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How Jane Austen Uses Marriage to Get What She Wants

HANNAH EBERLE
Faculty Advisor: Misty Anderson

Department of English, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

As a biochemistry major approaching the subject of Jane Austen and feminism, I found the dichotomy between pleasure readers and critical readers interesting. How can books that are almost 200 years old draw so much attention from both quarters still today? In my thesis, I use Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, *and* Emma *to discuss how Austen uses the marriage plot in the context of the 18th century. This plot device allows her to point out problems with marriage as a market, such as emphasis on wealth and the social setup that requires women to be "taken care of" by men. Her strategy works because it is a mixture of the pleasurable and the critical: one cannot read Austen without enjoying the romantic love stories and learning deeper lessons. This intriguing overlap is one of the reasons Austen continues to impact the modern world.*

Jane Austen is one of the most well-known authors of English literature. Her novels are routinely read for academic purposes, yet they are also widely read for pleasure. Some divide the Austen audience into these two distinct groups, academic readers and star struck fans. In fact, it has been noted that "a customary method of establishing one's credentials as a reader of Austen has been to regret that others simply will insist on liking her in inappropriate ways" (Lynch, 7). But are these two groups really so distinct? Many people enjoy Austen's novels because of the love stories, but they still appreciate the social criticism that exists beneath the outermost layer of the texts. Academic readers decipher the agenda of the novels, but they must also get pleasure from Austen if they are willing to continually grapple with her works. The middle ground that exists between these literary approaches leads the two audiences to the same destination. One can learn from Austen's critique of her world regardless of the reason behind the reading. Austen voices her concerns about 18th century gender roles throughout her novels, and both the pleasure reader and the critic reap the benefits of her work.

A woman choosing to write as a vocation has been, in and of itself, a feminist act for the majority of literary history. Authorship was traditionally a male dominated field with

few mentors for female writers. Gilbert and Gubar have shown that this conundrum leads to an "'anxiety of authorship' – a radical fear that [the female author] cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her" (Gilbert, 23). They stress that the average female assumed she would ultimately submit to one of these two extremes: she must either become the innocent dove of great moral worth that was so desired in the 18th century, or she must go mad as "the result of too much storytelling" (Gilbert, 28). Because neither of these options was particularly alluring to a female author who wanted to have an impact on her audience, writers such as Jane Austen had to come up with ways to write while maintaining a sense of innocence. Therefore, most female authors used subversive techniques that "disguised, offset, or explained into moonshine" the more liberal themes of their novels (Netwon, 884). Austen used methods of subversion to undermine components of her career that could be seen as extreme, such as her sex and her famous plotlines.

Due to the obstacle of her sex, Austen's subversive techniques began before her stories even reached an audience. Nearly all correspondence with publishers was handled by her brother, Henry Austen. In an attempt to get *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* published, he wrote a biographical notice outlining her religious beliefs and fear of God. Critic Margaret Kirkham believes this was a calculated move to undercut any association that might exist between feminist authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen. Henry understood that Jane's "personal reputation might not escape embarrassing comment were the full force of her irony to be understood" (Kirkham, 56). By channeling publication correspondence through a male "chaperone" and creating a saint-like biographical persona, Austen managed to neutralize potential controversy over her novels before her writing ever reached the public arena.

Austen continued to negotiate the perils of appearing to be too independent or critical of her patriarchal culture while still asserting her own voice within the novels themselves. On the level of plot, Austen subverted her somewhat progressive themes by working within a well-known framework. She inherited the form of the traditional marriage plot, where a heroine's ultimate goal was to marry the ideal man and live happily ever after, from previous romance novelists. This plot came with expectations, such as an upholding of the cultural values associated with an ideal marriage in the 18th century. However, Austen turned this expectation upside down by using courtship as a platform to address deeper problems, such as economics and gender roles. While this material was important, it was also progressive enough to lead any author into "mad storytelling" territory. Austen managed to avoid this unwanted fate by critiquing social norms within an acceptable framework. She purposely used the marriage plot in her novels because she knew what was at stake and also how it could be accomplished.

