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Jane Austen was a revolutionary author. Her mode of writing, satire, served her a dual purpose. Satire was in vogue at the time she began writing, but it also gave her a chance to criticize her society covertly. In her major novels, Jane Austen reveals to us the foolishness of the prejudices about women that were prevalent in her society and attacks society's prejudices and faults through irony and satire. Austen shows us how blind society was to its own faults, including its attitudes toward women, in particular.

Austen's novels are packed with social commentary. Austen does not glorify the gentry. In her novels, Austen gives us a frightening portrayal of the upper class. She shows them as lazy, cruel, thoughtless, and mercenary. Examples of abandonment of responsibility by parents and family members are all too common in Austen's novels.

Yet, Austen does not leave the reader without a ray of hope. Through her portrayal of her heroines and heroes, she shows us what,

in her view, the ideal society should be like. All of its members should be well educated. Education for Austen went beyond learning just mathematics, history, geography, and languages. Her educated person, including the woman, must also have self-knowledge--an important element for Austen. She considered it to be far more important than book learning.

Another major focus for Austen was marriage. She considered it to be a necessary and important part of life. Her view was that marriage gave women an expanded arena of influence. Well educated and kind married couples could exert a positive influence on others close to them.

Although Austen's setting was limited to the world that she was familiar with, the message of her novels is universal. It transcends time and class. The topics that Austen explores--women's education, parental duties and failures, marriage and equality--are all relevant today.

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COMMENTARY

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1

INTRODUCTION

During her time, Jane Austen was one of the forerunners of social criticism. Perhaps the subdued tone in Austen's novels has misled some into believing that Austen is not concerned with social issues. Although most will agree that neither the French Revolution nor the Napoleonic Wars were subjects that Austen seemed to want to delve into, one cannot ignore that recurring themes that she explored were social disintegration, the women's situation, women's education, equality of gender, and parental responsibility. Although women's situation was a main focus for Austen, she did not exclude men from criticism or praise. She defines in her novels those qualities she finds admirable in people, such as intelligence, moral strength, self-knowledge, and wit. Austen considers those qualities as necessary elements for improving society. Austen also examines marriage and portrays it as necessary. She shows that marriage can often improve women's social situation, giving them more independence and influence. A necessary element that Austen advocates in marriage and in the social arena is gender equality. Her six major novels--Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Emma, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion-- show that equality was a major concern for her. Another major social problem Austen examined was the role of parents and what their responsibilities were to their children. In her novels, Austen shows parents often failing to fulfill their duties to their children.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, writing about the woman's social situation was extremely difficult. One

needs to examine the time period in which Austen wrote to understand fully the constraints put upon her. This was a period when much of society, and in particular the upper class, was asked to change its perspective about the role of the individual in society. A bloody revolution in France had occurred, and the demands made by the working class frightened aristocrats in Europe. Although small steps were being taken to rectify the situation of the proletariat, the rights of women were being repressed, possibly as a backlash response. Alison Sulloway, a scholar of Austen, argues that as more of the rights of men were being granted, women's rights were being taken away:

[W]omen's oppression occurred in the form of a bizarre compensatory equation: the more "Rights of Man" came in time to seem legitimate questions to some enlightened men, the more men of almost all persuasions demanded restrictions upon women even beyond the customary hardships. In this search for balance between freedom and order, the masculine craving for new and enlightened liberties under laws was ironically counter-balanced by a renewed and vehement public insistence upon woman's confinement in her limited province. In some unspecified way, woman's segregated domesticity was supposed to compensate for man's expanding universes and to forestall revolution both at home and overseas. (4)

During the 1790s when Austen was writing seriously, many male members of society were lashing out against the rights of women. It was an incredibly difficult time for women and in particular women writers. Sulloway states that women writers faced long-held prejudiced beliefs in the male community:

Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment women were offered a satirical vision of themselves, which was itself an appropriate target for their own satire. When they were not publicly charged with innate intellectual and moral failures, they were accused of ugly and blasphemous attempts to educate themselves beyond their proper province and, even worse, with attempting to remedy conditions that were often considered neither unjust nor remediable. (xv)

Males considered themselves far superior to females. They thought that they were superior morally and intellectually and were offended that women could not nor would not recognize this fact.

It was also a time of increasing social upheaval in the Western world. It has been argued that Austen ignored the major social issues, such as the question of science and religion, the French revolution, the hardships of the common man, and the repression of women. Austen once claimed that her work as only a "little bit of ivory (two inches wide) in which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour" (introduction Pride and Prejudice). But could her comment be filled with her well-known

irony and hold much more than many realized? Margaret Kirkham wrote, "Jane Austen learned to tell the truth through a middling irony which 'dull elves' might misread, but which she hoped reader of sense and ingenuity would not" (162). With the exception of the issue of repression of women, those topics were not topics that she wanted to delve into. Her purpose was different, and many critics seem to ignore that fact. However, the critics who argue that Austen was too preoccupied with developing a novel of manners rather than one that discussed social issues overlook numerous subtleties. Marilyn Butler, a modern critic of Austen, has written that un insightful readers seem blind to Austen's themes:

Secularists and radicals could accuse a novelist like Austen of having a limited, unduly acquiescent or unduly commercial outlook upon life, especially in the matter of love and marriage. Pride and Prejudice and Emma seem to have aroused resistance of this sort even from such intelligent readers, demonstrably well-disposed to women authors. . . . (xxxvii)

Many critics have overlooked the obvious--that Austen devoted all of her works to one central theme--the woman and her situation. While others were arguing about one diverse topic or another, Austen concentrated much of her work on women. However, Butler states, Austen goes beyond just a woman writing about women, and to recognize her only as that short-changes her:

To read an Austen novel as only a woman's novel is then, to read it selectively. But not to read it as among other things a woman's novel is also, as feminist criticism has taught all of us, to leave a proper historical dimension out. (xxxiii)

Austen was a writer of some complexity.

Readers should realize that Austen's novels contain considerable psychological insight. She uses many tools once considered beyond the ability of women to handle. Sulloway suggests that Austen's use of satire shows her concern with social issues:

Austen's satirical purposes may have been so oblique that they have not been recognized for close to two centuries, but when she satirized male privileges and female disenfranchisements, her purposes were as insurrectionary as those of Mary Wollstonecraft and Wollstonecraft's feminist colleagues of the 1790s and later. (xvi)

Even today, critics argue extensively about the purpose behind Austen's satire. Some argue that Austen was simply being faddish while others see a feminist implication behind her well-honed satire. Sulloway contends that, despite outer appearances, Austen was eventually shaped by the French Revolution and the feminist revolt of the 1790s (xvi). Sulloway also points out that David Monahan, in the introduction to Jane Austen and the Drama of Women,

"reluctantly admits that Austen 'often appears to be closer to Mary Wollstonecraft' than to the male conduct-book writers whom she [Austen] read" (xvii). Lloyd Brown, another modern critic agrees that Austen's themes are "comparable with the eighteenth-century feminism of Mary Wollstonecraft" (321).

Austen is considered to be one of the best satirists of her time. Indulging in satire provided a chance for Austen to make fun of both men and women, but in particular those with negative views about the contributions made by women. Her use of satire also provided Austen with a subtle method of helping the woman's cause. Sulloway points to the idea that satire allowed women a chance to prove the equality of women:

In a distinct yet covert way, Austen perceived the struggle of the satirists to rise out of the battle of the sexes. . . . Women satirists thus tend to pay other women the compliment of assuming that the female gender is as various as the male in sensibilities, values, talents, and achievements, or lack of them, and therefore as varied as the male gender in its indictable sins and follies, which women satirists do not consider to be innate in their gender. (xv)

Women writers who used satire in Austen's day took a tool that was considered to be predominantly a male one and used it to stab to the heart of the equality issue. Using satire allowed Austen to attack

society's preconceptions about women, without being so overt as to draw male chauvinistic criticism.

In her novels, Austen has given us didactic works that argue that women have much more to offer than what the male-dominated society has perceived them to have. She also argues that women are equal in moral value and intelligence to their male counterparts. Her novels reveal that Austen was a staunch defender of women.

Sulloway suggests a reason why Austen did not become a radical and outspoken defender of women's rights:

She was too devout an Anglican and too astute a social observer of possibilities and impossibilities to have become a radical feminist. Yet she was too intelligent and too ironic an observer, even a ruthless observer, of social patterns that she considered destructive to family peace and to women's moral life, to have become a mere conduit for the status quo, which many reader still assume she is. (xix)

Austen was a talented observer of the social world around her. The conflict between maintaining a stance that would not scandalize her family and fulfilling her need to reveal the inconsistencies of society was very strong. With brilliant talent, she found a way to both conceal and reveal.

In all her major novels, Jane Austen reveals to us the foolishness of the prejudices about women that were prevalent in her society and attacks society's prejudices and faults through

irony, allusion, and satire. Through laughter, Austen shows us how blind society's views about women were. She takes a firm stance against the traditional role that women were expected to play and the blind beliefs of many members of society who contended that the female gender lacks meaningful value.

Although Jane Austen was an covert radical who hid her message behind a wall of allusion and irony, her message was clear for those with insight. Sulloway writes that "her [Austen's] fiction mediates between the traditional forces of hostility and inertia toward women and the counterforces of radical disruption, without denying the tragic sources of that disruption" (xix). Despite the subtlety of the methods Austen used, she advocates social change. However, it is clear that Austen did not believe that beneficial social change could occur by way of dismantling the current social system. Instead, Austen stresses that people must change the system by using the strengths of the current system, thereby slowly changing the attitudes of the members in society to forge a new and better society. Although it has been argued that Jane Austen was merely a comic writer whose main theme was social manners, she was in fact extremely concerned with social problems and through the use of irony and satire attacked society's distorted beliefs about the proper role of women, their inferior minds, their lack of moral value, and their inferiority to men, as well as examined the parent-child relationship and the responsibilities associated with each role, including the role of the mother. She championed the idea of

equality between the sexes and showed in her novels that society can become better once its members realize that fact. Austen advocated social change on many levels.

JANE AUSTEN'S HEROINES: MODELS OF AN IDEAL

Jane Austen's novels include elements engaging to their readers. One of those elements is her heroines. In each of her major novels, Austen introduces us to a unique character with flaws as well as redeeming qualities. Often her heroines are lacking in such a way as to make us want to shake our heads in frustration. Yet, these very shortcomings endear Austen's heroines to her readers and reveal to them what makes the heroines admirable or likeable. Often Austen shows the reader reoccurring characteristics in her heroines, such as intelligence and moral strength. But, despite some similar characteristics, each of her heroines stands out as different from any of the other heroines.

Austen uses her heroines to reveal her feminist tendencies. Austen did not make her heroines extremely beautiful and intelligent. They are not paragons of virtue who stand above all the other characters in the novels. What Austen gives to her reader is a group of heroines who learn and grow. They learn that their thinking and choices sometimes need reevaluating. And when they need to, the heroines reevaluate. Austen shows us women who make mistakes and learn from them, and then make better decisions based upon what they have learned. She makes her heroines take responsibility for their errors, but she also gives them credit for their appropriate actions. Margaret Kirkham, a student and scholar of Austen and feminist literature, notes that Austen's heroines are

not persons who "lead extraordinary lives, or are endowed with extraordinary genius. The difficulties they experience are not, in many instances, the same as those experienced by men, but the way that they learn to solve them is what matters" (83).

Northanger Abbey is Austen's first major work. Its heroine, Catherine Morland, is a romantic, seemingly insipid character, who is obsessed with novels such as The Mysteries of the Uldolpho. Austen writes at the beginning of Northanger Abbey, "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (1). And as readers, we find that Austen's description of Catherine leaves us wondering about this heroine. Catherine does not possess an outstanding amount of intelligence or moral fortitude, unlike many of Austen's later heroines. In fact, Catherine resembles the characters in the novels that the reader is asked to laugh at because of their silliness. However, the fact that Austen does make Catherine the heroine of Northanger Abbey gives us reason to examine the qualities that make her special. John Hardy writes:

Even though the undercutting in the first two chapters might seem at first glance to be directed against Catherine, a more careful reading shows its primary target to be the conventional sentimental heroine whose life proved so 'eventful'. . . . Despite Catherine's seemingly unpromising start and lack of prospects, her life does become eventful. (1)

The initial negative description of Catherine seems, as Hardy points out, directed not at Catherine but at other heroines from different novels of the time; and once the initial description is completed, Austen gives us a more promising look at Catherine:

Her heart was affectionate, her disposition cheerful and open, without conceit or affectation of any kind--her manners just removed from the awkwardness and shyness of a girl; her person pleasing, and when in good looks, pretty--and her mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is. (8)

In this description, Austen reveals a young girl who is admirable for her lack of conceit and who is likeable despite her possession of romantic notions.

