second, and more

[25] Loraine Fletcher discusses this resemblance briefly in her *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) and in her introduction to *Celestina* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2004). Jacqueline Labbe also briefly discusses the similarities between the two in "Narrating Seduction: Charlotte Smith and Jane Austen," *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008): 113-128, and at greater length in "What Happens at the Party: Jane Austen Converses with Charlotte Smith," *Persuasions On-Line* 30.2 (Spring 2010): n.pag.

importantly, I am not seeking here to tabulate a complete list of similarities between these novels but to demonstrate a method for approaching key works of fiction in conjunction with one another. Thus, although there are many more similarities and echoes of Smith in Austen than are discussed here, I have chosen to focus on a few crucial elements which set the terms of ideological debate and serve to guide readers' holistic interpretations of the texts.[26]

The Terms of Debate: "Sense" and "Sensibility"

Despite their potential appearance as antithetical concepts, "sense" and "sensibility" are unstable signifiers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as Claudia Johnson and others note; both political liberals and "Burkean reactionaries" claimed the values of sensibility – affection, deep feeling, sympathy – for their own causes (xxii).[27] Although it had become an incredibly loaded term by the end of the eighteenth century, "sensibility" initially bore no gendered connotations and referred to the physical "power of sensation or perception," the word's primary meaning from the early fifteenth century to the early eighteenth according to the OED ("sensibility"). Isaac Newton's *Opticks*, first published in English in 1717-18, played a key role in beginning the shift from physical denotation to gendered connotation. Newton's treatise uses language to describe the nervous system that would "reverberate through eighteenth-century

[26] In addition to Fletcher and Labbe, other critics who point out the similarities between these two novels include Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939); Frank Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge: UP, 1966); and William Magee, "The Happy Marriage: the Influence of Charlotte Smith on Jane Austen," *Studies in the Novel* 7 (1975): 120-32.

[27] For other discussions of sensibility, see Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986); G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992); C. B. Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993); Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambirdge: Cambridge UP, 2005); Claire Knowles, *Sensibiilty and Female Poetic Tradition, 1760-1860: the Legacy of Charlotte Smith* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

literature" and its conceptions of sensibility (Barker-Benfield 5). Newton's theory of sight suggested that rays of light entering the eyes "excite Vibrations" which convey "into the brain the impressions made upon all the Organs of Sense" (Newton 319). These vibrations could be "excited in the Brain by the power of the Will," which then transferred its energy into the muscles to perform "Animal Motion" (328). As G.J. Barker-Benfield notes, Newton "did not gender this scheme in the least;" nevertheless, the notions of excitation and vibration later provided the basis for gendering sensibility as feminine due to females' supposedly weaker, more susceptible nerves (Barker-Benfield 5).

Following Newton's theories, the physician George Cheyne expanded his ideas on the nervous system, offering a continuum of "sensibility" within humans: "There are as many and as different Degrees of *Sensibility* or of *Feeling* as there are Degrees of *Intelligence* and Perception in *human* Creatures. … and as none have it in their *Option* to choose for themselves their own particular *Frame* of Mind nor *Constitution* of Body; so none can choose *his* own Degree of *Sensibility*" (366-7). As Barker-Benfield points out, according to this system of thought, sensibility "could be cultivated" but "it was also seen to be inborn" (8), and the degree to which one possessed sensibility "betokened both social and moral status" (9). Those with exceedingly receptive sensibilities were, according to Cheyne, "quick Thinkers, feel Pleasure or Pain the most readily, and are of most lively Imagination" (105) due to their smaller but more vibratory and thus more responsive nerves. George Cheyne communicated his ideas on sensibility to his patient Samuel Richardson, who not only published Cheyne's books but incorporated his physician's concepts into his novels, paving the way for their larger cultural popularity and influence (Barker-Benfield 7).[28]

[28] For a fuller discussion of Cheyne, as well as the sources from which he drew some of his arguments, see G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, Chapter 1.

"Sense" in its physiological meaning had been established in English since at least the mid-15th century, according to the OED ("sense"). It is this meaning that Locke generally uses when referring to the "Senses" in his *Essay on Human Understanding*, often placing them in contrast to "Reflection" (Locke 85). Alexander Pope also contrasted "sense" and "reason." For example, Pope's popular poem *Essay on Man* considered how the "scale of sensual, mental powers ascends" (19), claiming in the abstract to the passage that it progresses along a "gradation of sense, instinct, thought, reflection, reason" (x). Pope states that "Reason alone countervails all the other faculties" (x), it being an emblem of Divinity on earth; but although he claims that the line between the "Instinct" of the "grov'ling swine" and the "Reason" of humans is "insuperable," he concedes the question "What thin partition Sense from Thought divide?" (21) In the same essay, however, Pope also uses the word in a more familiar setting: in his notes to the poem he decries "Those who only follow the blind guidance of their Passions; or those who leave behind them common sense and sober reason, in their high flights through the regions of Metaphysies [sic]" (3). As Pope's note regarding "common sense" reflects, the word "sense" could also refer to a "[n]atural understanding" or "intelligence," particularly when part of the collocation "common sense;" the OED notes the phrase had carried this meaning since the mid-sixteenth century ("common sense"). The word "sense" appears with this connotation in Frances Burney's novel *Cecilia* (1782).[29] While not pure or "sober" reason itself, "common sense" was a framework without which the higher levels of reason and understanding were impossible to attain; according to Locke, "Men of Sincerity" led "blindfold from common Sense" have fallen victim to that which "blinds their Understandings" and "captivates their Reasons" (Locke 371).

[29] Burney's heroine Cecilia Beverley is frequently referred to as having "good sense," and Mr. Delvile claims that she has "too much sense to let my advice be thrown away" (OWC 157).

"Sense" is thus a complex term in the eighteenth century. While physical "sense" was seen as inferior to mental reason, it was also an inescapable element of human consciousness, the channel through which the brain received sensation and processed it into information. As Locke argued in his monumental *Essay on Human Understanding*, sensation determined perception, which in turn determined knowledge. In his Epistle to the Reader at the beginning of the *Essay*, Locke even compared the "Understanding," which he called "the most elevated Faculty of the Soul," to the physical eye; each judges "Objects only by its own Sight" and "cannot but be pleased with what it discovers."[30] Yet despite its physiological connections, "sense" was also linked to intellect; a person with "good sense" or "common sense" could be relied on to make rational decisions and conduct themselves with propriety, as Burney models with her Cecilia.

"Sensibility" was also a complicated concept. Initially, as demonstrated in works such as Newton's, it referred to the reception of sensory information by the nerves, without an inherently gendered focus. Cheyne's connection between finer, faster intellect and a more receptive nervous sensibility, as well as his insistence that each person is born with a specific degree of sensibility which s/he cannot change, would seem to suggest that gender played little role in one's faculties. Despite his characterization of those with weaker nerves as being "quick-thinkers," however, Cheyne nevertheless set the groundwork for the association of sensibility with femininity and the distancing of women from rational thought. For example, in *The English Malady* he reiterates Aristotelian physiology in claiming that the "original *Stamina*, the whole *System* of the Solids…are they not owing to the *Male?* And does the *Female* contribute any more but a convenient Habitation, proper Nourishment, and an *Incubation* to the seminal Animalcul for a time[?]" (96).

[30] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 14th edition (London, 1775), n. pag.

By the late eighteenth century, rationality and sensibility had become commonly contrasted concepts, as one of the most significant texts of the 1790s did not hesitate to demonstrate. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, one of the late eighteenth century's most strident and influential attacks on the oppression of women, claimed to address women as "rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces" (25), a type of address which Wollstonecraft argued was unjustly uncommon. Repeatedly, her essay emphasizes the dichotomies common in her era: society characterizes men as "made to reason" and women as made "to feel," man as "reason" and woman as "sensibility" (85). Wollstonecraft argued that the cultural preference for "elegancy of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners" were not inherent to women but a trap devised by men to "soften our slavish dependence" (25). Wollstonecraft rejects the common conception of sensibility as damaging to women because it confines them to the flesh, emphasizing their status as material comforts and ornamentations for men's lives rather than as thinking beings of their own: "And what is sensibility? 'Quickness of sensation; quickness of perception; delicacy.' Thus is it defined by Dr. Johnson; and the definition gives me no other idea than of the most exquisitely polished instinct. I discern not a trace of the image of God in either sensation or matter" (85).

Wollstonecraft does not entirely reject sensibility, however; instead, she draws distinctions – not always stable ones – between false and genuine sensibility. "False sensibility," like "artificial notions of beauty," are constructed to retain power over women by forcing them into culturally determined molds from birth onwards (63). Arguing within the same paradigm that she is chastising, Wollstonecraft reiterates that "sensibility is not reason" (86). Yet there do appear forms of sensibility which Wollstonecraft is much in favor of; her definition of modesty, for example, is the "[s]acred offspring of sensibility and reason" and exhibits "true delicacy of

mind" rather than an artificial form (151). Wollstonecraft's language citing her reason for writing the *Vindication* as stemming from "an affection for the whole human race" (15) and praising "the natural emotions of the heart" (26) demonstrate the same sort of attention to emotion that proponents of sensibility encouraged.

Speaking specifically to novelists, Germaine de Stäel's opinions on sensibility and its role in fiction and thereby society were also highly influential.[31] Like Wollstonecraft, de Stäel deplored what she saw as false sentiment addressed to women, "a wretched language with no more delicacy than wit" that kept women silly and uneducated ("On Literature" 203). However, de Stäel did not reject the importance of feeling in life or its ability to capture the attention of readers: "[t]he greatest power of fiction," she claimed, "is its talent to touch us" ("Essay" 74). In order to influence the moral imagination of readers, de Stäel argued that authors should "paint all the emotions of the human heart" and "use their intimate knowledge of it to involve us" (72). Reading with one's emotions, engaging fully with the full range of the capacities of the "human heart," was for de Stäel the only effective way to learn morality; only novels can place "emotion itself on their side and [use] it for their own ends" (76).

Charlotte Smith the Author, Jane Austen the Reader

In addition to being an author of novels herself, Jane Austen came from a self-acknowledged family of "great Novel-readers" (*Letters* 27),[32] and she emphasizes the importance of reading and its complexities throughout her books. She consistently presents her own readers

[31] According to Vivian Folkenflik, de Stäel's writings on fiction provoked intense debate amongst her contemporaries and "helped establish the Romantic canon" (*An Extraordinary Woman: Selected Writings of Germaine de Stäel*, trans. and ed. Vivian Folkenflik [New York: Columbia UP, 1987]), 20. Olivia Murphy cites de Stäel's novel *Delphine* (1802) as particularly influential on Austen's fiction, including *Sense and Sensibility* (*Jane Austen the Reader: the Artist as Critic* [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013], 60-63).
[32] Letter to Cassandra Austen, 18 December 1798.

with examples of fictional readers who do not carefully read; for example, *Pride and Prejudice*'s Caroline Bingley foolishly picks up the second volume of a triple-decker novel without having read the first – an obvious misstep to any reader of the time – to impress Mr. Darcy.[33] In giving readers these examples, Austen instructs them in the practices that will best reward a reading of her own texts. Austen's own careful readership is evidenced even in her early works. References to other authors and novels abound in Austen's juvenilia, as the frequent reappearance of the names "Cecilia" and "Camilla" (both titles of extremely popular novels by Frances Burney) suggest. Although only briefly mentioned by name, Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* appears by name twice, once in "Jack and Alice a novel" and once in "Evelyn." The narrator of "Jack and Alice" describes Lady Williams as "like the great Sir Charles Grandison" (32) in her willingness to see company, and in "Evelyn" the young Maria is given the opportunity of "shining in that favourite character of Sir Charles Grandison's, a nurse" (15).[34] Jocelyn Harris has extensively noted the references to works by Richardson in Austen's works, particularly the juvenilia.[35] Despite Austen's documented fondness for Richardson and his fiction, however, he does not appear by name in any of the juvenilia manuscripts. In contrast, the young Austen

[33] Caroline then yawns and puts down her book (for of course, she has no idea what is going on in it) and says, "I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of any thing than a book! – When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library" (60). Amusingly, as Elise Barker points out, this deeply ironic quote has taken on a life of its own on presumably earnest Jane Austen-themed gifts and apparel, despite its origination from the mouth of a very bad reader (193). One can only imagine that Austen would be perplexed to see the words of the "notoriously mean-spirited snob" Caroline (Barker 194) used as cultural cachet by readers declaring their allegiance as devoted readers of her works.

[34] All references to Austen's juvenilia in this chapter are from *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts: A Digital Edition*, edited by Kathryn Sutherland (2010), available at www.janeausten.ac.uk. Page numbers, emphases, strikethroughs, and spelling are reproduced exactly from the manuscripts.

[35] See Harris's book *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge, 1989) for a full discussion, including the many references to *Sir Charles Grandison* in "Jack and Alice." Other studies of Richardson's influence on Austen include Olivia Murphy, "From Pammydiddle to *Persuasion*: Jane Austen Rewriting Eighteenth-Century Literature," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 32.2 (Spring 2008): 29-59; Elaine Bander, "'O Leave Novels': Jane Austen, Sir Charles Grandison, Sir Edward Denham, and Rob Missgiel," *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 30 (2008): 202-215; and Yuko Ikeda, "The Development of the Playful Mind: Samuel Richardson's Grandison and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*," *Kumamoto Studies in English Language and Literature* 53 (2010): 23-39.

specifically mentions Charlotte Smith's novels twice, once in her "History of England" once in "Catharine, or the Bower." Smith is, in fact, the only novelist referred to by name in the juvenilia.[36] The self-identified "partial, prejudiced, & ignorant Historian" of the "History" mentions Smith in reference to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. She announces her sympathy for "[t]his unfortunate young Man" who is "not unlike in Character to that equally unfortunate one Frederic Delamere" (177). In this simile, the author notes, this makes "Elizabeth the torment of Essex" who "may be compared to the Emmeline of Delamere" (177). Elizabeth, however, gets the comeuppance that Emmeline does not, for the queen "did not long survive his loss, & died so miserable that were it not an injury to the memory of Mary I should pity her" (178).

The second reference to Smith is more extensive and grounds a discussion of genuine vs. pretended literary taste. In "Catharine, or the Bower," the young heroine Kitty (alternately Catharine or Catherine), in need of a bosom companion after the departure of her two female friends, meets Miss Camilla Stanley, who appears at first to be a potential candidate for intimate friendship. Kitty introduces the topic of "Books universally read and Admired" in order to assess how similar their "sentiments" are (42). A scene similar to this in structure and ironic tone would later appear in the immediate and impassioned discussion of reading between Marianne and Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*, although there the favored authors are Cowper and Scott (*S&S* 36-7). The novels Kitty immediately mentions are those of "Mrs Smith": *Emmeline* and *Ethelinde* (43). The girls' praise of the novels is characteristic of the young Austen's hyperbolic satire: Camilla exclaims that her books are "the sweetest things in the world," even though she

[36] Smith also appears to be one of only two writers mentioned by name. The other, who also merits two references, is William Gilpin, the Anglican priest most famous for his essays on the nature of the picturesque. Gilpin is included with Delamere and Robert, Lord Essex in *History of England* and is given a brief mention in "Love and Freindship." Peter Knox-Shaw provides an extensive and sophisticated tracing of Gilpin's influence on Austen, particularly *Pride and Prejudice*, in *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: UP, 2004).

has done such a poor job reading them that she has missed all of the descriptions of landscape (for which Smith was often praised by reviewers)[37] in her haste to "know the end of" *Ethelinde* (43). Kitty, on the other hand, is a more careful and informed reader. She is aware of public opinion of Smith's novels and has formulated her own, countering Camilla's assertion that *Emmeline* is "so much better than any of the others" with the statement that "Many people think so, I know; but there does not appear so great a disproportion in their Merits to me" (43). Like heroines before her such as Frances Burney's Evelina, Kitty makes some dubious etiquette choices; however, despite her foibles she is also clearly Austen's model for sense and taste, directly contrasted to Camilla's ignorance and boasting. Lest the reader fail to understand which young lady is meant to be thought superior, Austen describes Camilla as having an "Understanding unimproved by reading and a Mind totally devoid either of Taste or Judgement" and professing, much like the despicable Caroline Bingley, "a love of Books without Reading" (41). Also unforgivably, although Camilla claims to be a great traveler, she has no idea of the location of Matlock or Scarborough, or indeed Yorkshire itself.

Although the girls' adoration of Smith's novels is presented in "Catharine, or the Bower" with Austen's characteristic ironic gloss, the young Austen was clearly also a careful and aware reader of Smith, as this short exchange between the two girls reveals. For example, Camilla's rather melodramatic assessment of the relative merits of the two novels (emphasized in Austen's manuscript by the underlining of the words "so much") appears quite similar to that given by the erudite *Critical Review*. While it had gushingly compared *Emmeline* to Frances Burney's novels, *Ethelinde* "appeared in comparison not very advantageously….less full of adventure, of sudden

[37] For example, the reviewer for the *Critical Review* praises *Ethelinde* for its depictions of scenic Grasmere, which are "admirably described" (58) and cites two long passages in support of his admiration. The *Monthly Review*, also reviewing *Ethelinde*, admired Smith's displays of imagination as "really poetical;" Smith "considerably heightens our British scenery, and almost brings the Thessalian Tempe to our view" (165).

changes of fortune, and less interesting by its humbler denouement" (57). Perhaps surprisingly, the *Critical Review* appears to share the extravagant Camilla's taste for adventure and wildness. Nevertheless, the *Critical Review* was largely on its own in its preference for *Emmeline*; most reviewers were more of Kitty's mind, finding *Ethelinde*'s charms not dissimilar to *Emmeline*'s, particularly in Smith's evocation of landscapes (Fletcher 120).

By the standards of the juvenilia, in which major events occur within a sentence or two and characters act and change at breakneck speed, this discussion of the relative merits of Charlotte Smith's novels is comparatively extensive. Unique within the juvenilia, it reflects the same sort of consideration, although abridged, given to literature in something like the conversations about literature between Captain Benwick and Anne Elliot in Austen's much later *Persuasion*. Given Smith's prestigious literary reputation and widespread popularity in the late eighteenth century, it is not surprising that she would form a crucial part of Austen's reflections on literature; what is surprising is that so little critical attention has since been paid to the relationships between Austen's fiction and Smith's. Reading Austen's writings in conjunction with Smith's provide for a richer understanding of how both authors operate to destabilize traditional boundaries and binaries than reading either alone allows.

A few scholars have previously noted similarities between Charlotte Smith's novels and Jane Austen's. In the type of literary "influence study" popular prior to the 1980s, several critics made arguments for the influence of Charlotte Smith on Jane Austen, generally concluding that Austen probably had Smith "in mind" as she wrote her own novels.[38] However, these acknowledgements of Smith are generally rather cursory and do not argue for Smith's real

[38] See Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939); Frank Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge: UP, 1966); Anne Henry Ehrenpreis, "*Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen and Charlotte Smith," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25 (December 1970): 343-8; William Magee, "The Happy Marriage: the Influence of Charlotte Smith on Jane Austen," *Studies in the Novel* 7 (1975): 120-32.

significance to readings of Austen. Comparisons of Smith and Austen, for example, have never been given the same level of detailed and sustained attention as comparisons of Austen to Richardson and other male writers.[39] Feminist scholars since the 1970s have done much to re-emphasize the contemporary recognition and reputations of eighteenth-century women writers such as Charlotte Smith. Given her success in the literary world during Austen's voraciously novel-reading youth, it is difficult now to imagine a scenario in which something of Smith's fiction did *not* echo in Austen's. By the time the young Austen was writing her first "novels" in the 1790s, Smith had become an established name in the world of fiction as well as poetry, having published three very successful and well-received "courtship" novels featuring young female protagonists. Indeed, when she pitched her latest novel, *Desmond*, to Thomas Cadell in a letter in September of 1791, Smith could boast that "it is already very certain that you will not lose by the last Novel [*Celestina*], which is extremely liked; I feel no concern on that head" (Smith n.pag.).[40]

Smith's first novel, *Emmeline* (1788), was well-received by critics and readers alike. With a wide circulation of over 5,000 copies per issue by 1797, the *Monthly Review* was quite influential in the area of literary taste-making. In addition to reviewing books since its establishment in 1749, it was the first English periodical to employ the "review" in the form that would become the literary standard.[41] Its glowing review of *Emmeline* was thus a significant

[39]For example, see Jo Alyson Parker, *The Author's Inheritance: Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, and the Establishment of the Novel* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1998); Gloria Gross Sybil, *In a Fast Coach with a Pretty Woman: Jane Austen and Samuel Johnson* (New York: AMS, 2002); William Deresiewicz, *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets*, (Columbia: UP, 2005); and Olivia Murphy, *Jane Austen the Reader: The Artist as Critic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[40] This uncollected letter is from the British Library's manuscripts collection.

[41] By comparison, in 1797 the *Critical Review* had around 3,500 copies per issue, and the *Analytical Review* had 1,500 (Stuart Andrews, *The British Periodical and the French Revolution, 1789-1799* [New York: Palgrave, 2000],139). According to a review of Francis Jeffrey's *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review* in the January 1844 issue of *The Monthly Review*, the *MR* was "the first periodical in England to adopt the system of reviewing which has since grown so popular" and that its success "led to the establishment of several other critical journals" (1).

boon for Smith. Opening with a complaint of the "many trifling, the many wretched productions" of the novel-writing world,[42] the review assessed Smith's *Emmeline* as being, in stark contrast, "conducted with a considerable degree of art," the product of a "nice and accurate judgment" (242). The *Critical Review*'s response was similarly positive. Although less widely circulated than the *Monthly Review*, it was nevertheless also prestigious and influential; its first editor was novelist Tobias Smollett, and regular contributors included Oliver Goldsmith and Samuel Johnson. Their review opened by remarking that "a new era in novel-writing" had recently emerged in English fiction, although they were more optimistic about its general character than the *Monthly Review*. Citing Frances Burney's *Cecilia* (1782) as quintessential of the recent developments in plot and characterization, the review compared *Emmeline* favorably to Burney's fiction, particularly in Smith's character work, which was praised as "excellent copies from nature" (531).

There were a few, sometimes startling, exceptions to the critical consensus on *Emmeline*: Mary Wollstonecraft and poet Anna Seward both harshly reviewed the novel, Wollstonecraft writing that characters such as the "fallen woman" Adelina "tend to debauch the mind" (qtd in Fletcher 99). These few dissents from the general opinion of the novel do not appear to have affected its popularity, however: the first edition, a printing of 1500 copies, sold out immediately, with a second edition following very soon after. The novel did so well, in fact, that Smith's publisher Thomas Cadell paid her more than they had initially contracted for, and she earned approximately £300 from the first three editions (Fletcher 101). To put such a profit in context, six years later Anne Radcliffe earned £500 for *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), a sum that was considered "huge" for the time (Mandal 16). Smith's success with *Emmeline* is

[42] Language not dissimilar to Austen's complaint of the "trash with which the press now groans" in *Northanger Abbey* (Oxford: UP, 2003), 23.

particularly remarkable considering that 1788 saw a marked spike in the number of titles released; in 1787, 51 new novels were published, but in 1788, that number leapt to 80, an increase of over 60 percent (Mandal 6). Many of these were by women, who created a significant trend of domestic sentimental fiction that typically abandoned the earlier epistolary model and often involved an orphaned heroine and her adventures; Smith's three heroine-centric novels, *Emmeline*, *Ethelinde,* and *Celestina,* are considered to be characteristic of this mode of fiction (Mandal 8).

In addition to their domestic-sentimental tropes, Smith's novels were also influential in developing the vogue for "Gothic" fiction that would come to dominate the literary landscape of the 1790s. As Loraine Fletcher notes, Smith herself was a major figure in developing some of the most common Gothic tropes, in particular the castle as metaphoric code "for a more specifically female confinement" (92). While authors such as Horace Walpole and Clara Reeve had written novels with significant "Gothic" elements before the 1780s, the massive popularity of the form as instituted by Anne Radcliffe had yet to occur in 1788 when *Emmeline* was published. Yet despite Smith's role in shaping the terms of literary discussion during her era, even those critical discussions that acknowledge Austen's debts to Smith generally fail to note just how significant Austen's employment of an extremely well-known figure such as Smith would have been, both to an enterprising woman writer and to her readers. The studies that acknowledge similarities between Smith's fiction and Austen's almost unanimously declare that the resonances between the two authors' books are either incidental or that they mark superior craft on Austen's part. William Magee points out many elements of similarity between Smith's novels and Austen's, but concludes merely that Smith "remained in [Austen's] creative mind" throughout her career as a source from which to innovate upon (131). Frank Bradbrook acknowledges Smith's extensive

influence on later Gothic fiction, but rather uncharitably claims that "Charlotte Smith's fiction was only of negative use to Jane Austen in providing burlesque material for *Northanger Abbey*" (105). More recently, Peter Knox-Shaw also notes similarities between Smith and Austen, but states that Austen "differs from a writer like Charlotte Smith…in her unwillingness to stick by tidy dichotomies, or, indeed, to leave an earlier position unexamined" (126).

Janet Todd, in the *Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (2006), writes that Austen "almost single-handedly . . . has made most of her contemporaries seem excessive, artificial, or absurd" (18). Mary Waldron asserts that Austen "created a new kind of novel which put all her predecessors and contemporaries more or less in the shade and ensured her work outlived theirs" (3). Even Olivia Murphy's recent assessment of Smith relies on asserting the ultimate superiority of Austen's novels; she writes that "few living people have read, or would even *want* to read, the novels of Austen's contemporaries and competitors" (x). Again and again, it seems crucial to critics who mention similarities between Austen's writings and those by other novelists, especially her contemporaries, that they emphasize Austen's originality and superiority. Such a claim hardly seems to need defending; scholarship is not particularly overwhelmed by critics calling Austen a hack or copycat. Furthermore, such statements fail to adequately credit Smith as an innovator in her own right and neglect the sophistication of her novels. Far from embracing "tidy dichotomies" or providing mere Gothic fodder for Austen's keenly satirical pen, Charlotte Smith's novels represent important interventions in the novelistic tradition that offered her readers – including Austen herself – complex, nuanced alternatives to the dominant fictions of her era.

While often trading in the domestic-sentimental tropes that Austen (particularly the young Austen) satirizes, Smith's novels also keenly emphasize the linkage between the domestic

and the political. And, as Katharine M. Rogers points out, Smith's novels also challenge the "enormous claims of men possessed by the Romantic imagination" (84). As her later, more overtly political novels would also do, Smith's early novels present both the value and the limitations of sensibility, the dangers of male power, and the difficulties inherent in the male-centric, highly individualist version of Romantic genius often proffered by male Romantic writers such as Wordsworth. These themes deeply interested Austen as well, and in engaging with Smith's novels Austen also engages with these ideas. The act of allusion itself is an act of destabilization, of appropriating and resituating something familiar in a new setting. Both Smith and Austen are interested in complicating binaries, reversing established paradigms, and collapsing semantic polarities. Both achieve these goals in part through alluding to and reorienting previous works.

Unlike traditional influence studies, which proceed in a linear fashion from one author to another – as in the assertion that Austen "had Smith in mind" while writing – the type of allusive reading I propose does not consider the author as singular maker of meaning, directly responding to a previous figure of author-ity. Instead it instead examines readers, including the author, as participants in a larger cultural community of shared references, familiarities, and expectations – what Wolfgang Iser refers to as the "repertoire of the text" – that together with the books they read form an intertextual matrix.[43] In addition to the excitement that recognition of a previously encountered element provides, allusive encounters offer didactic possibilities. As stated in the introduction, a reader projects her expectations for one novel onto the next, and the presence of similarities between those novels highlights deviations from those expectations more forcefully.

[43] Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978), 69.

Bizarrely for two novelists for whom reading is a central concern, there is little discussion of how the marked similarities between Smith's novel and Austen's affect readers. As demonstrated earlier, there is excellent evidence to suggest that readers in Austen's era would have been quite familiar with Smith's fiction. Furthermore, this sort of familiarity was considered a necessary and useful element of reading. For example, in *The Female Reader* (1789) Mary Wollstonecraft argued that "[t]o read with profit and advantage, we should read with attention and deliberation, and endeavour to improve the truths we read by remembrance. Without attention in in [sic] reading it is impossible to remember, and without remembering it is time and labour lost to read or learn" (120).[44] For Wollstonecraft, passively receiving information was useless; readers had to pay attention, actively creating "truths" from what they read and transferring that knowledge from the reading of one text to another. In other words, Wollstonecraft promotes an inherently intertextual way of approaching reading.

A common, though by no means exclusive, way to read Austen is as an anti-Jacobin novelist suspicious of sensibility and easily critical of emotionalism.[45] Yet, as Jacqueline Labbe notes, several scenes in *Sense and Sensibility*, like their counterparts in *Celestina*, "force readers into a participation in agitation" ("What Happens"). This manipulation of readers serves to fulfill the call to action that author and political activist Germaine de Stäel urged in her "Essay on Fictions" (1795) and elsewhere.[46] Writing a defense of fiction addressed to those suspicious of

[44] Mary Wollstonecraft published *The Female Reader*, an edited collection of essays and advice, in 1789 under a pseudonym. This quotation is from a short piece that is unattributed to another author in the volume and thus presumably is Wollstonecraft's. "The Advantages arising from Reading," *The Female Reader; or Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse; Selected From the Best Writers, and Disposed under Proper Heads; For the Improvement of Young Women. By Mr. Cresswick, Teacher of Elocution. To Which is Prefixed a Preface, Containing Some Hints on Female Education* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1789), 120.
[45] For example, see Loraine Fletcher's claim that Austen "continued to attack the easy emotionalism and soft morals she saw" in Smith, thus "placing herself more firmly within an anti-Jacobin political tradition" (304).
[46] Similar defenses of emotion in novels arise in de Stäel's preface to *Delphine* (1802): "The novels we will never cease to admire…seek to reveal or trace a crowd of feelings which, in the depths of the soul, make up life's happiness or its unhappiness. These are the feelings we never speak aloud because they are bound up with our

the "dangers of imagination" de Stäel asserts that if novels "touch our hearts, they can have a great influence on all our moral ideas" ("Essay" 60-61). In an argument reminiscent of Austen's assertion in *Northanger Abbey* that the presses "groan" with "trash," de Stäel writes that "[t]he art of novel-writing does not have the reputation it deserves because of a throng of bad writers overwhelming us with their colorless productions" (71). Nevertheless, she argues, novels do have the ability to inspire morality and empathy in readers if they can provide "an intimate knowledge of the human heart" (73). The scenes that resonate in *Celestina* and *Sense and Sensibility* tend to be those most invested in revealing feeling, which for de Stäel was a vital and missing part of culture: "Women have no way to show the truth," she writes, "no way to throw light on their lives" ("On Literature" 207). Smith and Austen, however, seek to do just that.

Family Resemblances

Jacqueline Labbe has argued that Austen "cooperates with Smith in moving the novel into a modern mode" through her employment of references to *Celestina* in *Sense and Sensibility* ("What Happens"). Labbe's argument focuses specifically on a party scene, present in both novels, that involves miscommunication and social restriction. In addition to this paralleling of scene and plot, Austen also echoes elements of *Celestina* in her characters. However, in *Sense and Sensibility* Austen fragments elements that are singular in *Celestina*, creating a narrative entropy that gradually destabilizes any expectations a reader might be expected to have. Such deployment, first of familiarity and then of destabilization of that familiarity, requires readers to think more critically about what they are reading, for the novel reveals that they cannot rely on

secrets and our frailties, and because men spend their lives with men, without ever confiding in one another what they feel." Germaine de Stäel, *Delphine*, trans. and ed. Avriel H. Goldberger (Dekalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1995), 4.

their past experiences to accurately predict future ones. Far from demonstrating merely that Austen was "influenced" by Smith, the resonance of *Sense and Sensibility* with *Celestina* provides readers with elements of fixity to the narrative while emphasizing the fluidity of interpretation.

Austen's revisions to her manuscripts could be quite substantial, as seen by the evolution of *Sense and Sensibility* from its original epistolary form as *Elinor and Marianne* in late 1797 into the form published as the novel we recognize in 1811.[47] Nor was she unwilling to incorporate new material into her literary references; although *Northanger Abbey* was initially drafted at the same period as *Sense and Sensibility* in the late 1790s, later revisions and the published novel include references to novels such as Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1802) which could not have been in the original manuscript.[48] Thus although *Sense and Sensibility*'s references to *Celestina* would have been, as Murphy notes, "more current during its first drafting" (57) than at the time of its revision and publication, the fact that they remained in the novel when there is no necessary reason why they should have argues for the importance of reading these two novels together. As this chapter will demonstrate, these novels actively work to complicate the tidy binaries often cited in contemporary discussions of reason and emotion, rejecting characterizations or plot structures that clearly side with one over the other. In this way, both novels engage with and draw readers' attention to the problems of reading and interpreting not only fiction but the world around them.

[47] "Note on the Text," *Sense and Sensibility* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), xl.
[48] For the story of *Northanger Abbey*'s transformation from the manuscript *Susan* into the published novel, see *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 174-75; James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 105-106.

There are good reasons for the resemblance of Austen's novel to Smith's beyond the popularity of the courtship plot. Claudia Johnson calls *Sense and Sensibility* a "dark and disenchanted" novel, likely because it is "the most attuned to progressive social criticism" of all Austen's novels (*Women* 49). Olivia Murphy suggests that "[p]erhaps alone among Romantic-era novelists, Austen in *Sense and Sensibility* demonstrates that she has no authorial conviction of the accepted moral truths that underpin existing novelistic conventions" (54). The strong resemblance between *Sense and Sensibility* and *Celestina*, however, suggests that Austen was in fact *not* alone in her dissatisfaction with the tidy moralizing generally present in the fiction of her era, and further that she knew it. Murphy points out that *Sense and Sensibility* was written "in an environment that was increasingly hostile to women's rights and to the novel" (54), an argument which she convincingly supports by tracing women's gradual disappearance from canon-making lists in the early nineteenth century.[49] Most discussions of Smith's writing note the same thing: she was incredibly popular during her era, even making substantial sums of money for her books, but continually chafing at the injustices toward women that she perceived and personally experienced.[50] *Sense and Sensibility* expresses deep angst over topics that also preoccupied Smith: specifically, the problems inherent in the patriarchal power structure and the horrible necessity of money. The most crucial sympathy between *Sense and Sensibility* and *Celestina*, however, is the latter's comments on the instability of interpretation. Such instability is inevitable when considering ideas such as "sense" and "sensibility," ideas that as even the briefest of sketches demonstrates bore a wide range of meanings in the eighteenth century. In

[49] See Chapter 1 of Olivia Murphy, *Jane Austen the Reader: the Artist as Critic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) for her extensive discussion.
[50] For example, see Amy Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), as well as Loraine Fletcher's extensive discussion of the links between Smith's personal life and her political sentiments in her biography of Smith.

both its plot and its characterizations, *Celestina* interrogates these notions and challenges their stability, a tactic which Austen similarly utilizes in *Sense and Sensibility.*

Interpretation and Instability

Austen's choice of title for her novel does no less than tackle two of the most influential concepts in eighteenth-century culture. The pairing of "sense" and "sensibility" was generally read by contemporary critics as a direct character contrast between Elinor and Marianne. The *British Critic* stated in its review that the "object of the work is to represent the effects on the conduct of life, of discreet quiet good sense on the one hand, and an overrefined and excessive susceptibility on the other" (527).[51] The Tory *Critical Review* also presented the two young women as opposites, although in less stark terms: Elinor is the character with "great good sense, with a *proper quantity of sensibility*" and Marianne, who has "an equal share of the sense which renders her sister so amiable," unfortunately "[blends] it at the same time with an *immoderate* degree of sensibility" (149).[52] These oppositional characteristics were often interpreted as teaching readers – and specifically, young female readers – important moral lessons about the necessity of moderation and self-regulation, lessons quite similar to those Smith was often credited by reviewers as teaching. Modern critics have at times also adopted this line of reading, although the trend in argument has shifted since the 1980s toward a less polarized method of interpretation.[53]

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[51] *The British Critic* (May 1812): 527.
[52] *The Critical Review* (Feb 1812): 149-57; 149 (emphases in original).
[53] For example, Ian Watt, "On *Sense and Sensibility*," *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), claims that the novel, while not a diametric opposition between the two elements, nevertheless "articulate[s] the conflict…between being sensible and being sensitive" (51). A. Walton Litz, in *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (New York: Oxford UP, 1965), discusses the novel's "crude antitheses" of structure, in part due to its dual-stage composition. The novel, for him, is a "youthful work patched up at a later date, in which the crude antitheses of the original structure were never successfully overcome" (73). Marilyn Butler, in her pivotal *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) argues that the novel's

Despite the novel's consistent play with its titular concepts, the structure of the title *Sense and Sensibility* nevertheless presents readers with two initially discrete terms. Given the critical response, some readers at least were quick to assume that the title characterized its two heroines as oppositional, representational figures.[54] Smith's *Celestina* lacks this structure, presenting readers with a singular heroine whose name gives her novel its title and two subsidiary stories of young women whom Celestina befriends. Neither of these embedded stories presents as clear a distinction as Austen initially draws between Elinor and Marianne, although between her three young women Smith does give a cross-section of English economic life: Jessy Woodburn is a farmer's daughter, Sophy Elphinstone the daughter of a middle-class merchant, and Celestina herself the daughter of aristocrats. Through these three stories, however, Smith directly investigates ideas of "sense" and "sensibility," and her verdict is similarly complex: sensibility is crucial in establishing and maintaining sympathy, without which society cannot function, but uneducated or uncontrolled, it can lead to discomfort and dishonor.

Both *Celestina* and *Sense and Sensibility* begin by describing the financial troubles of a landed family through the lens of a disenfranchised widow and her children and introducing a vulnerable young woman without a fortune whose adventures the narrative will follow. *Celestina* breaks with convention by spending its initial chapter sketching out, in significant financial detail, not the potential destitution of Celestina herself but of the young George Willoughby, whose paternal ancestors have misused the family estate's money in an attempt to keep up with the "manners of the times" and seemingly destined him to the loss of his home and fortune

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"entire action is organized to represent Elinor and Marianne in terms of rival value-systems" (184). In direct contrast, Claudia Johnson in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) refutes Butler's polarized interpretation of the novel in favor of a less dichotomous reading. In *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), Mary Waldron states that the "simple oppositional framework, sense/sensibility, has long since been abandoned as a critical starting point" (63).

[54] Such a response is not unreasonable given that the novel's first title was *Elinor and Marianne*, which also seems to encourage a dichotomous or at least discrete reading of the title's two elements.

unless he marries an heiress (59). This is a familiar situation, but Smith's innovation here reverses the gender paradigm and thus troubles readers' expectations. Readers are accustomed to reading of young women's dependence on marriage for financial and social stability, a common theme particularly amongst reformist novelists, but the portrait of a young man whose future has been jeopardized by his ancestors' abuses of power and money and requires rescue (and a healthy injection of cash) from a young woman is far less familiar. The "sensible" approach is that taken by George Willoughby's mother, who has from her "good sense" as well as maternal pride arranged for her son to marry his cousin so that the "two remaining branches" of the family (and their money) may be united (60). Through her unfolding of the narrative, Smith criticizes this pragmatic approach, although she does not extend her emphasis on the necessity of sensibility to deny the necessity of money to a healthy and happy existence.

The presence of a young aristocrat named Willoughby in the first pages of *Celestina* serves as a helpful point of entry into the type of intertextuality reading model I am proposing. Although "Willoughby" is an old name backed by the respectability of *Burke's Peerage*, it has a more familiar antecedent in fiction.[55] Smith's choice of nomenclature would ring alarm bells for those who had read Frances Burney's extremely popular *Evelina* (1778).[56] That novel also features a young aristocrat named Willoughby, but he is not good news for the eponymous heroine; a chameleon dandy with a mean streak, Sir Clement Willoughby essentially stalks Evelina, pays her socially inappropriate attention, and sends her a letter falsely addressed from her noble love interest Lord Orville in order to wreak havoc on her happiness. Happily for readers, Smith's hero initially appears to refute Sir Clement's precedent, behaving in a courteous

[55] Both Fletcher and Labbe note this, and Labbe also mentions the connection between Burney's, Smith's, and Austen's Willoughbys, though not in extensive detail ("Narrating Seduction," 113).
[56] Also noted by Jacqueline Labbe in "What Happens at the Party: Jane Austen Converses with Charlotte Smith," *Persuasions On-Line* 30.2 (Spring 2010).

and respectful manner toward Celestina. However, when George Willoughby inexplicably jilts Celestina on their wedding day and subsequently disappears, his actions are made more ominous by his name's echo with that of Burney's villain. Readers must wonder whether the echo of his dissolute antecedent spells doom for the young heroine; in *Evelina*, after all, Willoughby does not get the girl in the end.

By toying with readers' initial associations with the name, Willoughby's name helps to prevent one of the significant difficulties of the courtship novel as a genre: a predictable ending. In 1740, Pamela's eventual happy marriage to her initial tormentor in Samuel Richardson's eponymous novel might have taken readers by surprise, as the outcome of events in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Heloise* might have done in 1761. After decades of the form's continued popularity, however, the repeated formula became more obvious; the hero, destined to win the heroine's love, was recognizable for his strong moral character and courtesy (with the ability to rescue the heroine as an added bonus).[57] Smith's Willoughby appears to initially fit this virtuous model, but the sudden interruption of his plans with Celestina, his persistent refusal to explain himself, and his name's ominous prior associations suggest the possibility that the reader and Celestina have misread him and allow for a modicum of suspense.

Further complicating the perception of Willoughby is the novel's emphasis, in its early chapters, on Willoughby's potential destitution if he fails to marry well. The power of money over a person's destiny was an issue that Smith, inspired by her own economic woes, returned to again and again in her novels, particularly in *Ethelinde*, which directly preceded *Celestina*. While the importance of love and emotional compatibility in making marriages had been increasingly emphasized in novels since mid-century and featured prominently in Smith's own, Smith clearly

[57] Fletcher notes this in her Introduction to *Celestina*, 12-13.

and swiftly delineates the position in which choosing emotion over pragmatism will place Willoughby: the destruction "for ever [of] all his favourite hopes" (63). In addition to making his marriage to the penniless French orphan Celestina seem unlikely, even perhaps unwise, thereby increasing narrative uncertainty, this bleak assessment of Willoughby's situation eschews the sort of "tidiness" of which Smith is often accused by her detractors. While not marrying for love is frowned upon as inauthentic or heartless, marrying for love without any financial security is equally dangerous to marital felicity. Willoughby's future has been callously jeopardized by the abuses of the patriarchal system, and thus no decision he makes, it appears, can be without negative consequence.