Cultural and Economic Changes: The Ideology of the Domestic Sphere

In order to understand Austen's critiques of social norms, it is necessary to look at her 18th century world as a function of historical perspective and cultural situation. As Judith Newton points out, "to see a text in isolation from its historical conditions is not fully enough to answer the question 'So what?'" (Newton, 887) Austen's books were published in a time when England was shifting its economic focus from an agrarian and landed wealth base to a more industrial cash economy. Prior to this shift, many women enjoyed at

least some level of equality as they worked alongside their husbands in family businesses. However, as men began to leave the home to pursue other avenues of income, "unpaid domestic work lost visibility," and masculine work that was "public, divorced from the home, and salaried" gained more and more value (Newton, 890). Austen inherited a century of economic shifts in British culture that would solidify the domestic sphere as the "woman's sphere," an ideologically sturdy concept that made domains of the public and private seem natural.

The ideology of the women's sphere mandated that women had control over domestic responsibilities, such as moral and spiritual guidance of children, while men had control over public and political matters (Newton, 890). This new ideology surfaced as Austen was writing, and therefore relevant issues that emerged during this period, such as economic inequalities between men and women, are often addressed in her novels. Several characters have to cope with the problems of employment that arise from the shift to a more industrial economy. For example, John Dashwood, who inherits the Dashwood family home, a family Austen ironically notes has "been long settled in Sussex," is ready to turn landed wealth to spendable cash in *Sense and Sensibility* (3). The women of the Dashwood family find themselves at the mercy of men because they cannot participate in economic transactions, which fall outside of the domestic sphere. When John fails to fulfill his responsibility as caretaker, they must look to the charity of other male well-wishers, such as distant relative Sir John Middleton.

Economic changes also meant women had to find a new position in comparison to the changing social order. The only female vocation addressed by Austen in her novels is that of governess, a fate that haunts the Dashwood women and that is directly addressed through characters such as Jane Fairfax from *Emma*. Austen uses the situations of these and other characters to comment on cultural shifts that are occurring at her moment in history, shifts that leave women more vulnerable at the same time that the ideology of the domestic sphere insists they are "safe" at home under the care of a loving father or husband. Through her plotlines, Austen begs to differ, and paternal failure to provide is a common theme throughout her canon. On the critical level, this failure of the domestic sphere is upsetting because it indicates a large spread and invasive failure of functionality. This is not just a problem within a novel, but rather a truth of society that needs correcting. In fact, the failure of the domestic sphere even goes so far as to imply that a male-dominated structure may not be the only answer. From the perspective of a pleasure read, this lack of protection is also distressing because it negates the natural order that allows for romantic endings. Ideally, our heroine will find her perfect marriage in the end, but what happens if she needs help along the way? When parental care and societal protection fail, there is a chance that everything else will fall apart too. Both approaches lead to the same end: the reader realizes that imperfections in Austen's world may be a negative shadow of her own realities, and she begins to question the validity of domestic sphere ideology.

Cultural changes, such as the shift from an agrarian to a cash economy, are often reinforced by literature. Building upon the philosophical works of Foucault, Nancy Armstrong shows that literature can make cultural changes feel natural because it teaches the audience how to behave in their new world. This strategy of using literature to guide public opinion has been used throughout history. Armstrong points to the Puritan use of writing to dictate traditional roles of husband and wife (Armstrong, 921). Austen utilizes the marriage plot in the same way, although her end goal is certainly different than that of the Puritans. By giving her audience female role models who grapple with the real life

problems of economy and marriage, she makes the process of questioning and changing sexual relations seem normal. Furthermore, strong and relatable female leads pull the audience directly into the action. The reader finds herself in the story, for "who can resist believing that she, too, possessed the 'fine eyes' of Elizabeth? Or the common sense of Elinor?" (Carson, xvi) While direct identification is not necessary to comprehend the deeper meanings of Austen, her creation of lovable characters aids the process of reinforcement. If the questioning of social norms was left to abrasive characters, the audience would see this as a call to accept the norms because the progressive content would be associated with the wrong group. However, by giving her heroines desirable traits, such as beauty, intelligence, and wit, Austen combines the push for social change with other pleasing qualities. This makes social change seem acceptable and even advantageous to the audience. What started out as an innocent reading of an Austenian love story has segued into a reading filled with intelligence and instruction. This is not an inactive observance of Austen's world; rather, it is a discussion between the reader and the text, a discussion filled with give and take.