Catherine is the youngest of all Austen's heroines. In creating her, Austen seems to say that we must overlook some of Catherine's flaws because of her age. Catherine's mind has yet to examine many of the complex issues of life, and she has formed opinions from her reading of romantic and Gothic novels of the times. Catherine comes to learn that she is incredibly foolish and amazingly blind, and she realizes that she must abandon her romantic notions for more practical thinking. In the next chapter, Austen not only tells us about Catherine's faults but also makes satirical comments on society:

She did not learn either to forget or defend the past; but she learned to hope that it would never transpire farther,

and that it might not cost her Henry's entire regard. Her thoughts being still chiefly fixed on what she had with such causeless terror felt and done, nothing could shortly be clearer, than that it had been all a voluntary, self-created delusion, each trifling circumstance receiving importance from an imagination resolved on alarm, and everything forced to bend to one purpose by a mind which, before she entered the Abbey, had been raving to be frightened. She remembered with what feelings she had prepared for a knowledge of Northanger. She saw that the infatuation had been created, the mischief settled long before her quitting Bath, and it seemed as if the whole might be traced to the influence of that sort of reading which she had there indulged. (214)

Catherine is forced to learn a harsh lesson about herself. Her obsession with making Northanger a setting similar to that of Anne Radcliffe's novels was childish and irritating to Henry Tilney, Catherine's future husband and son of the owner of Northanger Abbey. However, it was harmless. Before any tragedy can occur, she learns a lesson about the difference between reality and fiction. Austen suggests in this passage that people need to realize when they make mistakes and to correct themselves.

Critics have argued that the fault of this novel lies in Henry's superiority to Catherine. Henry leads her to grow as a character

through his guidance and advice. Henry shows her that she has made a fool of herself by her creating in her mind a world more similar to that of a Gothic romance novel than real life. However, she learns that she is not only silly but ridiculous and consciously makes an effort to curb her rampant imagination. After reevaluating her situation, Catherine realizes that she needs to abandon her romantic notions and become a more mature and sensible person. Henry shows Catherine her mistake, but it is Catherine who sees beyond the mistake of the situation to realize that many faults lie within her own character. Catherine decides to change herself for the better.

As a foil to Catherine, Austen gives her reader Isabella Thorpe, a foil who gives us a basis for understanding and appreciating Catherine. Hardy points out that "Isabella, despite her protestations of friendship, is selfish of her own interests in deserting Catherine to go off with James [Catherine's brother] " (5). Isabella is ignorant, self-contained, and vulgar. In comparison to Isabella, Catherine is a very likeable character despite all her flaws. Catherine's regard for Isabella has been strong. However, once James writes of Isabella's defection and their broken engagement, Catherine realizes how insensible Isabella is. James's letter to Catherine opens her eyes, and she reflects on Isabella's previous improprieties. Early in the novel, when Catherine notices that Isabella is allowing Captain Tilney to pay too much attention to her, Catherine reflects on Isabella's imprudent behavior:

But when Catherine saw her [Isabella] in public, admitting Captain Tilney's attentions as readily as they were offered, and allowing him almost an equal share with James in her notice and smiles, the alternation became too positive to be past over. What could be meant by such unsteady conduct, what her friend could be at, was beyond her comprehension. Isabella could not be aware of the pain she was inflicting; but it was a degree of willful thoughtlessness which Catherine could not but resent. (155)

Although Catherine is bothered by Isabella's behavior, she makes no mention of it to Isabella. Instead Catherine blames the entire incident on Henry's brother, Captain Tilney. Austen shows the reader that Isabella is not only thoughtless but also lacks a strong sense of correct moral behavior. Isabella abandons James for Captain Tilney; then realizing that she has made a drastic mistake in betraying James, she pleads to Catherine for her help. The letter containing Isabella's request that Catherine try to repair the broken relationship between Isabella and James is actually the only written correspondence that Catherine receives from Isabella although Isabella promised to be faithful in her letter writing, a fact that gives Catherine more evidence that Isabella is not good for either James or Catherine herself; so she decides to ignore Isabella's pleas. Isabella cannot keep her promises of friendship with Catherine nor

her promises of love with her fiance James Morland. Catherine finally understands Isabella's character:

Such a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine. Its inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood struck her from the very first. She was ashamed of Isabella, and ashamed of having ever loved her. Her professions of attachment were now as disgusting as her excuses were empty, and her demands impudent. (234)

Catherine realizes her mistake in trusting Isabella and decides to end an unsound relationship. As Northanger Abbey draws to a close, Catherine learns more about the people around her and about herself. She learns that people deceive just as books lie. She learns that she must be careful in choosing companions and should avoid imprudent and impractical characters. She also learns to reevaluate her judgment and make right choices. She abandons a friendship that will not help her to better herself, and as seen earlier, she learns to abandon romantic notions that cloud the judgment.

The novel shows us that, regardless of all of her flaws, Catherine is a character who grows and is endearing. She becomes more insightful in realizing other people's flaws and also, particularly, her own. However, despite her realization that life and people are not as simple and good as she previously thought, she remains a very innocent and naive character. Hardy suggests that

Catherine's prevailing characteristics are what make the novel special:

Catherine remains untouched by selfishness or sophisticated behavior, and it is 'the fine instinct which runs through her simplicity' that gives Northanger Abbey its particular freshness. (9)

Hardy further suggests that when Henry says of Isabella to his sister, "Prepare for your sister-in-law, Eleanor, and such a sister-in-law as you must delight in!--Open, candid, artless, guileless, with affections strong but simple, forming no pretensions, and knowing no disguise" (221), Henry is describing Catherine and not Isabella. Eleanor, too, realizes that Henry is referring to Catherine as her sister-in-law, and that is why Austen has Eleanor respond 'with a smile,' "Such a sister-in-law, Henry, I should delight in" (221). Catherine has all the qualities that Henry alludes to.

Despite her childishness, Catherine is still a likeable character. Austen shows us that, although Catherine might have much to learn, she is intelligent enough to recognize this fact and be willing to change. Henry and Eleanor can look beyond her faults to see that she is a morally strong, insightful character who is kind and loving; and for those qualities, they admire her. Austen asks us to do the same.

Elizabeth Bennet, in Pride and Prejudice, has no problem attracting our admiration and our affection from the beginning of the novel. She is intelligent, insightful, witty, and kind. Because of

these characteristics, she is perhaps one of the most well-liked of all Austen's characters. Jane Austen, herself, seemed to admire Elizabeth Bennet. Tony Tanner in his introduction tells us that Elizabeth Bennet's immense charm "has . . . much to do with the appeal of the book" (8), and that Austen, too, recognized the fact and had once written about Elizabeth in a letter. She wrote, "I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like her at least I do not know. . . ." (8). In many ways, Elizabeth Bennet, along with Anne Eliot from Persuasion, is Austen's ideal heroine.

Elizabeth possesses all the qualities that Austen seemed to find appropriate in a woman. She has intelligence, insight into herself, wit, and goodness. Her only problem is that "she is surrounded by immature people" (176), as Sulloway points out.

Some critics have argued that Austen has hidden herself in the character of Elizabeth Bennet. Butler suggests, "In appearing before her reader in the guise of Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Austen . . . reveals herself the critic of various forms of orthodoxy" (197). Butler tells her reader that Samuel Klinger, a powerful critic of Austen, and others like him associate "Jane Austen intellectually with Elizabeth's individualism" (201). Elizabeth is, as Butler points out, "fearless and independent" (199).

The first time that we are introduced to Elizabeth she accidentally overhears a conversation between Darcy and Bingley, where Darcy belittles her. However, despite Darcy's hurtful words,

Elizabeth is able to keep her sense of humor by telling the story "with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous." Later we discover that she not only has a playful side but is also extremely intelligent and caring. She cares not about her appearance if such concern interferes with her caring for those she loves. Mr. Bingley defends her to his sister after Elizabeth has walked in the mud to come and attend Jane. Miss Bingley criticizes Elizabeth's rash behavior:

To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles [sic] in dirt, and alone, quite alone! what could she mean by it? It seems to me to shew an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country town indifference to decorum. (82)

Mr. Bingley replies, "It shews an affection for her sister that is very pleasing" (82). No one in the group understands Elizabeth's motives except for Mr. Bingley. He is kind enough to recognize a concerned sibling who is willing to bear the censure of others to take care of her sister. However, Miss Bingley is correct in her estimation that Elizabeth is independent, so much so that she will not let others influence her negatively. P. J. M. Scott observes, "Impenitently independent of spirit, Elizabeth Bennet is bloodied at times but not bowed. . ." (58).

Darcy, too, recognizes Elizabeth's good qualities. The first thing that he notices about her is not so much her prettiness (we

already know that she is attractive because Austen tells us so) but her intelligence. He is unconsciously drawn to her. The narrator tells the reader:

Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness. (70)

And later, we discover that despite of the facts that he abhors about her background and family, Darcy cannot help but love Elizabeth. He tells her, "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" (221). Darcy recognizes "Elizabeth's genius for treating all people with respect for their natural dignity" (198), as Butler suggests.

Characters and readers are invariably drawn to Elizabeth. Critics, too, have found Elizabeth to be enjoyable. Margaret Kirkham claims, "None of the Austen heroines is more attractive than Elizabeth Bennet, none more clearly possessed of intelligence and warm affection. . ." (92). Butler contends, "Elizabeth attracts critics of diverse liberal tendencies because they are predisposed to like a heroine who champions individualism against the old social order" (203).

However, Elizabeth is not infallible, and Austen does not draw her as an epitome of all that is good in woman. Instead she shows through her depiction of Elizabeth and her other heroines that people make mistakes. Elizabeth's first fault is that she cannot recognize her own prejudices. Although Elizabeth is quick and intelligent, at the beginning of the novel she is not quick enough to realize that "whenever [she] discusses Darcy's faults, she touches, though often unconsciously, upon her own" (205), as Butler suggests. In Pride and Prejudice, Austen takes Elizabeth on a journey of self-knowledge and recognition. Because she is doing this, she clearly shows us Elizabeth's faults. Elizabeth is often too satirical and too quick with her wit. Butler points out that those qualities lead Elizabeth to adopt a low opinion of others (211). At times in the novel Elizabeth seems too much like a cynic. Her cynicism, however, does not prevent her from some blindness. She is taken in by Wickham and does not see his faults, just as she is blind to Darcy and does not see his merits. By the end of the novel, she learns that she has been too blinded by prejudices. She admits her faults to herself:

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself.--Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

"How despicably have I acted!" she cried.--"I, who have prided myself on my discernment!--I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my

vanity, in useless or blameable distrust--How humiliating is this discovery. . . . I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned." (236-237)

Elizabeth learns all her faults and changes for the better.

Austen is astute enough to make Elizabeth a well-rounded character. Butler notes, "Elizabeth, even if not wholly victorious, is Jane Austen's revolutionary heroine" (198). And from the point that Elizabeth realizes her faults, she "takes on the character of the later Austen heroine; she becomes the central intelligence through whose eyes and understanding events and character are mediated to the reader" (91), as Kirkham points out.

Anne Eliot in Persuasion can be considered a mature version of Elizabeth. They have many similar qualities. They are intelligent, witty, outspoken, and critics of their society. However, the reader follows Elizabeth through her mistakes and her lessons, but in Persuasion, Austen introduces us to Anne after she has learned her lessons--eight years after in fact. Anne is a practical, intelligent, mature, and strong woman. This novel of Austen's presents us with her ideal woman. Although her father sees Anne as "only Anne" (3), the reader sees her as much more; we see her through Austen's eyes. Austen describes Anne as having "an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding" (3). Her family may not appreciate her, but the admirable characters in the novel and the reader do.

Of all Jane Austen's characters, Anne is the most mature and introspective. Because she had her lesson earlier on, she knows herself. Scott suggests:

Austen has elected her into the role of heroine and the book's chief focus of interest but [sic] because, for all her apparent quiet insignificance in terms of the outer world's view of things, she is a heroine as other females in the story could never be; her interior history has a substantiality theirs lack. . . . Like all the Austen heroines Anne Elliot looks forward and back, weighs the past with the present, has critical sense which will not be lulled with easy anaesthetics, goes off on her own to evaluate the experiences by which she is begirt.

(185-86)

Anne has a sense of herself and, because introspective in behavior, she has more maturity of mind and behavior than any other of Austen's female characters in Persuasion and also in any of her other novels.

Although not quite as witty as Elizabeth, Anne is still quite intelligent. Sulloway writes that Anne might not know the level of her own intelligence but that "her mind is even more acute than her modesty will admit to herself; in fact, it is almost as 'excellent' as Fredrick in the second flush of love thinks it is" (137). Muriel Bradbrook describes Anne's entreating qualities:

Both more vulnerable and more assured than her predecessors, Fanny or Jane Fairfax, Anne is ten years older than Fanny but even more lonely and neglected. No one in her family considers her, everyone makes use of her, she is expected to sit at the piano and play dances for the flirtatious Musgrove girls. However, she has a rank in general society, and a certain confidence in herself. She knows that she has been 'blighted'. . . but when she meets commander Benwick, who has also been blighted by the death of his fiancée, she gives some fairly robust counsel, advising him to leave poetry and read more moral and improving works as the best means of fortitude against affliction. At the same time she is prepared to laugh at herself because of the gap between her advice and her own conduct--such mockery was previously left to the author. (43)

No one in her family seems to appreciate Anne, and she is often taken advantage of. However, Anne has the intelligence that none of the other characters do. She understands herself enough to see her foibles, and is strong enough to laugh at them. She has more power than any of Austen's other characters because, as Bradbrook points out, Anne has the ability to mock herself. Austen does not give that power to her other heroines; she reserves it for herself as the author.