Austen's choice of nomenclature for her dashing hero in *Sense and Sensibility* achieves several things for her readers. His antecedent in Burney's Sir Clement Willoughby is clear: like Sir Clement, he offers the object of his affections inappropriate displays of attention, seemingly oblivious to their effect on the young woman's reputation. Although he does not openly attempt to abduct Marianne, as Sir Clement does with Evelina, Willoughby's casual attitude towards his unchaperoned visit to Combe Magna with Marianne reveals a similar sense of masculine presumption and privilege. And, while not as openly deceitful as Sir Clement, John Willoughby shows less than an admirable regard for straightforwardness and honesty. His ultimately pragmatic decision to choose Miss Grey over Marianne Dashwood calls his love for her into question. Readers, like Elinor, might reassure themselves that Willoughby's "embarrassment which seemed to speak a consciousness of his own misconduct" signifies a true "regard" on his part (133), but even such a reassurance shows a somewhat dismal evaluation of the possibilities for the "marriage of true minds" in a world driven by patriarchal economics. This apparent

despair resonates with that presented in the first chapters of *Celestina* and links the progressive politics of Smith's novel to similar attitudes in Austen's.

Despite his similarities to the rakish and contemptible Sir Clement Willoughby, Austen's John Willoughby also appears to be a man of feeling, inspired by the genuine sensibility that Smith's Willoughby possesses and Burney's does not. Thus, when confronted with a dashing gentleman named Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility,* readers are presented with conflicting information. One the one hand, Burney's Sir Clement Willoughby presents a troubling model that seems confirmed by John Willoughby's incautious behavior with Marianne. On the other, however, elements such as his love of poetry and his expressions of deep, seemingly authentic feeling align him more with Smith's George Willoughby, who does ultimately overcome the hardships put in the way of true love and marry Celestina. In drawing on both Burney's and Smith's Willoughbys, Austen creates much more complexity for her Willoughby than either Burney or Smith achieve: whether John Willoughby turns out to be a villain along the lines of Burney's or a sentimental hero along the lines of Smith's is not entirely clear even at the end of the novel.

Unlike Willoughby, the name Celestina does not carry the same fictional baggage in the eighteenth century.[58] Her heavenly name seems to align Celestina with the sentimental heroine of her era: mild, well-mannered, a domestic angel. Yet although Smith is sometimes accused of oversentimentality and "easy emotionalism" even by her defenders (Fletcher 304), her heroine Celestina combines sense and sensibility with no fixed alignment to either. She is not merely a

[58] It is, however, the title of a very famous Spanish Golden Age novel about a bawd, *La Celestina*. This novel was second in popularity and prestige only to *Don Quixote* and was widely familiar in Europe for several centuries, translated into multiple languages including French. Although its popularity waned in the seventeenth century, it was considered enough of a threat that the Spanish Inquisition explicitly banned it as late as 1773. See José María Pérez Fernández's introduction to James Mabbe's *The Spanish Bawd* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2013), 15-16. Although I can find no source for this other than Wikipedia, "la Celestine" may have entered European slang as another word for "prostitute" or "loose woman" by the eighteenth century.

sentimental young woman, nor is she only acted upon like the passive heroines of Gothic fiction tended to be; instead, at several points in the novel she assumes agency and takes action herself. Although like most sentimental heroines she is prone to fits of emotional rapture, Celestina is a more complicated figure than she sometimes gets credit for. She is also an observable influence on both Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. Like Marianne Dashwood, Celestina is widely read, although she is more creative than Marianne; at several points during the narrative Celestina composes sonnets in response to her overwhelming feelings.[59] Even this action, however, should be read with an awareness of subtext; this is not merely a Wordsworthian "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling." While Smith initially describes Celestina's composition as the result of an idea "[i]nsensibly" taking "possession of her fancy," she *also* notes that Celestina "wrote the following lines in her pocket book, not without some recollection of Edwards' thirty seventh and forty fourth sonnets" (189). Smith thus calls attention to her heroine's internalization of her reading – Celestina can recall what she has read well enough to draw upon it in her own writing – and highlights her own novel's intertextuality. Furthermore, after the sonnet's insertion in the text, Smith remarks that after Celestina had "finished her sonnet" she "read it over aloud: she changed a word or two, again read it" (190). This demonstration of her editing process counteracts her composition as simply a bout of unexamined enthusiasm, as Marianne's raptures tend to be; Celestina's poetry is not only written but revised.

As her "natural turn to poetry" would suggest, Celestina is also, like Marianne, deeply sensitive to things such as picturesque landscapes. At two separate points Celestina revisits her old home (and John Willoughby's family estate) Alvestone, and is overcome with "sensations"

[59] The sonnet would have been inextricably linked by this point with Smith herself, as her *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) had been immensely popular since its first edition. Smith continued to expand the collection, including Celestina's two sonnets in new editions.

of "melancholy pleasure" (135) and "melancholy indulgence" (240) in recalling the memories of times she spent there with Willoughby. Austen recalls these moments in *Sense and Sensibility* in Marianne's "moments of precious, of invaluable misery" during her "solitary rambles" at Cleveland, in which she fancies that she might see Combe Magna despite its being nearly thirty miles away (Austen, *S&S* 229). However, in an excellent example of how the differences between the two novels might produce an educative cognitive dissonance for the reader, readers who know that Celestina performs such visits and maintains her health would be surprised to witness Marianne take a violent cold (*S&S* 231). Austen reminds the reader of the emotional indulgences of the earlier heroine but twists them so that Marianne is rendered ridiculous, rather than sublime; Marianne's walks in the wildest, oldest part of Cleveland Park contribute to her falling ill, but even more significant, the narrator notes, was the "still greater imprudence of sitting in her wet shoes and stockings" (231) – a very prosaic turn to a poetic wandering.

Celestina is a more balanced character than Marianne. While she shares many of Marianne's sentimental traits, she is not so wrapped up in her world of reading that she cannot cope rationally. Despite her own enthusiasm for poetry, she scolds Montague, a silly scholar given to sentimental raptures who seeks Celestina's affections, for reading so much poetry that "there is no rational conversation with you…you do nothing but make speeches out of Otway or Shakespeare" (Smith, *Celestina* 228).[60] Celestina is initially presented as a figure of reason in the novel, possessed equally of a passionate affection for George Willoughby and a "strong and excellent understanding" (100). In an unusual move for heroines of the era, she asserts her

[60] Thomas Otway was a sentimental dramatist of the seventeenth century whose influence continued well into the nineteenth. Oliver Goldsmith ranked him "next to Shakespeare, the greatest genius England has produced in tragedy" in 1759. His popularity suggests that Montague is something of a dilettante, since he only "makes speeches" out of the most popular and time-tested authors. See Jessica Munns, "Otway, Thomas (1652-1685)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (OUP: 2004).

agency and decides to leave Willoughby so that he will have an easier time accomplishing the duties she believes he owes to his household. Her decision is related in rational terms, and the reader is party to her "meditation":

> What would become of me…were I to be the wife of Willoughby, and to see him unhappy that I was so? He would have broken his faith to his mother; he who has always been taught to hold the slightest promise sacred; he would see his estate dismembered…and it would be to me he would owe his indigence and his unhappiness! How dare I suppose that my affection, warm and sincere as it is, could make him any amends for all those mortifications. (100)

Celestina's concern here is both pragmatic and sentimental. In addition to the monetary distresses which she knows would accompany her marriage to Willoughby, she cannot accept the emotional damage that she believes their marriage would do to him: after she has "coolly reflected" on the situation, she concludes that Willoughby's attachment to his ancestral home was "so strong, that it was very probably [sic] his love would soon yield to the regret which would arise from their sacrifice" (100). Her decision is motivated both by her deep sensibility, revealed by her concern for Willoughby's emotional health and sympathy with his mental state, and by her rational acknowledgement of economic necessities.

Celestina, with her balance between sense and sensibility, models ideal behavior in ways that neither Austen's Elinor nor her Marianne do. What Austen appears to promise with her title, and what contemporary reviewers often saw, is a separation of Celestina's traits into two distinct figures: the rational Elinor and the romantic Marianne. Both young women recall elements of Celestina's character. Significantly, the aforementioned speech has a close counterpart in *Sense and Sensibility*. Like many of the other scenes that strongly echo *Celestina*, it is a scene of

emotional resonance, and it focuses in particular on the roles of the sisters: Elinor once more acts as the protective, socially aware voice of reason and Marianne as the sister in need of guidance. In this scene, Celestina's speech is given not to Marianne, but to Elinor, who attempts to reassure Marianne that Willoughby is no great loss to her:

> "But does it thence follow that had he married you, he would have been happy? —The inconveniencies would have been different. He would then have suffered under the pecuniary distresses which, because they are removed, he now reckons as nothing. He would have had a wife of whose temper he could make no complaint, but he would always have been necessitous—always poor; and probably would soon have learnt to rank the innumerable comforts of a clear estate and good income as of far more importance, even to domestic happiness, than the mere temper of a wife." (Austen, *S&S* 266)

Though similar both in structure and sentiment, Austen's passage is notably more bitter than Smith's. Celestina's Willoughby, we are told, would be dissatisfied by his having broken a promise to his mother to provide for his family and his estate as much as by real resultant economic trouble. Austen's Willoughby is untempered by such noble intentions; his dissatisfaction would proceed not from his unselfish devotion to family honor but from an attention to his own comforts and extravagances that is selfish "in every particular" (*S&S* 266) – far more Burney's Sir Clement Willoughby than Smith's George Willoughby.

Importantly, Celestina's meditation comes before she and Willoughby acknowledge their love and become engaged, and before she is subsequently heartbroken by Willoughby's abandonment of her. Smith's choice of structure initially suggests that Celestina's rationally motivated decision was wrong, as it failed to acknowledge the demands of her own heart.

Allowing Celestina and George Willoughby to then admit their love for each other and plan their marriage follows the expected progression for a novel of sensibility: the triumph of romantic love. However, Celestina is quickly abandoned by George Willoughby and for the bulk of Smith's long novel the reader, like Celestina, has no evidence to contradict the apparent fact that Willoughby has betrayed her and callously courted another woman for her money. Only at the very end of the novel, after both Celestina and Willoughby (and, by extension, the reader) have undergone emotional torments, are the misunderstandings resolved and their marriage assured. Although Smith does not resist the traditional happy marital ending, it is tinged by the turmoil that both characters (and readers) experience.

In contrast, Elinor's assessment comes at the end of the novel, after Marianne has already experienced her emotional trauma at Willoughby's hands. Austen's placement of her speech at the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, and having Elinor rather than Marianne voice these opinions, initially appears to controvert the point of Smith's placement. Still a rational assessment of economic realities, Elinor's harsh judgment reiterates the emotional trauma already experienced by her sister, Willoughby's worthlessness as a lover and Marianne's foolishness for believing her affection could change him. The reader has already witnessed these events and seen their consequences, and Elinor has previously been the voice of cautious reason to Marianne's passionate sensibility. Here, it appears that Austen, like Celestina in her initial version of this debate, sides with sense. Yet Elinor is being somewhat disingenuous with her speeches. Although she tells Marianne that "[i]t was selfishness which first made [Willoughby] sport with your affections" (266), the reader knows that Elinor herself has previously refused to believe Willoughby capable of such designs. In a passage of free indirect discourse earlier in the novel, Austen shows Elinor as "prevented from believing [Willoughby] so unprincipled as to have been

sporting with the affections of her sister from the first" (133, emphasis mine). This opinion is confirmed to her by Willoughby's confession that although he initially did not have serious intentions toward Marianne, he became "fully determined on paying my addresses to her" and genuinely intended to propose marriage (243). Marianne was not privy to Willoughby's confessions because she was busy dying of a fever, and Austen obliquely states that Elinor's narration of them to her sister are filtered. Although Elinor in general "related simply and honestly the chief points" of Willoughby's speech, she clearly does not relate them all, and particularly "softened…his protestations of present regard" (263). Thus, while this speech is bitterer on the whole than Smith's, Austen gives the reader room to believe that such bitterness is not quite accurate, reflective more of Elinor's own anger towards Willoughby than a completely rational assessment. Her speech reveals Elinor's rational sense, but its context complicates a simplistic reading of Elinor as "sensible" by suggesting Elinor's own propensity to experience deep feeling. Like its deployment in Smith's novel, the speech occupies an unstable ground in which the initial point argued appears to be to some extent refuted by later circumstances, leaving the reader in doubt about the accuracy of its prediction.

As the complexity of the transferred speech here reveals, Austen does more with Elinor and Marianne than split elements of Celestina's character into two separate, representational figures. Instead, Austen remixes character traits from *Celestina* across family lines and across gender lines so that the demarcations between "sense" and "sensibility" become increasingly fuzzier over the course of the novel. Smith's male characters are notably more given to sensibility than Austen's are (and, often, more so than Smith's female characters). *Celestina*'s Montague Thorold in particular anticipates many aspects of Marianne's character: he is given to quoting from Shakespeare and other poets rather profusely, speaks in hyperbole, and cannot

believe in second attachments. Perhaps more damning still is the similarity between their outbursts when confronted with a rational discussion of love. Montague pledges his "pure and violent" (and quite undesired) love to Celestina, to which she courteously replies that she cannot love him, but offers him "my friendship, my gratitude, my esteem." This provokes Montague immensely, and he interrupts her: "Friendship! gratitude! esteem! Can I be content with such cold words" (341). Readers of *Sense and Sensibility* might recognize an echo in the exchange regarding Edward Ferrars between Elinor and Marianne. Marianne also presses a woman for a confession of passionate love, although this time it is for a confession from her sister regarding a love interest, rather than directly from that love interest. Her needling produces only this response from Elinor: "I do not attempt to deny…that I think very highly of him – that I greatly esteem, that I like him." Marianne, as provoked as Montague Thorold, "burst forth with indignation" in quite similar language to his: "'Esteem him! Like him! Cold-hearted Elinor! Oh! worse than cold-hearted" (Austen, *S&S* 16). While *Celestina* thus offers Austen sentimental fodder for her satirical portrayal of Marianne, her incorporation of strong resemblances to Smith's male characters reminds the reader, as Smith does, that sensibility as a weakness is not limited to the female sex.

In adopting elements of multiple characters for her two heroines, Austen destabilizes easy preconceptions about them. Although Smith's *Celestina* is not the only source for character types found within *Sense and Sensibility*, the other allusions to *Celestina* in Austen's novel reinforce the association of her characters with Smith's. If readers are familiar with Smith's characters, Austen's semantic destabilization cuts across not only philosophical lines – who is the figure of "sense" after all? – but across gender lines as well. For example, Celestina's poetic sensibility is mirrored in Marianne's, but so is Montague Thorold's unconsidered and inconsiderate

sensibility. Gender in fact offers fertile ground in which to sow semantic instability for both authors. Charlotte Smith presents George Willoughby as the putative hero of *Celestina*, employing his point of view at several moments in the narrative to communicate his feelings and sensations. Near the midpoint of the novel, when he believes Celestina to be engaged, Willoughby is forced to endure the same "narrative of waiting" that Austen's women often do, impatiently awaiting a letter from Celestina that might clear up matters (but which, of course, fails to do so).[61] Nevertheless, Willoughby's best friend and companion Vavasour bears more than a passing resemblance to him, despite Vavasour's characterization as a rake and seducer. Both Willoughby and Vavasour are prone to hasty judgments, jealousy, and assumptions of their own entitlement. Smith pointedly remarks on this similarity at one point in the novel, where the narrator describes Willoughby as "speaking less like himself than like Vavasour, whose vehemence he seemed to adopt" (370). At times, his flights of passion resemble the more ludicrous enthusiasm of Montague Thorold, as he trembles, flushes, feels faint, and experiences other physical side effects of intense sensibility. Loraine Fletcher notes in her introduction to *Celestina* that this sort of "ideological doubling of traits" is common in Smith's novels and is often used to provide narrative suspense (14). It also allows Smith to comment on the moral ambiguities of character while presenting familiar types; George Willoughby may be a man of feeling, but as his similarities to Vavasour highlight, that has its disadvantages as well as its advantages.

As already noted, Austen's Willoughby evokes both of his famous fictional predecessors. In a move recalling Smith's multiplication of traits in her own Willoughby, Austen also draws upon Smith's character of Vavasour in painting her portrait of John Willoughby. Vavasour,

[61] See Nina Auerbach, "Waiting Together," *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978).

while attractive and often playfully irreverent, is described from Celestina's point of view as demonstrating "extreme inattention and disregard which…he never chose to take the trouble of concealing, for the opinions of those to whom he was indifferent" (Smith, *Celestina* 236). Vavasour's treatment of the family with whom Celestina stays in Devonshire, the Thorolds, is remarkably similar to Willoughby's thoughtless disdain for Colonel Brandon: "[Vavasour] disliked the Thorolds, without knowing or enquiring of himself why he disliked them" (236). Willoughby and Marianne similarly dismiss Colonel Brandon, and like Vavasour, neither of them can offer a considered reason as to why they dislike him. Willoughby's answer to Elinor's questioning of him on this dislike is flippant and reveals what appears to be his lack of consideration: "He has threatened me with rain when I wanted it to be fine; he has found fault with the hanging of my curricle, and I cannot persuade him to buy my brown mare" (Austen, *S&S* 40).

Austen's paralleling of John Willoughby with Vavasour continues in a darker vein when it is revealed that, like Vavasour, Willoughby was the ruin of a young woman.[62] This casts an entirely different interpretation on his earlier, casual indifference to Brandon; Willoughby's discomfort around Brandon is not the lack of having thought about his dislike for the man but his disregard for decency in his treatment of Eliza. Smith's Vavasour also casually engages in sexual relationships with young women, and the story of his dealings with young Emily Cathcart provides Smith with a trenchant critique of thoughtless male privilege that Austen later draws upon. Emily, like so many fallen women before and after her, is persuaded to elope with Beresford, a man she believes is of "strict honour," who, as expected, fails to marry her (Smith,

[62] The story of Brandon and his two Elizas, who both fall from virtue and end miserably, is reminiscent of Smith's own use of doubled narratives in her novels.

Celestina 261).[63] The narrative gradually reveals her situation: abandoned by Beresford, she becomes Vavasour's mistress, and he keeps her in luxurious style – better so far, at least, than John Willoughby does for poor Eliza. Yet when Vavasour sees the opportunity of marrying Celestina, he casually breaks off his attachment to his lover and offers himself to Celestina as unencumbered by any responsibility to Emily (403-7). His dismissive, flippant language when speaking of Emily betrays his lack of sympathy for her, with no glimmer of realization of his cruelty toward her: "she should at this moment have been mistress of my house and my fortune…if I had not, like a cursed fool as I am, taken up a passion for you which I cannot get rid of, and which my generous little girl not only knows, but…wishes me to succeed in" (404). As with Montague Thorold's hyperbolic speeches, Smith uses Vavasour's "passion" to explore the dark side of sensibility: unrestrained feeling, uneducated by rational thought, causes damage.

In a narrative move quite typical for the fallen woman trope, Emily dies of a "Consumption" – exactly the ailment that kills Brandon's first Eliza (Smith, *Celestina* 522; Austen, *S&S* 154). Vavasour is not directly responsible for her death, but he is certainly associated with it, as is his friend George Willoughby by extension; after all, despite his position as the supposedly virtuous hero, George has countenanced and excused Vavasour's sexual predation. Vavasour is no Gothic villain, however. His vices, like those of John Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* and George Willoughby in *Celestina*, are not the product of inherent cruelty, but rather the result of unexamined presumptions by a man who assumes his own superiority to others and has had that assumption reinforced, not challenged, by the existing power structures. In a society where women are completely reliant on male guardians of one sort

[63] As in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Emily's sister firsts discovers her indiscretion by way of a letter, and her family rush to find her and keep the situation from becoming a public disgrace. Beresford, the man with whom Emily has run away, keeps her in lodgings in London but does not move to marry her.

or another for survival and are treated as a sort of property, subject to male whim, it seems inevitable to both Smith and Austen that some of those men would abuse their superior position. The deaths of Emily and Eliza serve as a bleak reminder of the all-too-possible alternative ending to the courtship narrative; even those young women who find men who have, as Emily claims of Vavasour, traits like "generosity," "candour," and "attentive tenderness" are not guaranteed the familiar novelistic ending of a happy marriage.

By the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, it is unclear whether any character fits well within a single category. Once again, Austen's echoes of *Celestina* help to further this uncertainty. At the end of Smith's novel, the two protagonists meet, both believing that the other is married. Celestina has the worse side of it, for "no longer doubting of Willoughby's marriage, and entire desertion of her," she believes that he has indeed married his heiress to secure his fortune, choosing money over love (Smith, *Celestina* 519). Willoughby too suffers from "agony and desperation" in their encounter, because he believes she has tired of waiting for him and has married the overemotional Montague Thorold. In this scene, Smith emphasizes the deceptiveness of interpretation, particularly that based on observation rather than active investigation. Observing Celestina surrounded by the Thorold family, Willoughby assumes that this must mean her marriage has occurred and exclaims that "It is all over then" and rushes from the room, leaving Celestina quite perplexed. She follows him, suggesting that perhaps he is unhappy because "something is wrong," suspecting but not voicing some "misery between him and his supposed wife" (531). It takes several pages and several anguished, failed verbal interactions for this miscommunication to be cleared up, and even then it is almost by accident: Willoughby wishes her joy, and Celestina, breaching decorum, embraces Willoughby which prompts him to exclaim that he should not be holding another man's wife in his arms. Even once Willoughby

discovers that Celestina is not married, however, Smith demonstrates the dangers of too much sensibility; Willoughby is "raised from the abyss of despair to the height of felicity" so quickly that Celestina is "terrified" by the "extravagance" of his feelings. Only continuing to embrace Celestina and her reassurances of her devotion return him to the "native serene dignity of his mind" (532).

This scene too has a parallel in *Sense and Sensibility*, involving a "change…so wonderful and so sudden" (Austen, *S&S* 273), and readers would likely recognize it both for its structure of initial misinterpretation followed by accidental revelation and for its emotional intensity. They might be surprised, however, to encounter this scene of intense feeling not from Marianne, the supposed embodiment of the sensibility represented by both Celestina and Willoughby in their scene, but from Elinor and Edward Ferrars, the two characters who have been most strongly associated with prudence and rationality throughout the novel. Like Willoughby, who upon seeing Celestina has "agony and desperation in his looks," Edward Ferrars physically conveys intense feeling: his "complexion was white with agitation, and he looked as if fearful of his reception;" when asked a question by Mrs. Dashwood he "coloured, and stammered out an unintelligible reply" (272). As Willoughby does, Elinor mistakenly inquires after her love interest's spouse, to which Edward responds with confusion and, like Willoughby, frenetic energy: Willoughby first rushes from the room, then attempts to mount his horse, then sits next to Celestina, while Edward "rose from his seat and walked to the window…took up a pair of scissars [sic] that lay there…spoiling both them and their sheath by cutting the latter to pieces as he spoke" (273). The sense of kinetic energy driven by intense feeling in both scenes is palpable, particularly in Austen who is not known for her characters' physicality. Like Celestina, who "became almost senseless from the violence and variety of emotions that overwhelmed her"

(Smith, *Celestina* 532), Elinor "sat…in a state of such agitation as made her hardly know where she was" (Austen, *S&S* 273). This familiar progression in revelation – the mutual misunderstanding, the initially uncommunicative dialogue, the accidental clarification, the emotional responses – strongly evokes its companion scene in *Celestina*. This familiar scene involves different players this time around, however, which readers might find perplexing; despite several hints that Elinor is more emotional than she admits, nothing in *Sense and Sensibility* has prepared readers to expect an outpouring of sensibility from these two characters. The scene's resonances with *Celestina* emphasize the connection of Elinor and Edward not to the rational sides of Celestina and Willoughby but to their passionate, "phrenzied" selves, reinforcing that readers who expected all sense from Elinor have been gravely mistaken – a point explicitly reiterated by Austen a few paragraphs later but already hinted at by the scene's allusions to Smith's novel.

Marianne, although "reformed" into reason at the end of the novel by her marriage to the sensible Brandon, maintains her capacity for passionate attachment: she "could never love by halves; and her whole heart become, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby" (288). Marianne's deep sensibility, although more balanced than before, remains intense; despite "submitting to new attachments" and "entering on new duties" she is by no means a strict adherent to the cult of sense (288). Willoughby sees his rational but unfeeling move of marrying Miss Grey backfire; as with Smith's Willoughby, he is made rich by happenstance, suggesting that "had he behaved with honour towards Marianne, he might at once have been happy and rich" (288). This nod to Smith's Willoughby suggests that, much like Smith's own ending, Austen acknowledges the importance of true feeling; John Willoughby's

rejection of his genuine love for Marianne in favor of money causes him pain and turns out to have been unnecessary just as George Willoughby's flirtation with the same fate does.

In both endings, however, things are not entirely as they seem. While Celestina and two of her protégées end happily married, the memory of Vavasour's dead paramour Emily and the emotional trauma experienced by Celestina and Willoughby over the course of the narrative linger over the ending. The deus ex machina revelations of Celestina's aristocratic parentage and Willoughby's surprise inheritance also color the novel's end; Willoughby's sudden fall into fortune takes place in the last few pages of the novel, its proximity to his marriage to Celestina a reminder that without this lucky coincidence, the marriage would likely not have been so happy. Austen's ironic tone, a sharp departure from the steadily sentimental tone in *Celestina*'s last few pages, helps emphasize the subtext implicit in Smith's novel, as do her choices of wording. There is less mutuality in the Brandon/Marianne match than in Smith's pairing of Willoughby and Celestina: Marianne is a consolation to Brandon, but not the other way around, and Marianne "found her own happiness in forming his," rather than each contributing to the other's happiness (Austen, *S&S* 288). If Elinor and Edward's touching reunion scene invokes the passionate meeting between Willoughby and Celestina, the restrained, rather imbalanced relationship between Marianne and Colonel Brandon draws out the tensions just underneath the surface in Smith's too-happy ending.

Scene and Sensibility

As has been shown, Austen invokes familiar scenes from *Celestina* in *Sense and Sensibility* but almost never plays them straight. Rather, these moments of recognition are placed in strange contexts, thereby commenting on the instability of meaning based on who is

performing the interpretation. There are several moments in which this occurs in *Sense and Sensibility*, but the one I will focus on here is the interpretive uncertainty surrounding the receipt of letters in a scene that occurs in both novels. Letters play a significant role in both novels, perhaps a vestige of the earlier epistolary mode that "seems tailored for the love plot, with its emphasis on separation and reunion" (Altman 14). Separation and reunion are key themes in both novels, but the importance of letters to both narratives suggests a less romantic subtext as well. As Nicola Watson argues, by the late eighteenth century, letters had become the object of intense political suspicion: the "rapid disintegration of the epistolary novel in the late 1780s and the 1790s, far from being the 'natural' consequences of the increasing sophistication of the novel…was…intimately bound up with the problematic political resonances of its narrative mode in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period" (17). One of the most influential and popular novels of the entire century, Rousseau's *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) was an epistolary novel with "potentially revolutionary force" due in great part to its attention to the power of the letter, which "standing metonymically in the place of the figure of the desiring woman…was widely read as an oppositional discourse – a potential disruptor of the existing social or symbolic order" (Watson 16). In addition to their fictional associations with radical discourse, letters in the late eighteenth century would also evoke more real-world associations with the dangers of revolution: as Paul Keen notes, one of the driving forces behind the Treason Trials of 1794 and its subsequent damage to the revolutionary agitation in England was the seizure of mail from "suspected dissidents" (P. Keen 54). Read within this radical context, the scenes in both novels involving letters become more politically charged. Like English revolutionaries of the 1790s, Marianne's letters are policed; Elinor tells Willoughby that she saw "every note that passed" between them, including the "infamous letter" he sent to Marianne after

their encounter at the party (Austen, *S&S* 246). The letters sent and received by characters in *Celestina,* while subject to equal interpretive instability as those in *Sense and Sensibility,* are not monitored in the same way. Austen picks up the misconstruals that occur in letters in *Celestina* but adds to her letter scenes an additional element of surveillance perhaps suggested by other scenes in Smith's novel.[64]

A significant example of the confusion provoked by attempts to communicate and interpret is provided by the anguish over letters present in a scene from *Celestina.* In the counterpart to this scene in *Sense and Sensibility,* the product is much the same, but the gender of the main actor is reversed. In *Celestina*, George Willoughby's movements are severely restricted by the machinations of villainous Lady Castlenorth, and he has "no means of obtaining any information of the conduct of Celestina, or of her return to town" (Smith, *Celestina* 372). Thus hampered, he awaits a letter from the heroine that may assuage his fear that Celestina, as is rumored, has become engaged to another man while he has been in France. This letter, when it arrives, offers not a resolution of conflict but further emotional trauma. Although she does not provide Celestina's direct words for readers, Smith enters George's interpretive feelings as he reads the letter, which he believes "expressed too much calmness." Despite "the separation which he had himself indicated as too likely to be inevitable," and which he had fled abroad on his wedding day to effect, George cannot bring the appropriate context to bear on his reading; Celestina's words suggest to him that she has "submitted" to their separation "without feeling half that regret and anguish which he expected she would have described" (360). This unexpected lack of sensibility in her letter is mirrored in the scene in which Marianne receives

[64] Jacqueline Labbe notes this emphasis on surveillance, and Elinor's attempt to direct Marianne into "correct" forms of feeling, in the scene where Marianne encounters Willoughby at the party. ("What Happens at the Party," n.pag.).

the “infamous letter” from Willoughby after their disastrous encounter at the party. That letter is confusing to Marianne, certainly, but also to readers, for it is distinctly different in tone than we have experienced from Willoughby before; where before his impudence was apparently born out of arrogance but also youthful enthusiasm, he appears now “impudently cruel” (Austen, *S&S* 137). Like George Willoughby, Marianne is entirely dependent on others to provide information to her, and the information she receives serves only to heighten her emotional torment.

Both authors later reveal that the letters were in fact not as they initially appeared. Celestina’s letter to George Willoughby was cool because she believed him already engaged to another woman and was trying to maintain the emotional distance appropriate to a single young woman. This misinterpretation, although resolved in the end, nevertheless causes Smith’s Willoughby pain and “agonies” (Smith, *Celestina* 360). John Willoughby’s letter is even more problematic. Austen reveals that readers were right to sense a dissonance between Willoughby’s previous conduct and the “infamous letter” and that, like Marianne’s, Willoughby’s correspondence has been policed by external censors (in his case, his fiancée Sophia Grey). Rather than the outpouring of “regret and anguish” that Marianne, like George Willoughby, expects, Willoughby’s letter contains Sophia’s expressions of cruelty that Willoughby claims he has only “servilely” copied (Austen, *S&S* 249). Elinor appropriately insists that Willoughby is still “very blameable” in this incident, but the letter itself has been proven a fraud; like Celestina’s letter, it is not an accurate reflection of its writer’s feelings. Both Smith and Austen emphasize the instability of texts and the ability of language to communicate and wound regardless of attribution or intent. Both scenes also emphasize the necessity of context to proper interpretation: Celestina’s apparent coolness makes sense only when explained by the context of

her knowledge and feelings at the moment, and John Willoughby's letter makes sense only once it is known that someone else conceived it.

As with her placement of the speech by Elinor that resembles Celestina's discussed earlier, Austen's placement of the "infamous letter" reverses Smith's structure and this creates a sense of uneasy familiarity with her narrative. As Jacqueline Labbe has traced, the party scene in which Marianne encounters John Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* has an intensely emotional counterpart in *Celestina* that achieves similar goals. However, in Smith's novel this scene comes directly after George Willoughby's receipt of Celestina's confusingly cold letter, giving him more fuel for his misinterpretation of her actions and feelings. And in Smith's scene, the sensibility of both characters is explored from their own points of view. Smith describes how George Willoughby's "legs trembled so that it was with difficulty he supported himself, and his heart beat as if it would break" when he sees Celestina evidently enjoying herself with Montague Thorold, the man to whom she is reputed to be engaged (374). "[So] deeply was he affected" by this sight, in fact, that he "staggered, and might have fallen, had not the shame of betraying so much weakness lent him resolution to reach a chair" (374). Celestina is equally affected when she literally runs into him a moment later; Smith shifts into Celestina's perspective as she gives an "involuntary and faint shriek" and must be supported by Montague's arm (375). This action Willoughby misconstrues as evidence of her betrayal, and he coldly shoots her a "look of impatient reproach…and without looking back" turns and leaves her distraught (375). Celestina, devastated by Willoughby's apparent coldness, cannot conceal her "agitation" from "the enquiring eyes of those who remarked it" (375).

Similarly to her technique of incorporating traits of multiple characters from *Celestina* in her portrait of Marianne, Austen recalls and recombines elements from Smith's scene in her own.

Unlike Smith's scene, in which George Willoughby's receipt of Celestina's letter precedes his encounter with her, Austen's scene comes before any explanation of its causes. As Labbe notes, the similarities between the two scenes are strong enough that readers familiar with Smith, as they were likely to be at the time of *Sense and Sensibility*'s publication, would likely have connected the two ("What Happens"). Austen draws together the emotions that Smith attributes to both parties in her scene, giving all the immediate emotional resonance to Marianne and limiting John Willoughby's reaction to visible "embarrassment" (Austen, *S&S* 132). She recalls George Willoughby's emotional collapse in her description of Marianne, who, when confronted with her own Willoughby's apparent betrayal, "look[ed] dreadfully white, and unable to stand, sunk into her chair" (132). In Smith's scene, Celestina is stricken nearly "unconscious" with her grief and sits, watching Willoughby with his new fiancée, with "a palpitating heart and oppressed breath" (Smith, *Celestina* 376). Like Celestina, Marianne's "agitation" (the same word used by Smith) is observed by disapproving bystanders at the party, and she cannot prevent herself from declaring aloud "the misery of her feelings, by exclamations of wretchedness" (Austen, *S&S* 132). Only after Marianne has collapsed the next day "almost choked by grief" is the reader given an explanation for her Willoughby's cruel disregard of her.

Austen's reversal of Smith's narrative progression similarly emphasizes the potential for misinterpretation and the failure of language to adequately address such misinterpretation. George Willoughby's visual observation of Celestina's actions at the party, despite their actually innocuous nature, only reconfirms his misreading of Celestina's letter and the intentions he has wrongfully imputed to their correspondence. Austen's structure shows a similar lack of faith in the ability of language to adequately communicate; Willoughby's letter serves only to further wound and perplex Marianne, as it offers no explanation for his behavior at the party. Austen's

reversal, in its evocation and complication of *Celestina*'s narrative progression, extends Smith's commentary on misinterpretation still further. While readers familiar with *Celestina* would know in that novel that George Willoughby's reaction to Celestina is directed by prior information, and thus his actions are made more understandable, John Willoughby's reaction to Marianne is completely unexpected. Furthermore, the clarification that readers might justifiably expect, given the scene's resemblance to Smith's, serves not to clarify but only further obfuscate Willoughby's real feelings.

Near the end of Smith's *Celestina*, after Willoughby and Celestina have married, gone to France to visit her ancestral home, and returned to their estate at Alvestone, the narrator remarks that Vavasour sometimes visits them; he "seemed to have conquered his extravagant passion for Celestina" but "taken up no permanent affection in its place; but lost his health, and his fortune in pursuits which could not afford him even a temporary possession of that happiness for which he still declared himself to be in search" (542). Given his abominable treatment of women throughout the novel, readers might be forgiven for taking some pleasure in Vavasour's unhappy reversals. Austen denies her readers this pleasure with John Willoughby's fate. Willoughby always regrets not marrying Marianne and "made her his secret standard of perfection in woman" (Austen, *S&S* 268). However, as she does throughout *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen refuses the familiar ending of Willoughby's gradual slide into dissolute unhappiness that readers of *Celestina*, familiar with Vavasour's ending, might expect. With characteristic irony, Austen's narrator tells readers of Willoughby's regrets and then remarks:

> But that he was for ever inconsolable, that he fled from society, or contracted an habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart, must not be depended on—for he did neither. He lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself. His wife was

> not always out of humour, nor his home always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity. (268)

In Smith's ending, the hero and heroine overcome physical and emotional trauma to unite in a loving, financially stable marriage (for Smith, like Austen, emphasizes the need for both) and the rake is punished with the loss of his love objects, his health, and his fortune. In contrast, Austen's ending does not hold out the hope that abusers of women's affections will be rightfully punished with heartbreak and financial ruin. Despite Willoughby's callous actions, which could well have destroyed Marianne emotionally if not physically, he continues to benefit from the power structures of the patriarchy. Rewarded with wealth for marrying a woman who will supposedly reform his character (the traditional expectation for "good women" who marry), he lives comfortably on a landed estate, surrounded by the trappings of the gentry, and even his wife is not always unpleasant. Austen's use of litotes with the phrase "no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity" emphasizes the irony of Willoughby's fate: despite abusing his position of privilege as a well-off male, he remains largely unpunished financially, socially, or even emotionally for his actions. As he always has, Willoughby continues to live a life of unearned, undeserved privilege. Austen's ending is thus much more pessimistic about justice than Smith's. Although all the characters in *Sense and Sensibility* have been offered the opportunity for an emotional education, not all of them take it, and their refusal does not devastate them.

The failure of patriarchal structures to successfully educate the emotions of its youth is a theme that Austen returns to throughout her novels. As will be seen in the next chapter, Austen's *Mansfield Park* uses allusions to and echoes of *A Simple Story*, a novel by Smith's contemporary, Elizabeth Inchbald, to examine the impact of education on England's young

people. Her verdict in *Mansfield Park* is an instructive counterpoint to that of *Sense and Sensibility*; if Willoughby, despite remaining emotionally unrehabilitated, goes largely unpunished for his abuses, the abuses and neglects of the patriarchs in *Mansfield Park* visit punishment on nearly everyone.

CHAPTER 3

A LESS THAN SIMPLE STORY: ELIZABETH INCHBALD AND JANE AUSTEN

> "Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without farther expense to any body."
>
> – Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (7)

As the last chapter's discussion of resonances between Charlotte Smith's *Celestina* (1791) and Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) demonstrated, Austen's novels are heavily, and purposefully, allusive. That her novels should so heavily allude to those published much earlier than her own is also unsurprising, since she drafted several of them in the 1790s before revising them. They are, however, rarely as explicitly so as novels by her contemporaries. In an 1815 letter to James Stanier Clarke, the Prince Regent's Librarian, Austen remarks that a "Man's conversation" must be "occasionally abundant in quotations & allusions which a Woman, who like me, knows only her Mother-tongue & has read very little in that would be totally without the power of giving" (*Letters* 319). She ends the letter thusly: "I may boast myself to be, with all possible Vanity, the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress" (319). Obviously, such statements are untrue, and the irony of Austen's phrasing – she claims with "all possible Vanity" to be unlearned – makes it clear that she knows this. Throughout her life, Austen's writings reflect a keen interest and delight in her readings as well as an incisive ability to scrutinize and refashion them. Even her juvenilia, as discussed in the introduction, draw widely on fictional conventions and specific authors from her time.

Austen's letter bears examining for its very self-deprecation; why, as author of three novels (at that point) that clearly engage in intertextual play, would she claim to have read "very little"? Olivia Murphy proposes that the "unobtrusive nature of Austen's literary allusions may be seen…as a pre-emptive defence against imputations of unladylike pedantry or exhibitionism" (93). It is an unfortunate reality of culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that women were placed in a double bind regarding their education: while they were expected to develop literacy and fluency in "modern languages" – often by reading literature in those languages – they were also expected to maintain a modest silence regarding their accomplishments. The conversation between Caroline Bingley, Elizabeth Bennet, and Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* regarding "an accomplished woman" notes as much: in response to Caroline's catalogue of virtues – "a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages…[and] a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions" – Darcy adds, "and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (Austen, *P&P* 43). Despite Elizabeth's love of reading, however, she defends herself against the charge of taking "no pleasure in any thing else" by exclaiming, "I deserve neither such praise nor such censure…I am *not* a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things" (41). This passage makes clear the necessary balance between improving one's mind through reading and not appearing to become too wrapped up in an enjoyment of it – especially of novels. As Murphy notes, Fanny Price – perhaps not the heroine whom most readers likely think of when we consider Austen heroines with a great love of books – adores books but "certainly tends to recite her quotations 'in a low voice'" (93). In addition to operating as a defense mechanism, however, Austen's sardonic assertions of her lack of learning in her letter to Clarke also operate as an indirect boast,

though not the one she explicitly claims: her "quotations & allusions," rather than being dropped willy-nilly into "Man's conversation," are so skillfully woven into the fabric of her novels that only readers keenly familiar with the same textual community as Austen would be likely to recognize them.

As even this short passage from her letter shows, Austen was highly attentive to reading, and the proper way to be a reader is of central interest in her novels. Yet she was also a widely read, deeply aware female reader in an era where the display of immense familiarity with literature and "learning" was considered distasteful behavior for women. The problem of women's education appears throughout her novels, but is perhaps most explicitly dealt with in *Mansfield Park* (1812), which is her only major novel to begin with her heroine as a young child and follow her into adulthood. *Mansfield Park* also tackles problems central to the question of women's education: What constitutes a "proper" education"? How does a young woman learn to be a good reader? And how might reading present the opportunity to challenge, albeit often subtly, the oppressive social structures, the "imperatives of female propriety" (Johnson 96-7), within which women found themselves?