Austen as Social Critic: Uses of the Marriage Plot

The back and forth arguments of Austen's novels are part of the beauty of reading. And the intelligent reader, whether she reads for academia or for herself, would not want it any other way. Without the challenges presented in Austen's somewhat contradictory texts, the reading would quickly become boring. Cultural progression is rarely straightforward, and the tension of Austen's novels reflects this. The sheer number of personalities created within a span of six novels allows Austen to show characters on both sides of the argument. While this means Austen can remove herself from direct argument, it also provides a platform for complex argumentation. A character that is ultimately making the wrong choices can have redeeming moments in which the audience discovers life is not only black and white. For example, Elizabeth defends Mr. Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* by making allowances for his economic situation: "handsome young men must have something to live on, as well as the plain" (116). Although the reader may never forgive Mr. Wickham for his treatment of dear Elizabeth, and later Georgiana and Lydia, Austen purposely notes that another side of the story does exist. Gender roles, economics, and social customs are not straightforward topics, and any fair discussion must include a variety of opinions. Ignoring such complexities would only serve to alienate an intelligent audience. By acknowledging multiple sides of the argument, Austen pushes for cultural changes while simultaneously allowing her readers to enjoy the experience of social critique.

As mentioned earlier, one of the main ways that Austen functions as a social critic and a proponent of cultural progression is through her use of the marriage plot. However, her extensive use of this framework has also been used to argue against any feminist leanings on her part. Many critics see this plot as a conservative tool that further depresses the power of women. For example, Newton emphasizes that despite any freedom the heroine might enjoy throughout the novel, it would ultimately result in marriage, which "meant relinquishment of power as surely as it meant the purchase of wedding clothes" (Newton, 884). Others claim that authors like Austen, who end their plots with marriage, show that "marriage is the only desirable end for female protagonists" (White, 71). I assert that arguments holding Austen's use of the marriage plot against her fail to recognize two important factors: one, Austen does not follow a strict formula for these marriages; and two, Austen manipulates the literary form of her day as a platform to address issues. Austen's use of the

marriage plot is a progressive one that allows her to highlight the problems of customary gender roles.

Criticism pertaining to the marriage plot as a formula generally stems from the novels *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*, where the heroine marries a man who seems to be her intellectual superior and intends to transform her into the ideal woman. A quick look at the other novels shows that this is not the only marriage formula Austen is willing to follow. Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy are intellectual equals who instruct each other, and this puts them on the same level despite gender differences. *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* end with heroines marrying a man they have instructed throughout the book, which is a departure from the typical 18th century novel where a male must play the pedagogical role of teacher (White, 75). Varying the marriage formula also allows Austen to comment on less romantic partnering options. She discusses love lost (Anne Elliot), love as means to an end (Lucy Steele, Charlotte Lucas), and love without moral boundaries (Maria Bertram, Marianne Dashwood). In *Persuasion*, the final novel of the Austen canon, Anne Elliot is still unmarried at the age of 27 – "past her prime" in the 18th century. By making her the heroine of a story that ends in marriage, Austen insists on changes in the marital structure and foreshadows a transformation that is to come in the near future (White, 79). While critics may argue that Austen's ubiquitous marital endings prove she had no feminist leanings, this chain of logic falls apart when the varying uses of the marriage plot in the Austen canon are taken into consideration.

Another critic, Glenda Hudson, observes that Austen uses the marriage plot to change the balance of power in male/female relationships through sibling-like, almost incestuous, relationships. Eighteenth century social structure emphasized romantic relationships, or one's ability to marry, over all others. The power of such relationships resides in sex or gender relations rather than in any sort of value system. By writing about sibling-like marriages, however, Austen emphasizes ethical and spiritual beliefs over sex. Through these unions, "she posits a system of relations between individuals based on a hierarchy of moral qualities" (Hudson, 107). In a world where marriage, driven by power relations and dowries, is the ultimate goal, Austen suggests that there might be more important relationships at stake. Family ties are of the utmost importance in Austenian culture, and most of the marriages in her novels ultimately serve to condense the family structure. Fanny Price marries her cousin Edmund, with whom she has been raised side by side since childhood. Elinor Dashwood and Edward Ferrars are also cousins. While Emma and Mr. Knightley are not biologically related, they are in-laws, and the popular movie remake *Clueless* casts the Mr. Knightley character as a stepbrother to the Emma character. This theme of "almost family" is repeated in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion*. In all of these relationships, both members seem to be equal: "there was no need for the female to be chaperoned, to display false modesty or coyness in order to attract the male, or for the male to put on a show of artificial gallantry" (Hudson, 103). While many critics see this reversion back to family roots as a conservative move, the importance of these familial unions lies in the critique of marriage ideology. By raising other relationships above that of marriage, Austen creates a world where traditional gender roles are also questioned. Once again tension arises between the conventional marriage structure and the ends to which Austen uses it.