Anne is Austen's most introspective and thinking character. Margaret Kirkham suggests that Anne's nature prevents criticism. She writes, "Anne's gentleness of manner, together with her maturity, disarm criticism of her strength of character and her confidence in her own judgement. . ." (148). Kirkham goes so far as to contend that Austen has made Anne her strongest feminist. Kirkham suggests that when Anne is arguing with Captain Harville about books and histories, she is in fact showing herself to be a champion of women:

No other Austen heroine is shown as putting a feminist viewpoint so plainly, and she does it not within the confines of a family, to a brother or sister, but by conversing as a friendly equal with one of Wentworth's brother-officers. (147)

Because Anne is confident about herself and has a strong belief about equality and about how the ideas that society has about women are wrong, she feels no qualms about debating with someone not belonging to her family.

Anne shows her beliefs clearly when she argues with Captain Harville. Harville states:

"[W]e shall never agree I suppose upon this point. No man and woman would, probably, but let me observe that all histories are against you, all stories, prose and verse . . . songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's

fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men." (209)

She responds:

"Perhaps I shall.--Yes, yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands." (209)

She has the wit and quickness to duel about preconceived ideas about women. Anne's feminist tendencies clearly show through in her arguing that men have had the advantages that women have not.

Anne is the best of all of Austen's heroines. She possesses intelligence, at times, wit, moral strength, self-knowledge, integrity, fortitude and maturity. Although she is unappreciated by her family, the other characters in the novel see her worth and so does the reader.

In her heroines, Austen gives us an clear view of what her ideal woman should be like. The woman should be able to see her mistakes, change herself for the better, reflect on her own moral character, be intelligent, expand her mind, and be virtuous. Although at times her heroines seem unworthy of Austen's attention, by the end of the novel, Austen reveals enough of the good qualities in each of her heroines for the reader to appreciate them.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS: HAPPINESS IS DIFFICULT TO FIND

In all of her major novels, Jane Austen comments on the state of society as she saw it. Readers have often seen her works as a series of novels about manners that praise the landed gentry for their values and lifestyle. However, despite choosing the life of the landed gentry as the setting for her stories, Austen also criticizes their lifestyle. Just as some readers often mistake Austen's idea about marriage, so too do they mistake what Austen has to say about the society in which she lived and in which her characters play a part. A major reason for any misreading of Austen is in her use of ironic satire.

In reality, Austen often shows us a group of characters who are generally silly, stupid, or cruel. Only her heroines and heroes are endowed with a marginal amount of wisdom and generosity. Overall, what Austen has to say about her society is not pleasant. A major problem that Austen points to in her novels is her characters' lack of motivation to do anything. In Sense and Sensibility, Edward Ferrars tells Elinor that he has had nothing to do and that had he had some form of work to perform he would not have become so involved with Lucy Steele:

His heart was now open to Elinor, all its weaknesses, all its errors confessed, and his first boyish attachment to Lucy treated with all the philosophic dignity of twenty-four.

"It was foolish, idle inclination on my side," said he, "the consequence of ignorance of the world--and want of employment. Had my mother given me some active profession when I was removed at eighteen from the care of Mr. Pratt, I think--nay, I am sure, it would never have happened. . . . But instead of having anything to do, instead of having any profession chosen for me, or being allowed to chuse [sic] any myself, I returned home to be completely idle." (318)

As Edward says, there was nothing for him to do except attach himself to an attractive woman. Because he comes from a wealthy family, he is under no obligation to work. And in most cases, even when the characters to whom we are introduced to are poor, we later discover that they marry 'for money' as a means of producing an income rather than finding an occupation. A good example of this tendency is Willoughby from Sense and Sensibility. Austen gives us a series of villains who have nothing with which to occupy their time except running amok in society, gambling and drinking. In several of her novels, Austen reiterates the idea that the rich have no occupation to force them to act responsibly; she condemns the tradition that it is worthy of the rich to remain idle.

In Mansfield Park, Austen gives us another portrayal of a young man whose idleness leads to extravagance at the expense of others. Thomas Bertram is introduced to us as an unfeeling character, and in

chapter three, the reader discovers that Tom is destructive to other family members:

Tom's extravagance had . . . been so great, as to render a different disposal of the next presentation necessary, and the younger brother must help to pay for the pleasures of the elder. (21)

And even as his father lectures Tom about how he has "robbed Edmund for ten, twenty, thirty years, perhaps for life, of more than half the income which ought to be his" (21), Tom's selfish, over-indulged nature remains fixed:

Tom listened with some shame and some sorrow; but escaping as quickly as possible, could soon with cheerful selfishness reflect, 1st, that he had not been half so much in debt as some of his friends; 2ndly, that his father had made a most tiresome piece of work of it; and 3rdly, that the future incumbent, whoever he might be, would, in all probability, die very soon. (21)

Not only does Austen give us a character who is selfish, disrespectful, and thoughtless, but she suggests also that he is worthless because his society has condoned the notion that the rich need not do anything.

Austen shows us that Tom Bertram is not the only contemptible and lazy character the novel when she introduces us to Henry Crawford. Austen suggests that Crawford not only possesses those vices, but he is also dangerous. He has enough time on his

hands to play mind games with the opposite gender as a means of amusing himself. He tells his sister of his plans to occupy his time:

And how do you think I mean to amuse myself, Mary, on the days that I do not hunt. . . . I shall be happy to do both [walk and ride with Mary], but that would be exercise only to my body, and I must take care of my mind. Besides that would be all recreation and indulgence, without the wholesome alloy of labour, and I do not like to eat the bread of idleness. No, my plan is to make Fanny Price fall in love with me. (225)

Even Mary, his sister, realizes the cruelty in Henry's plan. She tries to dissuade him by saying, "Fanny Price! Nonsense! No, no. You ought to be satisfied with her two cousins" (225). Of course, Henry denies Mary's prudent advice. He tells her, "But I cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart" (225).

Austen's ironic portrayal of this brother-sister conversation is a cutting remark not only about Henry but also about the men who have nothing to do except ride, walk, eat, and hunt. Henry claims that he needs some form of mental exercise and has decided that trying to get Fanny to fall in love with him would be an engaging endeavor. Austen's sarcasm is clear in Henry's comment that he does not "like to eat the food of idleness." Henry does nothing. To fill the existing emptiness, he plans strategy to make Fanny fall in

love with him. He does this not because he loves her, but because he has nothing else and no thought of anything better to do .

Austen's commentary about the idleness and emptiness of the lives of the rich cannot be ignored. She offers it again and again in her novels. In Persuasion, Austen gives us Captain Wentworth, who has accumulated his wealth by working as a naval officer. All the other characters in this novel have very little stimulation. Austen reveals that none of these other characters has an occupation. Instead they are allowed to wander from town to town aimlessly. At the end of the novel, Austen gives her reader a comparison between Captain Wentworth and Sir Walter, the heroine Anne Elliot's father:

Captain Wentworth, with five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him, was no longer nobody. He was now esteemed quite worthy to address the daughter of a foolish, spendthrift baronet, who had not had the principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him. . . . (222)

Not only did Captain Wentworth become wealthy by working, but he would never be so foolish as to allow his family to become homeless and penniless.

The characters who are idle are often revealed to be destructive and dangerous to the other characters in the novels, or to their families, or to themselves. Austen does not excuse the

common practice of the genteel class to remain idle. Instead she is cutting in her portrayal of that tradition.

P. J. M. Scott argues that Austen also portrays many defects in the social system. Scott writes that Austen shows in Sense and Sensibility a "great tragedy of social life." Scott asks what comment the novel makes about society and whether Austen gives us an optimistic look:

For those who are intelligent, sensitive and just, is human society worth the pains they have to take to live with it? That is the question at the heart of Sense and Sensibility; and this is one of the great tragic novels because it answers 'No' with a very fine calibration of the complexities of social life. (85)

Scott further argues that not only does Austen show us a realistic view of this society, but the view also gives us a frightening portrayal of members of her class:

What they principally inspire us with is hatred and fear. The greed and miserliness of the John Dashwoods, the irrational tyranny of Mrs. Ferrars (her stupid younger son Robert ends by committing a still greater marital offence than Edward has done, but she is better reconciled to him and his wife, Lucy Steele, and provides for them more generously, because the silly-nasty pair are willing flatterers)--these embody the rapacities of exploitation which are to be met with in [sic] certain

individuals everywhere and who make life a much more troublous, incarcerative experience for others than it need be. (95-96)

Austen gives us a series of horrible, cruel, and thoughtless characters. The comments that she makes about them and the society that seems to ignore those faults and worship them for their wealth is a frightening world. The picture that she gives the reader is one that condemns society. She suggests that her society, overall, is not a commendable institution. The setting that she gives us, although seemingly limited, is in fact very encompassing. She sets her novels in a very tightly structured, very closed society, but what she says about people can be seen as a general comment about the state of all society. In that sense, Austen is not as limited a writer as critics have suggested.

Austen uses the setting that she is most familiar with--the genteel nobility--to criticize all of society. She makes her setting a universal setting that symbolizes the world as she viewed it. She uses her satire to criticize people, yet many surface readers do not recognize the harsh and condemning commentary that she makes about the state of human kindness, human logic, and the state of the world. Austen was an effective writer because she perfected her art so as to covertly strike at issues important to her, such as the nature of human kind and the world that they have created.

Scott points out that the world Austen portrays is frightening not only for the reader but also for Austen:

Insensitivity and insolence made powerful by worldly fortune the whole work shows as very prevalent in the social scene and this intuition even provokes in the author two utterances (to my sense) slightly hysterical. (97).

Scott includes as the two utterances two excerpts from Sense and Sensibility. The excerpts show an incredible amount of harshness on the part of Austen that seems so unlike her usual subtle sarcasm :

Lady Middleton was equally pleased with Mrs. Dashwood. There was a kind of cold hearted selfishness on both sides, which mutually attracted them; and they sympathized with each other in an insipid propriety of demeanour, and a general want of understanding.

Mrs. Ferrars was a little, thin woman, upright, even to formality, in her figure, and serious, even to sourness, in her aspect. Her complexion was sallow; and her features small without beauty, and naturally without expression; but a lucky contraction of the brow had rescued her countenance from the disgrace of insipidity, by giving it the strong characters of pride and ill nature. (97)

Chapter thirty-four reveals Austen's disgust with these characters in her novels and also gives insight into characters such as these in society who seem to disgust Austen as well. Austen is very severe with Mrs. Dashwood, Lady Middleton, and Mrs. Ferrars. She shows

them immediately to be selfish, cruel, and vain creatures who enjoy placing themselves above others whom they consider below them. Austen makes no pretense that these women are other than appalling members of society. She does not introduce them with her usual touch of humor but instead shows them to be terrifying in their manner. Scott writes, "A bitter desperation seems to dwell in the relative heavy-handedness of such commentary" (97).

Another comment that Austen reiterates in her novels is the arrogance and snobbery of her class. In each of the novels, Austen shows that basing a person's worth on his or her income level or the social level of their birth is ridiculous. In Pride and Prejudice, Darcy reveals himself to be a snob whose attitudes about the people less wealthy or sophisticated than he is almost leads to unhappiness for him. Austen describes Darcy to be too arrogant and too proud to be liked:

He was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his manners, though well bred, were not inviting. In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was sure of being liked wherever he appeared. Darcy was continually giving offense. (64)

Darcy learns a valuable lesson about the problems associated with snobbery. Until he learns this lesson, he cannot achieve happiness.

Austen deals less severely with Darcy than with her other characters who are snobs. She is very negative towards those characters who do not realize that social status and money are not

everything. At the beginning of Persuasion, we are introduced to Anne Elliot's previous folly. She allowed others to persuade her out of marriage to a man whom she loved very much. Their objections to Fredrick Wentworth were based on his social status and wealth rather than in any faults on his character:

Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen; involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in the profession; would be, indeed, a throwing away. . . . (22)

Anne's allowing the objections of her friends to sway her own decisions had led to eight years of abject misery for her.

The irony of the situation is that Captain Wentworth has since attained much wealth and respect, whereas the Elliots have lost their wealth and have resorted to renting out their estate. Claudia Johnson, in her critical analysis of Austen, points out that in this novel Austen makes a critical statement about the landed gentry:

Most readers note, for example, that Persuasion ridicules the ruling class. . . . It shows how the improvident landowners, proving themselves unworthy of their

station, have left England poised on the brink of the new world dominated by the best and the brightest, the Royal Navy. (145)

Persuasion deals very harshly with those of the landed gentry. Their foolishness is shown clearly. With the exception of Anne Elliot, the most admirable of the characters in this novel are not from the landed gentry. Instead Austen shows them to be from outside the ruling class. Johnson claims, "[I]n Persuasion, stately houses and their proprietors are no longer formidable, and their intransigence is matched only by their vapidty" (165).