In *The Act of Reading*, Wolfgang Iser speculates on the many purposes of reading. One such purpose, he argues, is the stimulation of reflection. Reading, he argues, initiates communication with the text through which the reader creates meaning by "questioning existing meanings and…altering existing experiences" (Iser 168). His concept of the repertoire, the framework of social conventions that the novel brings "before us in unexpected combinations," requires the reader to "work out why certain conventions should have been selected for his attention" (61). If the conventions appear at least initially familiar, arising "out of the reader's own social or philosophical background," they serve to "detach prevailing norms from their

functional context, thus enabling the reader to observe how such social regulators function, and what effect they have on the people subject to them" (74). As Claudia Johnson has argued, such critical observation is precisely the goal of *Mansfield Park*, which explores the "viewpoint of a heroine ideologically and emotionally identified with the benighted figures who coerce and mislead her" (Johnson, *Women* 96). In a letter to Inchbald professing her enjoyment of *A Simple Story*, Maria Edgeworth asserts that the novel is effective precisely because of its skillful evocation of feeling and reflection: she tells Inchbald "that it is by leaving more than most other writers to the imagination that you succeed so eminently in affecting it. By the force it is necessary to repress feeling we judge of the intensity of that feeling and you always contrive to give us by intelligible but simple signs the measure of this force" (Boaden 2.152-3). Edgeworth's theory regarding *A Simple Story*'s effectiveness bears remarkable similarity to Iser's own remarks on Austen, in which he says that the "apparently trivial scenes, the gaps arising out of the dialogue—this is what stimulates the reader into filling the blanks with projections….it is in the implications and not the statement that give shape and weight to the meaning" (Iser 168). In *Mansfield Park*, Austen emphasizes the importance of feeling and reflection through her heroine, Fanny Price, who is surrounded by characters who neither feel nor reflect. *Mansfield Park* also achieves its goal of instilling reflection in its readers by echoing strains from other novels with which its readers were likely to be familiar and requiring its readers to recognize and recontextualize them. In the present chapter, I will discuss how Austen's employment of allusions to Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* allows for a reading of *Mansfield Park* centered on the importance of female education, and specifically, of an education grounded on the twin foundations of strong reading practices and the proper exercise of feeling.

Locating Austen's work within the ideological context of the 1790s is not new, and scholars take positions on both sides of the debate: Was Austen an "Anti-Jacobin" novelist? A Jacobin novelist? Something in between?[65] *Mansfield Park* has often been a site for this debate because of the novel's apparently model heroine and its insular ending, in which cousins Fanny and Edmund marry and retreat into the safety and quiet of the patriarchy at the Mansfield Park parsonage. Although prominent scholars such as Claudia Johnson have asserted since the 1980s that *Mansfield Park* is a rejection of conservativism, "expos[ing] not only the hollowness but also the unwholesomeness of its moral pretensions" (*Women* 96), the argument that *Mansfield Park* is a "Burkean novel" – originating with Alistair Duckworth and repeated even in Clara Tuite's *Romantic Austen* (2002) – remains popular. Even critics who argue that the novel is a subtle challenge of patriarchal social systems, "presenting the psychological and social origins or propriety and the costs that it can exact" (Poovey 217), often admit that it is difficult to read *Mansfield Park* as a direct threat to paternalism. Mary Poovey, for example, argues that *Mansfield Park* acts to educate readers to "the dangers of uninhibited desire" in the attempt to "convince them that the controls exercised by the institutions of patriarchal society were necessary" (212). However, when read alongside Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791), *Mansfield Park*'s frequent use of tropes and situations familiar from Inchbald's novel support

[65] Marilyn Butler was arguably the first to seriously position Austen within the ideological landscape of the 1790s, with her pioneering *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), which argued for Austen as an Anti-Jacobin, anti-sentimental author. Alistair Duckworth makes a similar argument against Austen's perceived subversiveneess in *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971). Claudia Johnson has long occupied an opposing position, arguing for Austen as a subversive author who manipulates the tropes of sentimentality to serve her ideological purposes; see *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), and *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988). Clara Tuite argues for Austen as both interested in female advancement, a prime cause in the 1790s, and limited in her presentation of women's options in *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (Cambridge: UP, 2002). See also Gary Kelly, "Jane Austen and the English Novel of the 1790s," *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1986): 285-306; William Deresiewicz, *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets* (Columbia: UP, 2005);and Anthony Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

more radical readings of the novel such as Johnson's. *Mansfield Park*'s seeming contradictions, which for Mary Poovey made the novel "inadequate" (223), become more understandable when read in conjunction with *A Simple Story*, which is also a deeply fractured, contradictory work. As I will argue, in its very semantic instability, *Mansfield Park* shares a kindred spirit with the radical sentimental fiction of the 1790s, which often embraced the disjointed and contradictory in both form and philosophy.[66] As also seen in *Sense and Sensibility*'s slippery engagement with *Celestina* and gender politics, Austen is willing to create fundamental and unresolved tensions in her work.

These tensions perhaps help to explain why *Mansfield Park* and its heroine have not earned among many readers the "sparkling" literary reputation of *Pride and Prejudice* or *Emma.* Austen herself admitted that *Mansfield Park* was "not half so entertaining" as her previous novel (*Letters* 226).[67] *Mansfield Park* has polarized critics for decades; as Brian Wilkie notes, scholars have "not come close to producing a critical consensus" on the novel (517), and that statement was made even before Edward Said's famous and controversial claim in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) that Austen's novel "affirms and repeats the geographical process of expansion involving trade, production, and consumption that predates, underlies, and guarantees the morality" (92-93). Fanny herself has suffered more insults from critics than any other Austen heroine, having been called a "prig," a "cringing monster," and "relentlessly uncomfortable," among other labels.[68] The young women in both novels offer a striking contrast between

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[66] See Claudia Johnson's excellent chapter on *Mansfield Park* in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988): 94-120, in which she argues that *Mansfield Park* is "painful and richly problematic…Austen's most, rather than her least, ironic novel and a bitter parody of conservative fiction….animated by the preoccupations of the 1790s" (96).

[67] Letter to Francis Austen, 3-6 July 1813.

[68] See also John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen: Introductions and Interventions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 16; Kingsley Amis, *What Became of Jane Austen? And Other Questions* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 16; and Nina Auerbach, "Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm: Feeling as One Ought about Fanny Price," (*Jane Austen: New Perspectives*, Women & Literature, n.s., vol 3, ed. Janet Todd [New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983], 208-23), 208.

sparkling, witty society ladies such as *A Simple Story*'s Miss Milner and *Mansfield Park*'s Mary Crawford and the novels' "true" heroines, Lady Matilda Elmwood and Fanny Price, who are both models of virtue and, as Inchbald wrote, a "PROPER EDUCATION." In providing these contrasts, both novels call into question the models of education forced upon young women, as well as any easy answers about a solution.

"A Proper Education": The Novel of Education, *A Simple Story,* and *Mansfield Park*

A Simple Story and *Mansfield Park* participate in a much larger cultural discussion about the education of young women: by whom it should be conducted, with what means, and to what ends. Both novels also endeavor to educate their own readers by instructing them *how* to read, eliciting sympathy for the plights of oppressed women, and raising questions, often unanswered, about the social structures those women live within. In what follows, I propose that reading *Mansfield Park* alongside *A Simple Story* reveals a more radical sensibility in *Mansfield Park* than some scholars wish to credit it with. The usefulness of reading these two novels together also works in the other direction; with the memory of *A Simple Story* present while reading *Mansfield Park*, it is easier to see how Austen appropriates, deconstructs, and reworks Inchbald's themes to make them express her own views. As Austen did in modeling *Sense and Sensibility* on Charlotte Smith's *Celestina*, in echoing *A Simple Story* in *Mansfield Park,* Austen further fractures Inchbald's already fractured narrative. Inchbald's imbalanced tutor/pupil relationship between Dorriforth and Miss Milner becomes the similarly patriarchal relationship between Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price, though Inchbald's couple evinces far more physical attraction than do Edmund and Fanny. Fanny herself, however, is less kin to Miss Milner than to her shy daughter Matilda, who lives most of her half of the novel in terror of her absentee father, much

as Fanny lives in the shadow of Sir Thomas's ominous authority. Mary Crawford, Fanny's clearest foil in the novel, bears more similarity to the pretty, flirtatious, but ultimately kind-hearted Miss Milner. The characters who maintain the closest similarity are the two novels' patriarchs: Dorriforth and Sir Thomas Bertram. In keeping but reshuffling Inchbald's key elements, Austen seems to be making a point: it is impossible to clearly separate characters, particularly female characters, into simplistic categories of "good" and "bad." Fanny, while kind and thoughtful, can also be jealous and narcissistic; Mary Crawford, while she can be overly sexual and flirtatious, is also intentionally kind to Fanny, even though her own position as the more elegant and charming young woman obviates any necessity to do so. Austen delights in challenging any easy or simplistic judgments by readers, and *Mansfield Park* exemplifies such complication.

The cultural discussion surrounding the education of young women had reached a fever pitch by the late eighteenth century, but as Gary Kelly notes, it had been a matter of concern for far longer (Kelly, "Education" 252). While earlier writers on education were largely male, such as James Fordyce, author of *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) and John Gregory, author of *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774), women writers also vocally participated in the debate. As Claudia Johnson notes, women had a vested interest in making their opinions known: for them, "debates about reason, prejudice, happiness, authority, and independence were not academic" (*Women* 14). Amongst these writers, Hannah More was one of the most successful; her sole novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809) – essentially a novelization of her conduct manuals – went into eleven editions within 9 months (Nardin 15), and her books on female conduct and education were similarly popular. Over the course of her career, More earned some

£30,000 for her writings, an exceptional figure for the era (Nardin 15).[69] Her most popular book of instruction for young women, *Strictures on the Modern System of Education for Young Women* (1799), had a formative role in shaping ideas of women's education for decades afterward, and her ideas appear in both Inchbald's *A Simple Story* and Austen's *Mansfield Park*, among others.

One of the most pressing problems for both conservative writers such as More and more radical reformers such as Mary Wollstonecraft was the shallow nature of education provided for young women. As More writes in her *Strictures*, "To allure and to shine is the great principle sedulously inculcated into [a girl's] young heart; and is considered as the fundamental maxim; and, perhaps, if we were required to condense the reigning system of the brilliant education of a lady into an aphorism, it might be comprised in this short sentence, *To make the most of herself*" (84). More's complaint is quite similar to that raised by Mary Wollstonecraft earlier in the decade that young women are brought up "only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect" (*Rights of Woman* 1) and that "[g]irls marry merely to *better themselves*, to borrow a significant vulgar phrase" (92). The two writers held differing views on how best to educate young women; while Wollstonecraft advocated increasing young women's liberties, More emphasized the particular importance of inculcating "habitual restraint." More enjoins in her *Strictures* that young women "should when very young be inured to contradiction. …They should be led to distrust their own judgment; they

[69] The calculation of this figure remains somewhat of a mystery. Jane Nardin states the figure but does not offer a source for it ("Jane Austen, Hannah More, and the Novel of Education." *Persuasions* 20 (1998), p. 15). Linda H. Peterson also states the £30,000 figure, noting that Harriet Martineau cites the figure in an 1844 letter (*Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, Princeton: UP, 2009, p. 68). The *Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* also states that Hannah More earned an "estimated" £30,000 from her writing (Cambridge: UP, 2010, p. 155). Dorice Williams Elliott claims that More's "biographers" provided the figure, though she does not state names ("'The Care of the Poor Is Her Profession': Hannah More and Women's Philanthropic Work," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 19.2 (1995): 179-204).

should learn not to murmur at expostulation; but should be accustomed to expect and to endure opposition" (142). Most importantly, "they should early acquire a submissive temper and a forbearing spirit. They must even endure to be thought wrong sometimes, when they cannot but feel they are right" (143). Although Hannah More was by no means the only writer espousing such models of education, she was one of the most popular and most vocal, and both Inchbald and Austen would have been familiar with her works. Fanny Price's education largely conforms to More's recommendations – perhaps one reason why modern readers tend to find Fanny less "likeable" than more saucy heroines like Elizabeth or Emma – but Austen, in her quietly subversive fashion, also takes care to point out the costs of this model.

The "novel of education" was already a popular genre in the eighteenth century; works such as Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761), and Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-6) were all highly successful books well into the nineteenth century. Eliza Haywood's *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) and Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) offer heroine-centered examples of the form. By the late eighteenth-century, the female "novel of education" had become its own robust tradition of didactic fiction, in which the heroine matures through personal experience and external education from fallible young lady to mature, married woman ensconced within the status quo (Mellor, "A Novel" 332). Romantic novelists adapted this tradition in order to critique it; as Anne Mellor notes, many Romantic women novelists (including Inchbald and Austen) "transformed this tradition by putting forth a subtle critique of masculinity, highlighting the flaws in intelligence and moral virtue demonstrated by their male and female characters as well as the dangers of passionate love, sensibility, and the creative imagination for both men and women" (332). In fact, "all of

Austen's novels are novels of female education" (*Romanticism and Gender* 53), but this education consists of more than learning to navigate the dangers of the marriage market. What unites *A Simple Story* and *Mansfield Park* is that the failure of education does not rely wholly on bad intent. The patriarchs of both novels have presumably good intentions in the education they offer to their charges, but as both novels reveal, good intentions are not enough to combat a repressive status quo.

As Jill Campbell argues, women writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries often envisioned fiction as a way to provide "didactic instruction" by offering themselves as "surrogate[s] for a human instructor or parent" (165). She notes such titles as Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788) and Maria Edgeworth's *The Parent's Assistant* (1800), both influential volumes of didactic tales, as early examples of what would later become a popular form for long fiction: the use of the fictional narrative as "an extension of the loving but stern instruction provided by a present human individual" (165). Fiction made strong claims about its ability to inspire emotion and thereby to inspire thought and change. However, as Campbell points out, not all fiction of the era was so optimistic. Mary Hays's novel *The Victim of Prejudice*, for example, presents two heroines (a mother and daughter) who both succumb to the inexorable injustices of patriarchal society, despite the daughter's education and understanding of the social forces that operate on women (Campbell 170). Like much Romantic fiction, *The Victim of Prejudice* argues that raising awareness of repressive social structures alone is insufficient to combat them; nevertheless, such understanding must be attained, and novels are a way to educate the reader.

Although both authors use their novels to educate their readers, neither Inchbald nor Austen follow the model of the "novel of education" without deviation. Inchbald's novel is

explicitly about "A PROPER EDUCATION," but *A Simple Story* continually questions what that might look like. *A Simple Story* tells a tale of two women, a mother and daughter, with radically different educational experiences and very different lives. Miss Milner, the heroine with whom readers begin the novel, appears to be a typical flighty, uneducated girl who has not learned to govern her feelings or discipline her mind. She is an orphan, the ward of Roman Catholic priest Dorriforth, who is released from the priesthood to take up an inheritance and ends up falling in love with her. Unlike the expected narrative progression of the novel of education, however, Miss Milner ultimately fails to learn from her experience, and she is ultimately punished with death. Her death marks the stark bisection of the novel, and the second part follows her daughter, Matilda, after the girl's stern father, Dorriforth (now Lord Elmwood)[70] reluctantly agrees to care for her. Matilda's education is practically the opposite of her mother's, but although it seems to produce a more virtuous heroine, it is difficult for the reader not to see Matilda's childhood and education as anything other than Gothic tribulation. Even the novel's figure of authority, Lord Elmwood, has been failed in some sense by his education, for it has not taught him sympathy for his wife or his daughter, whom he essentially imprisons and agrees to care for only on the condition that he never see or interact with her. Similarly, *Mansfield Park* explicitly raises questions about education, particularly that of young women, and like Inchbald, Austen provides no easy answers. The Bertram girls' education, along with Mary Crawford's, is obviously inadequate, although it is provided by patriarchs whose intentions, if not their efforts, are unquestioned. Yet Fanny Price, who receives the novel's most model education (an education generally in line with the principles More advocates) is not a perfect heroine, nor is she treated well by the systems of power with which she interacts. Despite the insistence by More and other

[70] Dorriforth becomes Lord Elmwood late in the first volume of the novel, having renounced his priesthood in order to serve as heir to the previous Lord Elmwood. He is referred to as Lord Elmwood for the rest of the novel.

conservative writers that a proper education, in which women learn to "cherish standards of female excellence which serve the patriarchy" (Johnson, *Women* 17), would result in a stable and harmonious society, both Inchbald and Austen provide examples of the dark side of such education: model young women who nonetheless fall prey to the casual cruelty of the patriarchs they willingly obey.

Elizabeth Inchbald: A Simple Story of Lovers' Vows

We know that Austen read at least one of Inchbald's plays, *Lover's Vows* (1798), a loose translation of August von Kotzebue's *Das Kind der Liebe* (1780), because it quite literally plays a central role in *Mansfield Park* (1814) – possibly the only such instance of a specific literary work serving the plot so dramatically in all of Austen's novels. The strong relationship between Inchbald's drama and Austen's novel has been noted by several scholars and is unnecessary to rehearse here.[71] Surprisingly, however, far less attention has been paid to the textual interplay between Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows*, her novel *A Simple Story*, and any of Austen's fiction, even *Mansfield Park*. Perhaps this general oversight of Inchbald's fiction in connection with Austen's is due to the fact that Elizabeth Inchbald is far less well-known as a novelist than as a dramatist; she was certainly less prolific a fiction writer. Although she wrote 22 plays of her own and 125 prefatory introductions to plays collected in the massive 25-volume *British Theatre* collection (1806-1809), she published only two novels: *A Simple Story* (1791) and *Nature and Art* (1796)

[71] See, for example, Elaine Jordan, "Pulpit, Stage, and Novel: *Mansfield Park* and Mrs. Inchbald's *Lover's Vows*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 20.2 (Winter 1987): 138-48; Paula Byrne, "A Simple Story: From Inchbald to Austen," *Romanticism: The Journal of Romantic Culture and Criticism* 5.2 (1999): 161-71; Susan Allen Ford, "'It Is About Lovers' Vows': Kotzebue, Inchbald, and the Players of Mansfield Park," *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-Line* 27.1 (Winter 2006): n.pag.; Nora Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady: British Women Novelists and the Eighteenth-Century Theater*, New York (AMS, 2008); Emily Hodgson Anderson, *Eighteenth-Century Authorship and the Play of Fiction: Novels and the Theater, Haywood to Austen*, New York (Routledge, 2009).

(Garnai 11). Despite this relatively limited production, Inchbald's novels had a significant impact on the political and literary landscapes of the 1790s. Amy Garnai notes that, along with those of fellow "Jacobin" novelists Mary Robinson and Charlotte Smith, Inchbald's novels kept a "conspicuously evident" revolutionary stance prominently apparent throughout the decade, despite the common view that "the middle-class, intellectual support of the French Revolution in Britain" had begun to disappear by 1792 (2). Inchbald's name was frequently mentioned in critiques of fiction of the era, such as that by Thomas J. Mathias, in his 1797 edition of his satirical poem *The Pursuits of Literature*: "for almost any modern novel, Mrs. Charlotte Smith, Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Mary Robinson…are too frequently *whining* or *frisking in novels*, till our girls' heads turn wild with impossible adventures, and are now and then tainted with democracy" (14).

1796, the year *Nature and Art* was published, was a banner year for fiction publishing. Anthony Mandal claims that it was the "most significant imprint year of the decade," seeing a "breathtaking rise in production of new titles" almost doubling the output of the year before (12), from 50 titles in 1795 to 91 in 1796 (14). Importantly, most of these titles were "domestic-sentimental works" by female authors (Mandal 12), suggesting a popular taste for similar books. Both *A Simple Story* and *Nature and Art* were commercial successes according to the metric proposed by James Raven in his history of the English novel; both went into five or more editions between the time of their publication and 1829 (Mandal 16). Part of this success may be attributed to Inchbald's keen awareness of the tropes that got readers' attention in the 1790s. By the time *A Simple Story* was published in 1791, Inchbald had been acting for nearly twenty years and had been producing plays since the early 1780s, giving her extensive knowledge of how to employ dramatic conventions. Inchbald's familiarity with literary convention is the source of

some playful teasing in a letter from her friend, clergyman-turned-actor John Kemble, in which he asks about Inchbald's progress on the novel that would become *A Simple Story*: "Pray how far are you advanced in your novel? – what new characters have you in it – what situations? how many distressed damsels and valourous knights? how many prudes, how many coquettes? what libertines, what sentimental rogues in black and empty cut-throats in red?" (Boaden 1.93). Inchbald's very familiarity with the building blocks of popular entertainment – a familiarity Austen shared, as evidenced by her satirical "Plan of a Novel" essay – allowed her to manipulate them more effectively. While most of the character types Kemble's letter teases about are present in *A Simple Story*, they are far from simplistic caricatures despite the title's promise.

According to biographer Annibel Jenkins, "[i]n the last two decades of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth, Elizabeth Simpson Inchbald was at the center of the world of the theatre and the world of publishing" as well as being one of the "leading social figures in the intellectual group that made up the writers and artists in London" (3). Inchbald's drama *Lovers' Vows* was astonishingly successful by eighteenth-century terms. Opening on the 11th of October, 1798, in the Covent Garden theatre, it was performed forty-two times in its first season, a number that Ben P. Robertson calls no less than "astounding" (112). It was included in Inchbald's *The British Theatre* in 1806 and remained in print through the middle of the century, although its popularity declined somewhat between 1806 and 1830 (113). Its appearance in Austen's *Mansfield Park*, in fact, "helped boost the play's popularity" after the novel's publication (112), as particularly interesting fact to me, as it reinforces the idea of these texts acting upon readers not singly in isolation, but as a larger textual community not bound by strict chronological order. Certainly some of Austen's readers would have already known *Lovers' Vows* and other Inchbald works before reading *Mansfield Park*. Austen's presentation of the play

in the novel suggests that she expects a certain level of familiarity with its characters, supporting my earlier assertion that Austen wrote her novels for an audience with whom she expected to share a network of familiar literary references. After all, the exchange of literary references to express emotions and opinions was the "habitual way" of reading within the Austen family (Halsey 76). Certainly, readers of *Mansfield Park* who had not read the play would not understand the nuanced depth of why *Lovers' Vows*, which "denounces the entire upper class and substitutes for the values traditionally associated with the landed classes the morality based on individual desire that Hannah More so roundly berated" (Poovey 214), would be so inappropriate for a group of genteel young men and women to perform in a house built upon patriarchal social structures. (As Poovey notes, the house itself must be refashioned to fit the needs of this radical work of sentiment.) Yet, given the boost in sales noted by Robertson, it is also plausible that readers of Austen's *Mansfield Park* might then "rediscover" Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* and *A Simple Story*, so that the influence of one text upon another works in both directions.

It is also useful to include *A Simple Story* in this textual matrix, something that has not often been done. Published in 1791, seven years before *Lovers' Vows* was performed, *A Simple Story* deals with many of the same themes Inchbald's play examines, particularly in its attention to the proper education and behavior of young women. These ideas had already long been on Inchbald's mind; her diary notes that she was trying to sell a version of *A Simple Story* as early as 1780.[72] It was finally published in 1791 by G.G.J. and J. Robinson, who had already seen a great deal of prior success publishing nine of Inchbald's plays (126). Critics were generally enthusiastic about the novel, although several complained about the seventeen-year time gap that

[72] She writes in a diary entry of 5 December 1780 that a friend "brought me my novel," it having been rejected for publication. For further information, see Robertson, *Elizabeth Inchbald's Reputation: A Publishing and Reception History*, Pickering & Chatto (Brookfield, Vermont), 2013, 126-139.

bisects it.[73] *A Simple Story* was one of the great literary successes of the 1790s and went into six editions between 1791 and 1810, with dozens of editions appearing throughout the rest of the nineteenth century; in fact, it has never been out of print (16).[74] A new edition of the novel, complete with Inchbald's "last corrections" and a preface and introduction by Anna Barbauld, was published in 1810 as part of Barbauld's massive and popular *British Novelists* series – only a few years before Austen published *Mansfield Park*. These statistics suggest two conclusions: first, that *A Simple Story* broke the ground for themes Inchbald later returned to in *Lovers' Vows*, but *A Simple Story* was the more famous of the two texts; and second, that it is plausible to assume a continuing level of reader familiarity with *A Simple Story* at the time during which Austen's novels were published. Austen certainly relies on readers' pre-existing knowledge of *Lover's Vows* to emphasize exactly how inappropriate a play it would be for the Mansfield Park youth to perform, since details about the play are scant in the novel itself.

Reading a "Proper" Education

As discussed earlier, Wollstonecraft, More, and many other writers on female education focused heavily on the problems posed by educating young women only to be marriageable objects, a dissatisfaction that works its way into many novels of the period. For example, the secondary heroines Mrs. Stafford and Lady Adelina in Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788) are victims of this marital focus and give the lie to the idea that a woman's troubles end once she is married. In the novel, Mrs. Stafford is married off at a young age to an extravagant husband completely unsuited to her, and she now lives trapped in stoic unhappiness, unable to leave her

[73] This complaint appears in the *Critical Review* 1 (1791): 207-8; the *Monthly Review* (April 1791):434-8; and the *Weekly Entertainer and West of England Miscellany* 18.446 (15 August 1791): 153-9.
[74] The Bodleian Library holds ten editions published before 1833.

husband because of her children. Lady Adelina is also married off early, and her uneducated sensibilities attract her to an extra-marital affair for which she must suffer for the bulk of the novel. Smith's doubling of these characters also suggests that virtue and vice are not uncomplicated categories; although Mrs. Stafford rejects a potential lover (who later seduces Adelina), she is not rewarded for this virtue, and while Adelina must suffer for her sexual wrongdoings, she also makes a miraculous recovery from illness and marries her lover. Like Smith, Austen takes pains to point out the sad state of women's education; for example, she actively calls out the younger Bennet sisters as "insipid" and "ignorant" (*P&P* 428), their lack of real education and their mother's singular focus on marriage putting them in danger from those who would prey upon them. Yet even Caroline Bingley, crafted from childhood to possess an entire catalog of accomplishments aimed at landing a suitor, cannot win the heart of the man she desires because she lacks a genuine education; unlike Darcy and Elizabeth, she sees books as decorations, having "only chosen [her book] because it was the second volume [of Darcy's]" and being "quite as much engaged in watching Mr. Darcy's progress though *his* book, as in reading her own" (134). Even when an incomplete education does not morally endanger a woman, it makes her dull, and that is, as Austen points out, its own sort of danger. *A Simple Story* and *Mansfield Park* also tackle this issue in the way they present their young female characters. Mrs. Norris even signals the novel's concern with this idea in the first chapter, when she and the Bertrams discuss whether to adopt Fanny: "Give a girl an education," she says, "and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without farther expense to any body" (7). Austen continues to critique Mrs. Norris's limited view of female education, so indicative of the major problems of the era, throughout the novel.

Both novels, *A Simple Story* and *Mansfield Park*, have contrasting female protagonists. Inchbald chooses a highly unconventional route, casting her contrasting heroines not as friends or sisters but as mother and daughter. Her choice allows her to trace the effects of family history, but it also serves to heighten the sense of patriarchal oppression present within the tale. Miss Milner is alone, parentless, mostly uneducated, and her end is tragic but presented as almost inevitable. We then switch to her daughter Matilda's narrative; she lives a Gothic existence as essentially orphaned within her father's foreboding house, also isolated from community. We never see Miss Milner and her daughter together; the social structures that produced them have also kept them apart. Similarly, Austen presents contrasting heroines, who in typical Austenian fashion split off into an entropy of young women: the two Bertram sisters, Maria and Julia, the scheming Mary Crawford, and the novel's wallflower heroine, Fanny Price, whom Lionel Trilling once famously insisted nobody could find likeable.[75] Maria, Julia, and Mary all contrast with the more timid Fanny not only in their character but in the type of educations they receive. Austen draws on the unfortunate Miss Milner most strongly in her depiction of Mary Crawford, and her Fanny Price bears more than a passing resemblance to Inchbald's Matilda.

In keeping with the sentimental mode, which traditionally illustrates its heroines through a quick character sketch early in the novel, Inchbald introduces her first heroine as "beauty…united with sense and with virtue" (69). In this, Miss Milner is very like other sentimental heroines, such as the eponymous heroine of Charlotte Smith's *Celestina* (also published in 1791). Yet Miss Milner is not an ideal young woman, and Inchbald acknowledges as much:

[75] Lionel Trilling, "Nobody, I believe, has ever found it possible to like the heroine of *Mansfield Park*" ("Mansfield Park," *The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism* [New York: Viking, 1955]), 128.

> From her infancy she had been indulged in all her wishes to the extreme of folly, and habitually started at the unpleasant voice of control—she was beautiful, she had been too frequently told the high value of that beauty, and thought those moments passed in wasteful idleness during which she was not gaining some new conquest—she had besides a quick sensibility, which too frequently discovered itself in the immediate resentment of injury or neglect—she had acquired also the dangerous character of a wit; but to which she had no real pretensions, although the most discerning critic, hearing her converse, might fall into this mistake. (69)

She is, above all, a skilled coquette: "what she said was spoken with an energy, an instantaneous and powerful perception of what she said, joined with a real or well-counterfeited simplicity, a quick turn of the eye, and an arch smile of the countenance" (69). Miss Milner's character flaws are precisely those presented by Hannah More in her *Strictures,* who admonishes that young women "should be accustomed to receive but little praise for their vivacity or their wit" and should instead cultivate "their patience, their industry, their humility, and other qualities which have more worth than splendour" (142). Young women are also too much praised for their beauty; parents instead should "seek to lower the general value of her beauty in her estimation" (128). Inchbald's Miss Milner, then, is a walking picture of the poor state of female education in the 1790s.

Yet despite her flirtatious vanity, Miss Milner is genuinely kind-hearted; before the reader even meets Miss Milner, Mrs. Horton has already related to Dorriforth how the young woman not only managed to extend the amount of time the Hortons had to pay an outstanding debt, but also "secretly sold some of her most valuable ornaments" to pay off the remaining balance (66). Although she cannot remember anything about Miss Milner's physical presence,

Mrs. Horton declares that the "beauties of [Miss Milner's] disposition" made her "beautiful as an angel" (67). Miss Milner's behavior with Dorriforth also reveals her good innate character: for example, when she is reproved, she "wept with a gentleness and patience" (85), and the narrator makes frequent mention of her "frank and ingenuous disposition" (88). Miss Milner is not inherently corrupt, nor even, despite her flaws, beyond redemption; her education, not her essence, is her downfall.

Near the beginning of *Mansfield Park*, Austen characterizes Maria and Julia Bertram's education as quite similar to Miss Milner's. Their education exemplifies the very failings Wollstonecraft and More emphasize in their writing. Like Miss Milner's, the Miss Bertrams' failings are also due to their improper education, which has focused on drilling into them "the chronological order of the kings of England, with the dates of their accession, and most of the principal events of their reigns," as well as "of the Roman emperors as low as Severus; besides a great deal of the Heathen Mythology, and all the Metals, Semi-Metals, Planets, and distinguished philosophers" (16). The narrator remarks that, thanks largely to Mrs. Norris's direction of their education, "it is not very wonderful that with all their promising talents and early information, they should be entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In every thing but disposition, they were admirably taught" (16). As this brief passage shows, the Bertram girls' education has been focused on the memorization and regurgitation of tidbits rather than the development of their imaginative and emotional intelligences. Given such a shallow education, it is hardly a wonder that they turn out to be shallow young women.

Austen's suggestion is not, however, that the girls' education is flawed only because it lacks intellectual depth. While Sir Thomas states that "[w]e shew Fanny what a good girl we

think her by praising her to her face" (185), his own daughters do not receive similar treatment. Indeed, the narrator openly states that Sir Thomas does not see what is "wanting" in his daughters' development precisely because "though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him" (16). So focused on whether his daughters become "in person, manner, and accomplishments, every thing that could satisfy" him (17), Sir Thomas neglects to pay any attention to what lies below their attractive veneers of sophistication. Although whether Sir Thomas actually does treat Fanny the way he thinks he does is debatable, his shortcomings in raising his biological daughters are clear: he has with good intentions ensured his daughters have a "proper" book-education, but he has never invested in the education of their feelings. Their inability to properly empathize is demonstrated early in the book as well, as the two girls repeatedly report back to Lady Bertram that Fanny is "prodigiously stupid" for not knowing how to put together the map of Europe or locate the "principal rivers in Russia" (15). It is not the lack of paternal order or structure that is blamed for the Bertram girls' failings, but Sir Thomas's emotional unavailability; the narrator strongly implies that, had Sir Thomas *been* more empathetic and "outwardly affectionate" – more a hero of sensibility – his daughters would have been more comfortable showing their true natures around him, and he would thus have been made more aware of his daughters' flaws and more able to correct them. As it is, his repression of emotion distances his daughters from him, and that lack of emotional connection directly results in their weakened moral states.

Mary Crawford, too, is the victim of a bad education – a fact that Fanny points out to Edmund when he laments her "evil" behavior, even in "playfulness": she replies to this remark "gently" by reminding him that her behavior is "[t]he effect of education" (184). Edmund is unconvinced, telling Fanny that "it appears as if the mind itself was tainted" (a complaint

Dorriforth also levels at Miss Milner) (184). Like Miss Milner, Mary initially appears as "very prepossessing," "remarkably pretty" and "lively and pleasant" (31). Also like Miss Milner, unfortunately, Mary has been indulged in her upbringing within the fashionable London "set," notorious for its loose morals and conniving ways. She speaks her mind energetically but without tact or propriety. More damningly still, her conversation is at times rife with frank sexual implications that are considered extremely inappropriate by others (particularly Edmund).

Mary's inappropriate conversation is the subject of an extended dialogue between Fanny and Edmund as early as Chapter 7, after Mary's unfortunate punning on "*Rears* and *Vices*" (44), which Edmund attempts to turn into a teachable moment for Fanny. When Fanny remarks that she finds Mary Crawford "extremely pretty" and entertaining, Edmund responds "But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you Fanny, as not quite right?" (46) Fanny immediately replies that "she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did," apparently the conclusion Edmund wished her to express, as he promptly agrees with her (46). Edmund cites Mary's "warm feelings and lively spirits" as the reason for her comments, and in a somewhat liberal moment states that "I do not censure her *opinions*; but there certainly *is* impropriety in making them public" (46). Edmund's remark highlights the required performativity of women's expression: Mary's opinions may seem justified due to her circumstances, but it is crucial that she maintain the illusion of respect for the male authority she has lived under, regardless of whether those authorities deserve it (and the narrator seems quite openly to believe that they do not, in Mary's case). His distaste for the theatricals later in the novel mark him out as rather a hypocrite; he insists on the importance of women's performing certain roles, but to publicly *appear* to do so is unacceptable to him.

Both Lady Matilda Elmwood and Fanny Price receive educations which conform much more closely to the ideal established by Hannah More and which differentiate them from their more vapid, flirtatious counterparts. Figures of male authority shape both girls' reading, as recommended by More, who saw the role of instructor as "imitat[ing] the physician" in prescribing "bracing medicines" for "a mind which is already of too soft a texture" (*Strictures* 163). In neither case, however, is this education ideal. As with Inchbald's Matilda, who lives so in terror of her own father Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood that she feels "apprehension at mentioning his name" (241), Fanny lives a marginalized life for much of the novel. Both girls are only conditionally adopted into their new households. Matilda is allowed to live in her father's house only because his fatherly duty "in the strictest sense of the word" compels him to do so, and he warns that "one neglect of my commands" – regardless of whether those commands are based in reason or are even possible to perform – "releases my promise totally" (238). Fanny, her own mother's unwanted surplus, is sent to live with the Bertrams, who accept her on the condition that she be consistently reminded that, as Sir Thomas states, "she is not a *Miss Bertram*" (10). Marginalized, neglected, and isolated within their own families, both Matilda and Fanny spend much of their time unhappy and afraid, which are not the desired products even of More's conservative recommendations for young ladies' education. The key difference between Inchbald's novel and Austen's is that Inchbald presents Matilda as literally isolated from society: she interacts with virtually no one, least of all the patriarch who has forbidden her from ever appearing before him in person. Austen, on the other hand, depicts Fanny as isolated *within* a society: despite being surrounded by people, she is usually overlooked and too shy to often stand up for herself. In placing her timid, nearly friendless heroine solidly within the "safety" of the patriarchal system rather than as a marginal heroine barely supported by its grudging

benevolence, Austen extends Inchbald's comment on the inability of this power structure to adequately support or protect even those women who conform to its expectations.

Matilda's education conforms to the model advocated by More, yet Inchbald makes a strong case for the emotional aridity of such emphasis on "dry tough" education (165). Lord Elmwood fulfills his fatherly responsibility to shape his daughter's mind, albeit through technicalities: he allows her mother's friend Miss Woodley to live with her as governess, and his own former tutor Sandford frequently visits and instructs Matilda. Matilda "excelled most of her sex" as a scholar, and her love of "amusements which a recluse life affords" marks her as sensitive and intelligent. In addition to reading, which she does for several hours of the day, Matilda is "accomplished in the arts of music and drawing" as well as "walking and riding" (244), traditional pursuits for gentlewomen of the era. Though we are not given much of a hint of the subjects in which Matilda is educated, the one mention of Matilda's reading material is a volume of plays that she has loaned Rushbrook, suggesting that Sandford has allowed her to temper more classical authorities (the likely subject of a Roman Catholic priest's study) with more "frivolous" pursuits. In only one scene does Lord Elmwood take an active role in his daughter's education, when late in the second part of the novel he examines the books Miss Woodley has chosen to give Matilda: "One author he complained was too light, another too depressing, and put them on the shelves again; another was erroneous and he changed it for a better; and thus he warned her against some, and selected other authors; as the most cautious preceptor culls for his pupil, or a fond father for his darling child" (287-88). When Matilda receives the books, she considers them "almost like presents from her father" (288). Matilda's isolation from her father is so complete that she interprets even an act that would be considered natural and correct by any educator of the age – a father's recommendation of books for his

daughter – as a special occasion. The jarring double use of the simile here emphasizes that readers are meant to feel disturbed by Matilda's situation. Lord Elmwood is biologically Matilda's father, but the simile presents him as *like* a father caring for his child, causing readers to consider whether what Elmwood has done to his daughter actually qualifies as fatherhood. Similarly, the books he loans her are "*almost like* presents," suggesting both the extremely occasional nature of his participation in her education and the lack of real gifts (or any show of affection) in her life. Matilda's education has produced "peace" and "content" but not "happiness" for her (245), and it is the very isolation produced by her father's neglect of her that contributes to her later abduction by the villainous Lord Margrave.

Like Inchbald's Matilda, Fanny's education is of two sorts. Her intellectual education is administered well enough by her cousin Edmund, but her emotional education is, like Matilda's, engineered to produce quiet content – or lack of visible discontent – but little happiness. Living under similar conditions of patriarchal tyranny, Fanny is the victim of the same emotional neglect as Inchbald's Matilda: her opinions are rarely consulted, and when they are, it is usually to suggest that Fanny does not know her own mind, as when Sir Thomas tells her "you do not quite know your own feelings" (214). Like Matilda's mother Miss Milner, Fanny is a ward reliant on patriarchal authority for support. In contrast to Inchbald, however, Austen provides more information on the intellectual education Fanny receives, paying particular attention to the things she reads. Unlike Matilda, whose education includes traditional female "accomplishments" like music and drawing, Fanny does "not want to learn either," and she is not forced to pursue them because Sir Thomas considers her perceived inferiority to the Bertram girls desirable (16). Fanny's education is in general more liberal, more focused on her own personal needs than creating her as an object for display: the narrator remarks that Edmund "was

always true to her interests, and considerate of her feelings" when drawing up plans for her education, which the narrator regards as "assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures" (18). Unlike Maria and Julia Bertram, whose education largely consists of rote learning such as memorizing "the chronological order of the kings of England, with the dates of their accession, and most of the principal events of their reigns" (16), Edmund's intellectual nourishment of Fanny extends to her sensibilities as well: by nurturing her "fondness for reading," 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" (18). Because of this attention, Fanny learns to love reading as an activity that "charmed her leisure hours" (18). Importantly, Edmund's education of Fanny is neither a mechanical drilling of facts and figures nor an impressment onto her mind of only his own ideas, but an encouragement for Fanny to develop self-reliance and self-care in her habits of mind. Fanny has essentially no real friend in the Bertram house but Edmund, and so she turns to books to find the intellectual and emotional support that she cannot find in her own family life. As Katie Halsey notes, "[b]ooks are Fanny's primary way of understanding the world" (77). Such a turn to books, especially if the reader was unguided or isolated, and more especially if it included novels, was considered an immense danger of female reading in the period, but Austen does not present it as such. Fanny is a more mature reader than Austen's earlier reading heroines and does not fall into the same traps as they do because she has had a more appropriate education.

It is tempting to read Edmund's education of Fanny as a paternalist attempt to shape Fanny's mind in the direction that will be most pleasing to him. Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) directly comments on the problems posed by such tutelage with Clarence Hervey, whose ward Virginia, whom he has raised to be his partner since her childhood, is revealed to be dull

and insipid compared to the novel's heroine. (Edmund, perhaps unwittingly, has far better results.) Nevertheless, these early passages in *Mansfield Park* reflect an approach to education similar to that espoused by reformers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, who while skeptical of novels wrote in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that "any kind of reading I think better than leaving a blank still a blank, because the mind must receive a degree of enlargement and obtain a little strength by a slight exertion of its thinking powers" (220-221). Edmund not only "directs" Fanny's reading (which still suggests that Fanny must perform or "act upon" her reading, to make a theatrical metaphor) but encourages *her* taste. To "encourage," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, meant in Austen's era to "stimulate" but also to "promote the continuance or development of," particularly that of a "natural growth" that is already latent. Edmund's encouragement of Fanny's reading tastes, then, is precisely what the Bertram girls' education lacks: the nurturing and development of traits that already exist within her.

Despite her reputation as a wallflower, Fanny often demonstrates remarkable independence of thought. For example, in Chapter 7 – the same chapter in which Mary Crawford makes her unfortunately sexual "*Rears* and *Vices*" pun – Edmund attempts to lecture Fanny on what constitutes feminine propriety, concluding, "I am glad you saw it all as I did" (46). Although Edmund concludes that Fanny has seen it "all as he did," this remark is ironic. Fanny has in fact just offered a Wollstonecraftian view of the situation, that Mary's ideas and reactions have been shaped by her upbringing rather than any innately debased character – a proposal to which Edmund has acquiesced, not the other way around. Far from seeing things exactly as Edmund has, Fanny has proposed an alternate interpretation of Mary's behavior that Edmund has accepted. Fanny repeats this challenging behavior throughout the novel, such as when she is disappointed by not finding Mr. Rushworth's chapel like the poetic architecture of Sir Walter

Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805): "There is nothing awful here, nothing melancholy, nothing grand. Here are no aisles, no arches, no inscriptions, no banners," she says, quoting Scott as she relays her disappointment to Edmund (61). Her immediate aversion to the modern, mundane sleekness of Rushworth's chapel is rather akin to Catherine Morland's disappointment to find only washing bills in a wardrobe, rather than a Gothic manuscript of horrors. Such moments encourage the reader to see Fanny as more than a priggish wallflower cultivated in Edmund's image; she is a young lady with eclectic, often fantastical tastes. Although she acknowledges Edmund's rational Enlightenment explanation that the Rushworth chapel has been built quite recently and thus cannot have the storied history she wishes for, she also retains her right to wish for the romantic: "It was foolish of me not to think of all that, but I am disappointed" (61). Edmund may have had a role in "form[ing] her mind" but he does not control it; as the narrator remarks in Chapter 7, "he had a good chance of her thinking like him; though at this period, and on this subject [i.e., of Mary Crawford], there began now to be some danger of dissimilarity" (47). "Dissimilarity" from the male patriarchal views of female propriety is in fact what threatens all of the women in the novel, including Fanny.