Even in a novel such as *Emma* where the marriage plot appears to be quite tame, with blundering Emma being educated by the gentleman Mr. Knightley, things may not be quite as they seem. Wayne Booth reminds audiences that although "all *is* finally well for Emma and George Knightley, in their fairy-tale world, we have been taught, unrelentingly, that *all is far from well in the real world implied by the book*" (quoted in White, 74). By this

he means that the marriage is too perfect. It leaves the reader with the realization that things can never be this perfect in the real world, and therefore she must accept that the real world is, in fact, quite flawed. In the Austenian way, ironic commentary shows the audience a worldly truth they may not want to accept. According to Laura White, however, this argument is problematic because it can also be used to undermine any argument for Austen's feminist leanings (White, 74). If what appears to be conservative is actually liberal, than any supposed feminist stances could ultimately be traditional. Perhaps this catch-22, a reminder that all political positions are relative, is no fault of the critics. It may simply be the result of Austen's writing style itself. Austen is known for removing herself from direct interplay in the plot, and this move makes understanding the novels on the surface level nearly impossible. The reader must interpret Austen's message and decide how it pertains to her own life. This is part of the pleasure of Austen: the lessons are situational, and more importantly, they are our responsibility. Because we must work for them, they are much more valuable and applicable to our lives.

Audience Responsibility: The Tensions of Austen

The most obvious example of audience responsibility is found at the end of *Northanger Abbey*. As the novel closes, Catherine and Henry are happily married despite the obstacles presented by General Tilney. Austen "leave[s] it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (*Northanger*, 187). Austen sees the tension in her work, and instead of trying to camouflage it, she blatantly points it out to her audience. She uses comedy to show that her lessons are complex and multidimensional, rather than simplistic dichotomies. The joke challenges us to rise to a heightened level of critical engagement, and this tension - the give and take, the active debate - is part of the joy of Austen. There are definitely lessons to be had in Austen's novels, but she is not going to simply give away the answers. She expects her audience to think, to work for the lesson. Here, the lesson and the marriage plot are almost interchangeable. The marriage plot is used to confer a lesson; it allows Austen to present the evidence of cultural problems and let the pieces fall. While marriage may be the end of the story on paper, it is not the end of the story in the readers' lives. As noted by Janet Todd, "Elizabeth Bennet would not have broken her heart and pined for the rest of her days had Darcy failed to return and Elinor Dashwood, denied her first love, would have loved again…readers have been delivered the joy of romance – and the understanding of something closer to anti-romance" (Todd, 156). A love story may be the outmost layer here, but the universal truths are found in the tension between fantasy and reality. This is why her opinions have been so widely debated: Austen refuses to argue for change in a straightforward manner, but rather points out the problems and respects her audience enough to believe that they can come to the correct conclusion.

Critic Barbara Seeber supports this in her book *General Consent in Jane Austen*. In her introduction she warns that her interpretations of the novels may "seem contradictory…because Austen's texts are. To settle on one meaning is an act of authority that the text continually defies" (Seeber, 17). She calls this the "dialogic nature" of Austen's novels, implying that the texts are not the last word but rather a conversation between different sides of the argument and the audience. Seeber claims that Austen uses techniques which have often been interpreted as out of place in the novels to make political points. For example, she uses cameo appearances by peripheral characters, like Georgiana in *Pride and Prejudice*, "for whom the social order has failed" to address issues such as economic

injustices (Seeber, 68). The cameo appearances remove the action from the main plot, making it seem less threatening, but they often parallel the politics of the actual story. As in the case of Georgiana, marriage (or attempted marriage) is subject to critique. Others, such as Austen's rejection of the semi-heroine Harriet in favor of Emma, are less relevant to this thesis. It is worth noting, however, that other critics believe Austen purposely critiqued 18th century norms in a dialogic and sometimes conflicting way.

The tensions noted by Seeber are found throughout the six novels as Austen uses the seemingly traditional marriage plot in a nontraditional way. These romantic marriages attract readers seeking a pleasure read, or an escape from reality where no number of problems can disrupt the inevitable happy ending, meaning marriage in the Austen novels. At the same time, however, Austen's manipulations of this literary form have attracted a great deal of academic attention and been subject to much critical analysis. Somewhere in the middle of these tensions lies self-discovery: the radical reader may discover she appreciates the traditional ending, and the romance reader could find she enjoys the academic challenge of Austen. In the end, letting go of the need to define and embracing the tension of Austen may be the only way to truly enjoy her novels. Titles such as "'romance' and 'realism' may have little to do with stable categories of writing. They may do no more than index the varying uses to which readers may put a single text" (Lynch, 9). These terms are merely placeholders used to explain what is already occurring: a reader, regardless of background, exploring and learning truth from Jane Austen.