Kirkham also argues that Austen's novels contain many negative comments about the social lifestyle of her characters and those in her real life:

In the three late novels [Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion], the main thrust of irony is against the errors of law, manners and customs, in failing to recognize women as the accountable beings they are, or ought to be; and against those forces of contemporary literature which render them "objects of pity, bordering on contempt," by sentimentalizing their weaknesses and making attractive what ought to be exposed as in need of correction. Austen's adherence to the central convictions of Enlightenment feminism becomes more marked and more forceful, and the scope of her comment

is enlarged, not by taking in a wider social spectrum, but by widening and deepening the range of allusive irony. (92)

Austen uses her novels to point out many problems within her society. Hers is not a positive portrayal of this social class. The comments about the shortcomings of the structure and values of the genteel class as well as the attitudes and moral disintegration of many members of this class are damning. Her writings show that her thinking was broad enough to be able to point out the deficiencies of the landed gentry. She saw beyond the scope of her own class and saw the problems within society as a whole.

All of this condemning is done in a style of ironic satire, which does perhaps in places take on a tone of hysteria. One of the main reasons that Austen usually lays her commentary underneath a heavy blanket of irony is, as Janet Todd points out, a means of self-preservation:

After Godwin had published his biography of Mary Wollstonecraft, Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, in 1798, making of his wife a public and principled whore, there was no question of any modest novelist associating with her or writing a new Rights of Woman. (74)

Regardless of what Austen wanted to say, she could not be as blatantly radical as Wollstonecraft had been about the rights of women and the drawbacks of their society. Yet, as Johnson points

out, Austen found a covert way to make the commentaries that she wanted to make. Johnson argues that "under the pressure of intense reaction women including Austen developed stylistic techniques which enabled them to use politically charged material in an exploratory and interrogative rather than hortatory manner" (xxi). She perfected the use of irony and satire to attack society's faults. Austen was a writer extremely clever at writing the then popular method of satire. She became such an expert at that style of writing that less insightful readers could not see below the surface. Only the more astute readers saw her meaning clearly. Had Austen not used irony and satire, she would likely have had to face male criticism that would have associated her with a scandalous woman and, therefore, undercut the value of her work during the time. However, her writing techniques enabled her to write criticism about her society without having to endure the stigma of being associated with Mary Wollstonecraft.

Austen's novels are full of sharp though hidden commentary. They criticize the ruling class and its values. Austen is very critical of the importance that the landed gentry placed on money and social status. Her harsh, stinging laughter can be heard as she shows the irony in the merit that one does not work for wealth but only be born into it. She uses irony to laugh at the foibles of the gentry. Although the likes of the critical event of Goodwin's biography on Mary Wollstonecraft prevented Austen from allowing her to show clearly to her reader her criticism of society's

treatment of women and its lack regard for work, she had the courage to criticize the social system for all its social flaws and defective thinking through the use of satire and irony. She encourages women and men to improve themselves through work and self-examination. Although women on her social level could not work, she encouraged them to make the best of their situation and better themselves by realizing that kindness and inner-awareness of one's faults were the first step to a better society. Austen stresses the importance of treating people as worthy despite their economic and social level. She also stresses the importance of treating women as worthy members of society and discourages the practice of treating women negatively because of their gender. Austen had much to say about traditional views of marriage, the issue of equality between men and women, the dictated education for women, and the failures of parents to act as good role models for their daughters, which are closely examined in later chapters of this thesis.

MARRIAGE, LOVE, AND SENSE GO HAND IN HAND

Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection. . . . and nothing can be compared to the misery of being bound without love . . . to one, and preferring another. (Jane Austen, Letters 409-10, 483)

Despite being a unmarried, in her letters to her niece, Fanny Knight, Jane Austen showed her capacity for understanding the magnitude of matrimony. Austen's novels give readers not only a sense of the importance of marriage in her society, but also the vision she had of the institution of marriage and what important questions one must ponder before entering that institution. Also for Austen, marriage allowed women to live more independently than they could single. Julie Shaffer contends that women writers of the nineteenth century, including Jane Austen, used the marriage plot to their advantage:

Female novelists may have felt that if they wanted to challenge repressive images of femininity, they had to do so from within this plot form [marriage] typically read as capable only of supporting an ideology repressive for women. Rather than viewing eighteenth and nineteenth century marriage-plot novels as ideologically identical simply because their heroines all end up as wives, one might better view the genre as a site for some women novelists to participate in constructing and

disseminating an ideology that granted women greater autonomy and respectability than that which viewed them as subordinate and inferior creatures. (52)

Jane Austen considered marriage as an initiation that was not only a tradition but a necessity in her society, particularly for women. Austen believed that women could make tolerable their given situation, and that one of the prime ways to do so was to marry. Rather than take women's power away, marriage could instead give them a greater significance.

Shaffer affirms that Austen saw marriage giving power to women:

By empowering Elizabeth within the marriage relationship [in Pride and Prejudice] and expanding the influence of a good marriage beyond the confines of the couple most immediately involved . . . Pride and Prejudice quite clearly expands the power of women into the realm beyond the domestic. . . . (66)

Women did not have many choices in Austen's world. The women of the gentry did not have the financial means to forge for themselves independent lives devoid of marriage. In her novels, Austen shows us a group of heroines who take the opportunities presented to them and carefully analyze the situation to make the best possible choice that will not undermine their own morals, values, and sense of worth.

In Pride and Prejudice, Austen changes the traditional marriage plot and twists it by giving her characters a chance to grow with each other. Shaffer suggests that Austen wanted to show that marriage can have a broad significance:

The novel [Pride and Prejudice] shows . . . that the marriage can be an institution more socially important than it is shown to be in novels that treat it as a romantic institution only; it suggests, in fact, that novels that treat marriage in such a limited way misunderstand the broader social and political nature of the institution. . . . Because the novel suggest that the positive influences of the domestic can extend into the social and political realms, Pride and Prejudice offers a possible solution to the issue of women's confinement in the narrowly domestic. (66-67)

From the onset in Pride and Prejudice, Austen lets her reader know the importance of marriage. She writes, "It is a truth universally acknowledge, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (51). Indeed, marriage is not only important for women; it is also very important to men. Marriage allows for society and, at the most basic level, human life to continue.

In Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen gives her reader many different images of marriage. In this novel (as in her other novels), many of the characters, including the heroine, Elizabeth, seem preoccupied with marriage. However, Elizabeth differs from

Mrs. Bennet and Charlotte, who believe that marriage is but a necessary event and that the main goal is in finding any husband regardless of affection or the lack of it. Mrs. Bennet becomes upset at Elizabeth for refusing Mr. Collins' marriage proposal, although she knows that Elizabeth does not like, admire, or respect Mr. Collins. Mrs. Bennet is upset not because she believes that Mr. Collins is a wonderful man, but because Elizabeth is losing an opportunity to get married. Charlotte is very similar to Mrs. Bennet in the fact that she considers marriage something that a person can enter into without emotional attachment. She is willing to sell herself to a man with whom she finds little in common and for whom she has no real affection. Charlotte tells Elizabeth that this idea of marriage is most practical:

I am not romantic. I never was. I ask only a comfortable house; and considering Mr Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state. (165-66)

Elizabeth considers Charlotte's reasoning to be faulty. Charlotte's thinking is practical in the sense of physical comfort, but is impractical in terms of long-term happiness. Austen says of Elizabeth:

She [Elizabeth] had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into

action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage. (166)

Elizabeth realizes that she and Charlotte differ about marriage on one major point, and that is that Charlotte considers economic security to be more important than affection.

Austen treats Charlotte mildly in comparison to the most mercenary of her characters, Maria Bertram. In Mansfield Park, Maria marries a man for whom she has no affection and respect. The most appealing aspect about him is his wealth. Maria's brother realizes this fact, and regards it in a negative light. Austen tells us, "He could allow his sister to be the best judge of her own happiness, but he was not pleased that her happiness should centre in a large income" (38). Soon before her marriage to Mr. Rushworth, Maria confirms that her happiness is based upon elements other than love:

She must escape from him [her father] and Mansfield as soon as possible, and find consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world. . . . In all the important preparations of the mind she was complete; being prepared for matrimony by an hatred of home, restraint, and tranquility; by the misery of disappointed affection, and contempt of the man she was to marry. (199)

Maria detests her future husband but is willing to ignore her feelings and marry him. Austen is very critical of Maria's avaricious

nature, a view evident in the scathing satire of the depiction above.

In her novels, Austen shows that foregoing all affection and respect will lead to unhappiness. Marriage, itself, is not shown as always successful. However, to make the marriage the best it possibly can be, Austen stresses that affection, respect, and financial security are all elements necessary in a happy marriage. She shows that marriage is an essential part of life for women, and she encourages women to think carefully and to take all elements into account when choosing a marriage partner. If one makes a bad choice in choosing a marriage partner, he or she will be unhappy for rest of his or her life. Happiness is of utmost importance, and those who make foolish choices live unhappily.

For example, because Maria Bertram is willing to forsake all of the other elements simply for physical comfort, she ends up being unhappy in marriage, a circumstance which leads to her destruction. Austen has no other character, in any of her novels, fall to such disgrace as does Maria. Maria's decision to marry for wealth regardless of her loathing for the man who has the wealth is her downfall. Her hatred for Mr. Rushworth allows her to fall into the arms of another man. Maria searches for happiness by violating moral and social conventions. Austen is extremely critical of those who regard money as the ultimate salve for all problems.

Despite her criticism of those who marry for wealth, Austen knew the value of money. Her novels show that she understood that economic security was important for women in her milieu. She does

not dismiss the significance that money had in the lives of her characters. She was a romantic optimist (in that her stories end happily and emphasize love.) Her stories are comedies. She shows us in the relationships between her heroines and their partners that happiness and love are possible. Nevertheless, she was also extremely pragmatic. Karen Newman, a Jane Austen scholar, argues that Austen balanced economic importance with love to give us her concept of the ideal marriage situation:

Austen exposes the fundamental discrepancy in her society between its avowed ideology of love and its implicit economic motivation. . . . Her consistent use of economic language to talk about human relations and the many portraits of unsatisfactory marriages prevent us from dismissing her novels as romantic love stories in which Austen succumbs uncritically to the "rewards" her culture allotted women. (695)

Austen shows us that money is important but that so is love and respect for one's marriage partner. Had Austen not been as practical as she was, she would have "written utopian fantasy, not novels" as Newman suggests. Austen criticizes those who marry solely on the basis of money, as Charlotte does.

However, Austen also criticizes the women who marry only for love regardless of the economic situation. Just as women who marry solely on the basis of wealth, women who marry solely for love do not consider all elements necessary for a happy marriage.

Lydia's marriage in Pride and Prejudice and the marriage of Fannie's mother, Frances Price, are examples of marriages based upon affection only with no regard to money. Lydia is one of the silliest characters in Pride and Prejudice. She does not protect her virginity and cares nothing about money. She runs away with Wickham without considering the consequences of her actions. Although Lydia thinks that she is marrying Wickham, his intentions are not so honest. When Mr. Gardiner, Lydia's uncle, finds them he discovers that they are only living together. He writes to Lydia's family, "They are not married, nor can I find there was any intention of being so. . ." (317). Lydia allowed her infatuation for Wickham to impair what little judgement she had. Lydia's marriage is not the ideal situation. She and her husband do not have enough to live on, and they are not thrifty enough to live within his income. Because they do not have enough money, they are constantly asking Elizabeth for handouts:

I am sure Wickham would like a place at court very much, and I do not think we shall have quite money enough to live upon without some help. Any place would do, of about three or four hundred a year. . . . (394)

Austen shows us that affection is not enough, just as money is not enough. In her novels, Austen shows the reader that affection will wither quickly if money is not available or if people do not know how to manage their money so that they can live reasonably well. She is bitingly harsh about Lydia's choice. Austen describes how

difficult life can be when people throw caution to the wind as Lydia does:

Their [Lydia and Wickham's] manner of living, even when the restoration of peace dismissed them to a home, was unsettled in the extreme. They were always moving from place to place in quest of a cheap situation, and always spending more than they ought. His affection for her soon sunk into indifference; hers lasted a little longer; and in spite of her youth and manners, she retained all the claims to reputation which her marriage had given her. (395)

Without economic backing, affection turns to either apathy or dislike. Affection alone, particularly blind affection, cannot lead to happiness. Austen shows us that it is only part of the formula, that other considerations such as money and respect are also needed.

Although Frances Price's situation is different, she, too, marries where the lack of money is a problem. Austen is not as harsh toward Mrs. Price as she is toward Lydia, but she again shows us a negative portrayal of a marriage where the individuals involved do not consider their economic situations. Just as Lydia does, Mrs. Price must apply to her sisters for help:

By the end of eleven years . . . Mrs. Price could no longer afford to cherish pride and resentment, or to lose one connection that might possibly assist her. A large and still increasing family, an husband disabled for

active service, but not the less equal to company and good liquor, and a very small income to supply their wants, made her eager to regain the friends she had so carelessly sacrificed. (2-3).

Mrs. Price did not take economic considerations into account when she married. She married a man who was a "Lieutenant of Marines, without education, fortune, or connections" (1). Because she had made such a poor choice in a marriage partner, she was unhappy, and she, later, suffered the consequences of her actions.

Mrs. Price must break apart her family and be willing to cut ties with her eldest daughter so that her family can all find some economic comfort. Mrs. Price sends Fanny to her uncle, separating Fanny from her family. Mrs. Price takes the step to allow her daughter to have a better life and also to alleviate the burden of having so many children in the household. Austen shows that the Price family cannot afford their large family. At the beginning of the novel, Mrs. Price is pregnant with her ninth child. In the following years, after Fanny arrived at Mansfield Park, she did not hear regularly from any of her family except from her brother William. When Sir Thomas Bertram exiles Fanny to her family as punishment, Fanny feels like an outsider. Austen says of her, "She was home. But alas! It was not such a home, she had not such a welcome. . ." (379). Austen shows that money is a major factor in happiness. If people do not recognize money's importance, they will

ultimately have to pay for their folly, just as Lydia and Mrs. Price do.