The problem with Fanny's education is that, despite its making her a more self-reliant, self-cultivated individual, it also has developed her ideas of intellectual and personal freedom past a level that is considered desirable by the oppressive society she lives within. Mrs. Norris's sole education of Fanny in the eight and a half years she has lived at Mansfield Park has been to tell her that "it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer" as Henry Crawford's (226). Sir Thomas also deplores her independence of mind: when Fanny tells him she will refuse Henry's proposal, he harangues her for more than a page, saying that she has "disappointed every expectation I had formed, and proved yourself of a character the very

reverse of what I had supposed" (216). He calls her "wilful and perverse" in her belief that she "can and will decide for yourself," and accuses her of self-interest and failing to consider the "advantage or disadvantage of your family" (216). While his accusations are disturbing to both Fanny and the reader, Sir Thomas merely parrots the advice published by conservative reformers like Hannah More, who argued that girls "should be led to distrust their own judgment" (143): "Let them suspect their own plans, and reform them," she writes, "let them distrust their own principles, and correct them" (146). The emotional devastation his words work on Fanny should be enough to convince the reader that Austen's sympathies do not lie with Sir Thomas in this matter, but his error is compounded by the fact that his reaction is exceedingly similar to Mrs. Bennet's in *Pride and Prejudice*, the novel directly preceding *Mansfield Park*, upon learning that her daughter Elizabeth has rejected Mr. Collins's proposal: "She is a very headstrong foolish girl, and does not know her own interest" (123). The reader is very clearly *not* expected to sympathize with Mrs. Bennet in that instance (or, really, ever), and the notion that Elizabeth should marry Mr. Collins for the sake of an establishment is considered wrong in the face of her assertion that "You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so" (120). Fanny says nearly the same thing, in tears, in reply to Sir Thomas's accusations: "I am so perfectly convinced that I could never make him happy, and that I should be miserable myself" (217).

Austen's emphasis on the primacy of personal happiness here is not only in direct contrast to More's recommendation that young women should sublimate their own desires in favor of their parents', but also a contradiction of Wollstonecraft. Arguing against the "*sentimental*" education of young women in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft directly indicts novels as corrupting their ideas of love: "Women subjected by

ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for *happiness* in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice" (220, emphasis mine). Inchbald demonstrates her agreement with ideas such as these in the first half of *A Simple Story*, where the ill-educated Miss Milner, brought up in the sentimental, indulgent tradition deplored by writers such as More and Wollstonecraft, is "[l]ost in the maze of happiness which surrounded her," falling into the trap of considering her "power over [Dorriforth]" diminished once she is secure of his affections (Inchbald 172). Having had little agency except in her sexual power over men as a coquette, Miss Milner makes the poor decision to test Dorriforth's love by seeing "whether it would exist under ill treatment" (172). Miss Milner's plight is a corruption of self-determination: she knows (and in effect has) no other way to exercise agency than to torment men who have demonstrated interest in her. In addition, Miss Milner is – as Wollstonecraft warns against – "subjected by ignorance to [her] sensations" (Wollstonecraft 220), and this is evidenced even at the moment in which she is married to Dorriforth (now Lord Elmwood): "Never was there a more rapid change from despair to happiness—to happiness most supreme—than was that, which Miss Milner, and lord Elmwood experienced within one single hour" (Inchbald 219). These unguarded, uneducated emotions result in the now-Lady Elmwood's eventual downfall: left alone for several years by her husband, who has gone to the West Indies, she becomes "unhappy" and "at last provoked," and makes the unwise decision to "divert the melancholy hours his absence caused, by mixing in the gaiest circles of London" (223). There, she encounters the dangers of exposure to high society; as the narrator remarks, "Lady Elmwood's heart was never formed for such a state—there where all the passions tumultuous strove by turns, one among them soon found the means to occupy all

vacancies—that was love" (223). Inchbald implies here that Lady Elmwood falls from virtue not out of intentional depravity but a lack of options; raised as she has been to view romantic love and coquetry as the center of her purpose, she cannot help but fall back on it when overwhelmed by other emotions.

In contrast, Austen's Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price exercise their ability of choice – also one of the few areas in which either has personal agency – not as a test of a lover's commitment but as an acceptance that they would rather reject a marriage establishment than live in personal unhappiness. *Mansfield Park* is more radical even than *Pride and Prejudice* in its assertion of the validity of female choice: Elizabeth is absolutely justified in rejecting the ridiculous Mr. Collins, but Henry Crawford's character when Fanny refuses him is less clearly objectionable. In fact, he has some distinct personal charms, such as his handsome appearance and ability to beautifully read Shakespeare. Fanny does appear less immediately justified in rejecting Henry's proposal than Elizabeth rejecting Mr. Collins's, and yet Austen clearly presents her choice as proper for no other reason than that she is convinced she would be unhappy with him. Despite Fanny's valuation of *happiness* in a marriage, she has not fallen into the trap Wollstonecraft says novels encourage, of adopting sentimental or silly ideas that lead her into vice.

Although Austen's presentation of Fanny's choice clearly vindicates it, the novel also emphasizes the untenable position Fanny occupies as a result of the patriarchal system she lives within. As Olivia Murphy notes, it was common in the idealized families promoted by conservative writers like More and Maria Edgeworth that "a young woman's rejection of a marriage proposal – even of an acknowledged disinclination to a gentleman – receives the full and unalloyed support of her parents" (118). She cites the example of Lucilla Stanley's rejection

of an inappropriate proposal in More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809) and Mr. Carlton's reaction to it: "when I saw Lucilla, a girl of eighteen, refuse a young nobleman of a clear estate, and neither disagreeable in his person or manner, on the single avowed ground of his loose principles; when the noble rejection of the daughter was supported by the parents, whose principles no arguments drawn from rank or fortune could subvert or shake—I was *convinced*" (More 251). More liberal writers such as Charlotte Smith and Elizabeth Inchbald instead show the heroine besieged by unwanted lovers and isolated from family support. In Smith's *Emmeline* or *Celestina*, for example, the heroine is an orphan with no defense against unwanted romantic advances but to physically flee from them. In Inchbald's *A Simple Story*, the heroine Matilda is abducted by the rapacious Margrave precisely because he anticipates no retribution from her neglectful father. Fanny's situation differs from both Smith's and Inchbald's heroines: not literally an orphan, Fanny is in fact surrounded by family when she receives the unwanted proposal. Yet this powerful patriarchy, tasked with protecting her, does not provide the support exemplified by conservative texts; Sir Thomas, in fact, draws his *only* arguments in favor of Fanny's marrying Henry Crawford from his notions of Henry's "rank" and "fortune." Fanny occupies an untenable position: although her education has largely shaped her into the ideal woman of More's conservative prescriptions – quiet, reserved, gentle – her compliance with the recommendations of the patriarchy are not repaid with kindness and support. Far from being the source of benevolent support, as conservatives argued, Austen's Bertram patriarchy is oppressive, even violent, in its treatment of Fanny. However, as the next section will argue, both Inchbald and Austen extend their critique of the patriarchy past its harmful effects on women. Both authors also go to some lengths to show the damage that patriarchy does to men as well,

offering the "subtle critique of masculinity" that Anne Mellor argues is central to the project of many Romantic novels ("A Novel" 332).

The Problem of Patriarchy

When *A Simple Story* was published in 1791, it met with generally positive reviews (Lott 369), but perhaps surprisingly to modern readers, who may be accustomed to focusing on the heroines of romance novels, reviews tended to focus most on Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood as the principal character. The *Critical Review* gushed over the novel as inspiring "delight" and "rapture," but remarks that "there is but one hero, Dorriforth," in the novel (207). Mary Wollstonecraft's unsigned review of *A Simple Story* for the *Analytical Review* (May 1791) states that the reader is never "at a loss to say which is the hero of the tale" (qtd in Lott 381). The *Gentleman's Magazine* raved that "[h]er principal character, the Roman Catholic lord, is perfectly new" (255). The *Monthly Review*, too, believed *A Simple Story* to be largely about Dorriforth: "To give a picture of Lord Elmwood, in all these trying circumstances, as well in his conduct to his wife, who had dishonoured him, as to the daughter, who was his issue by that wife, is the main design of Mrs. Inchbald's *Simple Story*" (436). Novelist Maria Edgeworth, an enthusiastic reader of *A Simple Story*, exclaimed in a letter to Inchbald: "I am glad I have never met with a Dorriforth, for I must inevitably have fallen desperately in love with him" (Edgeworth 385). For many contemporary readers, Dorriforth was a character of equal interest and importance to the novel's two heroines, if not even more.

As mentioned earlier, Dorriforth begins the novel as a Roman Catholic priest. He is summoned to the deathbed of his friend, Miss Milner's father, who entrusts him with his daughter's upbringing. Dorriforth's first feeling on the subject is that "he had undertaken a task

he was too weak to execute" (62), a thought which positions him as lacking power, not embodying authority. Despite his friend Miss Woodley's cheerful observations – bolstered by the writings of the period – that Miss Milner's mind may be "improved" through "good company, good books, experience, and the misfortunes of others" (65-6), Dorriforth remains despairing, wishing with a "manly sorrow" that he had "never known her father" (65). Dorriforth thus begins the novel in a position very similar to Sir Thomas Bertram: the reluctant guardian of a young woman whose potential is as yet unknown. However, Inchbald continually encourages the reader to question whether this male character truly has as much power as he seems to (a technique also used in Smith's *Celestina*, published in the same year). For example, the patriarchal social structure requires Dorriforth to abandon his initial religious convictions and leave the Roman Catholic Church to which he had made sacred vows. As the only viable heir to the Elmwood title, Dorriforth has little choice but to submit his life and even his name to the patriarchy, a powerlessness that contrasts sharply with his attempts to exercise power over first his wife and then his daughter. Unlike Sir Thomas, then, Dorriforth's position within the patriarchy at the beginning of the novel is involuntary and uncertain. Brian McCrea suggests that Dorriforth is "the victim of the requirements of patrilinear succession" just as much as either heroine (171).

Dorriforth has also been failed by his education. He experiences intense emotions; Inchbald's first description of him is typical of a romantic hero, on whose "you beheld the feelings of his heart—saw all its inmost workings—the quick pulses that beat with hope and fear, or the placid ones that were stationary with patient resignation" (64). Yet because of his education, he does not know how to handle these feelings and chooses to repress, rather than govern, them: the narrator explicitly remarks that his "heart was not formed (at least not

educated) for love" (88). Immediately following this statement, the narrator describes the model of Jesuit education that Dorriforth and his relative the young lord Elmwood have received: extremely patriarchal, the "Preceptor" holds "with a magisterial power the government of his pupils' passions" that is so effective that "no one could perceive (nor did the young lord [Elmwood] himself know) that he had any" (89). Rather than teach its pupils to effectively govern their own feelings, the educational institution represses them in the attempt to transfer that governance to an authority figure. In this situation Dorriforth is much like the first heroine, Miss Milner, who also experiences intense feelings but has little idea of how to regulate them effectively, and who is also expected by society to govern her feelings even as society attempts to deprive her of the necessary agency to do so. As G.J. Barker-Benfield notes, the eighteenth century was intensely preoccupied by the "tension between the high evaluation of refinement in men and the wish to square it with manliness," a tension which "permeated the eighteenth-century novel, whatever the sex of the writer" (141). Dorriforth embodies this tension.

Dorriforth and Sir Thomas are distant both from the women in their respective worlds and their readers. As Jane Spencer notes, the reader is privy to Miss Milner's interiority but not Dorriforth's; the narrator "informs us of his religious principles, goodness, generosity, and feeling heart, but—apart from his gentleness towards Miss Milner whenever she is miserable or submissive—they seem very little in evidence" (xviii). In fact, Inchbald subtly suggests that his emotional distance from his wife is partly responsible for her fall from virtue because he never admits her to his confidence: his cagey letters do not tell her of the illness that keeps him in the West Indies for so long, making only feeble but "frequent apologies for not returning" (Inchbald 223). Inchbald's narrator remarks that these letters were "calculated, but not intended, to inspire" Lady Elmwood's "suspicion and resentment" (223). When Lord Elmwood returns to discover

that his unfaithful wife has fled from him in fear and shame, Inchbald condemns him for his lack of mercy (224). Sir Thomas Bertram, another patriarch who returns from the West Indies to find his home in disarray, would likely remind readers of Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood's transgressions. Sir Thomas's similarity to Inchbald's patriarch undermines any interpretation of Sir Thomas as a stable figure of benevolent authority in *Mansfield Park.* And, like Dorriforth, Sir Thomas's emotional unavailability is to blame for much of his family's misfortune. He is so much of a mystery that his own daughters do not understand him, and his education seems equally to blame as Dorriforth's. As a baronet, he undoubtedly would have been trained by excellent tutors or sent to an elite public school, followed by time at university.[76] Yet, as Austen quickly notes, this education is hardly a guarantee of moral character; after all, Tom Bertram's prodigal spending at school forces Sir Thomas to sell a living that should have gone to Edmund, depriving him of "more than half the income which ought to be his" (18-19). Neither patriarch takes the feelings or needs of his children into account, a dismissiveness mirrored in Tom's easy banishment of any guilt over his extravagance. Sir Thomas has taught neither his daughters nor his sons to empathize, presumably because he was not taught himself. Sir Thomas's emotional distance from his family emphasizes his kinship to Dorriforth, who physically distances himself from his daughter because he is unprepared to deal with his emotions regarding her and her mother.

In Tom Bertram and Henry Crawford, Austen continues to extend Inchbald's critique of education. Almost immediately, Mary Crawford remarks of her brother Henry that he is "the most horrible flirt that can be imagined" (32). She attributes this characteristic directly to *his* education: "I assure you he is very detestable," she says, "the admiral's lessons have quite

[76] For a fascinating discussion of the gentry and traditions of education, see *Making Men: The Formation of Elite Male Identities in England, C. 1660-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) by Mark Rothery and Henry French.

spoiled him" (33). "The admiral" is the same figure whom the narrator has already introduced as "a man of vicious conduct, who chose, instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his own roof" (30). *Vicious*, as used in Austen's era, carried principally connotations of vice (later played on in Mary's pun about "*Rears* and *Vices*" [44]), particularly of that which is "depraved" and "immoral."[77] Thus, although Henry himself may not yet exhibit the signs of explicit depravity as did his tutor in sexual behavior, his education has not been a proper one, and neither has his sister's; it is hardly a wonder that they exhibit sexually inappropriate conversation and behavior, given such an upbringing.

Male education in fact forms the center of a conversation between Henry and Edmund that Fanny observes "with great entertainment":

> The subject of reading aloud was further discussed. The two young men were the only talkers, but they, standing by the fire, talked over the too common neglect of the qualification, the total inattention to it, in the ordinary school-system for boys, the consequently natural—yet in some instances almost unnatural degree of ignorance and uncouthness of men, of sensible and well-informed men, when suddenly called to the necessity of reading aloud. (230)

Edmund again condones performance of a role, here the necessity of improving the clergy's performance of preaching because "distinctness and energy may have weight in recommending the most solid truths" and dull preachers make unhappy congregations (230). Surprisingly, this statement comes *after* the Mansfield Theatricals, in which Henry has shown that he is capable of reading with significant "distinctness and energy" but with no real character or morality. Henry

[77] OED, "vicious," adj.

Crawford's lack of character is directly linked to his "great dislike" of "any thing like permanence of abode, or limitation of society" (31), which speaks ill of the education that ought to have formed him for responsibility as a patriarch within a patriarchal society. Henry's distaste for permanence and stability foreshadows his involvement with the theatricals as well; as Jocelyn Harris notes, part of the distrust of actors common in Austen's time was that they lived "without a habitation and a name" (Harris). Such instability also inhibits Henry's ability to understand himself, which Fanny points out; "wearied at last into speaking" by Henry's persistent pursuit of her, she exclaims "perhaps, Sir, I thought it was a pity you did not always know yourself as well as you seemed to do at that moment" (233). Her most significant critique of Henry throughout the novel is that "he can feel nothing as he ought" (156), a charge that can be leveled at all of the men – and most of the women – in *A Simple Story* and *Mansfield Park*.

Performing an Education

"Feeling as one ought" is at the heart of both *A Simple Story* and *Mansfield Park,* which Austen's use of Inchbald's play, *Lover's Vows*, as its pivotal "setpiece" (pun intended) emphasizes. Both Inchbald's and Austen's novels argue that an education of the feelings is equally important to an education of the mind, showing the devastation that occurs when characters cannot feel as they ought or properly govern the feelings they experience. Austen's employment of the "Mansfield Theatricals," as Julia Bertram names them, allows her to comment extensively on the importance of the ability to rightly interpret – in other words, to "read" correctly – and the role of performance, both literal and figurative, in her society. The Mansfield Theatricals take up a nearly unheard-of amount of space in *Mansfield Park*; the same novel that dismisses Fanny and Edmund's entire courtship in less than a paragraph spends *seven*

chapters following the youths' transformation of Mansfield Park into a theatre and their ill-fated attempts at acting. Acting is dangerous for the Mansfield Park youth precisely because it encourages them to feel things they ought not and to perform a simulacrum of emotions rather than genuinely experience them.

The distrust of acting had already been established in eighteenth-century fiction and culture. As Juliet McMaster argues, Samuel Richardson – Austen's favorite author – uses the language of theatre to highlight the dangers of his villain, Lovelace, in *Clarissa* (1748); while Clarissa's gestures and language express her real feelings, Lovelace's are always performances (104-5). Inchbald, herself an expert in the theatre, refers to her villain Margrave's schemes as "mature for performance" (Inchbald 327), and his abduction of Matilda has elements of the theatrical to it: Margrave stages a fire alarm and urges everyone to leave the house, absconding with Matilda in the ensuing confusion. Even his interactions with her in her captivity are acting: he reassures himself that he is still virtuous by telling himself that "[i]t was his design to plead, to argue, to implore, nay even to threaten, long before he put his threats in force" (331). Even having sunk so low as to kidnap a young woman to become his mistress, Margrave still believes that he can play a convincing part and thus win her affections.

The language in the seven chapters involving the Mansfield Theatricals hammer home the lack of genuine empathy and feeling amongst all the characters except Fanny. Even Edmund does not emerge unscathed, having failed to use his position of moral authority (he is the one training to become a clergyman, after all) to halt the theatricals or protect Fanny from anxiety and embarrassment. The foolish peer John Yates initiates the theatricals by complaining that he was robbed of his rightful role in a play by the inconvenient death of a family friend, who "'could not have died at a worse time'," according to him (87). The popinjay Mr. Rushworth is

"too much engaged with what his own appearance would be, to think of the others" (97). Edmund attempts to quash the play by claiming that hosting theatricals in his father's house unbeknownst to him would "show great want of feeling on my father's account" (89). Yet while Edmund perceives the danger of theatricals as encouraging the young people to play roles improper to their real characters, Austen reveals to her novel's readers that the *real* danger of the play is not that her characters become other people through acting, but that the performance heightens their real and unsympathetic natures.

In a novel so thoroughly engaged with the work of one of the eighteenth century's most popular playwrights, from a novelist who clearly enjoyed the theatre, such anti-theatrical sentiments seem peculiar. However, Austen's critique of the theatre is not the same as that found in Hannah More's writing, another author with whom *Mansfield Park* is in deep conversation. Hannah More was herself a former playwright, and had hoped that her plays would serve a didactic function: in her "Preface to the Tragedies" (1801), More writes that "[f]rom my youthful course of reading, and early habits of society and conversation, aided perhaps by that natural but secret bias which the inclination gives to the judgment, I had been led to entertain that common, but, as I must now think, delusive and groundless hope, that the Stage, under certain regulations, might be converted into a school of virtue" ("Preface" 2). More later saw the theatre as a significant moral danger, particularly to young women: a young woman exposed to drama "will value herself in proportion as she thinks she could imitate the heroine….By frequent repetition, especially if there be a taste for romance and poetry in the innocent young mind, the feelings are easily transplanted from the theatre to the closet; they are made to become a standard of action, and are brought home as the regulators of life and manners" (38-39). In the Romantic tradition, as playwrights such as Joanna Baillie demonstrate, "closet dramas" were both popular and

considered to be effectively didactic. Furthermore, as Catherine Burroughs argues, More also encouraged women to *read* plays at home as part of their education (which Inchbald's heroine, Matilda, does), creating something of a paradox by connecting "theater and drama with domestic and private settings" (96). Austen's critique of the theatre is far more complex, as is to be expected, and shows arguments against the theatricals based on precepts such as More's to be incorrect. When Edmund argues that it would be unpleasant to see acting by those who "have not been bred to the trade" – a common way of distancing the dangers of acting from the rest of society – but instead by a "set of gentlemen and ladies, who have all the disadvantages of education and decorum to struggle through," readers must immediately recognize the flaw in his argument. Except for Fanny and himself, none of the gentlemen and ladies involved have either education or decorum to begin with. The theatricals themselves are not to blame for this insufficiency.

Austen uses *Lovers' Vows* to comment on the performance, both private and public, of an appropriate identity. These performances are always more demanding of women than of men, as demonstrated by another of Edmund's seemingly endless objections to the theatricals, that the situation of Maria (who is engaged to be married to Mr. Rushworth) is "'extremely delicate'" and might be subject to improper interpretation should the play proceed (*MP* 89). Yet, as in her other novels, Austen's verdict on this performance is complicated, and her intertextual weaving of *A Simple Story* and *Lovers' Vows* into this crucial scene highlights this complexity. As several scholars have noted, Austen's use of *Lovers' Vows* in *Mansfield Park* deliberately places Mary and Edmund in the roles of coquette and clergyman occupied by Amelia and Anhalt in

Inchbald's play.[78] Paula Byrne also notes that a similar structure appears in Inchbald's novel, *A Simple Story,* the roles there occupied by the coquettish Miss Milner and the serious priest Dorriforth. Yet the intertextual complexity of Austen's choice here is rarely fully explored. After all, Inchbald rewards Miss Milner with her chosen lover in a desperately passionate, highly theatrical scene that teases the reader until the last possible moment with the possibility that the two, who clearly are in agonies of love for one another, might not communicate their feelings to one another and instead live out lives of isolation and desperation. *Lovers' Vows* also sees the sexually desirous Amelia (and socially superior, as a baron's daughter) confess her love to the poor clergyman Anhalt and be rewarded with him as a husband at the play's end. It is therefore difficult to argue without qualification that Inchbald condemns the expression of real desire by young women, even when it is done in violation of the traditional rules of courtship.

Mary Crawford, therefore, performing the role of Amelia, has little reason to think that her performance will not be successful: she has two highly popular models on which to base her expectations. She initially even believes herself to be successful: like Miss Milner, who gloats that her performance of the coquette has made the "grave, the sanctified, the anchorite Dorriforth" the "veriest slave of love" (Inchbald 138), Mary also exults that her acting forced Edmund's "sturdy spirit to bend" (Austen, *MP* 243). Austen's readers, too, would also face a dilemma of interpretation: given Mary Crawford's similarities to Inchbald's two coquettes, is she more likely to end up destroying herself, like *A Simple Story*'s Miss Milner, or to be rewarded with her desired partner, like Amelia in *Lovers' Vows*? In echoing Inchbald's characters with Mary, Austen urges her readers to predict – much as Inchbald asks of readers with Matilda at the

[78] See, for example, Syndy McMillen Conger, "Reading *Lovers' Vows*: Jane Austen's Reflections on English Sense and German Sensibility," *Studies in Philology* 85.1 (Winter 1988): 92-113, and Paula Byrne, "*A Simple Story*: From Inchbald to Austen," *Romanticism* 5 (1999): 161-71.

end of her novel – Mary's fate based on their familiarity not only with her previous actions but also their resonances with her predecessors' behavior. Such prediction requires the active exercise of "Ingenuity" by readers, disallowing the kind of shallow, casual reading engaged in by the problematic readers in Austen's novel.

For Austen, *performing* the act of reading is not enough. Henry Crawford, an elegant and emotive reader of Shakespeare, is revealed at the end to be a morally bankrupt seducer. Mary Crawford, also a skilled performer, allows herself to identify overmuch with the character she plays, using the character as an excuse to express her own passions and schemes. The Bertram girls have read and can regurgitate volumes of history, but have no understanding of feeling or propriety. Even Edmund, the novel's supposed hero, often misreads his cousin Fanny. Fanny, on the other hand, who "cannot act," is demonstrated to have been a far more perceptive reader than the other characters have considered her. Interpretation is key for the characters of *Mansfield Park*, and those who focus solely on exterior performance and perception are doomed to fail. So, too, are the readers like Mary Crawford, who identify with the characters they read without taking a critical distance. In Fanny Price, with whom it is not necessarily immediately gratifying or even "flattering—and rewarding—to identify" (Poovey 212), Austen's readers are presented with a heroine whom they must approach with critical interpretation as well as passion.

Austen shows that the pressure on women to perform in *Mansfield Park* extends well past the mishaps of the Mansfield Theatricals. Mary Crawford's great flaw seems to be that she cares more for public perception than private virtue. With Mary Crawford, Austen extends *A Simple Story*'s commentary on public performances of femininity. In Inchbald's novel, Miss Milner's casually flirtatious behavior is mostly presented as disturbing because of its direct effect on the serious Dorriforth, who feels used and neglected by Miss Milner's continued capriciousness once

he confesses his love for her; she uses her coquetry to "test" his love despite his protestations. Austen judges Mary Crawford more harshly, despite her actual lack of vice in the novel. Whereas Miss Milner actually does have an affair while her husband is gone, Mary Crawford is only party to her brother's affair; her perception of that misconduct may be problematic, but she is not guilty of sexual offense herself. Mary's greatest fault is actually her defense of her brother's immoral actions: as Fanny thinks to herself, "[h]er eager defence of her brother, her hope of its being *hushed up*, her evident agitation, were all of a piece with something very bad" (299). Like Miss Milner, Mary's flirtations – the only education she has ever received – ultimately go awry, for her education has taught her to perform, but not to interpret. At the end of *Mansfield Park*, she and Edmund run into each other after her brother Henry's seduction of Edmund's married sister Maria. Mary, perhaps still too identified with her fictional role as Edmund's onstage lover, fails to accurately read the situation and attempts to regain Edmund's affection through coquetry: she speaks to Edmund, he says, "with a smile—but it was a smile ill-suited to the conversation that had passed, a saucy playful smile, seeming to invite, in order to subdue me; at least, it appeared so to me." (311). Edmund blames her failure on a "corrupted, vitiated mind," but her fault extends deeper than that. Mary Crawford's true failing is that her feelings are uneducated, and she has never learned to empathize with others: Edmund remarks that that he was dismayed by her "total ignorance, unsuspiciousness of there being such feelings" (309). Mary cannot suspect that anyone would treat the matter of marital infidelity in any way other than she has been taught by the school of moral neglect. Mary's flaw, as characterized by Edmund, is that she saw her brother's moral failure "only as folly, and that folly stamped only by exposure;" he remarks with horror that "it was the detection, not the offence which she reprobated" (309). Yet Austen reveals that Sir Thomas's principal concern is the same as Mary

Crawford's; his letters from London reflect that "[e]very thing was by that time public beyond hope" and his daughter's reputation cannot be rescued (306). Even after the discovery of his daughter's transgression – a transgression that the lack of a proper education encouraged – Sir Thomas cares more about the public discovery of her immorality than the action itself, highlighting the hypocrisy of performance (306).

Mary's greatest flaw, according to Fanny, is that "[s]he had only learnt to think nothing of consequence but money" (296). Such an outlook is directly the result of an improper education, as both More and Wollstonecraft argue: if a woman is told that her principal goal is through marriage to "*make the most of herself*," as More puts it (*Strictures* 84), then it cannot be surprising that she would in essence sell herself to the highest marital bidder. Even Fanny, who comes to intensely dislike Mary, defends her initial indiscretions as "[t]he effect of education" (Austen, *MP* 184) and to the last believes that Mary could have been "excellent…had she fallen into good hands earlier" (312). Yet while Mary is punished for this transactional way of thinking, it is not at all different from the way Sir Thomas considers matrimony. He is elated when Maria becomes engaged to the fabulously wealthy Mr. Rushworth[79]: as the narrator remarks, "Sir Thomas…was truly happy in the prospect of an alliance so unquestionably advantageous….It was a connection of exactly the right sort; in the same county, and the same interest" (30). His "cold sternness" when scolding Fanny for refusing Henry's proposal is couched in financial language as well; he chides her for not considering the "advantage or disadvantage of your family" and reiterates that it is unlikely she will be approached again by "a man of half Mr. Crawford's estate" (216). Henry himself uses similar financial language when urging his

[79] With over £12,000 pounds a year, Rushworth is substantially wealthier even than Mr. Darcy, who has "only" £10,000 a year.

proposal again to Fanny, saying that he "has the best right to a return" (233). Such a proposal characterizes Fanny as an investment that will turn a profit for Henry, uncomfortably similar language to the novel's references to West Indian slavery. Despite Sir Thomas's supposed disillusionment with "ambitions and mercenary connections" at the end of the novel, the narrator nevertheless refers to Fanny as a "repayment" of his "liberality" (320) in free-indirect discourse indistinguishable from Henry Crawford's language. Readers must question whether Sir Thomas has actually learned anything from the fall of his daughter if he can convince himself that he no longer cares about "mercenary" concerns yet frame Fanny becoming his daughter-in-law in explicitly financial language.

Fanny, too, must perform constantly, despite her refusal to "act." As Olivia Murphy notes, it is often difficult to "distinguish between Fanny's words, those of the narrator, and the impressions made in the mind of the reader" (95). The reader is often within Fanny's consciousness and is thus party to her private thoughts as well as her public actions, which often contradict one another. In many instances the narrator makes remarks such as "Fanny coloured, and said nothing" (154), "With silent indignation, Fanny repeated to herself" (155), "She was more silent than ever" (207), "She could say no more" (214), "She longed to add…but her heart sunk" (215), or "Fanny was silent" (145, 262). These recurrences consistently remind readers that Fanny is in fact performing a role all the time; that of the outwardly dutiful daughter. Despite her outward silence, however, Fanny has a great many thoughts, and as her interactions with both Edmund and her uncle Sir Thomas show, she often is more discerning than the men who are meant to take charge of her – a situation that, as Katie Halsey has noted, "the writers of conduct books do not envisage" (52). While Fanny's thoughts regarding Mary Crawford are undeniably tinged with jealousy, she is also a keen observer of what is wrong with Mary's

behavior. For example, near the beginning of the novel, the Crawfords, Bertrams, and Fanny have gone to visit Mr. Rushworth's chapel. Mary Crawford, deaf to how she might come across to her companions and to situational propriety, makes a flippant remark about religion, saying that she imagines the "former belles of the house of Rushworth" attended chapel services with "unwilling feelings" (Austen, *MP* 62). Fanny's reaction shows that she observes both the social impropriety of making disrespectful remarks (especially while still inside a house of worship!) and the personal affront to the future clergyman, Edmund, who is in the party: she "coloured and looked at Edmund" (62). When Mary's shock at hearing that Edmund is soon to take orders crosses her face, Fanny is the only character who appears to notice it. The third-person narrator begins the sentence by drawing attention to the fact that "Miss Crawford's countenance…might have amused a disinterested observer" (63-4) and then notes that "Fanny pitied her. 'How distressed she will be at what she said just now,' passed across her mind" (64-5). The subjunctive tense proposes that Fanny is *not* a disinterested observer, which the reader already knows, but it also draws attention to the act of observing, which in this situation appears to be performed only by Fanny. In this case, it turns out, Fanny is both correct and incorrect: Mary does express embarrassment over her comments, but the narrative later reveals that it was her dismay to learn her chosen love interest was to be a clergyman, not her dismay over inappropriate remarks, that caused the expression.

Fanny is also more discerning regarding Henry Crawford than any of her adoptive family, including Sir Thomas. While Sir Thomas attributes her refusal of Henry to Fanny's stubborn attempts to "decide for [her]self" (216), the *reader* knows that her dislike of Henry stems from stronger stuff than a conviction of their incompatible temperaments. When Sir Thomas asks Fanny where she has any reason to "think ill of Mr. Crawford's temper?" Fanny replies "No,

Sir," but in a characteristic move for the novel, the narrator continues that Fanny "longed to add, 'but of his principles I have;' but her heart sunk under the appalling prospect of discussion, explanation, and probably nonconviction" (215). Faced with the frightening oppression of a patriarch who sees no reason to listen to a woman's thoughts or feelings, Fanny chooses to retreat, but Austen reveals at the end of the novel that her convictions of Henry's principles are justified. Had Sir Thomas bothered to listen to Fanny, his family might have been spared the humiliation of his daughter's adultery.

At the end of the novel, Sir Thomas comes to the conclusion that his education of his daughters has been the most "grievous mismanagement" (314). Like Lord Elmwood's harsh isolation of his daughter in *A Simple Story,* Sir Thomas made himself unapproachable to his daughters, "teaching them to repress their spirits in his presence, [so] as to make their real disposition unknown to him" (314). Yet, like Edmund – who more than once states of Mary that her "mind itself was tainted" (184) – Sir Thomas also seems to impute his daughters' failings to "something…wanting *within*" (314). Both Edmund and Sir Thomas appear to believe, as was quite common among conservatives, that women's minds and characters are naturally less strong or moral than men's. Such a belief allows patriarchs to at least partially escape blame when the programs of education they have designed go awry. Despite appearing to have discovered his faults as a father, Sir Thomas still appears to believe himself a source of moral authority at the end of the novel, a troubling conclusion for readers who have been paying attention throughout the narrative. For example, the narrator reports through Sir Thomas's perspective that the silly peer Mr. Yates, who wishes to marry Julia Bertram, is "disposed to look up to [Sir Thomas] and be guided" (313), but given how disastrously Sir Thomas has managed his family up to this point, it is difficult to see this as a positive development.

The Sense of an Ending: Not Such a Simple Story

Like many novels of the era, *A Simple Story* employs dual contrasting heroines.[80] Unusually, rather than the heroines being sisters, cousins, or friends, as is typically the case in domestic-sentimental fiction, the two heroines of *A Simple Story* are mother and daughter and almost never interact. In fact, the mother dies almost as soon as the reader is informed she has a child, and the narrative skips seventeen years forward in time, causing what the *Critical Review*'s reviewer of the novel called a "pain of vacancy" (208). The deceased or absent mother is a common trope in late-eighteenth-century novels, although her influence was commonly still felt in the narrative; Jill Campbell argues that "the notion of an inheritance of experience from generation to generation, especially from mother to daughter – and especially as transmitted in the form of a text penned by a dead or missing mother – is a powerful and pervasive one in the late-eighteenth century and Romantic-era novel" (163). In Inchbald's novel, however, no such inheritance of experience is transmitted. Readers of *A Simple Story* observe Miss Milner's experience unfold and could, potentially, learn from it the dangers of uneducated sensibilities. Matilda, however, can learn no such thing. Matilda's "inheritance" from her mother consists of the burden of her sins without an understanding of the narrative that led to them, so she cannot apply lessons from her mother's experience to her own life.

Inchbald's narrative division rejects the typical mode for fiction of its genre, in which the reader observes the characters of the two heroines unfold and develop in parallel over the timeline of the novel. Instead, the reader first experiences the whole narrative of the vivacious Miss Milner and then the whole narrative of her more subdued daughter, Matilda. Such a

[80] For other examples, see (among many, many others) Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloise* (1761), Frances Burney's *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), and Austen's own *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

structural choice problematizes the didactic function of the dual-heroine novel, which encourages readers to observe parallels and divergences between the women and assign them causes from which the "right" path may be discerned. In Rousseau's *Julie* (1761), for example, the narrative of the good-hearted but overpassionate Julie and her fall from virtue contrasts with that of her best friend, the rational yet affectionate Claire. In Maria Edgeworth's eponymous novel *Belinda* (1802), the "wild" and unladylike Harriet Freke and Lady Delacour serve to highlight Belinda's virtue and warn against indiscretion. Susan Ferrier's *Marriage* (1810) offers a failed mother, Juliana, whose twin daughters Adelaide and Mary function as "exemplars of faulty and successful female education, respectively" (Mellor, "A Novel" 334); Adelaide follows her mother's example and slides into scheming and sexual immorality while Mary is raised by her noble aunt, from whom she learns the virtues of religion and restraint. Restructuring the novel so that readers encounter first one and then another largely discrete narrative calls into question the tidiness of this formula: after all, Matilda lives a life of oppression despite her impeccable character because of her mother's faults (and, crucially, her father's too), not her own. It also makes it much more difficult for readers to hold both narratives in their minds at once for any pedagogical purposes; as the reviewer in the *Critical Review* noted, the reader's "mind never loses sight of the first heroine, till she no longer occupies the scene, but gives place to Matilda: and the reader's thoughts are then as intensely fixed on the daughter, as they before had been on her mother" (207-8). To compare the daughter's narrative to the mother's requires a more active extension of the reader's recall and imagination – suggesting it might also prompt more reflection than the traditional narrative structure.

The beginning of *Mansfield Park* also offers a version of *A Simple Story*'s division, albeit in miniature. Rather than beginning *in medias res,* as *Pride and Prejudice* had, or even with the

past family patriarch, as with *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park* begins "thirty years ago" and relates the fortunes of the Ward sisters. Their very surname associates them with the orphan narrative so trendy in the fiction of Inchbald's era, and Miss Maria Ward appears to make good on the tendency of the orphan in such novels to discover her aristocratic background and achieve the ultimate goal: making a good marriage. Maria's good fortune even appears, like Burney's or Smith's orphan heroines, to be based on her personal virtue and charms rather than her social standing, as her uncle "allowed her to be at least three thousand pounds short of any equitable claim" to her match with Sir Thomas Bertram (5).

Following Maria Ward's fortuitous marriage, Austen plays merry havoc with her novel's timeline. A "half a dozen years" pass before her sister Miss Ward finds a husband, and at least eleven years are then dismissed with a single phrase, "By the end of eleven years" (6). Another "twelvemonth" after that passes with a single word (7). Much of Fanny Price's childhood is incorporated by the single sentence describing that "with all her faults of ignorance and timidity" Fanny "grew up [at Mansfield Park] not unhappily among her cousins" (17). These temporal shifts occur so rapidly, and pass with such little notice, that they provide significant potential for disorientation quite similar to that provoked by Inchbald's seventeen-year leap forward in narrative time. They also require a greater-than-average level of attention from the reader if they wish to know at what point in time the bulk of the novel actually takes place, emphasizing Austen's requirement that her readers read actively and with "Ingenuity."

These temporal dislocations achieve several goals. In Inchbald's case, splitting her narrative into two nearly discrete parts refuses the unified narrative progression generally expected from heroine-centered romances such those made popular by Frances Burney and

Charlotte Smith.[81] As Jo Alyson Parker puts it, the novel's structure is "testimony to Inchbald's inability to reconcile the contradictory cultural expectations facing women and women writers in the late eighteenth century" (257). Unable to truthfully construct a narrative that allows women to successfully exercise independence and agency in a world of patriarchal oppression, Inchbald chooses instead to emphasize the bedeviled choices women have available: to exercise their limited power over men in a type of sexual tyranny and end unhappily, or to submissively conform to the restrictions encoded within social structures and end ambiguously. Austen's novel expresses a similar perspective, not only through its initial temporal dislocations but in presenting the comparison between Fanny's life at Mansfield Park and her life in her "home" at Portsmouth. Like the heroines of *A Simple Story*, Fanny has no good options for most of the novel. She is ignored, overworked, and rarely cared for at Mansfield Park, but the education she has received – thanks almost entirely to the influence of her cousin Edmund – has also unfit her to live at the home of her biological parents, with whom she is mutually incomprehensible. Like Inchbald's Miss Milner and Matilda, Fanny is overlooked by the systems of power she lives under, her presence only noted when she transgresses expectations.

The conclusions of both novels further emphasize the untenable position of women in contemporary society. *A Simple Story* ends in a mire of contradictions: Matilda ultimately obtains the freedom to assert herself in her choice of marriage partner, but only because her father "his Lordship has told" her she may (341). Her disheartened suitor, her cousin Rushbrook, believes he cannot marry her because he has already received a rejection from her father –

[81] Charlotte Smith is frequently categorized as a Jacobin novelist, although her early books, centered on the stories of young women rather than young men, progress in a unified, linear fashion much as Burney's do. The Jacobin novel, which Gary Kelly identifies as beginning with Thomas Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* (1792) and ending with William Godwin's *Fleetwood* (1805) (Kelly 12), had radical ideas regarding politics and the structure of the novel and rejected many fictional conventions, including those of linear storytelling and narrative closure. Inchbald's novels are rightly considered Jacobin.

relying on the traditional patriarchal structure in which fathers, not daughters, have the power of decision. He indirectly proposes to his cousin Matilda, who has already agreed (with her father, not with her suitor) to "grant him what he has requested" before she knows what Rushbrook will ask (340-41). Then the narrator interrupts, commenting that "Whether the heart of Matilda, such as it has been described, *could* sentence him to misery, the reader is left to surmise – and if he supposes that it did not, he has every reason to suppose their wedded life was a life of happiness" (342). Inchbald's ending, although it does conclude the novel gesturing toward the expected heterosexual marriage, also emphasizes the ambiguity of women's position within the hierarchy of power. As the uncomfortable almost-rape scene with Margrave earlier in the novel emphasizes, Matilda's "proper" submission to her father's tyrannous wishes does not protect her or assure her a happy heterosexual ending. Inchbald leaves the *reader* to decide whether Matilda will end up married; essentially, Matilda goes unrewarded (at least explicitly) for her compliance with patriarchal norms. Yet, as the novel shows, even the expected marriage plot cannot guarantee the looked-for reward; readers will remember that Miss Milner won the husband of her choosing in the first half of the novel, despite her flawed behavior, yet is dissatisfied with the marriage.