All six published novels in the Austen canon, as well as stories from the *Juvenilia*, are ripe with examples of tension filled plots. Due to the limits of this thesis, I will only be discussing three of Austen's novels: *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*. These novels were chosen because they span the maturation of Austen's writing and provide diverse examples of marriages. While the contradictions implicit in Austen's novels can make determining her opinions a difficult task, a closer examination of the novels provides a rough estimate. Situational outcomes of characters, especially the female leads, and opinions of "more reliable" characters help the reader see more clearly. In the same way, by noting her uses of irony, satire, and the free indirect writing style, one can begin to see how Austen points her audience in a particular direction without providing specific answers.

Sense and Sensibility: An Ironic Exposé on the Economics of Marriage

Sense and Sensibility is the second novel written by Jane Austen and the first to be published. It is full of satiric wit, and for this reason is often grouped with the *Juvenilia* and *Northanger Abbey* as an immature effort that Austen made before finding her true literary voice. Irony, however, makes it easier to pinpoint Austen's feelings on social customs. In addition, her irony is entertaining, often making the first books in her canon the most beloved by her audience. Ian Watt describes the use of irony in this novel as "the means whereby Jane Austen shocks us into seeing the disparity between proper norms of conduct and the actualities of human behavior" (Watt, 47). For the marriage plot in particular, Austen uses irony to show that while marital customs may have been established with the intent of protecting women, the actualities of the system are often more harmful than helpful. This satiric humor entrances audiences because it points out undeniable truths and provides a laugh along the way.

Austen wastes no time in introducing her ironic voice in *Sense and Sensibility*. The first chapter acquaints the audience with the full financial situation of the Dashwood

family. This introduction rubs uncomfortably as one wonders at the intimacy of such information being revealed so soon; Austen, however, realizes that there is no reason to wait. The truth of the matter is that the Dashwood women have no fortune to rely on, and their brother, who "was not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted, and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed," will not be providing for them (4). Austen does away with formalities and discloses the truths immediately: the Dashwoods need somewhere to live, but society has made it impossible to secure housing without a male representative. She does not comment on the situation in an outraged tone, but rather reports these facts as the natural order. However, an educated audience sees the irony here: the natural order is nothing short of outrageous. Why should having a father with little inheritance and a brother with narcissistic tendencies make the Dashwood women into social pariahs? The ideology of the women's sphere is based on safety in the home for the female, but for the Dashwood women this has obviously proven false. Their sole protector has left them in poverty, and the brother who should be next in line to care for them has made them visitors in their own house. Instead of being a place of safety, the home has become a fearful place that the Dashwoods long to leave. Fortunately for them, male cousin Sir John Middleton intervenes by providing them with lodging on his estate. Even this help comes only by accident, out of the exuberance of Sir John's character, rather than from purposeful male protection. Despite whether the reader approaches the novel from a critical or pleasure perspective, she is aware that the economic troubles of the Dashwoods are well-grounded in reality. John Dashwood's failure to provide is intriguing from a critical perspective because he is a window into the clash between expected and actual male roles in the 18th century. Pleasure readers will also recognize the failings of John Dashwood because he negates the natural order that should occur in the romantic fairy-tale world. From the beginning, an attentive audience cannot miss the ironic cultural messages about the failure of the domestic sphere to protect women in an economically driven world.

As the story continues, economic realities presented in the beginning are complicated by the addition of marriage. As in all Austen plots, she introduces heroes (both false and true) and her heroines struggle to negotiate the stormy waters of romance. In *Sense and Sensibility*, however, this formula takes on another facet through the character of Mrs. Jennings. As a wealthy widow, Mrs. Jennings holds the unique position of being both female and independent. Because of her status she is able to get away with saying things that other characters cannot, providing the inappropriate yet all-too-true commentary of an experienced woman and mother. Indeed, as she has already seen both of her daughters married, her remaining goal is "to marry all the rest of the world" (28). Along with Sir John Middleton, Mrs. Jennings likes to poke fun at the Dashwood girls and their beaux. They tell the girls that certain men are "well worth catching" or setting their "cap at" (34, 35). And anyone will do, provided he has the proper résumé. While Marianne lives out the plot in her own romantic world, convinced that she is in love with Willoughby after only a week together, Mrs. Jennings points out the realities that are more likely to dictate marital unions. In her uncouth way, Mrs. Jennings tells her friends that she "never was very handsome – worse luck for me." She did manage to secure a good husband, however, which is what really matters in the end (121-122). In addition, she knows that a match between Marianne and Colonel Brandon would be worthwhile because "*he* was rich and *she* was handsome" (28). Mrs. Jennings' pragmatism illustrates the ideology that controls marriage, even as she helps the process along. In a society where the crass economics of marriage are hushed up or outright ignored, Mrs. Jennings introduces a refreshing change by saying what everyone thinks but refuses to address. Her voice highlights the inner workings of