In contrast to marriages based solely upon either money or affection, Austen gives us Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage. This marriage balances the economic factor with affection and respect. The first time that Darcy proposes, Elizabeth refuses to marry him. The reason she gives is that she dislikes him and does not respect him. She says to him:

From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I would ever be prevailed on to marry. (224)

Elizabeth expresses wholeheartedly the position that because she dislikes him so immensely there is no chance that she will marry him. Although Elizabeth could be financially comfortable with a man who has "ten thousand a year" (58), she refuses him because she does not have any affection for him. Only after her feelings for him have changed does she contemplate marrying him. Sulloway suggests:

In separating the understanding from the heart, and yet in recognizing that in women, just as in men, they are both essential but distinct talents for the gift of living well, Elizabeth speaks with the voices of the feminists. Readers have not recognized that she possesses the combinative and recombinative capacities to think, unthink, and then rethink, which Locke, Astell, and other Enlightenment figures recommended, because after all, Austen is really offering us little more than sophisticated love stories about mere marriageable young girls, or so many reader have largely assumed. (174-75)

Through Elizabeth's character, Austen gives us a practical prescription for happiness in marriage and ultimately in life.

Austen leaves the reader with a sense that Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage can remain solid, with each partner continuing to admire, respect, and love the other and that their marriage is the best of all marriages. Barbara Horwitz agrees that their marriage ranks as the most preferable:

Pride and Prejudice dramatizes much of what the conduct books say about marriage, presenting the reader with a "hierarchy of marriages." Lydia's marriage to Wickham will be as unhappy as her parents' because it is based on passion rather than esteem. The Collins's marriage, based on prudence rather than esteem, will not be happy either. . . . Jane and Bingley will have a happy marriage;

they are rich, good-natured and in love. But Elizabeth and Darcy will have the happiest marriage of all, because they unite material advantage, love and self-knowledge. (46)

Julie Shaffer delves further to suggest that Darcy and Elizabeth will not only be beneficial to each other, but they will also exert a positive influence on others: "Because Darcy and Elizabeth attract to themselves people who share worthwhile values, their marriage is treated as an institution capable of preserving society as it best ought to be preserved" (66).

Austen ends the novel by telling the reader of the effect of such a marriage as Darcy and Elizabeth's. An example of their good influence is with Georgina, Darcy's younger sister. Austen writes:

Her mind received knowledge which had never fallen in her way. By Elizabeth's instructions she began to comprehend that a woman may take liberties with her husband, which a brother will not always allow in a sister more than ten years younger than himself. (395)

Austen shows the reader that Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage basically has a ripple affect. Through their tutelage, they have taught another person the benefits of a happy marriage. Also, Austen shows us that women can have certain liberties that single women do not.

In Persuasion, Austen again gives the reader a picture of a marriage based upon a combination of practicality and romance. At

the beginning of the novel, the reader discovers that Anne, Austen's heroine, whom she called "almost too good for me," has refused to marry each of two men-- Fredrick Wentworth, the man she has loved for eight years, and Charles Musgrove, the eldest son of man with landed property. Because of practicality, as well as parental disapproval and friendly advice, she has refused to marry the man she had had great affection for, Fredrick Wentworth. In the novel, Austen describes him as "a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession" (22). An easier decision for Anne was her refusal to marry Charles Musgrove. The impression that Austen gives is that Anne held no affection for him so she was not tempted into marriage. Although Anne regretted not agreeing to marry Wentworth when he first proposed eight years previously, she tells him that she had made the right choice at the time. Anne says, "I have been thinking over the past, and trying impartially to judge of the right and wrong, I mean with regard to myself; and I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it" (220). Austen condones Anne's marriage to Wentworth only at the end of the novel, because he then has the monetary means to support her and also because they have rediscovered their mutual affection and respect for each other.

Austen tells the reader that Anne and Wentworth have qualities that will make them happy:

When any two young people take it into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point, be they ever so poor, or ever so imprudent, or ever so little likely to be necessary to each other's ultimate comfort. . . . If such parties succeed, how should a Captain Wentworth and an Anne Elliot, with the advantage of maturity of mind, consciousness of right, and one independent fortune between them, fail of bearing down every opposition? (221)

In these simple lines, Austen reveals her philosophy about an ideal marriage and that many times people marry with little regard to money, affection, or common sense. However, when a couple who decide to marry have intelligence, common sense, love, respect, and money, they have the sound chance of sustaining a good marriage. In all her novels, Austen gives the reader a series of marriages ranging from good to bad. She gives the impression that her heroines will have happy and successful marriages because they have made intelligent choices. Among Austen's novels, the most appealing marriages are Elizabeth and Darcy's in Pride and Prejudice, and Anne and Wentworth's in Persuasion. These marriages allow the heroines and heroes a chance to exert their influence in a positive way on.

By looking not only at the words that Austen uses, but also at the implications in the images of the many bad marriages she depicts, the reader can receive a clear understanding of what conditions and requirements Austen thought were needed for a happy

married life. One of Austen's first suggestions of the implications of a bad marriage came in her early novel Northanger Abbey. Margaret Kirkham suggests that by looking at what Austen writes about General Tilney and his wife the reader can get an understanding of how Austen saw their relationship and the critical implications that she makes about their kind of marriage:

[T]here is something really evil about the General, and his wife had, in a sense, been imprisoned by her marriage to him, perhaps even brought to an early grave through unhappiness; for General Tilney is allowed by the laws of England and the manners of the age to exert near absolute power over his wife and daughter, and does so as an irrational tyrant. . . . Northanger Abbey includes some of Austen's strongest criticism of the society in which she lived, but the schema does not permit her to make the heroine herself sufficiently aware of its real defects. (89-90)

Later, the Bennets in Pride and Prejudice are shown to be an extremely ill-matched pair. In chapter one, Austen compares the couple to show that they are incompatible:

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humor, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Hers was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little

information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous. (53)

This married couple have little, if anything, in common. Mr. Bennet remains secluded in the library, and avoids Mrs. Bennet. He mocks and ridicules her manners and silliness. Mrs. Bennet simply cannot understand him. A complete survey of Austen's novels show that, in all of them, Austen has very few married couples who like each other and enjoy being married. Austen's few happily married couples symbolize her ideal of what married life should be and what elements are needed for a successful marriage.

Austen considered marriage to be a necessity. However, she advocates that intelligent women, once they decide to marry, must take certain considerations into account. In her novels, marrying with a lack of affection is disastrous. As she writes in her letter to her niece, marriage without affection is miserable, and it is the worst marriage choice. Clearly, Austen is not a completely romantic novelist, thinking that romance and love are the only ingredients needed for happiness in marriage. She is a romantic optimist in that, despite the dismal marriage conditions that she saw, she also saw the human ability to find happiness in marriage. Along with these romantic notions, she also had a very practical nature, and took into consideration several other elements, such as respect, admiration, and financial conditions along with love. Austen is a novelist who has both "sense and sensibility." Barbara Horwitz stresses, "For Jane Austen . . . it is the business of women to marry wisely" (45).

She realizes that while love is very important, other matters count as well. Money and materialism are major considerations in her novels. However, money is not an only solution, and Austen regards the absolute pursuit of attaining wealthy connections as extremely negative. Austen shows us that marriages that combine respect and love with money are the ideal. She gives the reader disturbing insight into her society and shows that too often people considered money to be too important, so important that they were willing to sacrifice themselves for it. However, she was practical enough to understand that love was not enough and that people could not survive just on affection. Instead she shows us that people must take monetary considerations into account when thinking of marriage. Yet, having money is not the solution to all of one's problems. Austen shows us that stressing the importance of money to such a point that it eliminates the importance of other ingredients is dangerous and leads to unhappiness. Austen paints a picture of the ideal marriage. It is one that combines, love, respect, and financial security. When a couple has that combination, Austen implies that their marriage will succeed.

EQUALITY: A NECESSARY ELEMENT FOR SOCIAL GROWTH

Jane Austen differs from many of her contemporaries and predecessors in that she believed that neither gender was innately superior to the other. Also, in her novels she dispels the idea that certain faults or good qualities belong exclusively to one gender. She uses irony to show how ridiculous many preconceptions are. In her subtle way, Austen tells us that men and women are equal. She uses the good male-female relationships in her novels to show that when equality and respect are strong elements of a marriage, the marriage will succeed. Austen explicitly conveys to the reader that men and women are equal in intelligence and morals, as well as in ignorance and foolishness. Austen was a strong believer in the equality of men and women. Her novels show us that both men and women have faults, and only by changing his or her faults can everyone become happier. In her novels, Austen depicts for us a heroine who is neither perfect in every way, nor superior to those around her. Instead, what Austen shows us is a group of heroines who have both faults and merits., along with a group of men who are equally faulty and equally admirable. By this method, Austen presents us with her belief of what marriage and society should be like. It should be based on equality.

She most obviously shows her attitude about equality in Pride and Prejudice. She shows us that Darcy and Elizabeth are equal and can be happy only because they are equal. In Pride and Prejudice, Austen gives the audience one of her best and most likeable

heroines, Elizabeth Bennet. However, we are forced by the narrator to see that Elizabeth is quite blind in a number of ways. In this fault she parallels her future husband. Darcy, too, although not as likeable as Elizabeth, but in the end quite worthy of her, must learn that he is ruled by prejudice and is blind to the admirable qualities of many around him. Austen lays a solid foundation of equality for Elizabeth and Darcy, and by this means, she creates for us a vision of how to look at relationships. Rather than suggest that one gender is better than the other or that somehow the female characters must be shown to be worthy, Austen shows us from the beginning that there should be no doubt that her female heroines are equal to their male counterparts.

An example of the inclination to show women as superior exists in Jane Eyre. Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte are both nineteenth-century women novelists. Both are English. Examining the endings of these two authors' most popular novels Pride and Prejudice and Jane Eyre, one gains a clear sense of Austen's feminism. Bronte ends Jane Eyre by having Rochester maimed and blind, whereas Jane, the heroine, is unscarred by any of the events in the novel. It is clear that Bronte wants us to see that Jane is superior not only morally but also physically. Jane is the winner in the game of love between herself and Rochester. A discomfiting aspect of Jane Eyre is that Bronte felt a need to maim Rochester so that Jane could be seen as superior to him. This technique involves a contradiction. Rochester physically maimed is not a representative

male. Bronte does not give us a heroine who only triumphs on the basis of what and who she is. Also, Bronte shows the reader a society where love seems to be very adversarial. Love in Bronte's world is not one based upon mutual respect. As a means of having Jane win at the end of the novel, Bronte forces the plot so that Rochester is the one who has to be physically dependent upon Jane in every aspect of his life. He must hold on to her for guidance because he can barely see. Physically blind, he needs Jane to guide him, but he also needs Jane's moral guidance as well. Although Bronte shows us a relationship that is happy, the ending of the novel is troubling in that, unfortunately, the relationship is not one based upon equality. There lies the difference between Bronte and Austen.

Austen ends Pride and Prejudice with two people who not only love each other but also have come to respect each other. Both Elizabeth and Darcy are shown early on to be equally faulty in their judgment. They are both blind, and they need each other to find the truth. Austen gives us two characters who grow with the help of the other. Darcy comes to the realization that his prejudices about social class and wealth are detriments to him. They almost lead to a very unhappy ending for him. However, he comes to realize that his blindness is a fault that needs to be rectified. Yet, even after his realization of his faults, he is still blind to his condescension, until finally Elizabeth shows him that he is wrong. Austen not only shows us a situation where one must correct his or her faults and is taught by the other, she shows us that both characters have faults and that

both must learn from the other to become whole and better characters. Austen ends Pride and Prejudice by placing both Darcy and Elizabeth on equal ground. Neither is dependent upon the other physically or morally. Austen depicts a loving relationship based upon not only love and desire for the other, but also respect. This perhaps is the most radical of Austen's statements. Austen argues for equality and mutual respect in every relationship and in particular between husband and wife. Horwitz points out, "Jane Austen was the only writer on education who believed that women could teach men as well as learn from them" (127).

One of the major disagreements that Austen had with the thinking of her time was with the idea that women and men have faults that are "inherently masculine or inherently feminine" (Horwitz 86). For example, Austen attacks the preconception that only women, not men, are vain. Horwitz notes, "Sir Walter Elliot is far more conscious of appearance, and appearances, than any female character in the novels. His reaction to everyone he meets is determined by their attractiveness" (88). The story line of Pride and Prejudice shows that no one gender is endowed with particular faults. Horwitz argues that although "Austen is addressing the same issues as the writers of the conduct books [of the time] . . . she differs from them in that she shows that vanity and false pride can certainly afflict men as well as women" (89).