Austen echoes this ambiguity with her language at the ending of *Mansfield Park*. After Mary Crawford's departure, Edmund begins to consider "whether a very different kind of woman might not do just as well – or a great deal better" (319). After this admittedly unromantic epiphany, the narrator intrudes with one of the novel's few first-person passages:

> I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people. – I only

> intreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (319)

The paradoxical nature of phrases such as "the cure of unconquerable passions" or "the transfer of unchanging attachments" has the effect of ironically undermining Edmund's affections for Fanny; after all, if his feelings for Mary really were "unconquerable" and "unchanging," how could he have transferred them to Fanny? And would a heroine even wish to be the recipient of "transferred" love, rather than love that was uniquely inspired by herself? The novel's end also returns to the temporal instability of its beginning, enhancing the potential for disorientation and confusion posed by Edward's paradoxical emotional actions. *Mansfield Park*'s ending reinforces just how subjective the conventions of the marriage plot are; after all, if "every body" may define the appropriate amount of courtship time as they wish, the union that supposedly brings foundational stability to society appears, like the timeline itself, remarkably unstable.

Austen further destabilizes her ending by implying that Fanny's sense of duty not only could, but "must," have led her to a decision to marry Henry Crawford against her own deeply-held principles:

> Would [Henry Crawford] have deserved more, there can be no doubt that more would have been obtained; especially when that marriage had taken place, which would have given him the assistance of her conscience in subduing her first inclination, and brought them very often together. Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward—and a reward very voluntarily bestowed—within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary. (317)

Other than Fanny's "voluntary" bestowal of herself as a reward – and surely, "voluntary" is a very low bar for describing a young woman's love – the passage characterizes Fanny's marriage to Henry as an inevitability of circumstance. Given the pressure that the Bertrams continued to place on Fanny to marry Henry, despite their knowledge of her disinclination for him, it must seem likely to readers that Austen's narrator is correct. The language in this passage bears a remarkable similarity to that at the end of *Sense and Sensibility*: Marianne Dashwood is Colonel Brandon's "reward," given at least in part because her family is in "a confederacy against her" (*S&S* 267). Like Fanny, who would have been "subdued," Marianne is "submitting" to an alliance arranged by her family (although she comes to love Colonel Brandon despite her initial misgivings). Marianne, however, has throughout her novel been an unwise, emotionally unguarded (though never immoral) heroine, and Fanny has not. Comparing the possibility of Fanny's fate to Marianne's thus suggests that no matter how young women conduct themselves, it is essentially luck if they end up in happy marriages; as Katie Halsey argues, Austen's ending suggests her "resistance to the belief that virtue is always rewarded" (54).

Unlike Inchbald's novel, *Mansfield Park* does end with the certainty of Fanny and Edmund's union, but both endings push the responsibility for deciding the course of events back on the reader. Inchbald explicitly invokes readers' memory of the earlier text in her statement that the reader must, after looking back on the portrayal of Matilda's character, decide whether or not she would marry her cousin, but ultimately the marital ending is less important to her than the larger significance of the novel's project, which she explicitly returns to in the novel's final two paragraphs: "A PROPER EDUCATION" (342). Matilda's mother, Inchbald restates, suffered the "pernicious effects of an improper education," but readers who have just experienced the last several hundred pages of Matilda's emotional neglect might be rightfully

skeptical of the narrator's incongruously hopeful question: "what may not be hoped from that school of prudence – though of adversity – in which Matilda was bred?" (342) Fanny, too, has learned prudence from the school of adversity, and Austen's hedgy ending and heavily ironic tone suggests that the possibility of their wedded bliss may bear some of the same shading as Inchbald's.

Thus, Austen's ending, like Inchbald's, does not allow for a simplistic "happy ending" reading. Rather than present tidy conclusions in which everyone learns a moral lesson, Inchbald and Austen do not appear sanguine about the prospects for true growth, at least among the patriarchs. Lord Elmwood appears to have little understanding of the real emotional devastation that his lifelong mistreatment of his daughter has produced in her. Although Inchbald asks "what may not be hoped from that school of prudence – though of adversity – in which Matilda was bred?" (Inchbald 342) she resolutely refuses to answer her question. Sir Thomas's revelation about his role in his daughters' downfall appears only partial, and he ends the novel congratulating himself on "what he had done for them all" and the "advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure" (Austen, *MP* 321). Yet throughout their novels, Inchbald and Austen have demonstrated that "hardship and discipline" are more likely to produce "restraint or alarm" (*MP* 321) than moral benefit. Like Matilda in *A Simple Story*, Fanny has been deeply abused by the very social structures that ought to have protected her. Although both heroines are in many ways the ideal young women that conduct literature such as Hannah More's works sought to produce, their virtue and obedience have not saved them from lives full of trauma and neglect.

As I will show in the next chapter, Austen's commitment to narrative instability and semantic slipperiness influenced the writers who came after her, much as the radical sensibilities

of Charlotte Smith and Elizabeth Inchbald influenced Austen's own work. Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley,* like *Mansfield Park*, is often considered a "problem novel," yet it is precisely within those problematics that Brontë finds the space for her own ideological critique of patriarchy.

CHAPTER 4

"QUEER CHANGES" AND "IMPERFECT CHARACTERS": CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND JANE AUSTEN

> "If I spoke all I think on this point; if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in half an hour. …women read men more truly than men read women." Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* (296)

The two chapters previous to this have examined textual borrowings by Jane Austen from two major writers of the late eighteenth century: Charlotte Smith and Elizabeth Inchbald. In the following chapters, I reverse this structure and examine textual borrowings *from* Jane Austen by two major writers of the nineteenth century: Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell. The connections between Brontë and Gaskell are well documented and well discussed, but are nevertheless worth examination in conjunction with Jane Austen (and, by extension, with Smith and Inchbald) because they are generally grouped together in opposition to the more "genteel" authors from further south. Janine Barchas, writing on *North and South* as a "legacy" of Austen's, links Gaskell, Brontë, and Austen in her discussion, but she suggests that Gaskell's "close relationship" with Charlotte Brontë silenced Gaskell regarding her novel's Austenian origins, painting Brontë and Gaskell as "spiritually arm-in-arm" in a "long-standing rivalry between northern and southern writers" (62). Rosemarie Bodenheimer also discusses Gaskell in light of her connection to both Austen and Brontë, calling Gaskell's *North and South* "a tamer, more conventional work [than Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*], one that reaches back to Jane Austen

both for its depiction of strong-minded domestic virtue and for the social optimism of its *Pride and Prejudice* plot structure" (53).

Nevertheless, this triangulation, which posits Gaskell as a moderating figure between the conventional virtue of Austen and the radical strangeness of Brontë, inadequately examines all three authors. Although Brontë's famous distaste for Austen's novels is the subject of much discussion (and sometimes delight) from critics, to then distance her work from Austen's in order to align her with the "Northern" novelists seems unfairly limiting. A writer may dislike another author's work and still engage with it. Gaskell herself, for example, though fond of Brontë's "true and brave" form of expression, "disliked a good deal in the plot of *Shirley.*"[82] And even such an antipathy as Brontë's would not entirely negate the influence Austen had on the world of female novelists by the time in which Brontë and Gaskell were writing. As the following chapters will argue, although both Brontë and Gaskell both voiced criticism of their literary ancestors, they found in those works much to use in their own.

Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) is frequently categorized by critics as a "problem novel." For this reason, it is interesting to me, because so many Romantic novels by women writers received the same label. For example, Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (discussed in Chapter 2), is also a novel with structural peculiarities that do not conform to traditional expectations for the novel genre. In Inchbald's novel, the fact that her "simple story" is in fact *not* simple serves to point out how disingenuous claims to narrative orderliness are. Human life is chaotic and untidy, and Inchbald's novel reflects the acceptance of this. Similarly, Brontë's "problem text" is fertile interpretive ground precisely because of its narrative instability, with its multiple narrative points of view, multiple styles, and a whiplash-inducing ending that seems to discredit everything that

[82] Letter to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, 14 May 1850 (*The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, eds. J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967], 115-121).

happened before. Such narrative instability, as already seen in Chapter 2, is a technique that Austen also powerfully employs in her novels to discredit patriarchal power structures. As Olivia Murphy argues, Austen demanded much of her readers, and Brontë continues that tradition with an equally demanding novel of her own.

As the epigraph to this chapter demonstrates, *Shirley*, like so many of Austen's novels, is about the experience of reading and of interpretation. In its adherences to and deviations from the traditional marriage plot, it demands readers to reconsider what they expect and why. Unlike the authors discussed so far, in whose works literary borrowing and allusion appear fairly clearly – *Sense and Sensibility* owes a clear debt to *Celestina*, as *Mansfield Park* does to *A Simple Story* – Brontë's relationship with Austen is far more vexed. Thus, this chapter will diverge from the single-text models of the previous two chapters to examine how Brontë deploys familiar Austenian tropes from several novels, particularly *Emma* (1816) and *Persuasion* (1818), to further her own ideological agenda in *Shirley*. In doing so, she creates a novel of radical patchwork that in its romantic lacunae and narrative instability honors Austen's literary legacy perhaps better than would have consciously pleased her.

Austen's legacy was already well underway by the time Brontë was writing her fiction. As Clara Tuite notes, "[t]he late nineteenth century saw the beginnings of the popular production of Austen as a national canonical author and as a novelist of 'green England'" (100). James Edward Austen-Leigh's publication of his *Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1870 undoubtedly initiated an upswing in market interest, as did the biography of Austen by Goldwin Smith that was included in the "Great Writers Series" in 1890. Yet by mid-century, Austen had *already* become a household name for readers of romance novels. For example, Austen's niece Catherine-Anne Hubback began writing novels in the late 1840s, the first of which – a completion of Austen's

unfinished manuscript *The Watsons* – was published in 1850 as *The Younger Sister*. The marketing for Hubback's novels explicitly catered to the public interest in Austen by referring to the novelist as "Mrs. Hubback, niece of Miss Austen." The reviewer for *The Athenaeum* explicitly compares two of Hubback's books, *The Wife's Sister* and *Life and Its Lessons,* to Austen, whom he dubs "England's best domestic novelist" (129).[83] An author writing a novel involving a heroine in the 1840s would inevitably find her work in the same textual matrix of reader reference as Austen's.

G.H. Lewes in fact made the link between the two authors explicit. In his copiously tangential review of *Shirley*, Lewes claims that one of the principal reasons for Austen's success as a novelist was her modest scope: "[S]urely no man has surpassed Miss Austen as a delineator of common life? Her range, to be sure, is limited; but her art is perfect" ("Currer Bell" 157). His praise of Austen, in fact, could seem almost like a backhanded compliment to a modern reader: "She does not touch those profounder and more impassioned chords which vibrate to the heart's core – never ascends to its grand or heroic movements, nor descends to its deeper throes and agonies; but in all she attempts she is uniformly and completely successful" (157). In contrast, Lewes writes of *Jane Eyre*, "[a] more masculine book, in the sense of vigour, was never written. Indeed that vigour often amounts to coarseness,– and is certainly the very antipode to 'lady like'" (158). With this, he directly places Brontë's work within the frame of Austen, and more particularly, within the frame of readerly expectations of Austen's novels, the "lady like" books that Brontë found so distasteful. In *Shirley*, Lewes writes, the "same over-masculine vigour is even more prominent . . . and does not increase the pleasantness of the book" (158). Continually

[83] Review of The Wife's Sister; or, the Forbidden Marriage: a Novel. *Athenaeum*. 1214 1 Feb. 1851: 129. Geraldine Jewsbury – another of the "first rank" female authors of the mid-nineteenth century – is the author of the *Life and its Lessons* review.

confronting readers with the similarities between her own "over-masculine" text and Austen's "lady like" novels, Brontë breaks down the assumed binary inherent in much of the literary criticism of her era (although not necessarily in Lewes's), that a woman cannot work successfully within a man's paradigm, and that a masculine text cannot express a woman's "common life."

Most modern Austen criticism, of course, would argue against the idea that her fiction "does not touch those profounder and more impassioned chords which vibrate to the heart's core," as Lewes put it. And although Brontë would likely not care to admit it, in their focus on young women's struggles to determine their own identity while navigating the strictures of domestic relations within a patriarchal social system, her novels are more kindred than stranger to Austen's. Like Austen, Brontë enjoyed satire, as her fondness for Thackeray's novels reveals, but she disliked Thackeray's belief that satire is not "compatible with female writers or readers" (Judge n.pag.). In a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell in May 1852, she wrote that Thackeray should take Gaskell's Cranford stories as a model, "retire with them to his chamber, put himself to bed, and lie there—till he has learnt by diligent study how to be satirical without being exquisitely bitter" (47).[84] *Shirley* in particular shows its connection to the Austenian model in multiple ways, not least of which is its third-person omniscient heterodiegetic narrator who is both distanced from and intimately connected with the characters and actions of the novel. This narrator, like many of Austen's (consider the narrator's outburst in *Northanger Abbey* in defense of novels, or the protective coyness of *Mansfield Park*'s narrator regarding Fanny), is perfectly willing to break the fourth wall and directly address the reader to achieve a rhetorical effect. And, like Austen's narrators – and unlike the narrators of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* – the *Shirley*-narrator is

[84] Letter to Elizabeth Gaskell, dated 22 May 1852. In *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: Volume III: 1852-1855*, edited by Margaret Smith (Oxford: UP, 2004).

ungendered and unnamed (Jenkins 90). As Jennifer Judge notes, *Shirley* represents Brontë's first "trespass into [the] customarily masculine genre" of satire, assailing the "Augustan…derisive critique of women's innate monomania for love" of novels such as Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. However, she does not extend this trespass back to one of the most famous satirical voices of the Augustan era: Austen herself. In placing her novel within the genre of social satire, Brontë also aligns herself with Austen. As with Austen's novels, whose tendency is as E.J. Clery argues "to undercut, by means of the narrative voice, the appearance of a resolution" (164), *Shirley* negotiates a delicate balance between working within the established conventions of the romance novel and destabilizing those same conventions.

Shirley is the most difficult of Charlotte Brontë's novels to categorize. *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* are both written largely in the first-person narrative voice and focalize their action through a single unconventional heroine. *Shirley*, on the other hand, employs a third-person omniscient narrative voice and two heroines.[85] It is also Brontë's only historical novel, and a sizeable portion of the novel focuses on political unrest in Regency England rather than on the romances between its characters, an element which has led readers and reviewers to perceive the novel as lacking unity (a complaint that dates back at least to G.H. Lewes's review of the novel in January 1850).[86]

Readers of the novel have seen much to dislike in *Shirley* since its publication. The reviewer for *Fraser's Magazine* (December 1849), who was so delighted by *Jane Eyre* that he stayed up until four o'clock in the morning reading it, bluntly stated that although it was "worth reading," the novel was "deficient in connexion and interest" (153).[87] Writing in an unsigned

[85] As *The Professor* was not published until after Brontë's death, it is not discussed here.
[86] "Currer Bell's 'Shirley'." Unsigned review. *Edinburgh Review* January 1850: p. 159.
[87] Miriam Allott ascribes this review to W.G. Clark, a Shakespearean scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge.

review of the novel in January 1850, George Henry Lewes claimed that "[a] pleasant book…we are not sure we can style it" (159). While he acknowledged that "[p]ower it has unquestionably, and interest too," the novel for him lacked "unity" and "artistic fusion," ultimately resulting in a work of "defective art" (159). The reviewer for the *New Monthly Magazine* wrote that while *Jane Eyre* demonstrated "truth and masculine vigour in the delineation of character," *Shirley* has all its faults and "many of its own beside," leaving readers "yawning when we ought to be hurrying on" (505). The *New Monthly*'s reviewer also noted the novel's odd approach to romance, writing that "the lovemaking seems constructed from a pattern of which the exemplars are wild cats. Every endearment is a scratch, every approach to sentiment a snarl….gladiatorial rather than tender. This state of things is frequently a consequence of marriage; with the author of 'Shirley' it is the precursor" (506). The reviewer at *The English Review* disliked the novel so much that, although he did not actually write a review of *Shirley* at all, he took time from his review of Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Caxtons* (1849) to parenthetically dismiss *Jane Eyre* as "emphatically a *bad* book, though a clever one" and *Shirley* as "at once dull and odious, though, of course, egregiously belauded and bepuffed: it is far worse than a mere negative failure" (307).[88]

Modern critics of the novel are often equally unforgiving. Janet Gezari, in her introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition, acknowledges that "*Shirley* is not Charlotte Brontë's best book. It is less compulsively readable than *Jane Eyre* and less original than *Villette*" (x), and Lucasta Miller, in her introduction to the Penguin Classics edition, similarly states that *Shirley* is "a novel which affronts readers' expectations of Charlotte Brontë" (xi).

[88] Amusingly, perhaps, the review adored Bulwer Lytton's novel, which it declared "a creation of genius, picturesque, yet real and life-like, the rich fruit of its author's summertide, which will not soon wither or pass away" (307).

Shirley is the "odd one out" amongst Brontë's novels, a problematic "detour" (Ewbank 22) from the novels between which it is sandwiched: 1847's blockbuster hit *Jane Eyre* and 1853's bizarre but intriguing *Villette.* Yet for all the difficulties and oddities it poses, *Shirley* was not met with universal dislike even when first published. The *Eclectic Review*, already fond of *Jane Eyre* for "the war it waged against mere conventionalisms" (739), admitted in 1849 that although the "opening chapters" of *Shirley* were "somewhat unpromising, we found its charm deepen as we advanced, and were sorry when we arrived at its close" (740). An uncredited reviewer for the 1850 *Dublin Review* acknowledged similar discomfort with portions of the novel, but stated that "we must do justice to the art of the authoress. . . . it is astonishing how much variety enlivens [the novel], and keeps up the reader's suspense until the end" (227). And Lewes himself, although not blind to *Shirley*'s problems, asserted that "we take Currer Bell to be one of the most remarkable of *female* writers" (158, emphasis original). "Power is stamped on various parts of it," he continued, "power unmistakeable, but often misapplied" (160).

Although it is a novel of peculiarities, the abruptness with which the novel switches tracks in the third volume is often cited as its greatest flaw. The modern critical discontent with the novel's ending can be traced at least back to Gilbert and Gubar's chapter on *Shirley* in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), which asserts that in attempting to emulate Thackeray, Brontë "becomes enmeshed in essentially the same male-dominated structures that imprison the characters in all her books" (373). They write, "It looks as if Brontë began *Shirley* with the intention of subverting not only the sexual images of literature but the courtship roles and myths from which they derive. But she could find no models for this kind of fiction" (395). Other critics echo this summation. Valerie Grosvenor Myer laments that "Charlotte's control disappears when it comes to the marriages . . . [she] did not know how to end her novel, because the

problems she wrote about were insoluble" (177), and Miriam Bailin similarly claims that "[f]or Brontë, there seems to be no available alternative to relations based on the cruel opposition between domination and submission" (277). For many critics, Brontë's second published novel is a failure because it ultimately "submits to the same patriarchal culture that she set out to critique" (Vanskike 468).

As I will discuss in the next section, Brontë consciously situates her novel within the specific, often competing traditions of the historical novel and the romance. Her framing of the novel reveals her awareness of the conventions in which it will work, as well as her intention to upset those conventions from within. Reading *Shirley* within a lineage of women's fiction that stretches back into the radical Romantic novels of the late eighteenth century and continues with Austen's own subtle subversions and destabilizings allows for another way to read the novel. For Romantic authors, a unifying solution was not always necessary; sometimes, the project of performing conventions to demonstrate their invalidity was equally useful. Indeed, as Tillotama Rajan remarks, the Romantic reader was *expected* to "bridge the gap between conception and execution, and to supply a unity not present in the text" (2). Read in this context, Brontë's apparently disunified novel's use of the marriage plot is not a falling back upon a patriarchal tradition that she cannot see her way past. It is a way to force her readers to read exactly what they have expected to read, the heteronormative marriage-plot "Winding-up" at novel's end, and sit with the unpleasantness of it. In deploying and undermining these narrative conventions, Brontë deconstructs the patriarchal institution of marriage as related in the marriage-plot in a far more devastating way than an absolute departure from convention would have produced. Far from being a relapse or a sign of despair, Brontë's conscious manipulation of both familiar tropes

and characters and of her narrative's structure itself shows an author clearly in control of her creative powers.

"Anything like a romance": Narrative Form and Reader Expectations

Shirley is Brontë's only historical novel. In the novel's opening, Brontë explicitly declares the time-frame for *Shirley* in the novel's opening as taking place between 1811 and 1812 (5), placing the novel squarely within Austen's era and creating a perhaps unlikely link to Austen's only historical novel, *Persuasion*. The Oxford World's Classics edition of *Shirley* notes that the early manuscript of the chapter "The Waggons," from Volume I, shows a cancelled phrase after a sentence declaring the "period of which I write": *"(you may fix it, reader, in what year you will between the commencement of the present century, and the close of the French War).*" Such an emendation reinforces that Brontë wished her novel to be placed explicitly within a narrow range of time, rather than within a fifteen-year time span.

Brontë's choice to write a historical novel aligns her with the tradition of popular fiction by the likes of Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, who by the 1820s was more well-liked abroad than in the United States, and a reprint of whose 1824 novel *The Pilot* led off Richard Bentley's widely influential *Standard Novels* series in 1831.[89] By 1841, Scott's "Waverley novels" were so established as the benchmark by which all fiction might be judged that a satirical essay series in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* titled "Hints to Authors," purporting to offer a set of easy rules by which authors could immediately write best-selling fiction, could poke fun at

[89] It was this series that popularized Jane Austen's novels in the Victorian era. Six of the first twenty titles in the Standard Novel first series were Cooper's, which were all published between 1831 and 1832 (Patten 360n99). A further five were Austen's, which were originally sold separately but, after October 1833, also available as a collection (Halsey 110). As Halsey and others argue, Bentley's editions were likely how many readers in the mid-century approached Austen.

them thus: "I laid down rules for the attainment of all the beauties of style, whether elegant or sublime; and since the period of their appearance, it is, I flatter myself, impossible to be denied, that a very great change has taken place in the literature of my age and country. We have no 'Waverley Novels' now, with their absurd adherence to nature and probability."[90] In the early and mid-nineteenth century, it would be impossible to consider historical fiction without thinking, first and foremost, of Scott.[91]

Brontë's own opinion of Scott was, like that of most of her countrymen, exceedingly high. In an 1834 letter to Ellen Nussey making recommendations for reading, Brontë wrote: "For Fiction –read Scott alone all novels after his are worthless."[92] In addition to her adoration of Scott, Brontë also greatly admired the novels of William Makepeace Thackeray, whom she described to W.S. Williams as "the first of Modern Masters, and as the legitimate High Priest of Truth," and whose novel *Vanity Fair* she found "profound," a work "which the discernment of one generation will not suffice to fathom –a hundred years hence."[93] She admired Thackeray's early fiction so well that she later complained to George Smith that Thackeray was an "indolent intellectual Hercules" who displayed a "criminal carelessness of great faculties," wasting opportunities to continue to write great novels.[94]

Although Walter Scott was undoubtedly the foremost author of historical novels in the period, women writers of the era also penned well-known historical fiction. Probably the most famous female author of historical fiction up to Brontë's time was Jane Porter, whose novels

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[90] Anonymous. "Hints to Authors. Second Series. No I. On the Impressive." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (January 1841), p. 56.
[91] William St. Clair estimates that Robert Cadell, the publisher of Scott's *Magnum Opus* edition of the Waverley novels, sold 78,270 copies of that edition *alone* between 1827-1849. As St. Clair asserts, "with novels as well as poems, by sales as well as reputation, the dominant author of the romantic period, and indeed of the Victorian period which followed was Walter Scott" (221).
[92] Letter to Ellen Nussey, 4 July 1834.
[93] Letter to W.S. Williams, 14 August 1848.
[94] Letter to George Smith, 12 May 1851.

Thaddeus of Warsaw (1803) and *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810) both sold very well. Despite Porter's popularity, critics sometimes complained that historical fiction written by women was inferior to that of their male counterparts. For example, in May 1843 an anonymous but presumably male writer in *Fraser's Magazine* wrote a scathing review of Barbara Hofland's *The Czarina; an Historical Romance of the Court of Russia*, claiming that "her greatest blunder of all was undeniably committed when the idea of writing an historical romance first suggested itself to her mind" (521). The reviewer then took this opportunity to extend his judgment on Hofland's ill-fated novel to critique women's writing of historical novels in general, claiming that women are ill-suited to write historical fiction because their inherent natural tendency is to focus on matters of romance rather than the complexities of politics: "In Scott's hands the loves of Waverley and Francis Osbaldeston are mere interludes or accessories to the stories told. Take away the love-stories from Miss Porter's romances, and what would be left?" (522) For the *Fraser's* reviewer, at least, making romances integral to the plot of a historical novel was an amateurish move, made mostly by female authors who could not control their natural interest in love and marriage.

Perhaps with this condemnation in mind, Brontë, through the voice of *Shirley*'s narrator, confronts critical expectations of the genre immediately: "If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken" (5). Such a declaration distances *Shirley* from the criticisms leveled at woman-authored historical novels even by esteemed female authors such as Jane Porter, that they were too focused on "romance" to deal adequately with the serious affairs of history. As the Fraser's reviewer put it, "happy as a clever woman usually is in catching the outward forms and usages of society" – a sort of praise often directed toward Austen, including from Brontë herself – "we believe that she has no power at all to realize those strange and often inconsistent motives which stimulate men to action,

especially in what is called public life" (521-22). Even Brontë's idol Walter Scott explicitly claims in his first chapter of *Waverley* that readers will not encounter "a romance" in its pages (58). By aligning her novel *with* history and *against* romance, Brontë both places her novel in an esteemed and popular category and minimizes its connection to the "inferior" historical "romance" that tended to be associated with women writers.

In addition to situating itself as a historical novel, Brontë's first chapter continues to distance *Shirley* from readers' expectations of the "romance" novel by antagonistically confronting those expectations:

> Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto." (5)

With this statement, Brontë addresses popular anxieties about the state that novels induce in readers, particularly female ones. "Reverie," "passion," "stimulus," "melodrama" – these words had long been coded as dangers of the novel. As Jacqueline Pearson notes, reading in the eighteenth century was considered a "physical not an intellectual act" for women readers that could have dangerous repercussions to both their physical and spiritual well-being (4). As has been discussed in previous chapters, this view of reading continued into the nineteenth century as well. In his *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge derided novel-reading as "a sort of beggarly daydreaming," far from the instructive reflection that reading poetry might produce.[95] Gynecological doctor E.J. Tilt specifically singled out the romance in his *On the Preservation of*

[95] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. By W. Jackson Bate and James Engell (Princeton, 1983): p. 48.

Health of Women at the Critical Periods of Life (1851), writing that it "should be spurned, as capable of calling forth emotions of the same morbid description which, when habitually indulged in, exert a disastrous influence on the nervous system"; girls, of course, were unable to refrain from indulging in the "stirring adventure, the extravagant romance…gods of their idolatry" (40). Even the genteel Yorkshire landowner Anne Lister–whom several critics cite as a possible model for Brontë's characterization of Shirley Keeldar–wrote in her journal on 14 February 1821 after having read the first hundred pages of *Leontine de Blondheim* (1808) that "the stimulus, the fearful rousing, of novel reading" was dangerous to her, as it turned her thoughts towards "romance" rather than her duties to be "virtuous & quiet" (82).

Regardless of what Brontë explicitly promises, however, the novel's opening pages work to confound any stable concept regarding its narrative nature. Even the title works against the novel's contents: its full title is *Shirley. A Tale.* The word "tale" had long carried certain literary baggage and bore a strong connection to romance with both a big and little "r." Mary Robinson's *Lyrical Tales* (1800), for example, were both quite popular and immediately linked to the work of the Lake School's Romantic poets, as Stuart Curran points out.[96] This connection between the "tale" and r/Romance, particularly the Gothic, was still in full force in the nineteenth century. Brontë's idol Walter Scott notes as much in his tongue-in-cheek opening to *Waverley* explaining his own choice of title: "Had I, for example, announced in my frontispiece, 'Waverley, a Tale of Other Days,' must not every novel-reader have anticipated a castle scarce less than that of Udolpho…Would not the owl have shrieked and the cricket cried in my very title-page?" (57). Scott's alternative subtitle options, he writes, might have been a "Sentimental Tale," which would create inaccurate expectations of "a heroine with a profusion of auburn hair, and a harp"

[96] For a fuller discussion of the significance of Mary Robinson's literary achievements in the late eighteenth century, see Curran's chapter in *Re-visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837.*

or "A Tale of the Times," which would have incited the reader to "have demanded from me a dashing sketch of the fashionable world…lushly painted" (58). Scott spends so much time elaborating his choice of title not only to jokingly "tyrannize" his readers, but also because he clearly understands that a work's title codes expectations in the reader that they will "demand" to see fulfilled. Using the word "tale" in his title would thus have invoked too fantastical an expectation for his novel, "neither a romance of chivalry, nor a tale of modern manners" (58). Brontë's use of the word "tale" thus immediately subverts her novel's position as a work of "serious" historical fiction and subtly re-encodes it as a work linked to sentiment and fantasy.[97]

The narrative self-undermining continues into the novel's opening volleys. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer points out, the first paragraph of *Shirley* asserts that "Of late years, an abundant shower of curates has fallen upon the north of England," but also that the "present years are dusty, sun-burnt, hot, arid" (5). With these two contradictory statements Brontë creates a paradox in which the reader cannot clearly define or differentiate between the past and present, which are "confused and conflated" in the passage (Bodenheimer 40). The narrator's justification for the novel appears to lie in the sentence "we will evade the noon, forget it in siesta, pass the mid-day in slumber, and dream of dawn" (5), a seemingly simple statement of nostalgia for a better time that heroine Caroline reiterates later, when she claims that "though we don't want to think of the present existing world, it would be pleasant to go back to the past" (76). However, although the narrator suggests we will "pass the mid-day in slumber, and dream of dawn," this statement is followed up by a comparison of the novel to a meal of "unleavened bread with bitter herbs and

[97] Austen herself was quite aware of this connection. Her juvenilia boast several tales by name, including "Edgar & Emma, A Tale," "Memoirs of Mr. Clifford an unfinished tale—" "The Generous Curate—a moral Tale" and the simply titled "A Tale," telling the brief but highly romantic adventures of Wilhelminus and Robertus and the lovely sisters Arabella and Marina. The young Austen's short work "Amelia Webster" was self-professedly "an interesting and well written Tale" (57).

no roast lamb" (5), a meal associated with the Jewish Passover as discussed in the book of Exodus and which is explicitly *not* about dreaming or nostalgic revisiting but about wakefulness and remembrance of suffering. In just the first two paragraphs, then, readers are confronted with vivid imagery that actively works against itself, refusing to allow a stable interpretation.

While Brontë may have promised her readers something "unromantic as Monday morning," her novel ironically contains all the things she tells the reader *not* to expect. Caroline Helstone bears many traits of the traditional sentimental heroine: girlishly pretty with a "picturesque profusion" of fine curls (think of Scott's "profusion of auburn hair" in the opening to *Waverley*), a pseudo-orphan living with a male guardian, "docile yet quick," and above all affectionate (65). Like every good British schoolgirl, she loves Shakespeare and educates her love interest Robert Moore in the proper reading of it – thereby also educating the reader, should she not have chanced before to encounter Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Though Brontë instructs her readers to "calm" themselves and abandon "poetry" and "reverire," Shirley Keeldar embodies these elements: poetry abounds in Shirley's world (she rewrites no less a poet than Milton), and a central passage in the book involves her feminine reverie with Caroline about the nostalgic and poetic potential of the Nunnwood. Thus, from its opening pages *Shirley* makes clear that Brontë is both aware of readers' expectations for her novel and its genre and willing to openly manipulate those expectations, promising one thing and delivering quite another.

Shirley's continuously contradictory nature suggests, then, that the novel's lack of unity is not the result of Brontë's inability to control her novel or to imagine an ending alternative to the marriage plot, as some have suggested. Rather, by situating *Shirley* as a historical novel, Brontë initially leads her readers to expect the typical narrative progression of historical novels such as *Thaddeus of Warsaw* or *Waverley*, in which the hero's happy marriage at the novel's end

acts as a metaphor for peaceful political (re)union. Given that "Shirley" was commonly a man's name until Brontë's usage of it for her heroine, readers might be excused if they assumed that, like Thaddeus or Edward Waverley, Shirley would be some male quasi-historical figure whose political adventures end with peace and a pleasant marriage. Brontë's decision to make readers wait to encounter Shirley until the end of the first volume upsets these reasonable expectations.

A famous passage within the novel offers clues to Brontë's purpose for this unstable literary allusiveness. In Chapter 7, "The Curates at Tea," the narrator delivers a jeremiad on the subject of love which bears quoting at length:

> A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation; a lover feminine can say nothing: if she did the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery. …Take the matter as you find it: ask no questions; utter no remonstrances: it is your best wisdom. You expected bread, and you have got a stone; break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because the nerves are martyrized: do not doubt that your mental stomach – if you have such a thing – is strong as an ostrich's—the stone will digest. You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm. Never mind: in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a sob. For the whole remnant of your life, if you survive the test – some, it is said, die under it – you will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive. (89-90)

This outburst is not delivered from Caroline's point of view; in fact, the narrator jerks the reader back to her story after the end of the passage with the abrupt statement: "But what has been said

in the last page or two is not germane to Caroline Helstone's feelings, or to the state of things between her and Robert Moore" (91). Like the narrator's earlier assertion that readers were "mistaken" to assume that they were about to read "anything like a romance," however, this statement is not entirely truthful: what has just preceded this bitter explosion is Robert's cool withdrawal from Caroline, who feels that she cannot pursue his affections, precisely like the disappointed "lover feminine" who can "say nothing."

Furthermore, the intense and hyperbolic negativity of this passage suggests that it is to be read ironically, as does the tradition already established of the narrator making openly contradicting statements. While some of the sentiments voiced are traditionally prescriptive – women would feel "self-treachery" at violating the dictates of their natural instincts of delicacy and passivity – there is no reason why the reader must necessarily credit these as truth, because either the narrator is ignorant and does not know that her outburst is indeed germane to Caroline's emotional state, or she is intentionally deceitful, lying about its relevance by claiming the opposite. Either way, the abrupt reversal requires the reader to consider the relevance of this harsh narrative intrusion to Caroline's mental and emotional state and once more calls into question the notion of narrative stability.

The passage also suggests a way of reading *Shirley*'s narrative disunity: as the educative scorpion given to the reader to hold. The theme of the most explosive paragraph is the unexpected: "You expected bread, and you have got a stone….You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion" (89-90). The source of Brontë's imagery is Luke 11:11-12, in which Christ uses these analogies as evidence that even "evil" parents know better than to fill requests in such bad faith: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

(KJV). In the passage, these things do not immediately seem like good gifts, but the novel questions this interpretation, suggesting that there are indeed possibilities for learning from these unexpected reversals. Gruesome though the analogy is, *Shirley* itself is a type of scorpion, one that must be held firmly even though it is unpleasant, because the experience of being confronted with the confusion of all one's hopes and expectations will provide a "great lesson" (90).

These consistent reversals and undermining suggest that *Shirley* does what Kate Flint, in *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914*, argues that women writers of the Victorian period often did with their fiction: employs intertextual allusions in their fiction to urge readers to "consider fictional conventions, and to use this consideration to interrogate the relationship between novels and life" (267). The romantic element of the novel's plot supports such a reading. A key instance of this in *Shirley* is in the chapter "Mrs. Pryor," in which Mrs. Pryor and Caroline – who are mother and daughter, though at this point in the novel neither Caroline nor the reader know this – discuss the reading of romances and its relation to real life. When Mrs. Pryor brings up the topic of young ladies' expectations of marriage, Caroline replies that young ladies "look forward to marriage with some one they love as the brightest,– the only bright destiny that can await them," and that "mutual love" is the "most real, the most lasting,– the sweetest and yet the bitterest thing we know" (318). Mrs. Pryor's reply is revealing: "Mutual love! My dear, romances are pernicious. You do not read them, I hope?" Caroline admits that she does, "whenever I can get them, indeed," though she adds, "but romance-writers might know nothing of love, judging by the way in which they treat of it." Such a comment explains Brontë's assertion in its opening pages that *Shirley* is "nothing like" a romance: if romance-writers know nothing of love and Brontë's novel does, it is indeed "nothing like" the romances written by those ignorant (male) writers. Caroline, although she acknowledges the idea that "romance-writers" might have a false

idea of love, nevertheless still subscribes to the ideal of a happy marriage, "[w]here affection is reciprocal and sincere, and minds are harmonious" (319). The possibility of true reciprocity, however, as *Shirley*'s ending reveals, is elusive; certainly Caroline and Shirley are not equals to their male partners once they are married. In writing a romance as "unromantic as Monday morning," Brontë creates what Suzanne Keen refers to as "narrative annexes," spaces within a larger text to expose "absences, omissions, and the traces of the repressed" (108). In these annexes, the "eruption of a disenfranchised, marginalized voice" or the confrontation of readers' expectations "call attention to their difference from their surroundings. They jolt the reader out of a smooth journey through a fictional world; the map the reader has trusted must be suddenly – perhaps permanently – revised" (108).

This revision of expectations is something Austen also uses to advantage, particularly in the two novels that I will examine in the following sections: *Emma* (1816) and *Persuasion* (1818). In both of those novels, perhaps the most unconventional of Austen's mature novels, Austen tests the boundaries of what is possible in her fiction. *Emma* – the novel that prompted Walter Scott's glowing review and Brontë's outburst to W.S. Williams – does not offer Austen's readers quite the scorpion that Brontë does. However, Austen privately acknowledged that Emma was a heroine whom "no one but myself will much like" (Austen-Leigh 119), and the novel revolves around Emma's education as she learns to become a wiser reader before ending on a jarring note of discordance. *Persuasion* too challenges traditional narrative expectations, presenting its older heroine's romantic journey as the "natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (21). It makes sense that these two novels, so keenly interested in reading and readers, one with an unlikeable heroine and largely passionless hero and one that seems to work in reverse of the

expected narrative progression, would be those to most inform Brontë's *Shirley*, her most uneven, most radical challenge to readers.

The Heroine Reading

Shirley Keeldar, the novel's eponymous heroine, is a keen reader. About midway through the novel, she speaks passionately about reading in language that is uncannily similar to that in *Persuasion*. Talking to her friend Caroline Helstone, she says:

> "If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light; they misapprehend them…to hear them fall into exstasies with each other's creations, worshipping the heroine of such a poem—novel—drama, thinking it fine—divine!...if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in half an hour." (296)

When Caroline replies that "authors' heroines are almost as good as authoresses' heroes," Shirley scoffs: "Not at all: women read men more truly than men read women" (296). Caroline refuses to be persuaded, echoing the common disparagements against women writers of her era: "you could not write cleverly enough; you don't know enough; you are not learned, Shirley" (296). The crux of this passage is its discontent with male-authored texts, which Shirley believes are both badly written and badly read. Although she admits that she lacks the education of most male writers – although she has made it all the way through Milton's *Paradise Lost* and attempted an ambitious rewriting of it, so she is less uneducated than she claims – Shirley nevertheless refuses to agree that such learning makes male authors superior. In fact, male

authors *and* male readers (and male author-readers) do not read "in a true light," presumably because they are too busy falling into "exstasies with each other's creations" to attend to the neglected stories told (or too often untold) by women writers. While more extensive than Anne Elliot's defense of women in *Persuasion*, this passage shares the same emotional heart with it. Near the end of *Persuasion*, Captain Harville marshals "all histories…all stories, prose and verse" to support his theory of women's fickleness (one of the characteristics the portrayal of which Shirley rebels against). "But," Harville says offhandedly, "perhaps you will say, these were all written by men." Anne Elliot immediately agrees: "Yes, yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing" (156). While characteristically Austenian in its concision, the thrust of this passage is the same as that in Brontë's novel: men are poor readers, at least partially because they rely only on their own written ideals of womanhood rather than attending to the stories told by and of real women. Women, held back by patriarchal social structures that refuse them the pen, are not truly understood, misread by the same men who claim literary superiority.

However, this restriction does not relieve women readers of the responsibility to be good and true interpreters. Despite her claim that both she and Shirley are not learned, Caroline reveals that she is actually an astute reader quite early on in the novel. To tease the Belgian expatriate and mill owner Robert Moore, for whom she bears an apparently unrequited affection, she assigns him to read *Coriolanus* aloud. Like any good English person, Caroline praises "glorious William" and his ability to "draw the English power and melody out of [the] chords" of men's hearts (77). *Coriolanus* does not appear to do the trick, for Robert is not an adept reader; Caroline however, reads these scenes with "a pithy expression" and "a spirit no one could have

expected of her" (78). Caroline in fact tutors Robert through this scene, comparing him to Coriolanus's "proud patrician who does not sympathize with his famished fellow-men" (78). Caroline is far more astute than either Robert or her uncle/guardian knows. When she uses the play's theme of arrogant downfall to request Robert to pay more attention to his suffering millworkers' well-being, he asks: "Who tells you these things?...if your uncle knew, what would he say?" (80). Caroline's retort reflects the limited sphere within which she is expected to work, despite her clear abilities otherwise: "I rarely talk to my uncle, as you know, and never about such things: he thinks everything but sewing and cooking above women's comprehension, and out of their line" (80). Representative of the patriarchal structures of capitalism and industry, Robert dismisses her lesson and tells her to recite "a little piece of poetry you learned the other day" (80), and Caroline retreats into her "happy, docile child" self (81). However, when later the millworkers do rise up against Robert and attack him, her warnings – and her reading of both the play and the mill situation – are proven correct.