marriage arrangements, but at the same time she finds joy in the process. Her disinterested take allows her to see the realities of marriage clearly, and she diffuses economic tensions by acknowledging them in her approach. For Mrs. Jennings, the inevitability of matches like Marianne and Colonel Brandon endorse the economic status quo. The fairy tale ending is economically predetermined and ideologically loaded.

As the novel closes, Edward makes the "right" decision by marrying Elinor for love while Willoughby, who picks money, regrets the loss of Marianne. Marrying for money is a common theme in the Austen canon, and *Sense and Sensibility* is no exception. Mrs. Ferrars wants Edward to marry Miss Morton, who comes from a wealthy family and is the daughter of a Lord. In the same way, Willoughby chooses money over love when he marries Miss Grey, who is said to have 50,000 pounds. Although the audience may secretly want Willoughby to suffer from his bad decision forever, it is not only the love story that draws readers. Austen is famous for mixing the romance with reality, and the ending of *Sense and Sensibility* does not disappoint. Rather than dying of a broken heart, Willoughby "lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself" (289). Reality also presents itself in the conclusion of Elinor and Edward's marriage. Although they are truly happy, they are not "quite enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a-year would supply them with the comforts of life" (280). Eventually a change of heart in Mrs. Ferrars allows them to marry under more agreeable economic circumstances, but the message is not to be forgotten. Even in the ideal marriage of two people completely in love – here Elinor and Edward – money is a determining factor.

In a culture where marriages are based on riches rather than love or compatibility, it is only natural that people become less like individuals and more like objects. Austen criticizes this social norm through the theme of interchangeability. When people are used as a means to an end, the actual person ceases to matter and the goal becomes the determining factor. An obvious example of this is Lucy Steele. She wants to marry an eldest son, so she attaches herself to Edward in a secret engagement. However, when the truth about their engagement is discovered, Mrs. Ferrars refuses to give Edward the money she would normally bestow on her oldest son. This is of little consequence to Lucy, who simply exchanges Edward for the now favored Robert Ferrars. She writes to Edward that "as [Robert and I] could not live without one another, we are just returned from the altar, and are now on our way to Dawlish…but thought I would first trouble you with these few lines…" (277). This over-the-top letter illuminates how ridiculous the exchange of the brothers really is. The switch seems so natural to Lucy that it does not even occur to her to tell Edward until after she is married to Robert. Romantic readers see Lucy's actions as ludicrous because she treats marriage, which idealistically should be the most disinterested relationship, as a mercenary exchange. She manipulates the factors of the marriage relationship to receive the maximum benefit for herself, thereby distressing the heart of the fairy-tale loving reader to no end. From a critical perspective, Lucy is also a subject of interest because her motives deviate from the expected romantic female approach to marriage. This deviation is not a forward progression, however, but a move into dangerous territory for the institution of marriage. Her actions convict her, and thereby anyone approaching marriage as an interchangeable transaction, of going against the natural order of Austen's world. In this way, Lucy manages to appall the audience regardless of the reader's approach. Because she sees the Ferrars brothers merely as objects that will provide her with money and power, it is not important that she treat them with respect or even as individuals. In the end, Edward and the audience are grateful for Lucy's behavior because it releases him to marry Elinor. Lucy does not seem to deserve Edward because she is cruel and incapable of love. The two

categories of readerships once again overlap as they unanimously agree that Lucy is nothing next to Elinor and even Marianne.