Just as Austen mixes the faults often considered to belong particularly to one gender or the other, she also "will assign a

conventionally female virtue to men." Horwitz notes that at least one other critic has noticed this technique:

Stuart Tave has pointed out that Colonel Brandon, Fitzwilliam Darcy and Admiral Crofts possess an unusual degree of delicacy, which he defines as "the moral and social discretion able to make even finer distinctions, beyond the ordinary demands of propriety." (90)

Austen took preconceived stereotypes about one gender and reassigned them. By this means, she attacks (and often quite successfully) these preconceptions.

In Persuasion, Austen raises the question of equality and preconceived ideas of males and females. She tells us that only the ignorant refuse to accept that men and women are equal. Anne argues with Captain Harville about who is more constant, men or women. Captain Harville argues that men are more constant in love. This constancy does not come from an inner strength but from body strength:

"No, no, it is not man's nature. I will not allow it to be more man's nature than woman's to be inconstant and forget those they do love, or have loved. I believe the reverse. I believe in a true analogy between our bodily frames and our mental; and that as our bodies are the strongest, so are our feelings; capable of bearing most rough usage, and riding out the heaviest weather."

"Your feelings may be the strongest," replied Anne, "but the same spirit of analogy will authorise me to assert that ours are the most tender. Man is more robust than woman, but he is not longer-lived; which exactly explains my view of the nature of their attachments. Nay, it would be too hard upon you, if it were otherwise. You have difficulties and privations, and dangers enough to struggle with. You are always labouring and toiling, exposed to every risk and hardship. Your home, country, friends all your own. It would be too hard indeed . . . if woman's feelings were to be added to all this." (208)

The irony in the presentation of this argument is not necessarily that it shows a battle of the sexes, but that the battle depicted shows the futility in arguing about this subject. By the end of the novel, Austen shows us that neither gender has an inherently stronger constancy than the other. Both are faulty in love. Women, as well as men, are capable of having a constant heart. Both Anne and Wentworth are Austen's proof. Another point that Austen makes in Anne and Captain Harville's debate is that, as Anne points out, no one gender is created as the superior gender. Men are not endowed with lives longer than women's. Austen argues against the notion that because men have stronger bodies they have stronger minds

Another major point that Austen makes quite strongly in her novels is, indeed, that equality is necessary in a good relationship. Austen arranges her novels to show the equality between her heroines and her heroes. As we have seen, Austen explicitly tries to show the equality of Elizabeth and Darcy, and she once again raises the question of equality in Persuasion. Anne Elliot is one of the most admirable of all Austen's heroines, and Austen shows us that the man she marries considers her an equal. Frederick Wentworth realizes that Anne is his equal in intelligence, maturity, thought, and morality. Austen attributes those characteristics equally to these two characters. She describes them as having "the advantage of maturity of mind, consciousness of right" (221). Even before her debate with Captain Harville is over, Anne concedes by saying:

I should deserve utter contempt if I dared to suppose that true attachment and constancy were only known by woman. No, I believe you capable of every thing great and good in your married lives. I believe you equal to every important exertion, and to every domestic forbearance. . . . (216).

Anne, herself, admits the equality between men and women.

Equality, whether discussed implicitly or explicitly, is a topic that Austen is adamant about. Her narrators voice the importance of it, and often Austen implies it in the words of her characters, or writes the words loudly and clearly, as she does in Northanger Abbey. Catherine says, "In every power, of which taste is the

foundation, excellence is pretty fairly divided between the sexes" (19). The reader can not miss Austen's stress on equality of the sexes. It is a fact that must be recognized if society is to be sound. Austen shows equality in the relationships between her characters, in the faults and merits of both sexes, and in recognition by the heroes and heroines that the other gender is equal. Austen differed from many other writers of her time. She argues against people who believed that women were endowed with certain faulty characteristics, such as vanity and moral inferiority. She also argues against the idea that women are superior to men.

KNOW THYSELF: A COMPLETE EDUCATION FOR ALL

Education is a major social concern for Jane Austen. D. D. Devlin, in his book, Jane Austen and Education, claims that all of Austen's novels are about education. He writes, "Education, for the heroines, is a process through which they come to see clearly themselves and their conduct, and by this new vision or insight become better people" (1). Education for Austen is not simply learning history, mathematics, and languages; it also includes moral and self-knowledge education. Barbara Horwitz, a leading scholar on Jane Austen's view of education has suggested, "[S]he [Jane Austen] placed less stress upon the subject [religious education] than other writers did. She was, however, concerned with religion as the basis of moral behavior. . ." (46). Devlin suggests that Austen's idea of moral education is closely linked to John Locke's education, which is a "clear Understanding, a Reason free from Prejudice, a steady Judgement, and an extensive Knowledge. . . ." and a heart "firm and intrepid, void of all inordinate Passions, and full of Tenderness, Compassion and Benevolence" (17, 8). Jane Austen has a vision of an ideally educated woman. "The well-educated woman, according to Jane Austen, will not only be good, she will be good company. She will be morally, spiritually, and intellectually inferior to no one" (Horwitz 125). Although institutionalized education was important to Austen, it was not given precedence above self-knowledge. Close

examination of her novels gives a clear understanding of what she considered to be good education and bad education.

Unlike many male writers of her times, such as Rousseau and Fenelon, who believed that educating women would cause more harm than good, Austen believed that educating women could only better society (Horwitz 62). Austen examines the existing types of education and the way that individuals are educated and gives us her view on the best types. During Austen's time, a belief widespread in society was the notion that "learning must breed vanity in a woman," and that "men find female ignorance attractive" (Horwitz 62). Horwitz compares this belief to Austen's belief:

Jane Austen's reader would have been perfectly familiar with the terms of this discussion, and therefore, would not have been at all surprised that [her character] Henry Tilney found Catherine's ignorance of the esthetics of landscape captivating. What is new, is that the author smiles at those whose self-esteem requires that many of their acquaintances be ignorant. Jane Austen never ridicules the truly learned woman. (62-63).

Austen disagreed with the Lady Mary Wortly-Montague's assertion that the educated woman "should conceal whatever learning she attains, with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness" (Horwitz 62) and with Dr. Gregory, "who advised women to keep their learning 'a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great

parts, and a cultivated understanding'" (Horwitz 62). Horwitz points out that Persuasion is a good example of Austen's disagreeing with the idea that the woman should hide her intelligence. In the novel, Anne, the heroine, prescribes reading serious literature as a means for Captain Benwick to cure his depression. Horwitz states:

Not only is she [Anne] familiar with these works [prose rather than poetry, collections of the finest letters from the best moralists of the times, such as memoirs of characters of worth and suffering], she would not conceal her knowledge if it can be of use to someone. She is not vain, and does not 'particularize' until she is asked to do so, but she is perfectly aware of her 'seniority of mind.' (67-68)

Most of Austen's heroines are very intelligent, even those who bring problems upon themselves; and Austen shows their intelligence to be one of their major assets. Horwitz states that intelligent heroes want intelligent heroines. She writes:

Those of greater intelligence, such as Jane Austen's heroes, prefer intelligent women; they will even educate them if they must. Henry Tilney . . . is not [actually] captivated by Catherine's ignorance, but by her avidity for knowledge. . . . Fanny's right thinking, based on serious reading and the habit of serious reflection, win Edmund's approval and then his love. Mr. Knightley is

aware of Emma's deficiencies, but he is even more aware of her quickness and cleverness. (94)

In Sense and Sensibility, Edward Ferrars admires Elinor, telling her that he could not help comparing Elinor to his former fiancée and finding Lucy Steele to be lacking. "Edward Ferrars is impressed by Elinor's intellectual superiority over Lucy Steel" (43). The admirable male characters in the novel are not afraid of Elinor's intelligence. Colonel Brandon and Edward both admire Elinor for all her fine qualities, and she is not afraid that her practical and intelligent nature is a deterrent to men.

In Pride and Prejudice, Austen again gives us a couple who are both intelligent and not afraid to reveal their intelligence to each other and to the world. At their first acquaintance, Darcy finds Elizabeth attractive not only because of her physical assets but also because of her mental capabilities. Horwitz writes: "Darcy was not impressed by Elizabeth's looks at their first meeting, but no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face that he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression in her dark eyes" (94). She is his equal in intelligence and that fact makes her extremely attractive to him. Darcy feels no hesitation in admitting that he learned from her:

What do I not owe you? You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my

reception. You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased. (378)

He finds no shame in admitting that he was lacking in education and that Elizabeth had taught him that he was wrong.

Persuasion presents another example of the man admiring his love for all her qualities and in particular, her intelligence. Wentworth knows that Anne is educated in manners, morals, and mind, and discovered that despite his efforts he could not forget her. Wentworth tries to form connections with Louisa Musgrove in an effort to forget Anne but cannot help compare the two women, and in the end he finds Louisa to be lacking. Austen shows us in her presentation characters that the unworthy are the only ones who consider education to be detrimental. Horwitz suggests:

In Persuasion, the reader is not only told that Anne is respected for her intellectual superiority, but a dislike of bookish women is presented as a characteristic of the unworthy. . . . Jane Austen makes it clear that they [learned women] will excite jealousy in only the unworthy, whether male or female. Even more important, she makes clear that the proper target of disapproval is not the learned woman, but those who are foolish or mean spirited enough to envy and mock her. (94-95)

For Austen, the ideal woman is clearly an educated one.

In contrast to her heroines, Austen gives us a series of women who are missing important pieces in their education. In Pride and Prejudice, Mary is actually the most book-learned of all the characters. However, she cannot take what she has learned and use it to make herself more intelligent and to better herself. She lacks Austen's most important requirements for a truly educated woman. She is missing moral education and self awareness. She only gathers information found in books. She purposely sets out to become accomplished in the elements society dictated a woman should know:

Mary, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display. Mary had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given her application, it had given her a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than she had reached. (71)

Austen ridicules Mary because Mary does not truly understand what it means to be completely educated. In the case of Mary, Austen gives us a woman "whose learning has made her more foolish" (Horwitz). Austen shows that Mary is lacking in common sense. Despite attaining all the institutionalized requirements of education, she still lacks the more important element of education--self-knowledge and self-reflection. Horwitz suggests that Mary's looks cause her to behave the way she does:

Because she is less attractive than her sisters she has decided to become accomplished. Unfortunately, she is incapable of assimilating such knowledge. When asked a question on a topic she has not memorized, she wishes "to say something very sensible" but "knew not how." Even when she has prepared a quotation on the topic at hand, it is always inappropriate either in tone or in sentiment. (63)

Despite all that she has tried to learn from, from Austen's point of view, Mary does not know enough. Austen shows that Mary is not the only one at fault. Devlin contends, "Education, which includes tutor, parents, home and what we call environment, is all-powerful" (19). Unfortunately for Mary, her mother is silly, and her father hides in his study. She has no guidance from her parents to help her take what she has learned and incorporate it into her life. Her education has only made her book-educated, but it does not help her think intelligently and make the right choices.

In Mansfield Park, Austen again gives us characters who have been "educated" in the traditional sense, but are lacking Austen's vision of real education. Maria and Julia Bertram ridicule Fanny for what they consider her stupidity:

Dear Mamma, only think, my cousin cannot put the map of Europe together--or my cousin cannot tell the principal rivers in Russia--or she never heard of Asia Minor--or she does not know the difference between water-colours

and crayons!--How strange--Did you ever hear anything so stupid?. . . But I must tell you another thing of Fanny, so odd and so stupid. Do you know, she says she does not want to learn either music or drawing. (16-17)

Maria and Julia see that learning maps, memorizing, and knowing the difference between water colors and crayons are the important things to learn from education. They have been taught what women should learn to help them in attaining husbands, but what they lack is true education. The irony is that Maria and Julia are very similar to Mary. They know all the surface things but do not know how to think. They do not expound on their book learning to expand their self-knowledge. Instead, they think that the book learning is enough. Although the Bertram sisters tell their mother and aunt that Fanny is stupid because she knows none of the things that they know, Austen shows us that they are the ones who are lacking. They might have superficial knowledge that educated women are supposed to know, but Austen points out that this is not adequate:

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. . . . To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. . . . [T]he Bertrams continued to exercise their memories, practice their duets, and grow

tall and womanly; and their father saw them becoming in person, manner, and accomplishments, everything that could satisfy his [own] anxiety. (17-18)

Maria and Julia have all of the necessary requirements of a woman's traditional education, but this education is faulty. As Devlin points out, "Everyone at Mansfield Park . . . has been corrupted by a false education. Maria and Julia, Tom Bertram and Sir Thomas are . . . victims of their environment and bad education" (81).

Education of the mind, soul and moral sense is very important to Austen. However, unlike Wollstonecraft, who blamed a woman's lack of education on the social system, Austen argues that one cannot completely blame the social system for a faulty education (Horwitz 23). Individuals themselves (such as Mary in Pride and Prejudice) must take responsibility for their complete education. A good example of where Austen criticizes individuals for not taking action to educate themselves comes in Sense and Sensibility. Horwitz says:

Jane Austen . . . seems to have believed that young women must take some responsibility for their own education. One reason she is so hard on Lucy Steele in Sense and Sensibility, for example, is that she did not make the most of her educational opportunities. . . . Lucy . . . is described as "ignorant and illiterate, and her deficiency of all mental improvements, her want of information in the most common particulars, could not be concealed" . . . in spite of her endeavor to appear to advantage. Her

ignorance is particularly culpable because she has not taken advantage of her long visits to Mr. Pratt's school. (66-67)

Horwitz suggests that one can best understand the extent of Austen's harsh criticisms by recalling Austen's own situation:

We are told that Lucy met Edward at the home of her uncle, Mr. Pratt, a clergyman who ran a small, private school in his home at which she spent considerable time. Not only was Jane Austen's father a clergyman who ran the same kind of school, but so were the fathers of Hannah Moore, Clara Reeve, Elizabeth Carter, and several fictional heroines who were known for their learning.