Shirley is both a text and a reader. As a text, she is inscrutable. More than once, men attempt to interpret her and fail, as when local landowner Hiram Yorke attempts to subdue her opinion on the local unrest among the millworkers whose jobs are likely to be replaced by Robert Moore's machines: "her look spoke much at the moment: what — Yorke tried to read, but could not – the language was there—visible, but untranslatable—a poem—a fervid lyric in an unknown tongue" (312). Despite being adjured at the novel's beginning not to expect "poetry" or "passion" (5), readers witness the transmutation of Shirley *into* "a poem" here, a poem that the arrogant landowner cannot interpret. Shirley is in fact the only person other than Caroline to be capable of interpreting or reading poetry; her prospective suitor, Sir Philip Nunnely, bears out the promise in *Pride and Prejudice* that poetry, even "one good sonnet" (Austen, *P&P* 123) can

quickly ruin romance by writing and reciting bad poetry to Shirley. Worse still, the educated reader Shirley recognizes it as such – "she always winced when he recurred to the subject of his poems" – but Sir Philip does not: reading his poor sonnets in "a voice tremulous with emotion," he does not "seem to know, that though they might be rhyme, they were not poetry" (Brontë 396). Shirley knows poetry, for she once undertook to rewrite Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Her story of Eva and the marriage of "Genius and Humanity" is a productive failure; although it never became what she wished, it was so memorable that her former tutor Louis Moore can recite the entire pages-long text from memory some years later (405-9). This impression suggests that Brontë views "good" reading not as reaching a "correct" answer – Shirley's *devoir* ends with an unanswered and unanswerable question, "Who shall, of these things, write the chronicle?" (409) – but as an exploratory attempt at making meaning, which Shirley achieves.

Such a meaning-making is also found in *Emma*, whose heroine is an "Imaginist." Unfortunately for Emma, she is also a "pretty terrible novelist," a "resistant reader" who projects her own expectations (derived from novels) onto reality with spectacularly inaccurate results (Murphy 133). Unlike Shirley Keeldar, whose confidence in her own ability to interpret is borne out in *Shirley*, Emma Woodhouse's novel is the story of her realizing how truly poor a reader she has been. Austen tells the reader of her condition immediately: George Knightley remarks to her father that "Emma has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old. I have seen a great many lists of her drawing up at various times of books that she meant to read regularly through—and very good lists they were—very well chosen, and very neatly arranged…But I have done with expecting any course of steady reading from Emma" (28). It takes Emma much longer to realize that her spotty reading has led her into interpretive quagmire. She has failed to properly interpret Mr. Elton's charades. She has failed to recognize her own

role as marriageable heroine and her love of her father-figure Knightley. She has failed to read the secret engagement of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, although secret engagements are stock in trade of the sentimental novels of which she is fond. Austen defends Emma to a certain extent even as she reveals the depths of Emma's blindness: as Knightley admits, "Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest of her family" (28), but she is geographically, socially, and personally restrained from the opportunities that might have diverted her cleverness into productivity rather than mischief.

However, Emma herself is not the only reader who requires education. As Olivia Murphy points out, *Emma* itself is a metatextual meditation on the novel, a demand of readers to be careful about projecting their expectations onto a work of fiction, for they may not be answered as anticipated. Murphy argues that "readers of *Emma* as well as readers *within* the novel" must learn to "see only what is there, and not to manipulate facts to fit their own wishful thinking" (144). Austen uses the education of her heroine to model the readers' own education. While Brontë's heroines are immediately better readers than Emma is and do not undergo quite the same level of mortification-as-education, Brontë's project is ethically akin to Austen's: to teach readers how to *really* read.

Reading the Heroine: *Shirley, Emma,* and the Gentleman Heroine

Although Brontë herself would likely be displeased with the assertion, the heroines of *Shirley* are intercessors between the traditions of novels such as Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Gaskell's *North and South.* In *Pride and Prejudice,* Lizzie Bennet is (as she proudly reminds Lady Catherine de Bourgh) a "gentleman's daughter" (469), doubled by nearly every male figure in the text (and surpassing them all), and we are told she is much more like her father than her

mother. In *Shirley*, we see the model Nina Auerbach proposes of the Austen "narrative of waiting," in which women must wait for men to "endow [them] with...physicality" (44), presented and then disturbed: the mousy Caroline, echoing Elizabeth's sister Jane in many ways, follows a traditional narrative of waiting for Robert to notice her, but the "gentleman" Shirley makes readers wait for *her* and acts, in many ways, like the gallant Austen hero typified by a Wentworth or a Darcy. Elizabeth Gaskell's heroine Margaret Hale, of *North and South* (1854), is strongly influenced by Brontë's earlier gender-bending protagonist. While Gaskell did not enjoy the plot of *Shirley*, she admired Brontë's "true and brave" expression of her thoughts (*Letters* 116), and writes that Brontë had told her that "the character of Shirley was meant for her sister Emily, about whom she is never tired of talking, nor I of listening. Emily must have been a remnant of the Titans" (249). Gaskell clearly admired Brontë's characterization of Shirley, and her novel reflects this admiration in her appropriation of Brontë's heroine, as we will see in the next chapter.

Borrowing a heroine from Brontë, however, has its own set of complications. Rosemarie Bodenheimer asserts that "paternalism is an assumption central to Brontë's imagination of human relations" (37), and this seems clear in Shirley herself, whom Bodenheimer characterizes as a "female paternalist" (22). In this, she is much like Emma Woodhouse, another member of the landed minor gentry who likes to feel "useful" to those well beneath her on the social ladder, but who has no interest in the tenant farmers and other more well-off folk who "can need none of my help" (Austen, *Emma* 22). *Shirley* is in fact *more* conservative, at least in appearance, than some of Austen's novels. After all, at the end of *Pride and Prejudice* the Darcys and the middle-class Gardiners are "always on the most intimate terms" (505), a move that Susan Fraiman characterizes as "not merely personal but social, a marriage of two classes no less than a

marriage of true minds" (87). In contrast, the end of *Shirley* marks progress *as* regress: the bucolic world of the Hollow is marred by "queer changes" that have spoiled the "green, and lone, and wild" country and turned it into "substantial stone and brick and ashes" (Brontë 541). Social progress in *Shirley* is characterized as violence to the land, a view that Bodenheimer argues reveals Brontë's "nonprogressive view of history" (39).

This "nonprogressive view" seems at odds with Brontë's own debts to Austen, however. Brontë draws upon Austen for both incident and characterization, but the two novels most clearly apparent in *Shirley* are Austen's *Emma* (1814) and *Persuasion* (1818), the latter of which is in many ways Austen's most progressive work. In *Persuasion* the landed class are almost universally shallow popinjays and "foolish, spendthrift baronet[s]" (165), and its hero and heroine eschew the aristocratic model of landownership entirely: Wentworth has twenty-five thousand pounds in cash, not rents or land, and Anne is "mistress of a very pretty landaulette" but not a grand house (166). The sympathies that Austen demonstrates in *Persuasion* with the middle classes and officers who are not mired in defunct aristocratic concerns may help to explain why Brontë draws upon this novel in creating her own heroine.

Shirley is a strange hybrid, "an erect, slight girl" (Brontë 168) who nevertheless refers to herself throughout the novel as "gentleman" and who possesses and exercises social and financial freedom completely foreign to most Austen heroines. The single exception is of course Emma Woodhouse, "handsome, clever, and rich" and "mistress" of her father's house "from a very early period," with "the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (5). Like Emma, Shirley holds the highest power of landed authority in her neighborhood, "the first gentleman in Briarfield" (280). Like Emma, Shirley is a headstrong young woman who is romantically attracted to a father-figure in a position of

educative power over her, and may possibly have romantic attraction to her close female friend as well (Murphy 135). At the novel's end, Shirley, like Emma, must acknowledge the "superiority" of her male lover over her and "submit" to him via the heterosexual marriage union. Shirley is more keenly aware of her status than Emma; Shirley acknowledges that when she wishes, she can "comfortably fold my independence round me like a mantle, and drop my pride like a veil, and withdraw to solitude" (181).

Yet while Emma is subjected to multiple humiliations before she "learns her lesson" and is allowed to marry, Shirley does not seem to be ritually humiliated in the same manner, although her relationship with her former tutor and (later) husband Louis Moore both echoes and complicates Emma's relationship with the far older George Knightley. Knightley is clearly Emma's mentor throughout the novel – Austen's narrator refers to him as "one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them" (9) – and he openly chastises her for unladylike behavior, particularly after her humiliation of the impoverished and verbally incontinent Miss Bates on an excursion to Box Hill (258-9). Similarly, Louis Moore was once Shirley's formal tutor, and he re-asserts a dominant role over her not unlike Knightley's over Emma. Like Knightley, who admits that he "love[s] to look at [Emma]" (29), Louis claims that "[i]t delights my eye to look on [Shirley]," but his musing over his feelings for Shirley reveals that he is aware of her faults: "I worship her perfections; but it is her faults, or at least her foibles, that bring her near to me . . . and that for a most selfish, but deeply-natural reason: these faults are the steps by which I mount to ascendancy over her" (Brontë 437). Emma recognizes that Knightley is "infinitely the superior" (284) and acknowledges to him that "I never can call you any thing but 'Mr. Knightley'" (318). Shirley's claim of affection for Louis is quite similar: she famously claims that "I prefer a *master* . . . One

in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good. One whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge. A man whose approbation can reward – whose displeasure punish me. A man I shall feel it impossible not to love, and very possible to fear" (462). Many have read this statement as Shirley's capitulation to patriarchal norms, and in its similarity to the fatherly relationship between Emma and Knightley it seems possible. Nevertheless, Brontë does not blindly adopt this relationship model for her heroine and her lover: she radically destabilizes it. While Louis Moore is a "master" for some of the novel, he is also a distinctly feminized figure, one toward whom Shirley adopts a masculine stance in other parts of the novel (an interaction which I will discuss more later). This lack of fixity in their gender roles renders the relationship between Shirley and Louis potentially heterosexual (or bisexual, in Shirley's case, given her deep attachment to Caroline),[98] but not necessarily heteronormative.

Shirley confounds gender expectations in a number of ways. Nina Auerbach argues that Austen's writing reflects the gender expectations of her time by presenting "what an observant, genteel woman has to tell about the Napoleonic Wars...novels about waiting" (39). According to Auerbach, the women in *Pride and Prejudice* comprise a community of waiting women who participate in a "shared world [that] is a limbo of suspension and suspense" (38) – at least, until the men arrive to "bring life into limbo" (39). Auerbach suggests that it is the male who "can alone bring substance...the solidity and continuity of income and land" (39) and "endow female existence with...physicality" (44). In other words, women wait in a liminal space until the intervention of men brings both income and physical substance into their worlds. Caroline

[98] Anne Longmuir makes a convincing argument for the potential sexual fluidity of Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Helstone's relationship in her article, "Anne Lister and Lesbian Desire in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*." Annie Lister, a Yorkshire landowner who was "married" to her companion Ann Walker, was well-known for her sexual and romantic relationships with other women. Emily Brontë lived quite near Lister's estate, Shibden Hall, for a year, and Longmuir makes an excellent case for the notion that Charlotte would have known of Lister.

Helstone, the pretty and "modest and unassuming" young girl whose story we are involved in from the beginning of Brontë's *Shirley*, is largely subject to this narrative of waiting, experiencing a trajectory of hoping, fading, and reblossoming similar to several Austen heroines (particularly the sentimental ones such as Marianne Dashwood and Anne Elliot). With her delicate good looks and deeply internalized hopes and fears, Caroline could be cousins with a Fanny Price or Jane Bennet.

While Auerbach traces this theme of waiting through *Pride and Prejudice*, it is present also in *Persuasion.* Thematically, *Persuasion* itself is largely about waiting: readers experience Anne's excruciating lingering along with her, hoping as she does to discover that Captain Wentworth still loves her. What has been less remarked upon, however, is how the novel's structure sets the reader up for this anticipation. Most of Austen's novels begin by introducing the heroine in some form. For example, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* both begin with sketches of not only the heroines but of the social relationships that have led to their current situations; *Pride and Prejudice* allows us a glimpse of Elizabeth Bennet's wit and familial relationships while plunging the reader into the urgencies of the marriage plot; and *Emma* begins with a gently ironic portrait of its titular heroine that alerts readers to both her charms and her shortcomings. Austen's last novel, *Persuasion*, does not do these things. Indeed, Anne Elliot does not appear in her *own* novel – other than as a brief and dismissive description in the free indirect discourse of Sir Walter Elliot – until the end of Chapter Three. Instead, the novel begins with an examination of the social popinjay Sir Walter and his favorite daughter, Elizabeth (a name which, after *Pride and Prejudice*, readers might be excused for linking with the heroine of romantic fiction). In *Persuasion*, readers are left for several chapters to assume that Elizabeth Elliot is the likely heroine, as she gets the bulk of the description and the dialogue in the novel's beginning.

Readers must wait for the novel's real heroine to appear, and this waiting has significant impact on our expectations of the novel's progression. As James Phelan suggests, this is such a large rhetorical deviation from Austen's own model of progression that readers are by no means certain that a union between the protagonists will even happen (68-9).

Shirley plays on this Austenian narrative paradigm. Readers are immediately privy to and comfortably familiar with Caroline Helstone's traditional narrative of waiting for Robert Moore: like Jane Bennet, Caroline is fair-haired and pretty, and although she is familiar with the romantic trope that "[w]hen people love, the next step is they marry" (84), she must also wait passively for her love object, Robert Moore, to recognize her affection. Caroline recognizes and even laments the circumscription of her role and Robert's authority in matters of romance: "'Sometimes I am afraid to speak to him, lest I should be too frank, lest I should seem forward: for I have more than once regretted bitterly, overflowing, superfluous words, and feared I had said more than he expected me to say, and that he would disapprove what he might deem my indiscretion'" (85). This lack of female agency evokes the same lack of power visible in Anne Elliot's story, for Anne too is afraid to be too forward, unable to make the first move in discovering whether the man she loves returns her affections.

In *Shirley*, as in *Persuasion*, the eponymous heroine does not enter the narrative for a significant portion of the novel, but whereas Austen makes readers wait three chapters to hear Anne speak, Brontë makes her readers wait an entire volume (eleven long chapters) to see Shirley. This tactic challenges readers' presumptive ways of reading; like Emma Woodhouse's misplaced confidence in her analytical abilities, novel readers have a tendency to believe they know what they are reading and what to expect. *Shirley* upends these expectations entirely. Like the heroine-driven novels of Charlotte Smith, *Shirley* draws its title from its heroine's name (a

tradition also present in *Emma*). Yet although the novel bears her name, Shirley is ironically the woman who is most distanced from "her" narrative; the *Fraser's* reviewer commented that "[it] might as well have been called *Caroline,* or *Helstone*" (Allot 153). Readers are justified in expecting from its title to open the novel in Shirley's consciousness, or at least with a sketch of her character as we might see for the eponymous heroine of *Emma.* Yet we do not begin in Shirley's subjectivity (we rarely enter it at all, in fact) but at a dinner with three self-absorbed curates who appear to have little or nothing to do with the marriage plot we might expect from a novel bearing a heroine's name. Like Caroline and so many Austen heroines who must wait for the objects of their interest to acknowledge them, *Shirley*'s readers must wait passively for Shirley to acknowledge *us*. This experience is uncomfortable, but also educative: we know far better by the end of Volume I what it is to wait for someone's attentions.

Auerbach's argument about *Pride and Prejudice* is useful to readings of both *Persuasion* and *Shirley* in another regard as well. As Auerbach asserts, the women in *Pride and Prejudice* must wait until the men "bring substance . . . the solidity and continuity of income and land" (39) and "endow female existence with . . . physicality" (44). This interaction between men and female "substance" is to some extent found in *Persuasion* as well. Even before readers encounter Anne Elliot, we are informed by the narrator that that although she "had been a very pretty girl" a few years before the novel's action, "her bloom had vanished early," and we see that her father finds so "little to admire in her" that he and Elizabeth Elliot do not even think of her for several chapters (5). Anne spends much of her own novel as a bystander, a woman whose "bloom" readers are continually reminded has been lost. Anne's deprivation of her first attachment to Captain Wentworth has caused her a great deal of "suffering . . . 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" (20). Anne regains this "bloom" only once Wentworth sees *another* man, Anne's cousin Mr. Elliot, recognize her as pretty. Austen writes that "Anne's face caught [Mr. Elliot's] eye, and he looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration, which she could not be insensible of. She was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind," after which Wentworth "looked round at her instantly in a way which shewed his noticing of it" (70). We see Anne's return to beauty focalized through the perspective of two men; before, she has not been worth male notice, and so we have known only that she has lost her "bloom." Anne must wait for the intervention of the male characters in the novel to imbue her with physical beauty before she or the reader can rediscover it.

In *Shirley,* however, this trope too is invoked and destabilized. Shirley's bizarrely late entry into her own novel, and its narrative similarities to Anne's delayed entrance, has already been noted. Yet unlike Anne, Shirley is a distinctly beautiful physical presence in the novel from the moment she enters, and significantly, Brontë immediately associates her (figuratively and literally) with substance and with "bloom." Shirley's estate reflects her authority as a landlord, a position that, as Anne Longmuir notes, itself challenges the "economic and political standing" that women in the nineteenth century typically held (145). Shirley first appears in a chapter titled "Fieldhead," after the name of her estate, and before readers are shown Shirley herself, we are taken – along with Mr. Helstone and Caroline – through the physical trappings of aristocracy: the house is

> [v]ery sombre . . . long, vast, and dark: one latticed window lit it but dimly; the wide old chimney contained now no fire . . . . The gallery on high, opposite the entrance, was seen but in outline, so shadowy became this hall

> towards its ceiling; carved stags' heads, with real antlers, looked down grotesquely from the walls. This was neither a grand nor a comfortable house: within as without it was antique, rambling, and incommodious. (166)

Shirley's house is a physical representation of her family's "antiquity" (166), a manifestation of the power that she wields in the community that represents the same world of old money that a Mr. Darcy or Mr. Knightley would. But it is also a house stuck in the stifling past, full of grotesque dead things and vast dark spaces. With this description, Brontë explicates the unspoken potential of, say, George Knightley's estate in *Emma*: an ancient abbey in England, as Donwell Abbey was, would have carried the scars of centuries of religious exploitation and turmoil, from the corruption of the medieval Church through the violences of the Protestant Reformation and Henry VIII's stripping of church properties, but Austen does not mention this, referring to Donwell only as an estate of "English verdure, English culture, English comfort" (249). Fieldhead too is a symbol of ancient English culture, but it is not an enviable place in which to reside, and the narrator's choice of language – "vast," "dark," "grotesque," "incommodious" – emphasizes the discomfort that Caroline feels as she "reluctantly" enters the house (166).

Shirley's parlour, too, is "furnished all in old style" in dark oak paneling and antique furniture, but she first enters the novel through "a glass-door from the garden" (168). She is "an erect, slight girl . . . retaining with her left hand her little silk apron full of flowers" (168). Shirley enters the text as an embodiment of Spring, and she has not required the intervention of a male figure to create this blooming physicality in her – indeed, it could almost be said that she flourishes despite the gloomy oppressiveness of the masculine environs of Fieldhead. In a masculine intervention that literally takes *away* Shirley's "blooms," Mr. Helstone's insistence on

Shirley's saying her religious creeds – products of a patriarchal religion – causes her to "let fall her whole cargo of flowers" (169). Yet in a reversal of the paradigm in *Persuasion*, in which the attentions of men return Anne's bloom to her, Caroline Helstone gathers the fallen flowers up and returns them, "heap[ing] the blossoms" into Shirley's outstretched apron (169). The word "blossoms" here, as opposed to the word "flowers" which appears in all the other sentences, suggests the significance of this interaction: a blossom is new, fresh, a sign of youthfulness and desire shared between the two young women.

In contrast to the blooming physicality of the two young women, Shirley's secret male love object is so abstract as to almost lack physical substance altogether. Austen's heroes also tend to lack bodies, although the heroes of *Emma* and *Persuasion* are more embodied than is usual for her fiction; Emma remarks that George Knightley has a "fine air and way of walking" that embodies "*gentleman* so plainly written" (Austen, *Emma* 25). As Jill Heydt-Stevenson notes, *Persuasion* is arguably the most attentive to physical bodies of all Austen's novels; Anne Elliot notes that the returned Captain Wentworth is "glowing, manly, open," his "personal advantages" enhanced by a life of salt and sun on the sea (41). Unlike these men, Louis Moore is defined by Brontë's focus on what his physical features are *not*: Louis is not "so handsome" or "so noble" as Robert, but he is "not ugly" (Brontë 381). Like the condition of so many women in the era Louis's body exists only in negative space, by being "not" someone else's.

Louis's status lacks as much as his body. Although he technically has a position of superiority over her as her former tutor, Louis is financially and socially Shirley's inferior. Brontë writes of him that he has "the air of a man used to this life," one "who had made up his mind to bear it for a time. His faculties seemed walled up in him, and were unmurmuring in their captivity. He never laughed; he seldom smiled; he was uncomplaining. He fulfilled the round of

his duties scrupulously" (380). As Gilbert and Gubar note, Louis, is the "male counterpart of a governess…invisible and hungry" (394). Shirley is the active, blooming, and "gentlemanly" figure throughout the novel, whereas Brontë describes Louis' (non)presence in terms that evoke Austen's descriptions of Anne Elliot: he is "a satellite of the house of Sympson: connected, yet apart; ever attendant – ever distant....he had talents too, imperceptible to [his pupils'] senses. The most spirited sketch from his fingers was a blank to their eyes; the most original observation from his lips fell unheard on their ears" (379). Louis exists in the same liminal world as Anne, whom "nobody else thought of" (Austen, *Persuasion* 9), living as she does in "a sort of desolate tranquillity" (24) in which "she 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" (32). Indeed, Louis is far more a feminine figure in the novel than Shirley ever is; if in *Pride and Prejudice* "men alone endow female existence with...physicality" (Auerbach 44), in Brontë's novel Shirley seems to be doing most of the endowing.

In fact, the most physical sense of Louis's body comes through an intervention by Shirley, who acts the role of masculine reliever of affliction. Louis catches a "fever," itself a highly feminized affliction in the lexicon of disease, the sort of malady a romantic heroine catches (Caroline too takes a fever). Shirley visits him and nurses him. Although he refuses to eat the grapes she brings, he thanks her "for remembering [him]," although he has to "[turn] aside his flushed face" to hide his embarrassment over her attentions (400). In this scenario, Louis is the weak, feminized body, and Shirley the masculine comforter who offers relief to the "nervously sensitive" love-object (402). Louis must protest that "I am too feverish and excitable" – again, coding himself as intensely feminine – "to bear a soft, cooing, vibrating voice close at my ear" (402) to get Shirley to leave him.

This interaction between Louis and Shirley, although it evokes the relationship between Anne and Wentworth, also destabilizes the gendered roles of that relationship. Anne often does not notice Wentworth's assistance until it is completed, as when he relieves her of her pestering young nephew Walter: "she *found herself in the state of being* released from him; some one *was taking* him from her, though he had bent down her head so much, that his little sturdy hands *were unfastened* from around her neck, and he *was resolutely borne away*, before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it" (Austen, *Persuasion* 54, emphasis mine). Passive voice pervades Austen's description, emphasizing both Anne's passivity and the inconspicuousness of Wentworth's action. In contrast, Shirley's assistance is direct and open, and Louis clearly recognizes it and its source immediately. The sensations provoked by these interventions of a masculine force, however, are the same in Anne and Louis: Anne experiences "disordered feelings" and must retreat, "quite ashamed of being so nervous," to recover (54). Louis, privileged with the excuse of a sickbed, requests Shirley to leave him (although he has no agency to leave himself, as Anne does), but his "feverish and excitable" feelings are also disordered, and he too is "nervous" (Brontë 402).

As seen with Austen's use of gender role fluidity in *Sense and Sensibility* in Chapter 1, Brontë does not present to readers merely a simplistic reversal of the gender binary. Rather, Brontë invokes familiar characterizations and situations but continually refuses readers the comfort of fixity. Thus, although Shirley appears at times in the novel as dashing "gentleman" protector and Wentworth-like intercessor, the bringer of substance, physicality, and wealth and thereby the "masculine" figure according to Auerbach's theory, she *also* exists in the novel as a frustratingly demure schoolgirl, one who leaves her narrative as a woman "conquered by love, and bound with a vow . . . vanquished and restricted" (534) – but one who nevertheless "acted on

system," she and the narrator claim, in order to allow her husband to learn how "to rule" (535). Louis similarly slips between the extremely passive and feminized (the fevered waiting lover) and the extremely dominant and masculinized (the schoolmaster who "mounts to ascendancy" over his bride [437]). In creating characters who evoke familiar predecessors but who readily slip between traditional gender roles and at times appear to embody both stereotypically "masculine" and "feminine" traits simultaneously, Brontë challenges heteronormative concepts of gender even though her novel ends in heterosexual marriages.

"Winding-up" One's Readers

The trouble with reading the marriages at the end of Brontë's novel seriously is that it favors an implicitly binary view of gender: one may/must desire *either* members of one's own sex *or* members of the opposite sex, but not both. But, as already suggested by the fluidity of gender that both Shirley and Louis demonstrate, Brontë is not content to retain binaries unquestioned. Sharon Marcus notes that criticism has tended to insist that "relationships between women must heroically oppose the marriage plot," which has led to the automatic reading of novels that end in marriage as "hostile to female friendship" (76), and such is commonly the case with *Shirley* criticism. In contrast to critical trends, Marcus suggests that *Shirley* presents a narrative in which "female friendship and heterosexual marriage [are] logically related, structurally similar, and mutually reinforcing" (100). I would suggest we take the novel's ending one step further. There seems little reason to read the relationship of "female amity" between Caroline and Shirley as entirely asexual, which Marcus appears to do: critics such as Anne Longmuir have made strong arguments for the same-sex desire implicit in their relationship that I cannot do full justice to here, including compelling readings of the female erotics of spaces like

Nunnwood (Longmuir 150). But while Longmuir reads the novel's ending in heterosexual marriage as ultimately "the re-enforcement of patriarchal norms" (153), it seems to me that this despondent conclusion is not necessarily the only one possible; rather, the close bond maintained between the women even after marriage suggests that their marriages to their respective male love objects, while the products of genuine sexual desire (at least as presented by the novel's narrator), need not negate their (potentially similarly sexual) desire for each other.

While readers may close the novel dissatisfied with its apparently lackluster conclusion, this reaction too suggests the potential of Brontë's attempts: readers are warned from the very first page, after all, not to expect a "romance" as we are familiar with it, and the novel's ending delivers on the narrator's promise. The bittersweet (and, if the novel's critics may be believed, much more bitter than sweet) ending, a chapter mechanically titled "The Winding-up" in which Shirley silently endures "the lost privilege of liberty" (534) and refuses to make preparations for her own wedding, contradicts the flurry of excitement that readers have been taught by Austenian paradigms to expect from a novel that ends in a marriage.

However, the deliberate destabilization of the ending also implies a more careful reading of Austen than Brontë is usually given credit for. The implications of *Shirley*'s ending that so many find so disturbing also appear to explicate the ominous undertones of some of Austen's own weddings, particularly Emma's and Anne Elliot's. Although Emma and George Knightley get engaged in Chapter 13, they do not marry until Chapter 19 – and then only because Mr. Woodhouse is so taken with terror at a bout of poultry-house robberies that he at last gives his consent (Austen, *Emma* 333). This bizarre turn of events is what Suzanne Keen terms a "narrative annex," which exposes "absences, omissions, and the traces of the repressed" (108). Emma may fancy herself a genteel provider for those less well-off than herself, but the serial

pillaging of poultry-houses across the neighborhood suggests otherwise. In fact, poor relief sharply increased in Surrey (Emma's likely county of residence, as she is only seven miles from Box Hill) in 1815, the year before *Emma*'s publication, a likely explanation for the incursion on neighborhood fowl.[99] Turkey theft is a strange blip in the winding-down of a marriage plot, but that is precisely why it is there: to remind readers of the world just beyond the margins of the romance plot. Although the marriage in *Persuasion* is unmarred by the promise of poultry pilfering, the looming threat of Napoleon's return hangs heavy over Anne, as readers in 1819 would well know: "Anne was tenderness itself, and she had the full worth of it in Captain Wentworth's affection. His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm" (168). Like *Shirley*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* end with marriages but on disconcertingly ominous notes, introducing instability and indecision into this core social institution.

Disdainful of her predecessor's perceived lack of passion, Brontë complained in an 1850 letter to W.S. Williams that Austen's "business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet; what sees deeply, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study, but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of Life and the sentient target of death – *this* Miss Austen ignores" (qtd in Southam 128). Scholars have often noted Brontë's distaste for Austen's "shortcomings," and tend to establish her as a rebellious Northern writer actively dismantling Austen's genteel tradition of "romantic love...as an idealized mask for a social game in which female beauty is exchanged for the attention of men and the reward of marriage, with its conferral of economic

[99] See Judith Hill's unpublished doctoral thesis, *Poverty, Unrest and the Response in Surrey, 1815-1834* (University of Surrey, 2006).

security and prestige on the woman" (Weisser 98). This is certainly true, to an extent; Brontë appropriates narrative and thematic elements of Austen's novels and destabilizes them, complicating the gender expectations implicit in the tradition of "waiting" that Auerbach traces. But Brontë is not so radical that she can eliminate this romantic model entirely, as Weisser and others argue. Instead, Brontë creates in Shirley a woman already economically secure and prestigious, and in Louis a feminized figure stripped of his ancestral lands who is rescued from his narrative of waiting by Shirley's intervention. Mutable as their gender roles are, Brontë's characters represent less a full departure from their Austenian predecessors than variations on them. *Shirley* is an experiment in refashioning a familiar narrative, taking Austen's heroines from the subjunctive – *Persuasion*'s Anne Elliot "could" have been "eloquent," had she voiced her thoughts (21) – to the declarative. Shirley ends her novel married, as all of Austen's heroines do, but she boasts more agency than her predecessors, and – most importantly for Gaskell's later novel – *she* proposes to Louis:

> "Dear Louis, be faithful to me: never leave me....I do not ask you to take off my shoulders all the cares and duties of property; but I ask you to share the burden, and to show me how to sustain my part well....Be my companion through life; be my guide where I am ignorant; be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always!" (Brontë 523)

Austen's novels, according to Brontë, lack "what throbs fast, full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through" (*Letters* 162). Perhaps we may read *Shirley* as the product of Brontë's recognition of some hidden potential in Austen, something that needs only to be brought to the surface and made to "throb" to be interesting.

CHAPTER 5

OF NORTH AND SOUTH: ELIZABETH GASKELL AND JANE AUSTEN

> "'Could there be finer symptoms? Is not general incivility the very essence of love?" – Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (160)

A plucky young heroine, good-looking but not rich, meets an arrogant, wealthy older man who is the pillar of his community but not necessarily well-liked. She finds him intolerably proud; he thinks she is ridiculously prejudiced. He nevertheless falls in love with her, but she rejects him and the culture he represents. (She has a history of rejecting marriage proposals.) His covert exercise of power prevents a social catastrophe – caused by a sibling – from ruining her, and in the end they marry, uniting the spheres of wealth and influence with caring and middle-class virtues.

Such is a plot summary of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). It is also accurate regarding Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854), published just over forty years later. Several critics have noted the plot similarities between the two novels. Gaskell biographer A.B. Hopkins offhandedly remarks that *North and South* "could, in fact, be described as a Victorian *Pride and Prejudice*" due to its attention to the "gradual alteration in views and attitudes that takes place in the minds of the two central persons" (139), while Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests that *North and South* may at first appear as "a tamer, more conventional work [than Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*], one that reaches back to Jane Austen both for its depiction of strong-minded domestic virtue and for the social optimism of its *Pride and Prejudice* plot structure" (53). Janine Barchas argues for *North and South* as a "deftly refashioned *Pride and Prejudice*"

(53) although she acknowledges that "historians of the novel have never observed more than a vague family resemblance" between Austen's novels and Gaskell's (54). Yet although critics have sometimes been quick to label the plot of *North and South* as a Victorianized *Pride and Prejudice,* there is, as Barchas points out, very little deeper exploration of the relationship between the two novels, nor is there much discussion of what effect this narrative choice could have on its readers. Few critics seem to have questioned the idea that appropriating Austen means producing "tamer" or "more conventional" work.[100]

I argue in this chapter that reading Gaskell's novel in conjunction with *Pride and Prejudice,* a novel by Jane Austen to which it bears a striking amount of similarity, exposes an elision that is less obvious when *North and South* is read only (or primarily) in a Victorian context: that invoking familiar characters and expected tropes from readers' previous experience allows authors to promote readers' engagement with their texts. This engagement, in turn, urges readers to reconsider their preconceptions when their initial assumptions are challenged or shown to be inaccurate. Such destabilization is crucial to readers' learning, which may prompt a transformative empathetic response.

North and South and the Exercise of Empathy

Gaskell's long fiction is generally grouped in genres quite different from Austen's. Where exactly to place Austen's novels within literary tradition is the topic of near endless critical debate: Augustan? Eighteenth-century holdover? Satire? Romantic? Or, perhaps even

[100] The similarities between *Pride and Prejudice* and *North and South* have been pointed out by several critics, although these discussions are rarely extended critiques. A.B. Hopkins refers to *North and South* as a "Victorian *Pride and Prejudice*" (139). Rosemarie Bodenheimer asserts that *North and South* "reaches back to Jane Austen both for its depiction of strong-minded domestic virtue and for the social optimism of its *Pride and Prejudice* plot structure" (33). Nils Clausson offers a convincing reading of *North and South* as drawing upon the traditions of the "domestic women's romance" genre represented by *Pride and Prejudice* and using the conventions of romance for social critique ("Romancing Manchester" *The Gaskell Journal* [2007]).

more disturbingly, *Romance*? Gaskell's novels rarely produce such an identity crisis. Raymond Williams placed *North and South* in his "industrial novels" category in his highly influential book *Culture and Society* (1958), and critical thought has followed much the same trajectory since. In the same year, Arnold Kettle coined the idea of the "social-problem novel" and included Gaskell's works in that category, and in 1966, David Lodge placed Gaskell's novels within his proposed "condition-of-England novel."[101] Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests the concept of "Victorian social fiction" and argues that novels such as *North and South* "set themselves in a dramatic way to the task of giving fictional shape to social questions that were experienced as new, unpredictable, without closure" (*Politics* 4). As Nils Clausson points out, however, the difficulty with this generic assignment is that scholarship has tended to discuss these novels "almost exclusively in terms of their intervention in the 'condition-of-England' debate of the 1840s and 1850s" without paying the attention to elements such as narrative structure that these novels merit.[102]

Of further concern is that overlooking how Gaskell adapts and critiques *Pride and Prejudice* in *North and South* in favor of solely characterizing Gaskell as an "industrial" novelist actively engaged in the social concerns of the Question of England rejects the ability of domestic romantic (with a small "r") fiction to engage in those same concerns. The focus on Gaskell's work as industrial or realist or other "tough" terms serves to reify patriarchal conceptions of female worth; Gaskell's industrial novels are worth more than romances because they deal with weightier matters than mere marriage. This discrediting of the romance novel has been challenged, particularly in popular culture studies, for years, but nonetheless remains a consistent

[101] Arnold Kettle, ""The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel" in *The New Penguin Guide to English Literature*; David Lodge, *Language of Fiction*.
[102] See Nils Clausson, "Romancing Manchester" *The Gaskell Journal* for his discussion of similarities between *Pride and Prejudice* and *North and South.*

issue in criticism. As mentioned in Chapter 2, for example, the political novels of Charlotte Smith – which feature male protagonists – still receive far more critical attention than her novels featuring female protagonists, despite them often dealing with the same issues (her *Celestina* even directly addresses the French Revolution). As Pamela Regis points out, "critical characterization of the romance novel is overwhelmingly negative" (3). Stating a claim such as "*Pride and Prejudice* is a work of formula fiction" (which Regis then adeptly demonstrates is true) would be viewed essentially as condemnation of the work within critical circles (23). Even Nils Clausson's perceptive discussion of *North and South* as what he terms an innovative "industrial romance" sees the "romance" part of this experiment as a disadvantage. Clausson argues that "when [Gaskell] decided to write a fictional narrative to achieve [the goal of reconciling workers and factory owners], she did not invent an entirely new form but instead appropriated the romance plot…In doing so she put the romance form to an entirely new purpose, but it is a purpose that the romance genre itself resists" (n.pag.). I argue otherwise.

Austen's focus on domestic matters and lack of overt political commentary has been the subject of many a scholarly criticism and is a significant part of why it is so difficult to ascribe any political agenda to her novels. Robert Miles suggests in his essay "What Is a Romantic Novel?" that Austen's fiction represents "inward"-looking plots and characters rather than the "public and political" fiction that, as he rightly argues, both men and women wrote in the late eighteenth century (198). And, as he contests, the stereotype persists that "women writers coloniz[ed] the romance while male writers got on with the masculine tradition of the novel inherited from Richardson and Fielding" despite this traditional view being "wrong in nearly every respect" (198). As Miles reminds his readers, Scott wrote romances too. Even in Miles's essay, however, the "anxieties of social misreading and moral failure" in Austen's domestic

fiction are placed in contradistinction with the "matters self-evidently belonging to the public sphere" of philosophical romance (196). Viewing Gaskell's *North and South* as the product of a Northern, strong, industrial (and thus masculine) resistance to the Southern gentility and oppressiveness represented by Austen, then, is not only reductive of both novelists' significant powers but actively reinforces the patriarchal conventions that both novelists were so keen to challenge.

"Popular" readers, in contrast to their scholarly counterparts, have no trouble at all reading *North and South* as, in the words of goodreads.com reviewer, "*Pride and Prejudice* meets Industrial Revolution in the North of England."[103] User-generated reviews on the popular reading recommendations site goodreads.com – as of this writing, 3,889 reviews – consistently focus on the romantic relationship between Margaret Hale and John Thornton as their authors' main source of pleasure in reading, writing comments such as "Thornton + Margaret <3" and "I swooned over Thornton." The characters' realism is another selling point for these readers; several reviewers note that they enjoyed the book because the characters were "believable"[104] or "feel so real you can almost [touch] them."[105] Many reviewers also comment on Gaskell's interweaving of social themes with the romance: for example, the review by "Fiona" mentions that in addition to being "*Pride and Prejudice* meets Industrial Revolution," *North and South* has a "much more wider [sic] perspective" on politics, which the reviewer finds appealing. This perspective is echoed by many other reviewers, who refer to the novel as an "uncanny" *Pride and Prejudice* reworking that also serves as an "exploration of worker's [sic] rights"[106] or, more

[103] "Fiona," review of *North and South*, goodreads.com, August 29, 2011.
[104] "Alisa," review of *North and South*, goodreads.com, July 1, 2007.
[105] "Fiona."
[106] "Pamela," review of *North and South*, goodreads.com, June 1, 2011.

succinctly, as "*Pride and Prejudice* for Socialists."[107] These reviews demonstrate two ideas of consequence: first, that popular readers (as opposed to only those academic readers with a broad knowledge of nineteenth-century literature) widely recognize *North and South* as drawing heavily upon *Pride and Prejudice*; and second, that popular readers find the personal engagement with characters prompted by the romance plot to be helpful in establishing an interest in the social issues Gaskell incorporated.[108]

Romance, in fact, may be a highly useful vehicle for prompting empathic response through "perspective taking" by readers. As scholars of the modern romance novel point out, readers quite commonly "project themselves into the story" of the romance novel, in essence "becom[ing] the heroine" (Radway 67). The heroine is, in fact, often of central importance to readers' enjoyment of the text (Regis 22). Such projection into the feelings of another is also the starting point of empathy, and has been recognized as such since at least the mid-eighteenth century, as noted earlier. Robert Miles acknowledges that Austen's fiction captivates readers at least in part because it "[invites] an intense identification with her heroines" (196). Kate Flint notes that the female reader in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was often the subject of intense cultural debate precisely *because* of this tendency (either perceived or actual) to become emotionally involved in the fiction she read. Reading was "a means [for young women] of extending one's knowledge and experience beyond the bounds of one's personal lot," but also the dangerous source of "mischievous" emotional impressions (12) due to women's greater sensitivity to "emotionally provocative material" (22). This sensitivity was such an established

[107] "Barry Pierce," review of *North and South*, goodreads.com, November 4, 2011.
[108] Austen and Gaskell are not the only "classic" authors to receive rave reviews from pop readers. Even Charlotte Smith, whose novels barely received scholarly attention until the last half of the twentieth century, has several enthusiastic reviews on goodreads.com. *Emmeline*, for example, is often favorably compared by reviewers to Jane Austen's novels.

trope of female reading by the end of the eighteenth century that Austen playfully engaged it in *Northanger Abbey*, a novel in which the heroine Catherine Morland, having read more Gothic romances than is perhaps good for her, begins to project herself into her actual environment as the heroine of a romance. However, as many scholars have noted, Catherine's heightened readings of her environment are not without some grounds; Flint, for example, notes that Catherine has "plenty of justification for being apprehensive of her actual, rather than her imaginary, situation" (26). Romance novels, whether by Ann Radcliffe or by Stephenie Meyer, have a reputation for actively involving their female readers in a way that many other genres simply do not.

Romance is also an ideal form within which to provide cognitive dissonance, a concept which is crucial to my interpretation of these works. Because its readers are intimately familiar with its basic narrative formula (described in great detail by Pamela Regis in her book *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*), they are also likely to recognize deviations from that formula and be prompted to give those moments further thought. The many catalogues of similarities between *Pride and Prejudice* and *North and South* offered by popular readers (which often go into more detail than the scholarly analyses comparing the two works) demonstrate that readers are both keenly aware of a perceptible romance formula present even in "classic" literature and eager to consider what they view as departures from that formula.

There is evidence to suggest that Gaskell herself considered her novel, at least initially, to be more about its heroine than its social conflict: she titled the novel *Margaret* and was not entirely pleased when Charles Dickens, the editor of *Household Words* where the novel was initially published in serial form, changed the title to *North and South.* Gaskell had, after all, named her previous novels after their heroines (*Mary Barton*, *Ruth*). This practice of naming a

novel after its heroine is familiar to readers of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels and connects Gaskell's novel to a tradition spanning back to important and popular novels such as Frances Burney's *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla*, Charlotte Smith's *Celestina*, *Emmeline*, and *Ethelinde*, and Jane Austen's *Emma*, as well as *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, the widely read novels by Gaskell's contemporary and friend Charlotte Brontë.