Lucy's exchange of Edward for Robert is extreme enough to seem ridiculous, but it opens the conversation on deeper cultural questions about reasons for marriage. If marriage is just a "commercial exchange," as feared by Marianne, then this brotherly substitution should not bother the audience (29). Lucy should instead be seen as a normal young woman hoping for a good home. Austen's satire, however, shows her to be foolish and power-hungry, or the opposite of what the audience should strive for in their own lives. While *Sense and Sensibility* is one of Austen's early novels, the extensive use of satire and irony does not alienate her audience but instead drives home the problems of marriage as a commercial market. The ridiculous situations and observations of characters throughout the novel emphasize the gap between social customs and the ideal marriage. Both the critical reader and the pleasure reader experience the same gap, even if they describe or analyze it through different methodologies. Critics will be familiar with the social norms of the 18th century, so the differences square with a more comprehensive social critique as reading progresses. While the pleasure reader may not have the same extensive background, her more optimistic or idealized notions about the nature of marriage will be offended by the differences between the ideal and the real conditions of life in *Sense and Sensibility*. Ironically, the widening gap between social norms and idyllic marriages serves to close the gap that some say exists between critical and pleasure readers.

Pride and Prejudice: A Strategic Use of Character Foils

As Austen continues to mature, she uses different tactics to teach her cultural lessons about marriage. *Pride and Prejudice* is probably the most well-known novel of the Austen canon, and Elizabeth Bennet is an internationally adored heroine. Her journey through the world of courtship is kept in perspective through the use of character foils Charlotte Lucas and Lydia Bennet. Charlotte, as the pragmatic and economically conscious foil, shows Elizabeth to advantage when she marries for protection and immediate comforts. Lydia, on the opposite extreme, flirts with anyone in sight. Her lack of propriety leads to her downfall and simultaneously shows how Elizabeth keeps her passion in check. Charlotte and Lydia serve as bookends to highlight the qualities that provide the perfection of heroine Elizabeth Bennet.

Critics and devoted fans alike come to the same conclusion about these three characters: Elizabeth is to be admired, while Charlotte and Lydia are to be shunned then thought of no more. From the critical perspective, this conclusion comes from the fact that Austen tends to put her truest arguments into the mouths of her favorite characters. There are many similarities between Elizabeth and Austen herself. While Elizabeth ultimately ends up in a traditional marriage, she wrestles with the possibility of becoming an old maid, paralleling the struggles faced by Austen during her writing years. Elizabeth confronts this obstacle with style, using both the intelligence and spunk displayed by Austen throughout the canon in her response. For example, when asked at what point she first fell in love with Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth replies "I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley" (286). The joke here is that Elizabeth, while truly in love with Mr. Darcy, sees how easily her romantic motives could be interpreted as a gold-digging scenario. She directly echoes the marriage argument in which my thesis is grounded by pointing out the economic realities, and she artfully adds wit to spice up the message. One could almost imagine these words coming straight out of Austen's

mouth, rather than Elizabeth's. This theme of Elizabeth as the intelligent word-smith is repeated throughout the novel, leading to a natural relationship between Elizabeth's words and Austen's opinions. Even without a critical understanding of Austen's life and literary techniques, the spark evident in Elizabeth makes her impossible not to love. Like an energetic friend, we as readers are drawn to her vivacity. She "dearly love[s] a laugh," is full of liveliness and wit, enjoys nature, and reads quite often (42). In addition, she manages to win the love of Mr. Darcy, who has 10,000 a year amongst other worthy attributes. Whether admiration for Elizabeth springs from a critical or pleasurable approach, readers come to the same conclusion about the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*. She is woman at her finest, and all others should be lucky to rise to her level. Charlotte and Lydia in particular are defined by the ways in which they fail to measure up to her standards. Both women end up married to former admirers of the heroine, admirers who were turned down by Elizabeth for good reasons. Their choices destroy any chance they had of receiving respect from Elizabeth and from the audience as well.

Charlotte Lucas is a dear friend of Elizabeth's as the novel begins. Economically, they are in similar situations: both are dependent upon a good marriage to secure future comforts. There are no brothers to care for Elizabeth, her mother, and her four sisters after the death of Mr. Bennet, and to add insult to injury, the Bennet estate is entailed so that it can only pass to a male heir. Charlotte does have brothers, but her father's estate will not provide her with enough money to live comfortably. In fact, when she does become engaged, her brothers are "relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte's dying an old maid" (94). With the economic facts thus stated, in walks Mr. Collins, cousin to the Bennet girls. Having recently received a living with a sufficient income, he is looking to be married. As the Bennet estate is entailed to him, and Elizabeth is "as handsome and amiable as…represented by common report," he quickly selects her as his future companion (53). However, Mr. Collins is ridiculous, undereducated, and unloved by Elizabeth, who therefore declines his proposal of marriage. This distresses her mother, who worries about her future well-being, but her father, who knows that Elizabeth could never be happy in a loveless marriage, allows her refusal to stand. While Mr. Collins is momentarily upset by this turn of events, he is in love with the idea of marriage rather than with Elizabeth herself, as is made evident when he finalizes an engagement with Charlotte the very next day.