Perhaps because literature was discussed in these homes (which were also schools), perhaps because books were available, these women managed to get themselves well-educated. (67)

Lucy did not receive any education, and there lies Austen's criticism. Lucy had ample opportunity, and she let it slip away.

To emphasize her insistence that proper and complete education should include morals and manners, Austen gives us a series of morally corrupt people. In Sense and Sensibility, we are introduced to Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood. They are the most morally corrupt characters in the novel. After the death of Henry Dashwood, John and his wife talk themselves out of the promise that John had given to his father, namely to take care of John's stepmother and

half-sisters. The introduction of the John Dashwoods often leaves the reader with a sense of disgust for their greed and other moral failings. Austen, too, relays her distaste of them with her irony. Mrs. John Dashwood gives an argument to convince John Dashwood that they have no real obligation:

I must say this: that you owe no particular gratitude to him [your father], nor attention to his wishes, for we very well know that if he could, he would have left almost every thing in the world to them. (12-13)

Austen reinforces the feeling of disgust that the reader feels with the narrator's commentary:

This argument [above] was irresistible. It gave to his intentions whatever of decision was wanting before; and he finally resolved, that it would be absolutely unnecessary, if not highly indecorous, to do more for the widow and children of his father, than such kind of neighborly acts as his wife pointed out. (12-13)

John does not fulfill his promise nor honor his duty to his father because of his wife's desires. Another reason is that he has a disturbingly weak character which lacks integrity and has no sense of right and wrong. At the end of the novel, Austen doles out in her ironic style her justice for the John Dashwoods. Austen writes:

[S]etting aside the jealousies and ill-will continually subsiding between Fanny and Lucy, in which their husbands of course took a part, as well as the frequent

domestic disagreements between Robert and Lucy themselves, nothing could exceed the harmony in which they all lived together. (331-32)

Austen continually stresses that one reaps what one sows. In Mansfield Park, she again offers the reader a moral lesson. When Mrs. Norris suggests to Sir Thomas that he bring Fanny to Mansfield Park and raise her, he replies:

Should her disposition be really bad . . . we must not, for our own children's sake, continue her in the family; but there is no reason to expect so great an evil. We shall probably see much to wish altered in her, and must prepare ourselves for gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner; but these are not incurable faults--nor, I trust can they be dangerous for her associates. (8)

The irony in Sir Thomas's speech is that Fanny is not the one to have a bad disposition or corrupt morals. Instead, his daughters possess all those qualities that he fears Fanny may have. Devlin finds that the conversation between Mrs. Norris and Sir Thomas is comic, but that more importantly it expresses Austen's stand on morality. He writes:

The total ironic shape of the narrative is established in every line; the great moral issues of the book are raised, and Sir Thomas' moral blindness is made clear. . . . The moral insight of the novel is that whole movement of the

narrative which takes us from a literal reading of these words to an awareness, by the end, of their echoing irony when we come to see that, indeed, Fanny Price is not a Miss Bertram, and that they cannot ever be 'equals.'
(78-79)

Fanny Price has many qualities that Austen considered ideal. Fanny has a deep sense of self-knowledge, moral fortitude, and goodness of heart.

Manners are also important in Austen's novels. They are a major part of each of her novels, and the question of what constitutes good behavior and polite manners is brought up again and again. Horwitz states:

The question of manners . . . pervades Pride and Prejudice. . . . Darcy soon demonstrates his ill-breeding. Not only does he refuse to dance, showing a lack of consideration for the young women present who must endure a shortage of men, but he remarks audibly that Elizabeth Bennet is not pretty enough to be his dancing partner. . . . (52-53).

Darcy is not the only character lacking manners. Mrs. Bennet, too, has the same lack of manners, and so do other characters in the novel. Horwitz points out:

Darcy may not have realized that Elizabeth could overhear his unflattering comments on her appearance, but Mrs. Bennet does realize this fact and disregards it

as she describes her joy at what she considers to be the probability that Jane will marry the rich Mr. Bingley. . . . Mrs. Bennet's rudeness is exceeded only by Lady Catherine De Bourgh's [Darcy's aunt's] rudeness. (52-53)

Despite claims made by Darcy and Lady De Bourgh of superiority in birth and station, Austen shows that they are lacking in manners.

Austen suggests that proper education should prevent bad manners. Horwitz contends:

Unvarnished bad manners such as those of Lady Catherine is [sic] only one sort of ill-breeding a good education should prevent. Ill-breeding, according to both Jane Austen and the writers on female education, also encompasses superficially correct manners which are not based on consideration of others. (54)

The characters who show their lack of manners prove to be lacking in a complete education.

Although moral fortitude is an important theme in Austen's novels, the most important education that a woman can possess is self-knowledge. Horwitz contends that although Austen shared similarities with other writers on education of her day, Austen differed from other writers in one important aspect:

Jane Austen agreed with Locke that women must be taught to know their duty, to act in the light of reason, to master their imaginations, to respect religion, to achieve fortitude. . . . She agreed . . . that good manners

involved consideration for others, that female pedants made themselves ridiculous, and that serious reading was an important source both of knowledge and of spiritual comfort to women. Yet despite these wide areas of agreement, there is a significant difference between the educational philosophies of Jane Austen and her predecessors and contemporaries. . . . She insists the primary goal of education is self-knowledge. (74-75)

Austen believed that one must know oneself, one's capabilities, and one's limitations.

Austen's ideas on education covered a wide spectrum. She gives us her vision of what a truly educated woman should be like. She should be like Elizabeth Bennet and Anne Elliot in that she should be intellectually strong, well-learned in reading and logic and common sense. She should also be like Fanny, in that the educated woman should be morally strong with a sound sense of integrity and honesty. Also, Austen's ideal woman should be like all her heroines in that she possesses good manners, a good heart, and a good understanding of the self. She should be able to understand that she can correct her faults and grow, just as Catherine and Emma do. Of all her heroines, Elizabeth and Anne are those who best embody her vision of what the ideal person (whether man or woman) should be. Education, as we have seen, goes beyond the expanding of the mind to include the expanding of the self and soul.

PARENTAL FAILURES AND ABSENTEE PARENTS

A theme that Jane Austen insistently pursues in her novels is the failings of parents or their non-existence in the lives of their children. In Northanger Abbey, Austen removes her heroine from the presence of her parents and their influence. We discover that the heroine, Catherine, is neglected because of the size of her family. Sense and Sensibility gives us a family with only one parent, a mother, who is too ridiculous and romantic to give guidance to her daughters. Pride and Prejudice is the first novel where Austen has both parents taking an active part in the story. Unfortunately for Jane and Elizabeth, their mother is a silly goose and their father, although seemingly practical and intelligent, voluntarily removes himself from their presence. In Northanger Abbey, Austen again removes her heroine from the bosom of her family and into the laps of relatives. Supposedly, Fanny's parents send her to the Bertrams for her benefit. Indeed, when we see her in the home of her natural parents, we conclude that Fanny is better off without them. Emma is another case where the heroine has a single parent, and he fails to do his duty toward his daughter. Then, in Persuasion, Austen gives us a father who not only is silly and neglectful but has had his authority stripped from him.

Horwitz includes also the failings of the foster parents. In her book Jane Austen and the Question of Women's Education, she lists a series of parental failings:

It is often noted that parents and surrogate parents are inadequate in Jane Austen's novels. Mrs. Morland is too busy with her nine younger children to worry very much about Catherine. Mrs. Allen is too engrossed in her clothing. Mrs. Dashwood is too much a slave to her own sensibility to protect Marianne from Willoughby. Mr. Dashwood has been too irresponsible to provide for his daughters. Mrs. Bennet is stupid and ill-bred, so much so that she endangers her own dearest scheme--getting her daughters married. Mrs. Price is not only a poor housekeeper, but she favors her sons over her daughters. Her sister Lady Bertram is indolent. Her other sister, Mrs. Norris, is mean. Mrs. Woodhouse is dead, Mr. Woodhouse foolish. Miss Taylor could not quite cope with Emma. Anne Elliot had a wonderful mother, but she died when Anne was fourteen. Lady Russell gave Anne very poor advice. . . In her novels at least, she [Jane Austen] has little respect for the abilities of parents to educate their children. (121)

Because the removal of the parents' influence or their non-existence in the lives of the heroines or their failings toward them is a consistent theme in Austen's novels, it deserves examination.

In Sense and Sensibility, Elinor acts as the prudent character in the novel. She is the only voice of reason in her family. As soon as possible, Austen removes Elinor and Marianne from their mother's

care and gives them a certain amount of independence by situating them in London. Before she takes them to London, Austen shows us how rash both Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood are:

Whatever Marianne was desirous of, her mother would be eager to promote--she could not expect to influence the latter to cautiousness of conduct in an affair, respecting which she had never been able to inspire her with distrust. . . . That Marianne, fastidious as she was, thoroughly acquainted with Mrs. Jennings' manners, and invariably disgusted by them, should overlook every convenience of that kind, should disregard whatever [Mrs. Jennings's bad manners] must be most wounding to her irritable feelings in pursuit of one object, was such a proof, so strong, so full, of the importance of that object to her, as Elinor, in spite of all that had passed, was not prepared to witness. (138)

Marianne wants desperately to go to London, so that she can see Willoughby. Elinor cannot dissuade either her mother or her sister from this course of action. Elinor thinks that their going to London is a mistake. However, no one will listen to Elinor's voice of reason. Instead, Mrs. Dashwood pokes fun at her rational thinking. She says, "And what . . . is my dear prudent Elinor going to suggest? What formidable obstacle is she now to bring forward?" (138)

Although Elinor has valid reasons that neither she nor her sister should go to London, neither her mother nor her sister will listen to reason.

Another instance when Mrs. Dashwood refuses to listen to her prudent daughter is when Elinor sends her a letter begging for her help:

Elinor was very earnest in her application to her mother, relating all that had passed [Elinor's has a suspicion that her sister is secretly engaged to Willoughby], her suspicions of Willoughby's inconstancy, urging her by every plea of duty and affection to demand from Marianne, an account of her real situation with respect to him. (152)

Elinor realizes the danger of a secret engagement. However, no one in her family or in the Middleton family will listen to her. Even her mother responds with a blase letter: "Her mother, still confident of their engagement, and relying as warmly as ever on his constancy, had only been roused by Elinor's application, to entreat from Marianne greater openness towards them both. . ." (178). Elinor's mother does not have the maturity to lead her daughters in the right direction.

Another example of parents failing in their duty to their children is in Pride and Prejudice. As in most of Austen's novels, the parents of the heroines in this one are not the only parents depicted who fail their children. In Pride and Prejudice, Austen

gives us two families whose parents all fail to help their children. Charlotte Lucas is example of an offspring where the family has gone wrong. Sulloway states:

Charlotte shares with minor women characters in Austen's fiction, such as Lydia and Kitty Bennet, the wounds inflicted by grave parental failures. Despite her economic "prudence"--in fact, partly because of it--she is one morally impaired Austenian character who "has never been taught to think on serious subjects," as Elizabeth complained to Mr. Bennet about Lydia Bennet. (174)

Austen shows the reader that Charlotte's parents not only have failed in the moral and intellectual education of their daughter, but have no consideration for her. Sulloway suggests:

[A] young woman is urged to marry so as to benefit various members of her family, who are willing to accept her sacrifice without a single thought for her welfare. Sir William Lucas makes plans to be presented at court, "the younger girls formed hopes of coming out a year or two sooner than they might otherwise have done, and the boys are relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte's dying an old maid. . . . The whole family in short were properly "overjoyed" at this disgraceful event. (177)

The Lucas family does not care enough about Charlotte to dissuade her from this marriage. They can think only of their own comforts.

The heroine of Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth, too, has family problems of her own to contend with. Although her father agrees with her that marrying Mr. Collins would be a foolish mistake, in most cases he is inadequate as a father. Susan Fraiman contends, "Elizabeth's first father [Mr. Bennet] is a reclusive man and seemingly ineffectual. . . . Mr. Bennet, apparently benign to the point of irresponsibility, may seem to wield nothing shaper than his sarcasm. . ." (167). We see very little of him because he hides away in his study ignoring his ignorant, silly, and irritating wife. However, he also ignores his daughters. Because of his negligent behavior, they have no one to turn to except Mrs. Bennet, who is detrimental to them. Her influence has been minimal in the lives of her older daughters, but in her younger ones we see some of the same silly behavior.

When Lydia and Wickham run away together, and not for elopement, Austen shows us a father who is not necessarily negligent but definitely impotent. Austen writes:

When Mr. Bennet arrived [after his futile search for the couple], he had all the appearance of his philosophic composure. He said as little as he had ever been in the habit of saying; [sic] made no mention of the business that had taken him away, and it was some time before his daughters had courage to speak of it. . . . Elizabeth ventured to introduce the subject; and then, on her briefly expressing her sorrow for what he must have

endured, he replied, "Say nothing of that. Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it."