Contemporary reviewers were also interested in linking *North and South* to the romances that had preceded it, although (surprisingly) no reviews of the novel mention Austen. Instead, reviewers such as Margaret Oliphant focused on the relationship of Gaskell's novel to the author with whom modern literary critics also commonly group her works: Charlotte Brontë. Oliphant begins her review of *North and South* for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (May, 1855) with an extended meditation on Brontë's influential role in modern fiction: speaking of *Jane Eyre*, she remarks that "[t]he effect of a great literary success, especially in fiction, is a strange thing to observe,—the direct influence it has on some one or two similar minds, and the indirect bias which it gives to a great many others" (559).[109] One of the "great many others" Oliphant here refers to is "Miss Kavanagh," the author of heroine-driven romantic novels that, in Oliphant's words, "[do] little else than repeat the attractive story of this conflict and combat of love or war—for either name will do" (559).[110] Although Julia Kavanagh was extremely popular during her lifetime, that her works have since faded into obscurity while Gaskell's have remained popular despite their narrative similarities supports Oliphant's claim that copying a popular

[109] "Modern Novelists—Great and Small", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 77(475), May 1855. 554-568.
[110] Although not identified by her full name, the novelist Oliphant criticizes in this review is Julia Kavanagh, an Irish novelist who wrote fourteen popular novels during the mid-nineteenth century, all of which dealt with sexual politics and gender boundaries, albeit within a fairly conventional framework. Thirteen of Kavanagh's fourteen novels bear their heroine's names as titles (Fauset 64). She was also a perceptive critic of Austen and widely read in the influential female novelists of the past century; she wrote several volumes of literary biography, including *English Women of Letters* (1862), a volume of biographical sketches that included examinations of Frances Burney, Charlotte Smith, Anne Radcliffe, Elizabeth Inchbald, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, and Amelia Opie.

formula in one's own novels is not enough to attain longevity. Something else must also be at work.

Oliphant has her own ideas about what sort of familiarity *does* work in fiction. Bemoaning that so few authors make any effort to "put some novelty into [their] novel[s]" (560), she nevertheless admires a writer whom she sees as the beneficiary of "*indirect* influence" (emphasis original): Elizabeth Gaskell. In *North and South*, Oliphant sees distinct shades of Brontë:

> [H]ere are still the wide circles in the water, showing that not far off is the identical spot where Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, in their wild sport, have been casting stones; here is again the desperate, bitter quarrel out of which love is to come; here is love itself, always in a fury, often looking exceedingly like hatred, and by no means distinguished for its good manners, or its graces of speech. (559)

While the description of love as "often looking exceedingly like hatred, and by no means distinguished for its good manners, or its graces of speech" is accurate as a description of romance in Brontë's works, it is also quite accurate as a characterization of *Pride and Prejudice*. Despite the familiarity of *North and South*'s plot, however, Oliphant does not deride *North and South* as derivative. Oliphant, in fact, seems to have identified with the heroine's struggle: she writes warmly of Margaret's personal (and physical) qualities and claims that "when…Margaret becomes an heiress, it is somewhat hard to see her delivered over to the impoverished Manchester man, who is as ready to devour her as ever was an ogre in a fairy tale" (560).[111]

[111]This skeptical response to the romance between Margaret Hale and John Thornton is not uncommon. Parthenope Nightingale (Lady Verney), Florence Nightingale's older sister, wrote to Gaskell that she was "afraid Margaret will not be happy, tho' she will make him so; he is too old to mould, and the poetry of her nature will suffer under the iron mark which has so compressed his so long" (qtd in *N&S* 414). The letter from Nightingale is undated and does not appear to have survived other than as an excerpt in Elizabeth Haldane's *Mrs Gaskell and Her Friends* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 105.

Oliphant's long review ends with a eulogy for Brontë, who had just died. Of Brontë, she writes:

> No one in her time has grasped with such extraordinary force the scenes and circumstances through which her story moved; no one has thrown as strong an individual life into place and locality. Her passionate and fearless nature, her wild, warm heart, are transfused into the magic world she has created – a world which no one can enter without yielding to the irresistible fascination of her personal influence. Perhaps no other writer of her time has impressed her mark so clearly on contemporary literature, or drawn so many followers into her own peculiar path; and she leaves no one behind worthy to take the pre-eminent and leading place of the author of *Jane Eyre*. (568)

Of particular interest to me is Oliphant's description of reading Brontë's novels as an experience of "yielding to the irresistible fascination of her personal influence" (568). In the nineteenth century, "fascination" meant much the same as it does now, but the word carried stronger connotations of "attractive influence" and even of "enchantment" (OED, n. fascination). Oliphant was wary of fiction's influence on readers, especially female readers, as her reviews of mid-century sensation fiction reveal.[112] Nevertheless, her language here suggests that novels' ability to enchant is more than a danger; it can also propel readers toward an engagement with the characters and a deeper understanding of "individual life."

[112] For example, her review of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859) argues that Collins's novels, while not necessarily dangerous themselves, certainly pose a danger to novel readers in general by setting a trend for sensation fiction: "The violent stimulant of serial publication…is the thing of all others most likely to develop the germ, and bring it to fuller and darker bearing. What Mr. Wilkie Collins has done with delicate care and laborious reticence, his followers will attempt without any such discretion" (*Blackwood's* 90 [May 1862]: 565-74).

Nor was Oliphant the only nineteenth-century reader aware of fiction's powers to absorb. While readers' projections of themselves into the novels they read is a phenomenon that has only received study relatively recently, it is not a new phenomenon. A reviewer in *Fraser's Magazine* describes the experience of sitting up all night with a novel in terms not unfamiliar to a modern binge-reader of *Harry Potter* or *Twilight*: "Well do we remember how we took up *Jane Eyre* one winter's evening, somewhat piqued at the extravagant commendations we had heard, and sternly resolved to be as critical as Croker.[113] But as we read on we forgot both commendations and criticism, identified ourselves with Jane in all her troubles, and finally married Mr. Rochester about four in the morning" (692). [114] As Mary-Catherine Harrison notes, the reviewer (commonly agreed to be Shakespeare scholar William George Clark) almost certainly would have had more in common personally with Mr. Rochester – male, educated, financially secure – yet his sympathies lie with the heroine: he identifies himself with Jane and even claims that *he* married Mr. Rochester at the end (Harrison 260). Later in the review – which unfavorably compares Brontë's *Shirley* to its predecessor – the reviewer writes that "[i]n *Jane Eyre* the reader accompanied the heroine throughout, saw with her eyes, heard with her ears, in short, lived over again one life, and regarded other persons and things from *one* point of view—the heroine's personality" (692). What the reviewer describes here is the experience of empathy: not just feeling pity for Jane's misfortunes, but feeling *her* emotions and thinking *her* thoughts. That the person describing this experience is in nearly all ways very different from Jane Eyre strengthens the argument that fiction, and in particular fiction that focuses on the experiences of heroines (as

[113] John Wilson Croker, author of the infamous review of John Keats's *Endymion* in the *Quarterly Review* (1819), on which Percy Bysshe Shelley blamed Keats's death and the review to which Byron jokingly referred in Canto 11 of *Don Juan*: "John Keats, who was killed off by one critique" and "snuffed out by an article."
[114] The review is unsigned in *Fraser's*, although Miriam Farris Allott (editor of *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*) suggests that it was probably written by Shakespeare scholar William George Clark, based upon evidence from Clark's tutor at Cambridge (Allott 152). It is sometimes misattributed to G.H. Lewes, who reviewed *Jane Eyre* in *Fraser's*.

romances tend to do), can provoke a deep empathic response even in readers dissimilar to those individuals about (or in this reviewer's case, *as*) whom they are reading.

Neither *Pride and Prejudice* nor *North and South* have the explicitly autodiegetic narrator that *Jane Eyre* has. Nevertheless, Austen, as Miles notes, frequently "invited intense identification with her heroines" while undermining that same identification through the use of irony and free indirect speech (196). *Pride and Prejudice* manipulates its readers into identifying with Elizabeth Bennet through Austen's masterful use of "double-voiced" language that, as Anne Waldron Neumann observes, "conflate[s] narration with reported discourse…to confuse—intentionally—character's subjective speech with the narrator's objective account of that character's thoughts or feelings" (365). Neumann argues that the narrative voice in *Pride and Prejudice* is often "indistinguishable from the narrator's idiom" (372), and its narrator "devotes many passages to *sharing* with Elizabeth the rendition of her thought—blending tagged indirect thought with the free indirect thought of whole sentences" (381). While the narrator remains distant enough in the novel to pass judgment on characters (including Elizabeth), for much of the novel, readers are essentially in Elizabeth's head, and this creates an empathetic effect not unlike the first-person narration of a novel such as *Jane Eyre*. It is interesting to note that Gaskell does not follow Brontë's narrator model in *North and South*, despite her admiration for Brontë's work; like *Pride and Prejudice, North and South* is written in a third-person heterodiegetic voice. However, as with Austen's novel, the narration in *North and South* is principally focalized through the viewpoints of the heroine and hero, Margaret Hale and John Thornton, and Gaskell takes particular pains to allow the reader to intimately share in their feelings and thoughts.

My argument in reading *North and South* alongside *Pride and Prejudice*, then, is that borrowing the familiar tropes of Austen's novel allows Gaskell greater freedom to precipitate

thought and change in her readers than would a strict attempt at "originality." The romance offers some ideal opportunities for provoking empathy: readers are accustomed to its narratives and tropes and are comfortable and practiced in identifying with its heroines. In presenting readers with a world and inhabitants that refer to this familiar catalogue of tropes, Gaskell plays on readers' tendency to project themselves into a fictional genre with which they feel intimately acquainted, thereby prompting identification with the characters. In her deviations from the expected formula Gaskell then challenges her readers to rethink their initial assumptions about those tropes without losing their empathic responsiveness. Readers thus follow the same trajectory of confronting prejudice and undergoing moral education as do the novel's protagonists.

Empathy, Sympathy, and the Forms of Feeling

I use the word "empathy" in this chapter to refer to two related concepts: 1), the "vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect" (Keen, *Empathy* 4), i.e., in some way *feeling* the emotions of another person; and 2) "perspective-taking," or imagining oneself in the place of another and experiencing the thoughts and feelings of that other (Harrison 256). "Empathy," a loose translation introduced in the early twentieth century of the German word *Einfühlung* (literally, "in-feeling"), was not used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which used the word "sympathy" to mean something very similar; as the OED notes, "sympathy" meant "the fact or capacity of entering into and sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling." Suzanne Keen explains that modern-day sympathy is construed as "feelings *for* another," whereas modern-day empathy is construed as feelings *with* another (5). Prior to the twentieth century, however, such a distinction did not exist. David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*

(1738) and Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) both set out definitions of sympathy that resonate with our modern understanding of empathy, and these philosophers – while by no means the only ones who conceptualized sympathy, probably one of the most discussed ideas of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries – provided a foundation for most of those who followed. It is thus worthwhile to spend a little time discussing them.

For Hume, "moral sentiments" are emotions that result from considering persons or actions "without regard to our self-interest" (Morris [n.pag.]), and they can be developed and strengthened through increasing one's awareness of others' moral responses. (Such a theory was precisely the motivation for a great deal of literature produced at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, including Joanna Baillie's extremely popular *Plays on the Passions*.) Hume argues that sympathy depends on resemblance and familiarity: "[w]here [people] remark the resemblance" between themselves, he writes, "it operates after the manner of a relation, by producing a connexion of ideas" (149). "Resemblance" is crucial to the workings of sympathy: "Resemblance must very much contribute to make us enter into the sentiments of others….Accordingly we find, that where, beside the general resemblance of our natures, there is any peculiar similarity in our manners, or character, or country, or language, it facilitates the sympathy" (133-34). In Hume's view, sympathy is the direct experience of another's feelings that is prompted by our recognition of contiguity with them, understanding the resemblance of their feelings to our own, and experiencing them with a certain "vivacity" that is natural to our understandings of our own feelings and projected into the experience of others'.

Adam Smith's definition of sympathy is a little different, as he believes that "we have no immediate experience of what other men feel" and thus can imagine another's feelings only by

"conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (13). His famous example of imagining another human on the rack illustrates his conception:

> By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (13-14)

As Samuel Fleischacker argues, Smith's is a "projective" account of sympathy, while Hume's is a "contagion" account. Both, however, conceptualize sympathy in terms we now associate with empathy: the sharing of affect and the act of projecting ourselves into the emotions experienced by others. When Gaskell uses sympathy in her writing, which she does frequently, it is to these concepts that she refers.

The idea that sympathy, whether projecting ourselves into the feelings of others through thought or actually experiencing those feelings through Hume's concept of emotional contagion, could have a marked impact on society was one that the Victorians in particular were keen to explore.[115] Adela Pinch has recently examined British nineteenth-century writers' interest in whether "thinking can affect, even harm, others" (3) in her book *Thinking about Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing*. As Pinch explains, it was not uncommon in the era to believe that "forms of thinking" were in fact "forms of action, which produce not knowledge about but real effects on others" (2). It thus stands to reason that fiction that encouraged *thinking* about others would translate – at least in the imaginations of the writers – to encouraging *acting for* others, and this is the argument for much of what has since been labeled the "Industrial

[115] Given Britain's nineteenth-century colonial exploits, it is perhaps ironic that British nineteenth-century writers were so taken with the idea of thinking about others as a moral act.

Fiction" or the "Social-Problem Novel." Gaskell herself argued as much for *Ruth* in a letter to Anna Jameson: writing that she was dismayed by the public backlash against her novel's frank discussion of sexual mistreatment of women, she nevertheless ended her letter exclaiming that "I think I have put the small edge of the wedge in, if only I have made people talk & discuss the subject a little more than they did" (226).[116]

In recent decades, psychologists have revealed a strong correlation between experiences of empathy for others and ethical responses (Harrison 256).[117] Mary-Catherine Harrison argues that empathic responses by readers toward fictional characters "can prompt ethical behavior in the extra-fictional world" through what she calls a "synechdocal model of interpreting character." This model involves three steps on the reader's part: first, the projective imagining of oneself in the "spatiotemporal and emotional place of a fictional character"; second, the interpretation of that character "as part of a larger social category," by which, for example, one laborer becomes synechdocal for all laborers; and third, the feeling of helping impulses toward the social category just imagined (257). Such a model is supported by psychological evidence, such as the work done on "empathic concern" by C. Daniel Batson that investigates the role of "perspective taking" in developing altruistic behaviors toward others.[118] Batson argues that multiple influences affect individuals' altruistic responses, including ego-driven influences (the need to feel good after helping others, for example), but that "perspective taking," in which an individual is asked to project themselves into the feelings of another person (a la Adam Smith), often results in improved attitudes and behaviors toward that other.

[116] Letter to Anna Jameson, dated March 7th 1853.
[117] For a detailed overview of the psychological work involving empathy and ethical response, see Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (2007).
[118] For a detailed discussion of this work, see Batson's recent book *Altruism in Humans* (Oxford UP, 2011).

There is also significant scientific evidence in support of Hume's original notion of "resemblance" as crucial to the development of empathy. Modern psychology research has investigated what is now called the "similarity bias" and found that, in general, people empathize most strongly with those they consider similar to themselves. This tendency is perhaps unsurprising. However, Hume's original notion of "resemblance" includes more than the typical demographic markers such as gender, ethnicity, and class background: he also includes language. Thus, it seems possible that one world constructed by language – which is, after all, what novels are – that evokes resemblance to another world, similarly constructed, could prompt readers to draw connections between the two, allowing an empathic response. In other words, presenting readers with a fictional world that is full of familiar language, scenes, and characters may be useful in manipulating readers' similarity biases to provoke empathy.

There is contemporary evidence to suggest that, if prompting empathic response in her readers was Gaskell's goal, it succeeded. Anna Jameson expressed her deep satisfaction with *North and South* in a letter to Gaskell, writing that despite the novel's rushed, compressed ending (forced on Gaskell by the demands of serial publication in *Household Words*), "what is done is so beautiful and complete that it is only in considering the world as a whole that we feel too great compression – we want to know something more about the other characters" (qtd in Norton 415).[119] These other characters were more than likely those whose arcs Gaskell was obliged to compress due to the space constraints of *Household Words*, such as the laborer Higgins and his ill daughter. That Jameson wished to read more about them signals Gaskell's success in engaging a reader's empathic imagination for others, even those she was unlike. Jameson also wrote that she found the mutual blossoming of sympathy between the novel's hero and heroine something

[119] The full text of this letter, like Parthenope Nightingale's, is unavailable; the letter exists as an excerpt in Haldane's *Mrs Gaskell and Her Friends* (1930).

beautiful and powerful to read, stating that she is "enrage[d]" by the compression of "that beautiful picture of the gradual opening of the mutual mind and heart of the two beings you have created with such an intense vitality" (415).

First Impressions: *North and South* and *Pride and Prejudice*

This chapter argues that, rather than placing itself in opposition to Austen, Gaskell's novel relies on Austen's familiarity and popularity to increase its own impact. As my discussions of prospection and cognitive dissonance have asserted, readers rely on a "back catalogue" of impressions and memories to create predictions for their future experiences which they then project onto a new reading encounter. Deviations from these predictions result in moments of cognitive dissonance, which can only be resolved by the reader either rejecting the new information or adjusting their frame of reference to include it. In adapting the very familiar plot and tropes of *Pride and Prejudice*, Gaskell both encourages her readers to make predictions about *North and South* and actively challenges the accuracy and appropriateness of those predictions. The novel's power over its readers is heightened, not diminished, by their familiarity with Austen's work.

In tracing Gaskell's skillful deployment of *Pride and Prejudice* in her own novel, my aim is not simply to demonstrate that Gaskell rewrote Austen's most famous book with a literary realist bent – such arguments, as I stated earlier, have already been made. Rather, I see Gaskell further developing a novelistic tradition that stretches beyond her immediate relationship with Charlotte Brontë, thus connecting her work to that of the female authors writing decades before her. As I have argued for Austen's own appropriation and manipulation of works by Charlotte Smith and Elizabeth Inchbald, and for Brontë's complicated engagement with Austen, these

resonances create and reinforce a textual community that does not rely on the linear model of influence proposed by Harold Bloom and others, or fetishize originality as the sole litmus test by which the success of a work may be judged. Instead, the text's very evocation of familiar situations and characters allows readers to feel both the reassurance of recognition and the challenge of change. While a comprehensive catalogue of similarities between *North and South* and *Pride and Prejudice* is beyond the scope of this work, it is also unnecessary for my purposes. Instead, what follows in this chapter will be close readings of key moments from *North and South* that serve as case studies supporting my larger argument.

Gaskell's heroine in *North and South*, Margaret Hale, marks both a continuation of and departure from her heroine ancestors. *Pride and Prejudice* presents readers with a group of sisters, two of whom serve as the principal heroines: Elizabeth, vivacious and intelligent, and Jane, beautiful but quietly reserved. The wild, reckless younger sister Lydia is less a heroine and more a catalyst for her sister's romance; sisters Mary and Kitty are rarely more than punchlines for Austen's dry humor. *Shirley* streamlines this structure, eliminating the extra sisters while maintaining a dual heroine focus; indeed, while the novel is titled *Shirley*, Shirley herself does not appear until the very end of Volume I, and readers spend the first volume with the pretty but timid Caroline Helstone and her (apparently) unrequited love for Robert Moore. *North and South* pares the plot further to essentials: one heroine, one hero, one sibling-in-trouble side-plot that threatens to damage the heroine.

What we see if we trace the movement of the heroine from her early incarnation as Elizabeth Bennet through her transformation into Shirley Keeldar and finally her amalgamation as Margaret Hale is a character who comes to embody – quite literally – a critique of patriarchal values and culture. In each of her iterations, she continues to destabilize readers' expectations of

her gender by deviating from the model readers have been told to expect. Thus, in *Pride and Prejudice,* Lizzie is an outspoken "gentleman's daughter" who sympathizes far more with her father than her mother. In *Shirley,* Brontë presents and then disturbs Austen's "narrative of waiting," in which women must wait for men to "endow [them] with...physicality" (Auerbach 44): Caroline, like Jane Bennet a quiet, sweet girl, must wait for her love interest Robert to notice her, but the "gentleman" Shirley, more akin to a landowning hero such as Darcy, makes readers and her love interest wait for her. Gaskell's Margaret Hale (her name also Gaskell's original choice of title) unites the roles of Darcy and Elizabeth, and she is no longer a gentleman's daughter nor particularly a gentleman. Barchas suggests Margaret's role as Darcy in her argument, but she focuses on the influence of Gaskell's novel on our reading of Austen's "treatment of regional prejudices" (55). This is less interesting to me. Instead, I would like to consider why Gaskell seems drawn to Austen and Brontë, and how she ends up deploying their heroines (and plots) in new contexts to provide new meanings for her own work.

My argument is not to claim that Austen is the sole source of inspiration to Gaskell, nor that she necessarily wished her work to be read as a descendant of Austen's novels. We have no recorded opinions from Gaskell on the subject of Austen, although given Austen's popularity in the era – and her friend Charlotte Brontë's visceral dislike of her – it seems quite likely she was familiar with at least the more popular of Austen's novels. What I do wish to argue is that the act of reading *North and South* alongside *Pride and Prejudice* contributes to a better understanding of both novels. They need not be read in the chronological order in which they were published for this understanding to develop, either; reading *Pride and Prejudice* after *North and South* reveals new shades of Austen's own painting.

As Brontë's and Austen's novels were before it, Gaskell's *North and South* is principally concerned with its heroine. As Alan Shelston, the editor of the Norton Critical edition of *North and South*, notes, the initial novel heading as published in *Household Words* was a stanza from a Tennyson poem that included the lines "But for some true result of good / All parties work together" (7n1). When the novel was published in two volumes with substantial revisions, Gaskell deleted this heading and substituted chapter mottoes, including the line from a folk song used for Chapter I, "Wooed and married and a'," which Shelston suggests indicates that "Gaskell considered her heroine's story to be the main priority" (7n1).

The opening pages of *North and South* establish tropes familiar to any Austen reader. The scene opens in a respectable London house, where the young Edith Shaw has become engaged to military officer Captain Lennox and her mother is lamenting the probability that her daughter will be stationed far away from her in a foreign place. (Readers of *Pride and Prejudice* would remember that the possibility of her daughter being stationed in the north with her military husband is also a principal worry of Mrs. Bennet once Lydia marries Wickham.) Mrs. Shaw herself reads like many long-married women in Austen, a woman who "after deliberately marrying General Shaw with no warmer feeling than respect for his character and establishment, was constantly, though quietly, bemoaning her hard lot in being united to one whom she could not love" (9). Gaskell insistently reminds the reader of Mrs. Shaw's wounded feelings regarding her marriage, which align her with someone like Mrs. Bennet: Mrs. Shaw is always "plaintive" when she speaks, a characteristic "arising from the long habit of considering herself a victim to an uncongenial marriage" (14). Mrs. Shaw's similarities to Mrs. Bennet extend even into a hypochondriac temperament: "she had every good of life, with as few drawbacks as possible, [and] she had been rather perplexed to find an anxiety, if not a sorrow. She had, however, of late

settled upon her own health as a source of apprehension; she had a nervous little cough whenever she thought about it" (14-15).

Margaret seems initially to take the role of a Fanny Price, a young woman who was "brought, all untamed from the forest, to share the home, the play, and the lessons of her cousin Edith," a substantially wealthier cousin with a posh London home and "society" friends (10). Margaret is tasked with humdrum errands like fetching shawls and serving as a living "sort of block" for their display, "quite silent and passive," while her aunt and her aunt's friends admire the shawls and think nothing of the young woman modeling them (11). Yet while Margaret serves in these first few pages as an unobserved clothes-horse for her aunt's displays, her cousin Edith is nearly indistinguishable from the furnishings that surround her. In Edith's first appearance in the novel, she is "asleep on a crimson damask sofa," and has "rolled herself up into a soft ball of muslin and ribbon, and silken curls" (7). In the space of a paragraph, Gaskell repeats some variation of "white muslin and blue ribbons" three times to describe Edith, emphasizing how little distinction there is between girl and dry goods. While the tropes of this scene – the fussy hypochondriac mother, the pretty but perhaps a bit airheaded society girl, the hard-working country cousin – are familiar to readers of Austen, Gaskell's focus on the details of the young women's physicality embodies their status as *consumable* in a way that Austen's habitual elision of physical characteristics does not.[120] Women, in this first chapter, are still meant to be seen and not heard, a social pressure that seems to have changed little from the *Pride and Prejudice* era.

[120] Carol Shields gives a humorous catalogue of the actual body parts present in Austen's work: "one chin, ten ankles mostly sprained, and one liver….There are two bones (but neither one a human bone), seven elbows, five shoulders, just two noses, ten ears, only eleven legs, two wrists, six knees, two eyebrows and four eyelashes" (132).

The opening chapter also introduces the reader to the first of Margaret's many suitors, Henry Lennox, who demonstrates his unpleasant colors as soon as he opens his mouth: "Well, I suppose you are all in the depths of business—ladies' business, I mean. Very different to my business, which is the real true law business. Playing with shawls is very different work to drawing up settlements" (12). Lennox's cluelessness as to the real value of Margaret's labors (or feelings) instantly evokes Austen popinjays like Mr. Collins or Mr. Elton. Yet, very like Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse, Margaret is shown to be quite capable of holding her own in conversation with even the most annoying men, challenging them when they mistake her meaning and maintaining her own ideas. When Henry accuses her of making a "picture" of her hometown village Helstone – a comment seemed aimed at pointing out her feminized sentimental fancifulness – Margaret instantly replies, "somewhat annoyed," that she is *not* "making a picture" and that Henry "should not have said that" (13). Her days, too, seem of the kind familiar to readers of Austen (and reflective of Gaskell's own education): she will "read, or have lessons, or otherwise improve [her] mind, till the middle of the day, take a walk before lunch, go a drive with your aunt after, and have some kind of engagement in the evening" (14). The very fact that this typical day would not be foreign to the Bennet girls or Miss Woodhouse (or, to go further back, even to the heroines of Charlotte Smith's novels) may be part of Gaskell's point in setting out her scenery: the opportunities for young women – at least those of a certain class – have progressed surprisingly little in the half-decade since Austen.

Readers even discover in these early chapters that Margaret, like Elizabeth Bennet, is a great walker; her first conversation with Henry Lennox establishes her love for walking (14), foreshadowing her walks about Milton later in the novel that will serve as sites of education (and, occasionally, scandal). Like the hero of a Romantic poem or novel (or perhaps even a

Romanticized heroine like Marianne Dashwood), Margaret feels a deep, nearly Wordsworthian connection to the outdoors: she loves to "tramp…out on the broad commons into the warm scented light, seeing multitudes of wild, free, living creatures, revelling in the sunshine, and the herbs and flowers it called forth. …Her out-of-doors life was perfect" (18). Her walks are the primary source of solace for her in an otherwise discontented home life, and with their heaths and pleasurable "soft violence" would not seem out of place in a Brontë novel either: "She was so happy out of doors…that she almost danced; and with the soft violence of the west wind behind her, as she crossed some heath, she seemed to be borne onwards, as lightly and easily as the fallen leaf that was wafted along by the autumnal breeze" (20).[121]

Margaret's mother and aunt, too, could come straight from an Austen plot: the "pretty Miss Beresfords," wards of Sir John Beresford, had once been the "belles of Rutlandshire," members of the same class of gentry who populate so much of Austen's fictional world (21).[122] Marriage, however, as it does in many Austen novels, has not solved all their problems. Mrs. Shaw, who married her husband "with no warmer feeling than respect for [her husband's] character and establishment," has spent much of her life "bemoaning her hard lot in being united to one whom she could not love" (9). In contrast, her sister Mrs. Hale appears to have married for love in spite of her clergyman husband's small living (possibly rashly, if her maid Dixon is to be believed). Yet as Austen does in her novels – perhaps especially *Sense and Sensibility*, the most finance-minded of her works – Gaskell challenges the idea that marrying for love solves all

[121] Compare, for example, Jane Eyre's characterization of how being outdoors at Lowood refreshes her: "bright May shone unclouded ver the bold hills and beautiful woodland out of doors. … I…enjoyed fully the beauties of the scene and season: they let us ramble in the wood, like gipsies, from morning till night; we did what we liked, went where we liked: we lived better too" (Brontë 65).

[122] As John Beresford is a "Sir" and his wife is Lady Beresford, not Lady [First Name], Sir John is probably either knighted (like Sir William Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*) or a baronet (like Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park*). Either title places him firmly within the middle gentry, although a baronetcy was hereditary and thus a slightly more elevated position (McMaster, ch. 8).

problems. She first presents Mrs. Shaw's idealistic opinions on the matter: "Married for love, what can dearest Maria [Mrs. Hale] have to wish for in this world?" This romantic positing, however, is immediately undercut by Gaskell's wry commentary: "Mrs. Hale, if she spoke truth, might have answered with a ready-made list, 'a silver-grey glacé silk, a white chip bonnet, oh! dozens of things for the wedding, and hundreds of things for the house'" (16). Margaret's mother is in fact "much discontented with their situation" in general and "reproache[s] her husband" for his unwillingness to seek advancement, lamenting the fact that her husband is more learned and better at his position than his competitors yet is stuck in a place that she considers quite unhealthy (18). Gaskell's opening sketch of her character strongly echoes the characterization of Mrs. Bennet in the opening of *Pride and Prejudice* as a hypochondriac mother who "[w]hen she was discontented…fancied herself nervous" (Austen, *P&P* 5) and frets over her family's lack of advancement and her own health issues. Mrs. Hale, too, has many "fitful days, when everything was a difficulty and a hardship" (Gaskell 23). It would not seem out of place, in the early part of *North and South*, for this speech of Mrs. Bennet's to come from Mrs. Hale instead: "[H]ow can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves" (Austen, *P&P* 5).

Like Mr. Bennet, Mr. Hale is an introverted father who "withdrew, while the children were yet young, into his library, to spend his evenings...in reading the speculative and metaphysical books which were his delight" (20). He "shrank more and more" from seeking advancement in his position and is sometimes "overpowered" by his wife's insistence (18). Margaret's relationship with her father is much closer than that with her mother. And Margaret, like Elizabeth Bennet, is acutely perceptive that all is not ideal in her parents' relationship: "she blamed herself for her keenness of sight, in perceiving that all was not as it should be" (18).

From Margaret's point of view, however, much of the blame rests on her mother for "marring...the peace of the home, by long hours of discontent" (19). Such descriptions resonate strongly with Austen's characterization of the Bennets' home in the opening chapters of *Pride and Prejudice*: Mr. Bennet is an "odd mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice" (Austen 5) who retires to his library where "[w]ith a book he was regardless of time" (13). As Elizabeth Bennet does, Margaret shares a much more intimate and confidential relationship with her father than with her mother. Gaskell's noting of details such as Mr. Hale's fondness for his library and the word "discontented" to describe Mrs. Bennet suggest her attentiveness to reproducing familiar elements of *Pride and Prejudice* in the early parts of her novel.

Margaret, initially, shares a common Austenian prejudice against unlanded persons as well. As Juliet McMaster notes, "Austen's best sympathies rest with the professional class – her own, that is"; most of her characters and situations are drawn mostly from the "professional middle class and gentry" (ch. 8). Gaskell's initial characterization of the Hales fits right in with this class structuring. When Margaret's mother laments that they have no neighbors nearby, Margaret retorts that the neighbors they *would* visit if closer would be the Gormans, "who made their fortunes in trade at Southampton," interjecting "Oh! I'm glad we don't visit them. I don't like shoppy people" (19). Margaret's offhand remark reveals her kinship with Austen's heroines, who would also be disdainful of "trade." For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the two principal examples of families whose fortunes were amassed in trade are the Bingleys and the Lucases. The narrator ascribes the Bingley sisters' unpleasantness partially to the fact that they have conveniently elided that "their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade" (16). Sir William Lucas does not escape his former life in trade unscathed either; his rise to the gentry

"had given him a disgust to his business and to his residence in a small market town" and has sent him to a house he renamed Lucas Lodge, "where he could think with pleasure of his own importance" (19).[123] Margaret even shares the suspicion of port and coastal cities present in Austen; the dubious port-city location of the Gormans' origins in Southampton would raise red flags for Austen heroines as well, for as Franco Moretti reminds us, port and coastal cities are where "all of the trouble of Austen's universe occurs" (18).[124] When Mrs. Hale suggests that Margaret must not be so "fastidious" (with an eye toward a potential match for her daughter – a very Austen-mother situation), Margaret explains that she likes "all people whose occupations have to do with land; I like soldiers and sailors, and the three learned professions" (19).[125] Such a list reads as if straight out of an Austen dating handbook. As McMaster points out, in Austen's novels the "country gentleman, who leads a leisured existence and who subsists on income from land and inheritance, is at his best the moral and social ideal as a partner for a heroine," although exceptions might be made for someone in "the church, the army, the navy, the law and medicine" (McMaster, ch. 8) – the very professions that Margaret excepts as well.

In creating Margaret Hale's world early in the novel, Gaskell draws on settings that would be extremely familiar to readers of heroine-centered (aka "romance") novels, which in the nineteenth century usually focused more on the intricacies of social settings than the operations of the business or industrial world. However, her particular choices, such as the nervous hypochondriac mother obsessed with material status – at one point, she scoffs, "who on earth

[123] The one exception to this rule would appear to be Mr. Gardiner, who has made his fortune in trade as well. However, as he still lives "within view of his own warehouses" (158), one may assume he has not violated the proprieties of rank and class in the same fashion as the Bingleys and the Lucases.
[124] The exception to this rule is possibly *Persuasion*, which takes a much fonder view of the sea and coastal cities than any other Austen novel. And even then, as Louisa Musgrove's unfortunate fall from the Cobb at Lyme Regis demonstrates, ports and harbors can be dangerous to one's health and morality.
[125] This list also places Margaret in the unenviable company of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who, as Mr. Collins notes, "likes to have the distinction of rank preserved" (182).

wears cotton that can afford linen?" (44) – and the introverted and overtaxed father who retreats to his library whenever chance affords, argue for a more careful attention to the specific source material of *Pride and Prejudice* than is often acknowledged. Gaskell may wish to establish a romantic world so she can upend it, but that world also is likely to remind her readers of Austen's.

Immodest Proposals

As Elizabeth Bennet must in *Pride and Prejudice*, Margaret Hale also endures a sequence of failed marriage proposals. The first occurs very near the beginning of *North and South,* in Chapter 3; Henry Lennox, Gaskell's version of the forward and discomfiting Mr. Collins, takes Margaret "by surprise" at her parents' house and compels her to listen to his proposal of marriage (28). The unfolding of this first proposal bears many similarities to Elizabeth's first proposal in *Pride and Prejudice,* including instilling a sense of unease about its instigator. Like Mr. Collins, Lennox immediately passes judgment on the material appearance of the Hale house. Where Collins judges the "hall, the dining-room, and all its furniture" at Longbourn (Austen, *P&P* 73), Lennox "scrutinis[es]" the Hales' home, noting that the "carpet was far from new; the chintz had been often washed; the whole apartment was smaller and shabbier than he had expected" for someone whose mother once belonged to a "good family" (*N&S* 23). Such a judgment suggests a preoccupation with vanity and appearance that does not bode well for Lennox's proposal.

Also like Collins, the man of usually "solemn composure" who claims he is "run away with by my feelings on this subject [of romance]" (Austen, *P&P* 118), Lennox describes himself as a "man not given to romance in general...who has been carried out of his usual habits by the

force of a passion" that the object of his affections declines (Gaskell, *N&S* 29). As Hilary Schor suggests, the early chapters of *North and South* rely on readers "anticipating" the standard developments for a romance heroine so that Gaskell may thwart them: "As canny readers, we can predict the marriage proposal [Margaret] will receive from Edith's new brother-in-law, perhaps her initial shock but eventual acceptance, and so on – but both her plot and ours are subverted when she goes home to Helstone" (125). What Schor does *not* note, however, is that readers who, alerted by Gaskell's description of the Hales and other initial similarities of plot, are reading with *Pride and Prejudice* in mind will likely *not* expect Margaret to accept Henry Lennox. Gaskell's early characterization of Lennox is of a young man who, despite being well-off and even handsome, thinks too well of himself and is overly devoted to formalities – traits to despise in an Austen plot. For example, when Margaret asks if Edith's wedding plans are "quite necessary troubles," Lennox gravely replies: "'of course...There are forms and ceremonies to be gone through'" (*N&S* 12). Like Collins, Lennox drops studied compliments with "implied meaning" (26), persisting although Margaret "wince[s] away" from them (13). Nor is Lennox's proposal to Margaret at Helstone rather than in London particularly bizarre, if examined through the lens of Austenian narrative: Collins comes to Longbourn to propose to the Bennet girls too.

What makes Lennox's proposal so different from Collins's is not where or how he makes the proposal: those elements are very similar between the two novels. Rather, although she never regrets her decision, Margaret's initial response to the proposal is significantly different than Elizabeth's. Perhaps because Lennox is less of a moralistic popinjay than Collins, Margaret's language in rejecting Lennox is much less forceful than Elizabeth's rejection of Collins's proposal. Elizabeth interrupts Collins with a passionate interjection: "'You are too hasty, Sir,' she cried. 'You forget that I have made no answer....I am very sensible of the honour of your

proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than decline them'" (Austen, *P&P* 120). When he persists in disbelieving her, her replies become increasingly vehement: "'Upon my word, Sir...your hope is rather an extraordinary one after my declaration....You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so'" (120). Margaret, while she shares Elizabeth's agitation, does not share her fiery replies. Her first response to Lennox's overtures is that "'I was startled'" and that "'I don't like to be spoken to as you have been doing. I cannot answer you as you want me to do, and yet I should feel so sorry if I vexed you'" (Gaskell, *N&S* 28). (Readers of *Pride and Prejudice* might remember that Elizabeth is at first "sorry for the pain [Darcy] was to receive" after hearing Darcy's first botched proposal – her second of the novel – although that emotion is quickly superseded when Darcy's arrogance manifests itself.) When pressed, Margaret becomes annoyed, but she remains tactful: "'I am sure I could never think of you as anything else [than a friend]. Pray, let us both forget that all this' ('disagreeable,' she was going to say, but stopped short) 'conversation has taken place'" (29). While her plot is quite similar here to Elizabeth Bennet's, Margaret appears reserved, even passive in comparison with her heroine predecessor. Although readers may anticipate that Margaret must refuse the Collins-analogue Lennox to allow for her ultimate marriage to the Darcy-analogue (whom we have not yet met), her method of refusal characterizes her as a woman who is less hotheaded and less confident in herself than Elizabeth Bennet. Schor argues that the effect of this first disruptive proposal is to create confusion "between the expectations of earnest readers...and the unsettling nature of the 'new' plotting of industrial England" (125). If this is so, then Margaret's less impassioned, less self-confident reaction to this proposal suggests that whatever is going on in "industrial England" is not beneficial for our heroine and her development.

Lennox's response to Margaret's refusal, however, breaks with his initial characterization is a Collins-type formalist and is manifestly Darcyian. He immediately resorts to sarcasm, commenting with "hardness in his tone" that she should "make allowances for the mortification" of his feelings, that in "the one outlet which he has formed for the deeper and better feelings of his nature, he meets with rejection and repulse. I shall have to console myself with scorning my own folly. A struggling barrister to think of matrimony!" (29). Such words echo the bitterly sarcastic disappointment of Darcy's response to Elizabeth's first refusal: "And this is all the reply which I am to have the honour of expecting! I might, perhaps, wish to be informed why, with so little *endeavour* at civility, I am thus rejected. But it is of small importance. …I perfectly comprehend your feelings, and have now only to be ashamed of what my own have been. Forgive me for having taken up so much of your time" (212). Austen also uses the word "mortification" when describing Darcy's reaction: he wears an "expression of mingled incredulity and mortification" (215). Margaret's own feelings toward Lennox's outburst mirror Elizabeth's: Margaret felt the "whole tone of it annoyed her. It seemed to touch on and call out all the points of difference which had often repelled her in him….She felt a tinge of contempt mingle itself with her pain at having refused him" (29). These words are not unlike Austen's in reflecting on Elizabeth's state of mind: "astonishment" (211), "indignation" (213), and "disdain" (213). Like Darcy during his first failed proposal, Lennox clearly fails to empathize with the heroine's feelings, suggesting his unsuitability as a romantic partner. Furthermore, his position in the novel as the judgmental and self-important first suitor undermines the idea of a romantic hero in general: Lennox may be wealthy and handsome, but he is all too like Mr. Collins where it really counts.

As in *Pride and Prejudice*, *North and South* requires its heroine to receive a second unexpected and undesired marriage proposal. Margaret's second proposal in *North and South* comes in Chapter 24, almost exactly in the center of the novel (the same textual position as Elizabeth's first proposal from Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*). Like the scene in *Pride and Prejudice*, it transpires as a surprise (and, according to the social codes of the era, rather unorthodox) visit in the drawing room of an unchaperoned house. Mr. Thornton arrives unexpectedly when Margaret's father is out, and like Darcy, he is a bundle of nervous energy. Darcy sits "for a few moments" but then springs to his feet and paces around the room before approaching Elizabeth (211). Thornton "trembled at the anticipation of what he had to say, and how it might be received" (175). The significant difference between the scene in *North and South* and the scene in *Pride and Prejudice* is that the perspectives of both would-be lovers are presented in Gaskell's version, whereas Darcy's first proposal is focalized almost entirely through Elizabeth's point of view. This alteration is an interesting choice, for it encourages the reader to step back from a possibly strong identification with the heroine and to understand – indeed, perhaps even experience – the feelings of both persons in the scene. This choice is actually reminiscent more of writing by Romantic novelists like Charlotte Smith, such as the scene in Smith's *Celestina* discussed in Chapter 1, where an impassioned meeting between two estranged lovers presents the thoughts and feelings of both sides. If the central project of *North and South* is, as I argue, the development of empathy, vividly describing not only the emotions but bodily sensations of two distinct people experiencing radically different versions of the same scene is an excellent way to pursue such a goal.