"You must not be too severe upon yourself," replied Elizabeth.

"You may well warn me against such an evil. Human nature is so prone to fall into it! No, Lizzy, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being over-powered by impression. It will pass away soon enough. . . ." (314)

Mr. Bennet could neither find Lydia nor do anything to remedy a horrible situation for his family. It is Darcy who finds Lydia and Wickham, and it is Darcy who rescues the whole family.

Elizabeth discovers that Darcy has provided the funds to bribe Wickham to marry Lydia. Elizabeth's aunt tells her:

He [Darcy] came to tell Mr. Gardiner that he had found out where your sister and Mr. Wickham were, and that he had seen and talked with them both. . . . His [Wickham's] debts are to be paid, amounting, I believe, to considerably more than a thousand pounds, another thousand in addition to her own settled upon her, and his commission purchased. . . . (336-37)

Darcy pays all that Wickham demands. Darcy succeeds where his future father-in-law could not. In essence, this episode shows how incapable Mr. Bennet is. He cannot rescue his family from scandal.

It is up to the hero to do so. Darcy usurps Mr. Bennet's role as protector of the family.

Elizabeth's father is too weak and too ineffectual to act as a strong male influence in Elizabeth's life. Sulloway compares Elizabeth's situation to Charlotte Lucas's:

Charlotte Lucas functions as a deliberate contrast to Elizabeth. Neither woman has had any masculine examples before her that would encourage her to think "highly either of men or matrimony . . ." but Charlotte does not have the intellectual resources to abide by a principled distaste for the prevailing matrimonial arrangements in the world of this fiction, at least, whereas Elizabeth does. (177)

Elizabeth has to use her own judgment to face the challenges in her life. She usually makes good choices because she is intelligent, whereas Charlotte, who has no guide nor intelligence, makes bad ones.

Not only does Jane Austen condemn the father in Pride and Prejudice, she also condemns the mother. Unlike Mr. Bennet, who is intelligent but ineffectual, Mrs. Bennet is incredibly silly, a weakness that causes her to be a bad role model. In the above mentioned incident involving Lydia and Wickham, Mrs. Bennet responds to the news of their getting married in her usual silly way. Austen writes:

To know that her daughter would be married was enough. She was disturbed by no fear for her felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of her misconduct.

"My dear, dear Lydia!" she cried; "This is delightful indeed!--she will be married--I shall see her again!--she will be married at sixteen! . . . How I long to see her! and to see dear Wickham too! How merry we shall be together when we meet!" (320)

As the narrator says, Mrs. Bennet is oblivious to their situation. The only thing that she can think of is her daughter's getting married, and at sixteen--a seemingly matrimonial triumph.

Elizabeth is embarrassed and ashamed by her mother's lack of manners and her silly behavior. Often Mrs. Bennet causes Elizabeth to "blush" (89) for her mother, or stiffen in embarrassment when a "general pause which ensued made Elizabeth treble lest her mother should be exposing herself again" (80). Jean Carr writes that Elizabeth tries to dissociate herself from her mother. She suggests:

[S]he [Mrs. Bennet] stands in uneasy relationship with her daughter, Elizabeth, who both shares her mother's exclusion and seeks to dissociate herself from her devalued position by being knowing and witty where her mother is merely foolish. (68)

Elizabeth does not respect her mother. She fears being embarrassed by Mrs. Bennet, so Elizabeth removes herself from her mother's influence.

Austen portrays Elizabeth as a young woman who can depend only upon herself for guidance and growth. Luckily, she has the intelligence to form the right opinions most of the time. When she does make a mistake in judgment, she is intelligent enough to recognize her faults and try to correct them.

Austen begins Emma by putting the focus on Emma Woodhouse. Austen tells us, "She [Emma] dearly loved her father, but he was no companion for her. He could not meet her in conversation, rational or playful" (5). Austen continues by chipping away at Mr. Woodhouse's authorial voice:

The evil of the actual disparity in their ages . . . was much increased by his constitution and habits; for having been a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body, he was a much older man in ways than in years; and though everywhere beloved for the friendliness of his heart and his amiable temper, his talents could not have recommended him at any time. (5)

Austen draws a picture of Emma as being in control. She is more intelligent than her father and, despite being younger, more talented in conversation and mind than he.

The difference in the father-daughter relationship that Austen gives us in Emma is the idea that the father is more dependent on his daughter than she is on him. Emma takes care of his home and of him. Early in chapter ten, Emma tells her friend Harriet:

I have none of the usual inducements of women to

marry. . . . I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's. (79)

Her father does look upon Emma as the most important and beloved person in the world. She makes his life comfortable.

At the end of the novel, Austen clearly shows the reader how dependent Mr. Woodhouse is on his daughter. When Mr. Knightley and Emma decide to get married before his brother and her sister leave the country, she is worried about what her father's reaction will be.

Austen writes:

When first sounded on the subject, he was so miserable that they were almost hopeless. A second allusion, indeed, gave less pain. He began to think it was to be, and that he could not prevent it--a very promising step of the mind on its way to resignation. Still, however, he was not happy. Nay, he appeared so much otherwise that his daughter's courage failed. She could not bear to see him suffering; to know him fancying himself neglected; and though her understanding almost acquiesced in the assurance of both the Mr. Knightleys, that when once the event was over his distress would be soon over too, she hesitated--she could not proceed. (445)

Emma is tied to her father because to her he seems so helpless. He does not care for Emma's ultimate happiness. All that he cares for is his own comfort. Austen shows us that Mr. Woodhouse has stripped himself of parental power and that he uses Emma's feelings of duty and guilt to keep Emma close to him. In the end he resigns to the idea of Emma's marrying Mr. Knightley because Mr. Woodhouse fears thieves. He then feels that he needs "the strength, resolution, and presence of mind of the Mr. Knightleys" (445) and that he could transfer his dependence to them. He rationalizes, "While either of them [the Mr. Knightleys] protected him and his, Hartfield was safe" (445). Because he turns his need for Emma into a need for her future husband, he feels confident in allowing their marriage to proceed.

In each of her novels, Austen gives us a group of parents and surrogate parents who fail to do their duty to their children. Sulloway argues, "When important characters make mistakes, Austen's authorial voice or some other fictional device explains the parental origins of failed judgement or conduct" (176). Some, such as the Lucas Family, use their children for higher purposes. Others neglect their children's moral and intellectual education. Some even reverse the role of parent and child. In many cases, Austen removes her heroines from the bosom of their dysfunctional families and takes them to other places so that they can grow. No matter the differences in the scenarios, Austen shows us that many parents fail in their duty to their children.

CONCLUSION

Jane Austen's major six novels--Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Emma, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion--show an author concerned with social issues of her times. Austen's characters give her a vehicle to examine characteristics found in her observations of her society. Her heroines are her ideal women. However, Austen does not portray them as perfect. Her series of heroines can be seen as stages in the progression to maturity. She starts her writing with Catherine Morland of Northanger Abbey. Catherine is the youngest and most immature of Austen's heroines. Despite her immaturity, she learns a valuable lesson that changes her for the better. In Austen's last novel, Austen gives us her oldest and most mature heroine, Anne Elliot. She has learned from her mistakes long before we hear her story. She is Austen's most intelligent heroine and is her most outspoken critic of prejudices against women and society's treatment of women. Austen gives her heroines both faults and merits. She uses her heroines to give the reader a message to people: people cannot be perfect; however, they can make themselves the best they can. She encourages us to become as close to perfect as possible.

Austen satirizes the snobbish and arrogant attitude found among the upper class. In her novels, she uses humor to strike at negative social conditions and social practices. Austen was innovative in her thinking that women's education should include not

only the moral and intellectual but most importantly, self-knowledge. For Austen, education went beyond book-learning into the realm of self-discovery. In her novels, she gives us the ideally educated woman. She is one who knows herself and recognizes her faults, as well as her merits. She is kind-hearted and generous, but kindness was not enough for Austen. She shows her ideal woman as one who also has moral fortitude and intelligence. Austen believed strongly in the ability of her characters (and, therefore, society) to grow. Those who were introspective enough and able to reflect on their actions should be able to enlighten themselves and those around them. She shows us in Pride and Prejudice that when a married couple has the ideal education they can broaden the lives of each other and of those around them.

Austen also used her novels to make revolutionary social comments. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their ground-breaking work Madwoman in the Attic, write:

[I]n all her novels Austen examines the female powerlessness that underlies monetary pressure to marry, the injustice of inheritance laws, the ignorance of women denied formal education, the psychological vulnerability of the heiress or widow, the exploited dependency of the spinster, the boredom of the lady provided with no vocation. (136)

Austen also questioned the idleness of the landed gentry. She saw their way of living as unproductive and often destructive. She dispels the belief that there was nobility in doing nothing. She shows us that idleness can be dangerous. Often because wealthy men had nothing productive to do, they invented games for themselves at the expense of others, such as Henry Crawford does in Mansfield Park. Or they destroy the inheritance of their siblings, such as Edward Bertram does.

Jane Austen was an expert at observing society. She was very adept at dissecting its faults and used satire to reveal them. Austen's novels give us a clear picture of the world she lived in. John Hutcheson suggests that Emma gives us much insight into Austen's social world. He writes, "Emma can be described as a realistic portrayal of English society to the extent that it deals with the significant attitudes of a social group which continued to play a leading role in the profound changes that occurred in England from the 17th to the 19th century" (235).

Austen delves in the social psyche and examines the money and marriage aspect that was too prevalent in her society. She condemns people for marrying solely for money. However, she does see money as a necessity and something one should consider before marrying. Austen shows the necessity for marriage. She saw marriage as a means for women to become more independent. Julie Shaffer suggests that readers should not look at the marriage plot as confining women but as giving women autonomy (52). Shaffer has

concluded also that marriage allowed women to have larger influence in society (65).

For Austen, a necessary element in marriage is equality. It is also necessary for well-rounded society. She stresses the importance of equality in her novels (therefore, in society). Austen argues that no one gender has exclusive vices nor merits. In her novels, Austen dispels the preconceived idea that people are endowed with certain faults. For example, traditionally, vanity was considered a woman's fault, but Austen places that vice on Mr. Woodhouse, in Emma. Shaffer suggests:

[R]ather than simply suggest that some women are in a greater position to lead than are men, Austen's novel Pride and Prejudice suggests that neither gender has an innate grasp on reality, that each depends on the other for lessons in self-knowledge. (65)

Austen portrays men and women needing each other, because both have qualities that the other can learn from. Austen does not argue that women are superior to men, but instead argues that both sexes are equal. This thinking was revolutionary for her time. It puts all people on a level-playing field and demands that all people accept responsibility for their limitations and give credit where credit is due.

Austen examines the ineptitude of parents and devaluing of daughters and what significance those problems pose. None of her novels give us worthy parents. Often in her novels, parents do not

appreciate their daughter's importance. Austen either removes her heroines from their parent's influence by placing them with family friends or other family members or makes her heroines orphans. She gives us a litany of parents who have not fulfilled their duty to their children. Mrs. Dashwood, in Sense and Sensibility, allows her youngest daughter to behave foolishly. Mrs. Dashwood does not heed the advice of Elinor, her practical daughter. Austen removes Catherine Morland from her parents. Jane Austen shows Catherine's parents in Northanger Abbey to be rather neglectful of the heroine because of the largeness of the family. Austen shows General Tilney as a father more concerned with finding wealthy partners for his children than worrying about their welfare. In Pride and Prejudice, Austen gives us a silly mother and an absent and ineffectual father. Emma is a switch from the norm; Austen gives us a father who is more dependent on his daughter than his daughter is on him. He selfishly looks to his wants and comforts rather than to his child's.

Despite the limited setting of her novels, Austen examines many of the important issues of her day. She concentrated on women's issues because they were obviously a concern for her. Many of her heroines can be seen as feminists who argue for equal treatment and respect. She championed the idea of equality between the sexes and showed in her novels that society can become better once its members realize that fact. Austen used irony and satire to reveal the problems in society. Although it has been argued that Jane Austen was merely a comic writer, whose

main theme was social manner, she was, in fact, extremely concerned with social problems and through the use of irony and satire attacked society's distorted beliefs about the proper role of women, their inferior minds, their lack of moral value, and their inferiority to men. She also examined the parent-child relationship and the responsibilities associated with each role. Austen reveals that many parents fail in their duty to their children. An examination of Austen's novels reveals that she advocated social change on many levels.

Although at first glance Austen's novels may look limited in content and setting, they are in fact very universal. She takes a "little bit of ivory" and carves a picture of the dark elements of society. The problems that she reveals in her society can be seen as problems in all of society. The arguments that she poses, such as equality and fulfilling people's potential, as well as women's scope of influence are still relevant today. Equality between the sexes is still an issue argued in our society. And equal education was a serious topic of concern for Austen; it is also a topic of concern today. She was such a observant writer that her novels have lasted for almost two centuries. Her novels are considered classics, whereas novels by Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Anne Radcliffe have become obsolete. Austen concentrated her concerns on universal problems that went beyond gender and time. The topics that she concentrated on are as important today as they were two hundred years ago.

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Signature of Graduate Office Staff Member

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