Readers need not recognize this difference for the scene to make an impact, however, for the similarities between it and Austen's are striking. Both men are irritated by the "calm manner"

the objects of their affection initially display: Elizabeth's "cold civility" (211) is echoed in Margaret's "grave and steady" tone (176). Both men interpret the silence of the woman in the face of their presence as a cue to proceed with self-centered professions of feeling that continue despite later protestations. Mr. Darcy's proposal is clipped and self-centered: "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (Austen 211). Like Mr. Darcy's proposal, Mr. Thornton's proposal is badly worded and badly executed, and it strongly echoes Darcy's diction: "I hardly know if it is pain or pleasure, to think that I owe [my feelings] to one – nay, you must, you shall hear... – to one whom I love, as I do not believe man ever loved woman before....I am a man. I claim the right of expressing my feelings" (Gaskell, *N&S* 177). In both cases, the man presents himself as a "Man of Feeling" who claims a natural right to express his emotions but fails to consider that the object of his affections has just been through an intensely emotional experience. In *Pride and Prejudice*, this is Elizabeth's discovery that Darcy is responsible for separating Jane and Bingley; in *North and South*, the emotional stress is also physical, for Thornton's proposal comes on the heels of Margaret's bodily defense of him from the striking workers. Although both men claim to experience deep feelings for the women they address, both of these failed first proposals lack a crucial element: empathy. Darcy completely fails to empathize with Elizabeth's pain regarding his treatment of Jane: he is "wholly unmoved by any feeling of remorse" and states "[w]ith assumed tranquillity" that "'I did every thing in my power to separate my friend from your sister…I rejoice in my success. Towards *him* I have been kinder than towards myself'" (Austen 213). Thornton too fails utterly to read Margaret's emotions and persists in interpreting Margaret's defense of him as a sign of her unacknowledged passion for him, refusing to listen when she tells him that "you owe me no gratitude…any expression of it will be

painful to me" (176). He dismisses her objections, saying "I question not myself to know" whether his view of the situation is all in his head and pressing on with his declarations of love. His statement that Margaret rejects his proposal because she does not "understand" him is rather ironic given his own lack of understanding in this scene.

Darcy and Thornton also fail to respond empathetically when confronted with the rejection of their proposals. Darcy is so angered by Elizabeth's (admittedly biased) catalog of his moral failings that he walks quickly across the room away from her, then stops abruptly and turns towards her – practically an interpretive dance for Austen, who is not noted for her physical vocabulary – and exclaims:

> "And this…is your opinion of me! This is the estimation in which you hold me! I thank you for explaining it so fully. My faults, according to this calculation, are heavy indeed! But perhaps…these offences might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design. These bitter accusations might have been suppressed, had I with greater policy concealed my struggles, and flattered you into the belief of my being impelled by unqualified, unalloyed inclination…But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence." (214)

I quote this passage at length because it is a classic example of rationalization through redirection. Darcy here attempts to retain the power of the moral high ground, ascribing Elizabeth's rejection of him not to justified feelings of anger and hurt prompted by his treatment of her sister, but to her wounded pride that he has not "flattered" her in his wooing. Because he claims that "disguise of every sort" is his "abhorrence," Darcy maintains his idea of himself as the wounded party in the situation and situates Elizabeth as the aggressor. Rather than attempt to

actually understand her feelings, he creates his own idea of them: Elizabeth feels slighted that he has not used traditional ploys to win her affections, and this notion allows him to feel unjustly rejected. Elizabeth, of course, calls him on the carpet: "your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others" she says, make it impossible for her to conceive of him as marriageable (215). While Elizabeth is often read as having been too "prejudiced" in her initial treatment of Darcy (and Austen's novel also seems to suggest this is the case, particularly after Elizabeth's humbling visit to Pemberley), she is justified and accurate in her depiction of his behavior here.

Like Darcy, Thornton is too wrapped up in his own situation to empathize with Margaret's feelings. After pressing her to accept his gratitude despite her warnings that doing so will cause her pain, he retorts that he is "aware of all these misplaced sympathies of yours" (178). He also attempts to secure the moral high ground of victim for himself, saying sarcastically that "'yes; I, though a master, may be oppressed…I know you despise me; allow me to say, it is because you do not understand me'" (178). Rather than listen to Margaret's reasons for her actions, Thornton prefers to construct his own interpretation of them.

However, through comparing the responses of the two women in this situation as we did in the previous proposal, readers may see distinct progress in Margaret's development as a heroine. Whereas her refusal of Lennox was hesitant and somewhat feeble, Margaret's impassioned rejection of Thornton's proposal matches Elizabeth's own vehemence: after Thornton's confession that she "must" and "shall" hear him, she retorts in an "icy tone" that "'Your way of speaking shocks me. It is blasphemous. I cannot help it, if that is my first feeling....your whole manner offends me–'" (*N&S* 177). Her progression of emotions is also strikingly similar to Elizabeth's: Elizabeth, "[i]n spite of her deeply rooted dislike...was at first

sorry for the pain [Darcy] was to receive; till, roused to resentment by his subsequent language, she lost all compassion in anger" (Austen 211). Margaret too confesses to a "proud dislike" of Thornton, but tells him that "I do not want to vex you" (Gaskell, *N&S* 177). When he persists in proclaiming his admiration for her and in misinterpreting her actions as driven by a feeling she denies, Margaret's pride is wounded and she too becomes angry: her eyes are "kindling with indignation" and she breaks into "passionate tears" (177). While she is just as emotional during this proposal as she was during Lennox's, Margaret here demonstrates that she is willing and able to assert herself in the face of masculine force and authority. Her "education" as a heroine has clearly made progress.

Gaskell, like Austen, follows this unfortunate proposal with an extended scene from her heroine's point of view. Elizabeth Bennet is in "tumult" after Darcy leaves and reflects on what has just transpired in "astonishment" so great that she cries for half an hour (216). She finds it "incredible" that "he should have been in love with her for so many months!" (216) When she awakens the morning after Darcy's proposal, she is yet "to recover from the surprise of what had happened" and resolves to "indulge herself in air and exercise" (217). Margaret's reaction to Thornton's first proposal is nearly identical, although Gaskell suggests more desire on Margaret's part than Austen does for Elizabeth. Once Margaret has recovered from the initial shock, she begins "to wonder whether all offers were as unexpected beforehand,– as distressing at the time of their occurrence, as the two she had had" (Gaskell, *N&S* 179). Like Elizabeth, she is astonished that Thornton is in love with her, and that his offer should have been "forced and goaded out of him" despite his obvious attempts to contain his feelings. To "shake off the recollection of the past hour," Margaret, like Elizabeth, decides to undertake "active exertion" (180). However, unlike Elizabeth, who seeks solace in solitary wanderings, Margaret is a

different sort of heroine. She chooses instead to visit Bessy Higgins, the ailing daughter of a factory worker in Milton Northern.

Following in the tradition set by her eighteenth-century predecessors, Gaskell's *North and South* is a "novel of education." Education for Margaret Hale, however, must extend beyond the informing of her own feelings. Because of Gaskell's larger social project, Margaret must not confine herself to only self-absorbed musing (although to be fair, she does engage in such behavior). Thus, rather than head out to a grove to be solitary in the wake of an emotionally disturbing experience, Margaret goes out to make connections with others. By placing this scene directly after the turbulent proposal, Gaskell emphasizes the necessity of directing one's feelings outward to connect with others, rather than allowing them to simmer unacknowledged or repress them. Margaret's behavior in the scene with Bessy models what Thornton's did not: acceptance of another's perspective. She listens to Bessy's side of the story regarding the violent incident of a few days before, and asks questions to clarify when she does not understand (181). This scene and the others with Bessy highlight Margaret's education as akin, but not identical, to the process of education that Austen's heroines must go through. Elizabeth Bennet, for example, is shown to have been too confident in her judgment and too immediate in her prejudices. She must be instructed by Darcy and others before she learns her lesson. Margaret, too, is initially prejudiced – her casual remarks in the beginning of the novel against "shoppy people" betray an unconsidered approach to class – but she undertakes much of her education on her own by "actively seeking new experiences" (Kuhlman [n.pag.]). Much of how and what Margaret learns is accomplished through dialogue, i.e., talking with others, asking questions, and adjusting her own perspective. Gaskell was familiar with this educational model from her own schooling (Kuhlman [n. pag]). Her embrace of a dialogic mode of learning allows Margaret more agency in

her own life than is usually allowed Austen heroines: because she actively seeks learning and information, rather than simply being the recipient of it.

The danger of allowing oneself to become wrapped up in one's emotions is manifested in Thornton's reaction to the failed proposal. Chapter 1 of Volume II opens with his perspective, where readers see that Thornton has much learning yet to do, as evidenced by his petulant musings on Margaret's rejection: "His greatest comfort was in hugging his torment; and in feeling…that though she might despise him, contemn him, treat him with her proud sovereign indifference, he did not change one whit. She could not make him change" (191). Thornton actively rejects the idea of change here, thereby emphasizing his need for an education of his own. In this he is more like the heroine than the hero of a typical romantic plot; after all, the "novel of education" usually focuses on the heroine's education. Like Margaret, Thornton feels the need to relieve his emotions through "walking briskly, because the sharp motion relieved his mind" (192). Unlike Margaret, who goes out to perform service for others and engage with their viewpoints, Thornton flees the house "blinded by his baffled passion" (191) and boards an omnibus to the countryside, where he indulges himself in musing over his dashed hopes. Because he is disconnected from others, however – he ends up on the omnibus because it is "too much trouble to apologise and explain" (191) – his time spent in solitary reflection is uneducative: Gaskell writes that "If Mr. Thornton was a fool in the morning, as he assured himself at least twenty times he was, he did not grow much wiser in the afternoon. All that he gained in return for his sixpenny omnibus ride, was a more vivid conviction that there never was, never could be, any one like Margaret" (192). Unlike Darcy, whom Austen permits a position of authority after his botched proposal – he "demand[s]" Elizabeth's attention in his letter and vindicates himself as "entirely blameless throughout the whole" (Austen 228) – Thornton is stripped of his

authoritative position and returns, childlike, to his mother: "No one loves me,– no one cares for me, but you, mother" (194). Although Thornton occupies a position of power as Darcy does, and is in several places constructed as a clear analogue to Darcy, he is less insulated from the consequences of his own actions. Such destabilizing is part of Gaskell's project. The two proposal scenes are extremely similar, but the divergent responses of the heroine and the hero from the expected model point out that Gaskell's heroine has already begun her transformation and her hero has far more to learn.

Family Ties

Gaskell manipulates the expected plot in other areas of her novel to similar effect, forcing readers to reconsider familiar characters by creating dissonance in the events surrounding them. Perhaps the best example of this is Gaskell's treatment of Mrs. Hale's plot. Mrs. Hale is chronically discontented, one of those women who "throw out terrible possibilities, miserable probabilities, unfortunate chances of all kinds, as a rocket throws out sparks" (*N&S* 207). Her similarities to Mrs. Bennet in temperament and characterization prepare the reader to see Mrs. Hale fall ill; Mrs. Bennet, after all, spends much of *Pride and Prejudice* nursing her "nerves." When Mrs. Hale finally becomes a "suffering invalid" in Chapter 13, therefore, it strikes readers familiar with the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* as almost certainly hypochondria; as Mrs. Thornton does, we are inclined at first to see Mrs. Hale's ailment as "some temporary or fanciful fine-ladyish indisposition" (104). Gaskell, with her "intense self-consciousness about both plot and character" (Schor 124), cannot be unaware of the impression that Mrs. Hale makes on readers. However, unlike Mrs. Bennet's fancied ailments, Mrs. Hale's illness turns out to be real and fatal: in Chapter 16, we learn along with Margaret that Mrs. Hale has a "deadly disease" that

cannot be cured (116-17), and we watch her die a slow and painful death. Just as Margaret's preconceptions of industrial life must be challenged through confrontations with the new and unexpected, readers are challenged to abandon *their* preconceptions of what they think they "know" through this sudden contradiction of the expected narrative pattern. In *Pride and Prejudice* the capacity of the female body for physical suffering is elided. Women with chronic health complaints – not simply the brief but "violent cold" Jane catches on her way to Netherfield (Austen 38) – are made the object of ridicule, like Mrs. Bennet, or dismissed with barely a mention, like the sickly and "insignificant" Miss De Bourgh (Austen 184). By killing off Mrs. Hale and the sickly Bessy Higgins, Gaskell emphasizes the physical trauma that unchecked industrialism causes to women as well as men, and urges readers to reconsider what may have been hasty initial judgments.

Gaskell's deviations from the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* are not all so emotionally traumatizing, however. As Barchas points out, Mrs. Thornton ends up playing the role of Lady Catherine de Bourgh in Gaskell's novel (57). Although Mrs. Thornton's haughty matriarchalism evokes Lady Catherine in more than one place, the scene Barchas refers to occurs in Chapter 38, when Mrs. Thornton visits Margaret to offer her "advice" (*N&S* 287). The confrontation between the two bears a strong resemblance to Lady Catherine's irate invasion of Longbourn to prevent Elizabeth from marrying her nephew Mr. Darcy. Like Lady Catherine, who prides herself on her "sincerity and frankness" of character (Austen, *P&P* 391), Mrs. Thornton takes a "savage pleasure in the idea of 'speaking her mind'" to Margaret (Gaskell, *N&S* 286), and speak she does: "I have thought it right to warn you against...improprieties; they must degrade you in the long run in the estimation of the world, even if in fact they do not lead you to positive harm" (287). As in the case of Lady Catherine, what Mrs. Thornton chides Margaret for is actually a

misperceived situation: Mrs. Thornton believes Margaret to have been publicly "indiscreet" with a lover, even though the gentleman in question turns out to be Margaret's brother, Frederick.

Margaret is patient when she believes she is being scolded for a wrong she really committed, but once Mrs. Thornton's real reason for visiting becomes clear, her emotional response turns on a dime: "this was too insulting….to interfere with her conduct – to speak of her character! she—Mrs. Thornton, a mere stranger – it was too impertinent! She would not answer her—not one word" (287). Unlike the longsuffering, modest heroines of so much of Victorian fiction, Margaret asserts her rights and refuses to be burdened by the rules of sentiment: she tells Mrs. Thornton that "[f]or my mother's sake…I will bear much; but I cannot bear everything. She never meant me to be exposed to insult, I am sure" (287). Mrs. Thornton uses the same word, "interfere," to describe her actions as Lady Catherine does. Like Lady Catherine, she is overly fond of status and considers people less as individuals than as parts of a larger machine that operates as she wills it. She thinks of her son John as "her pride, her property" and is much more interested in the status trappings that might accompany a wedding than she is her potential daughter in law: Mrs. Hale thinks "little enough" of "the future daughter-in-law as an individual," but lays out a catalogue of what she expects her son's household to be like, all "supreme glory: all household plenty and comfort, all purple and fine linen…troops of friends, would all come as naturally as jewels on a king's robe, and be as little thought of for their separate value" (193).

As the scene between Margaret and Mrs. Hale progresses, the similarity between it and the confrontation between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth becomes unequivocal. Mrs. Thornton, echoing Lady Catherine's wounded pride, exclaims, "You do not know my son. You are not

worthy to know him" (288). As Mrs. Thornton voices her disdain for Margaret having captured her son's heart, Margaret interrupts:

> "What must you think of me, madam?' asked Margaret, throwing her head back with proud disdain, till her throat curved outwards like a swan's. "You can say nothing more, Mrs. Thornton. I decline every attempt to justify myself for anything. You must allow me to leave the room." (289)

Margaret's response very nearly parrots Elizabeth Bennet's response to Lady Catherine: "'You can *now* have nothing farther to say...You have insulted me, in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house'" (Austen, *P&P* 233). The increasingly similar speech patterns of the two heroines suggest that Margaret's "education" in the course of the novel is successful. If both novels revolve around a pattern of "mortification of the heroine" (Schor 127) in which the heroine must undergo humiliation in order to learn a moral lesson, those heroines are nevertheless allowed victories over those who seek to impose their will onto them.

By turning Mrs. Thornton into Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Gaskell elevates her to "the momentary status of a peer" (Barchas 57), making Mrs. Thornton a type of middle-class aristocrat. As Barchas acknowledges, this deployment of the *Pride and Prejudice* structure "neatly achieves part of Gaskell's visionary political project, namely to elevate those 'in trade'" (57). The analogy, however, goes one step further than that, actually challenging the worth of such a correlation by devaluing the position of aristocracy even as it elevates the middle class. While Lady Catherine is a woman of many imagined accomplishments, she has very few definitively: of her skill in music, for example, she says "If I had ever learnt, I should have been a great proficient" (Austen, *P&P* 194). She speaks her mind freely, but does not necessarily have much to say worth listening to. In contrast, Mrs. Thornton has *actual* accomplishments: while

she participates in such feminine occupations as mending tablecloths (Gaskell, *N&S* 71), she is also largely responsible for her son's financial success. Widowed by an inveterate gambler, Mrs. Thornton took the initiative and retrenched their expenses, managing her household so that John Thornton could save enough money to eventually start his own factory (78).

Nevertheless, Mrs. Thornton, although not an aristocrat, has her own "shades of Pemberley" that she seeks to keep from being "thus polluted" (Austen, *P&P* 396): part of the offense she accuses Margaret of is having "exposed [herself] to the comments of servants and workpeople" (Gaskell, *N&S* 288). Her son's reputation and emotional health act here as the analogue of landed property in the *Pride and Prejudice* plot (after all, Mrs. Thornton has already referred to her son as "her property" before this scene). Mrs. Thornton does not care that Margaret has no money or noble family; her offense is that she has "scorned" the "great tender heart" of Mrs. Thornton's "Milton manufacturer" son (288) – and exposed all of them to gossip from those whom she perceives to be lower in class status than herself. Thus, although her concerns are less directly aristocratic than Lady Catherine's, Mrs. Thornton's outburst does not represent a complete departure from the class issues entwined in the *Pride and Prejudice* plot. Instead, she signifies that prejudice and oppression may come just as easily from the middle class as the aristocracy; the landed gentry have no monopoly on bigotry.

At the end of *Pride and Prejudice,* Austen writes that both hero and heroine have educated one another: Darcy admits that Elizabeth showed him that his "behaviour...merited the severest reproof" (407-8), and Elizabeth concludes that "[t]he conduct of neither, if strictly examined, will be irreproachable; but since then, we have both, I hope, improved in civility" (408). Gaskell too has her characters catalogue their incivilities to one another: Margaret exclaims, "'Oh, Mr. Thornton, I am not good enough!'" (394) to which Thornton replies "'Not

good enough! Don't mock my own deep feeling of unworthiness'" (395). Thornton then asks Margaret if she remembers "how I requited you with my insolence" after the strike, and she replies that she "remember[s] how wrongly I spoke to you, – that is all" (395). The novel ends with both kneeling, and while Margaret is "clasped...close" by Thornton, she clasps him too: her arms are wrapped around his neck "as they had once before been placed to protect him from the rioters" (395). It is precisely the resemblance between this scene and Austen's that makes it so powerful. As in Austen's plot, the hero and heroine have come together, educated by one another into more sympathetic beings, and readers may be optimistic for their future. However, Gaskell's characterization of Margaret as a heroine who complicates our expectations of gender roles allows this ending to be even more optimistic than Austen's: Margaret proposes to Thornton, but there is no suggestion that she will give up all her authority once she marries him.[126] And Thornton – himself often feminized, or "Elizabeth-ized" – has learned the value of "actual personal contact" (391) and empathetic interaction with those not of his social sphere; he has given up his position as master, something Darcy is not required or even encouraged to do.

As these instances show, Gaskell both deploys and violates the *Pride and Prejudice* plot with dexterity. If *North and South* represents, as Schor argues, "the politicizing of the heroine's plot" (5), then Gaskell's careful use of a plot as intensely beloved and familiar as Austen's suggests an awareness of the dissonance her changes will evoke in readers. By using an old plot in a new way, Gaskell forces her readers, like her heroine, into "imagining a new novel" (Schor 126), one that opens spaces for imagining female physical suffering and the complexities of class in ways that Austen did not dream of.

126 Of course, as Gaskell's novel was written before the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, Margaret's independence would be mostly figurative; her fortune would almost certain devolve to Mr. Thornton after their marriage.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

> "The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid." – Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (120)

In September 1916, halfway through one of the deadliest military conflicts in history, *The Atlantic Monthly* ran an essay called "A Literary Clinic," by Unitarian minister Samuel McChord Crothers. In this gently satirical piece, the narrator recounts visiting his friend Bagster, who has founded a "Bibliopathic Institute" for "Book Treatment" (Crothers 291). Bagster has worked up a "system of Biblio-therapeutics," recognizing that "A book may be a stimulant or a sedative or an irritant or a soporific. The point is that it must do something to you, and you ought to know what it is" (292). Bagster continues: books "awaken faculties which we had allowed to be dormant. After reading them we actually feel differently and frequently we act differently. The book is a spiritual event" (293). The fictional Bagster prescribing a course of reading to treat emotional ailments may seem fanciful to modern readers, but as research has recently demonstrated, reading fiction can indeed alter one's emotional state, capacity to feel empathy, and even one's sense of personal identity.

Bibliotherapy as practiced today is a loosely defined concept, but it bears striking resemblance to Bagster's 1916 idea. Some bibliotherapists, such as those affiliated with Alain de Botton's "School of Life," do not have credentials other than a love of reading (and often, writing) and a lifetime's experience with it. Many other practitioners come from psychology and the mental health fields. An entire journal, the *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, exists to publish

research studies that use poetry and other literary expressions for therapeutic purposes. Bibliotherapy practices have even been piloted in prisons, with remarkable success rates in treating symptoms of depression.[127] Crothers's 1916 claim that after reading books, "we actually feel differently and frequently we act differently," is truer than he could have imagined.

In the past decade, a number of social scientists have investigated the link between reading fiction and the development of the self. Many of these focus on measuring the set of abilities commonly known as Theory of Mind (ToM), the ability to "identify and understand others' subjective states," which manifests in two forms: affective ToM, the "ability to detect and understand others' emotions," and cognitive ToM, the "inference and representation of others' beliefs and intentions" (Kidd and Castano 377). Affective ToM is positively correlated with the ability to empathize with others. Studies have shown that frequent readers of fiction tend to have more advanced social abilities than readers of non-fiction and score higher on tests of affective ToM.[128] In several experiments, subjects who read fiction reported increased empathy for others.[129] The exact mechanisms by which reading fiction affects ToM and empathy is unknown, although many scholars suggest that fiction – particularly literary fiction, which often focuses more strongly on character development – increases readers' knowledge of others' lives and emotions, allowing readers to identify with or recognize kinship with them.[130] According to a

[127] See for example Pardini et al., "Efficacy and Process of Cognitive Bibliotherapy for the Treatment of Depression in Jail and Prison Inmates," *Psychological Services* 11.2 (2014): 141-152.
[128] See, among others, Raymond A. Mar et al, "Bookworms versus nerds: Exposure to fiction versus non-fiction, divergent associations with social ability, and the simulation of fictional social worlds," *Journal of Research in Personality* 40 (2006): 694-712; Raymond A. Mar, Keith Oatley, and Jordan B. Peterson, "Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes," *Communications* 34 (2009): 407-428;
[129] For example, see P. Matthijs Bal and Martijn Veltkamp, "How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy? An Experimental Investigation on the Role of Emotional Transportation," *PLOS ONE* 8.2 (January 2013):1-12.
[130] For example, see Raymond A. Mar, Keith Oatley, and Jordan B. Peterson, "Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes," *Communications* 34 (2009): 407-428; Raymond A. Mar, Keith Oatley, Jacob Hirsh, Jennifer dela Paz, and Jordan B. Peterson, "Bookworms versus nerds: Exposure to fiction versus non-fiction, divergent associations with social ability, and the simulation of fictional social worlds," *Journal of Research in Personality* 40 (2006): 694-712; Edward Schiappa, Peter B. Gregg,

recent study published in *Science*, literary fiction "affects ToM processes because it forces us to engage in mind-reading and character construction" (Kidd and Castano 377).

Other studies present interesting findings about the role of narrative closure in emotional development. According to developmental psychologists, the need for cognitive closure represents an "aversion to ambiguity and confusion. It encourages 'seizing' on an early statement or proposition in the process of acquiring knowledge, followed by rigidly 'freezing' on the seized item, and remaining impervious to additional information" (Djikic et al. 149). While this tendency has obvious biological advantages, allowing for rapid information processing, it also affects the ability to think creatively and rationally (Djikic et al. 149). A recent study by Maja Djikic, Keith Oatley, and Mihnea C. Moldoveanu examined the role of reading fiction in combating the need for cognitive closure.[131] Fiction reading offers the reader cognitive flexibility, in which "the thinking a person engages in…does not necessarily lead him or her to a decision" and the reader is able to "simulate the thinking styles even of people he or she might personally dislike" (150). Their experiment demonstrated that these qualities of fiction do appear to reduce readers' need for cognitive closure, at least temporarily, leading to a more open mindset (153). Djikic's study provides quantitative support for the project of destabilization in which the authors examined in this dissertation participate. By denying readers their expected sense of closure, these authors promote in their readers the emotional and cognitive openness that their narratives also espouse. In this chapter, I present two miniature case studies of these

and Dean E. Hewes, "The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis," *Communication Monographs* 72.1 (March 2005): 92-115.

[131] Maja Djikic, Keith Oatley, and Mihnea C. Moldoveanu, "Opening the Closed Mind: The Effect of Exposure to Literature on the Need for Closure," *Creativity Research Journal* 25.2 (2013): 149-154. Maja Djikic is one of the frontrunners in this area of research, having published ten articles and presented fifteen talks on the subject of fiction and self-development in the past decade.

processes at work in the reading habits of two dissimilar subjects: Fanny Price and WWI soldiers.

Fanny's Bookshelf

Fanny Price, the heroine of *Mansfield Park*, does not often look into novels – at least, not any that Austen explicitly mentions. She seems to prefer poetry and nonfiction prose, the latter the type of material that Hannah More called "dry tough reading" meant to elevate the reader "from sensation to intellect" (*Strictures* 165). Fanny's small shelf of books includes "Lord Macartney" (probably his account of his ambassadorship in China, published in 1807)[132], George Crabbe's *Tales in Verse* (1812), and Samuel Johnson's *Idler* (1758-60). Olivia Murphy notes that these are clearly not the only books Fanny has read, citing her frequent allusions to Scott and asserting that the books Edmund praises "seem to belong with the ugly footstool and other unwanted furniture of the East Room, books that are too old, unfashionable, moralistic, or dull" (101). Murphy's assessment, however, is a rather unfair dichotomization of Fanny's tastes. The books on Fanny's little garret shelf are – with the exception of Johnson – quite contemporary, and very much in keeping with the general public's taste (and also with Austen's). These particular books merit closer examination, for they reveal that although Fanny may not read many novels, she is far from "intolerably stupid." In fact, her reading has likely taught her a great deal about how to interpret herself and her situation.

[132] Susan Allen Ford makes a compelling case that this identification of a particular volume is far from certain; she argues that Austen does not specify which Macartney Fanny is reading in order to provoke "readers [to] consult their own experiences of reading about Macartney's embassy" [n.pag.]. See "Fanny's 'great book': Macartney's Embassy to China and *Mansfield Park*," *Persuasions On-Line* 28.2 (Spring 2008).

Fanny's choice of Macartney's Chinese travel accounts reveals that she has a keen mind for politics and adventure – not necessarily always evident from her timid interactions with the oppressive Bertrams, though hinted at by her questioning of Sir Thomas over slavery at the dinner table (*MP* 136). Macartney's presence on her shelf also suggests Austen's own questioning of systematic power: after all, as Joseph Lew points out, Macartney debunked many of the "eighteenth-century notions of China" that painted the country as a site of "near-utopian benevolent despotism" (509). Macartney's portrayal of China as a place "prone to the same moral failings as those of Europe" equates "absolute patriarchy" with those moral failings (Lew 509), much as Austen herself does. Peter Knox-Shaw points out that by the time Austen was writing *Mansfield Park*, Macartney – who had "given a vivid account of the pressures put on him and his party to kowtow" – had become "synonymous with intransigence" (Knox-Shaw 186), a characteristic that, surprisingly, the timid Fanny appears to have learned. As Knox-Shaw notes, the reference to Macartney comes immediately after Edmund has effectively kowtowed to the peer pressure from the Mansfield youth and agreed to act. He comes to Fanny to seek her "approbation," which is he is "not comfortable without" (109) – and which she declines to give.[133]

Macartney suggests that a sort of Burkean restraint "usually" occurs in the patriarchal order of China:

> A Chinese family is regulated with the same regard to subordination and economy that is observed in the government of a State. The paternal authority, though unlimited, is usually exercised with kindness and indulgence. According to

[133] See also Peter Knox-Shaw's article "Fanny Price Refuses to Kowtow," *Review of English Studies* 47 (1996): 212-17.

> Chinese ideas, there is but one interest in a family; any other supposition would be unnatural and wicked. An undutiful child is a monster that China does not produce. (Macartney 416)

Lew makes the case for equating the patriarchy of faraway China with one much closer to home, Sir Thomas's; "kindness and indulgence" are hardly words that could characterize Sir Thomas's household. As Susan Allen Ford notes, Macartney's editor Barrow contrasts Macartney's portrait of patriarchal benevolence with a darker one of "unlimited and arbitrary" power that maims as it shapes (qtd in Ford). "Unlimited and arbitrary" certainly apply to Sir Thomas's behaviors as well, and from her reading Fanny is more equipped to make this connection. Far from representing an anomalous outburst, Fanny's questioning of slavery at the dinner table is an extension of her questioning of *Lovers' Vows* and occurs precisely because her reading has equipped her with the intellectual framework for resistance.

Although he is likely unfamiliar to most modern readers, George Crabbe's presence on Fanny's bookshelf signals her contemporary, even fashionable, tastes. Byron, for example, was a great admirer of Crabbe's poetry, making him one of the few poets worth praise in his infamous "English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers": Crabbe there is "Nature's sternest Painter, yet the best". Walter Scott was also a good friend of Crabbe's and a devotee of his poetry. And, as an 1819 letter by dramatist Mary Russell Mitford reveals, liking Crabbe was nearly *de rigeur* for the decade: Mitford writes, "Have you read Crabbe's 'Tales of the Hall?' Do you like Crabbe? But that is a silly question. Everybody likes Mr. Crabbe to a certain point…He is the only poet going of whom everybody thinks alike" (*Letters* 73-4). Austen herself adored Crabbe's poetry. In an 1813 letter to her sister Cassandra written from London, she complains twice that "I have not yet seen Mr. Crabbe" (*Letters* 227) and "I was particularly disappointed at seeing nothing of Mr.

Crabbe" at the theatre (230). Her nephew J.E. Austen-Leigh writes in his *Memoir* of her that "[s]he thoroughly enjoyed Crabbe; perhaps on account of a certain resemblance to herself in minute and highly finished detail; and would sometimes say, in jest, that, if she ever married at all, she could fancy being Mrs. Crabbe" (71).

Crabbe's poetry focuses not on the worlds of wealth and aristocracy common in much (though certainly not all) contemporary poetry, but on characters from emergent "middle-class" backgrounds, such as sailors ("The Brothers"), merchants ("The Wager"), and farmers ("The Gentleman Farmer"). Coming from a family who was not of the gentry, Fanny may have found the stories of more familiar characters appealing in her social isolation within the grand house of Bertram. As Katie Halsey points out, one of Crabbe's *Tales*, "The Confidant," strongly echoes Fanny's predicament as a "dependent relation" who must attend upon an unpleasant lady (Halsey 78-79): his heroine Anna's "duties here were of the usual kind – / And some the body harrassed, some the mind: / Billets she wrote, and tender stories read" (Crabbe 122). Fanny, a perceptive reader, would no doubt have recognized such a similarity between Anna's predicament and her own, perhaps explaining Crabbe's prominence on her little shelf. Like Anna, Fanny's body is "harassed" by the demands of an unthinking aristocratic woman; take, for example, her "headach [sic]" after spending the heat of the afternoon cutting roses in Lady Bertram's garden (*MP* 52). And, like Anna, who "veiled her troubles in a mask of ease / And showed her pleasure was a power to please" (Crabbe 122), Fanny's habitual abnegation – so intense that Nina Auerbach famously called her the "denying girl" (210) – masks the troubles she clearly feels within. However, as does Austen, Crabbe also gently satirizes his characters. For example, although her predicament and mistress are awful, Anna is not a particularly skilled companion: Crabbe notes that "She played at whist, but with inferior skill" and "Music was ever pleasant till she played /

At a request that no request conveyed" (122). Fanny, too, is not immune from Austen's ironic pen; Halsey argues that Austen's use of narratorial distance in parts of the novel encourages the reader both to "see through Fanny's eyes" and "perceive her self-delusions" (80).

Finally, Crabbe's tales explore the idea of "refinement," which can be attained through the act of reading. Thomas Williams suggests that this refinement is of two sorts: "a process that invites hopes of rising up the social scale" and "a process that leads to a more modern form of subjective identity…a type of identity which is valued according to an individual's qualities of mind, independent of their social standing" (Williams 174). Fanny's reading accomplishes both refinements. Like Crabbe's tales, Austen's novel takes a deep interest in reading as crucial in developing an individual's idea of him/herself that may be shared with others. Indeed, a significant problem with Henry Crawford is that he feels "as if I could be any thing or every thing" (Austen, *MP* 87) and is thus nothing. Those who read poorly in *Mansfield Park* find themselves faced with a dual punishment: they sink on the social ladder and generally seem to have a poor idea of their own identities. Fanny, on the other hand, reads carefully, and though she sees herself in others, she retains a strong notion of herself.

Johnson's *Idler* provides Fanny with more fodder for self-identification. The periodical sometimes comments on female education and "accomplishment" in much the same way that Austen does. For example, in *Idler* no. 13, a letter-writer to "Mr. Idler" remarks that his wife's industriousness has taken on ludicrous proportions. Much like Mrs. Norris, the writer's wife is an "irreconcilable enemy to idleness, and considers every state of life as idleness, in which the hands are not employed, or some art acquired, by which she thinks money may be got or saved" (S. Johnson 188). Like Fanny, the writer's daughters are "confined in a garret…both because work is best done at a sky-light, and because children are apt to lose time by looking about them"

(188). The writer complains that the house has become stuffed with handiworks to the point of ridiculousness: “We have twice as many fire-skreens as chimneys, and three flourished quilts for every bed. … She has twenty covers for side-saddles embroidered with silver flowers, and has curtains wrought with gold in various figures, which she resolves some time r other to hang up” (189). Also like Mrs. Norris, the writer’s wife is very proud of her parsimonious production: “she never fails to turn to me, and ask what all these would cost, if I had been to buy them” (189). The writer is concerned that “I know not why the children should be persecuted with useless tasks, or obliged to make shoes that are never worn….In the mean time, the girls grow up in total ignorance of every thing past, present, and future” (189). Fanny’s own domestic abuses at the hands of her aunt become even more ridiculous when viewed through the lens of Johnson’s satire, which emphasizes the silliness of requiring young women to produce delicate embroidery and other such “accomplishments” to the detriment of an actual education. Austen’s satire adds to Johnson’s, proclaiming the uselessness of even a “practical” education (such as that reflected by the Bertram girls’ memorization-heavy curriculum) if untempered by wise emotional sensitivity. Like Crabbe’s poetry, the presence of Johnson’s *Idler* hints at a larger critique of the systematic social treatment of women. Fanny experiences being forced at the hands of the actively abusive Mrs. Norris and the casually abusive Lady Bertram to be a figure of good female productivity despite her physical weakness and frequent mental fatigue, but she does not submit unthinkingly to this treatment. Rather, as suggested by Austen’s placement of Johnson on her shelf, Fanny would have read bitingly satirical accounts of just why this emphasis on productivity – and its concomitant, and more threatening, valuation of women as objects of (re)production – made no sense. In this light, her refusal to learn things such as music and

drawing become rather radical acts of self-assertion, of refusing to produce accomplishments merely for the sake of production, of the primacy of her preferences over those of society.

Fanny's bookshelf also suggests another reason why she might be so distraught by the incursion of *Lovers' Vows* into Mansfield Park. Fanny is accustomed to reading texts in which she sees herself. As her disappointed reaction to Rushworth's modernized chapel (discussed at greater length in Chapter 3) reveals, she is also more than capable of projecting the fantasies developed by her reading onto "real life." The presence of *Lovers' Vows* thus presents her with an alternate way of thinking about the relationship between herself and Edmund, who like the play's Anhalt is also a likely-to-be-poor clergyman. Like Crabbe's tales, which teach her "a more modern form of subjective identity…a type of identity which is valued according to an individual's qualities of mind, independent of their social standing" and to hope that "rising up the social scale" is a possibility (Williams 174), Inchbald's play teaches Fanny to think of herself as possible match for her tutor despite the Bertram family's refusal to acknowledge this possibility. Fanny's reading shows her to be a more complex and far more self-aware character than she is sometimes given credit for. As modern narrative theory suggests, Fanny recognizes situations in life that bear similarity to those she has read and learns vicariously from her reading experiences. She also makes decisions, such as standing up for her own views, based on what she has learned from the models in her reading; after all, if Macartney could rebel against the demands to kowtow, so can she. It is no coincidence that Fanny is the most feeling and empathetic of *Mansfield Park*'s characters, because she is the only one who reads so well.

Jane in the Trenches

Claudia Johnson relates in *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* how Jane Austen became the unlikely but "cherished companion of the World War I generation in general and of English

soldiers in particular during the war" (Johnson, *Cults*). Johnson examines *The Void of War*, the collected letters of WWI soldier Reginald Farrer, to explore why Austen became so popular, particularly amongst military men in the trenches. As Johnson explains, perhaps Austen's knack for detail allowed soldiers "at least temporarily, to surmount trauma by describing it in terms of what is already known, thus offering psychic consolation to a mind boggled by unthinkable carnage" (Johnson, *Cults*). Although she does not cite social sciences scholars in her own text, Johnson's argument is well-grounded in modern trauma therapy theory, and in particular, narrative therapy. Narrative therapy approaches trauma as one way of telling a story, one in which meaning has been lost or feels too fragmented to recover.[134] Narrative therapy encourages people to distance themselves from their experience of trauma in order to "examine, reflect, and deconstruct problems' influence over their lives" (Beaudoin 32). One way to achieve this distance is to tell the story in a different way, or with different language. As Johnson aptly demonstrates, Farrer's letters are littered with allusions to Austen, often incongruous, often uncited. They appear "[f]olded quietly amid shocking spectacles narrated with Austenian detachment" (Johnson, *Cults*). Although they may not have understood the psychological mechanism at work or its therapeutic value, Farrer and his soldier compatriots used Austen to give them a language to describe the indescribable.

Using another's narrative, or elements thereof, to tell one's own story is not the only therapeutic use for fiction. As shown earlier, reading also allows for the development of empathy and kinship with others, and Austen's role amongst WWI soldiers bears this out as well. Perhaps some of the most famous readers of Austen during the Great War were Rudyard Kipling's

[134] For an overview of trauma therapy and narrative therapy techniques within the field, see *Trauma Therapy in Context: The Science and Craft of Evidence-Based Practice*, eds. Robert McMackin, Elana Newman, Jason Fogler, and Terence Keane (DC: APA, 2012).

family; Mrs. Carrie Kipling wrote in her diary of January 1917 of the "great delight" and comfort that Austen's novels brought the family while their only son Jack was fighting in the war.[135] Rudyard Kipling's short story "The Janeites" explicitly engages with the power of Austen's work to forge community amongst its readers. In Kipling's story, as Humberstall – "an enormous, flat-faced man" who served in Garrison Artillery and was "Blown up twice" – recounts, "Jane" served as a "password" amongst military men to allow conversation between them, "regardless of rank" (Kipling). Kipling's biographer Andrew Lycett suggests that the motivation for "The Janeites" was a conversation with George Saintsbury "about the sense of fellowship felt by people who shared a powerful joint experience – whether fighting in war, or membership of a Mason's Lodge, or even familiarity with the works of an author such as Austen" (Lycett 513-14). Johnson reads the peculiar power of Austen's fiction for military men such as the Janeites as soothing for its "atemporal aspects of narration, minor descriptive details, catchy phrases, and, especially, characterization" (Johnson, *Cults*). Kipling's fictional military men recognize in Jane Austen's characters analogues of figures in their own lives. Humberstall begins by saying that Austen's characters "was no *use!*" because "[t]hey was only just like people you run across any day" (Kipling), perhaps echoing Charlotte Brontë's complaint to G.H. Lewes of Austen's "accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a common-place face" (Brontë, *Letters* 99).[136] Humberstall continues until he gets at the crux of why he felt so attracted to Austen's characters when he discusses his reaction to *Northanger Abbey*'s General Tilney and his cruelty to Catherine Morland: "some'ow Jane put it down all so naked it made you ashamed" (Kipling). Humberstall and his comrades accept cruelty in their own lives; Anthony interjects that cruelty

[135] Katie Halsey notes that Carrie Kipling's diaries were destroyed in 1976. Charles Carrington, a biographer of Rudyard Kipling, kept extensive notes on the Kipling family's diaries, from which Halsey draws this quotation (Halsey 254n52).
[136] Letter to G.H. Lewes, dated 12 January 1848. In *Selected Letters*, ed. Margaret Smith (OUP, 2007).

such as Tilney's "'appens all the time," even with "me own mother," to which Humberstall replies "That's right" (Kipling). However, through reading Tilney's treatment of Catherine Morland, the "enormous" military veteran Humberstall recognizes the "shame" of such treatment, even though he is about as far away from Catherine personality-wise as it is possible to be. In other words, Humberstall learns to empathize with the characters whose stories he reads, and the shared sense of recognition and empathy between him and his fellow military men create a therapeutic bond during a time of unspeakable trauma.

The Winding-Up

As these two case studies show, reading can have a fundamental effect on how a person views herself, as well as how one views the world. The model of reading this dissertation has proposed, of recognizing echoes and allusions of one text in another and considering the impact these familiarities might have on the reader, could have real-life potential. In learning to recognize the building blocks of one narrative in another and understanding how the shift in deployment or context changes the meaning of the text, those who have experienced traumas might be able to learn to re-craft their narratives in different contexts. The cognitive dissonance provoked by recognizing familiar elements in an unfamiliar text might also help to combat readers' distaste for ambiguity and encourage the development of a broader perspective by requiring them to reconsider their own preconceptions (Djikic et al. 149). A deeper sense of empathy and understanding could well be "the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning."

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