Upon hearing about Charlotte's engagement, Elizabeth is shocked, deciding that Charlotte has "sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage" (96). Forsaking love, which Elizabeth believes is the most important marital factor, Charlotte accepts Mr. Collins simply because he is the first man to ask for her hand. She herself admits that Mr. Collins's "attachment to her must be imaginary;" however, attachment is irrelevant because she "accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment" (93-94). Elizabeth and Charlotte have completely different outlooks on the concept of marriage, and because of Elizabeth's clear superiority, the audience is inclined to agree with her idealistic view. However, knowing the end result of the novel influences the way in which the lessons are taken. It is easy to accept Elizabeth's idealistic views, because in the end she is happy, secure, and the new Mrs. Darcy. But what about Charlotte, who probably would not have been so lucky? She could have rejected Mr. Collins and earned the respect of Austen's audience, but it would have come at the cost of future comforts.

Charlotte serves as a foil to bolster the romantic idea of the perfect Elizabeth-and-Darcy marriage, but she also functions as a reminder of 18th century economic realities. The marriage between Charlotte and Mr. Collins "is pitiful and creepy; but it is routinely pitiful and creepy. It is everyday" (Amis, 87). Elizabeth and Charlotte abide by their separate rules

of marriage, and in the process present a discussion about the various factors that affect courtship. Both end up happy in different ways: Elizabeth finds the love she is seeking, while Charlotte finds the comfortable home she has always desired. This divide of principles leads to a rift in friendship. Elizabeth feels that "all the comfort of intimacy [is] over" and writes to Charlotte at Rosings "for the sake of what had been, rather than what was" (113). A desire for romance leads the reader to despise Charlotte for her decision, because romance is not even a possibility with a character such as Mr. Collins. In this way, Austen capitalizes on the romantic desires of the audience to show what marriage should be about. Elizabeth provides the example, and Charlotte becomes defined by her "bad choices." At the same time, however, she hints at the tragedy the dear heroine might fall victim to if her hero fails to show up. While the reader is driven by a desire for romance and the eventual marriage of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, she cannot ignore critical realities on display in the story of Charlotte Lucas.

If Charlotte Lucas is the foil that shows how Elizabeth puts the proper amount of stress on economics, then Lydia is the foil that displays how she places the right amount of importance on passion. Lydia is the youngest of the Bennet sisters, and Lady Catherine de Bourgh is appalled to discover that she is out in society before her older sisters are married. A desire for attention and a lack of parental control combine to form Lydia into a determined flirt who "could talk of nothing but officers" (20). While Lydia is enjoying the thick spread of militia present in Meryton, Elizabeth is slowly gaining the acquaintance of one officer in particular, Mr. Wickham. Although he is "universally liked" by everyone in Meryton, visitor Mr. Darcy has other opinions (68). Elizabeth and Mr. Wickham part ways with feelings intact when he engages himself to a Miss King, who is known to be wealthy. However, Mr. Darcy, who has known him since childhood, later reveals Mr. Wickham's true character. Wickham turns out to be an indebted gambler who once sought to marry Mr. Darcy's younger sister for her large inheritance. The risk that Elizabeth might have married a scoundrel exhilarates the reader, but she ultimately breathes a sigh of relief when Elizabeth is safe from the devilish Mr. Wickham. Wickham represents illicit pleasure, in which the reader can safely indulge and then prudently reject. The reader discovers Wickham's failings and Darcy's merits alongside Elizabeth, allowing her to share the anxiety and experience of "being Elizabeth" while also bolstering her admiration with sympathy.

Lydia, on the other hand, takes no steps to reign in her passion. She is "always unguarded and often uncivil," and Mr. Bennet takes no care to temper her boisterous personality (97). He is aware of her stupidity, especially in comparison to Jane and Elizabeth, but rather than taking steps to remedy the situation, he simply strives to establish his own peace. When Lydia is offered a trip to Brighton with the wife of Colonel Foster, Mr. Bennet is happy to let her go. He knows that she "will never be easy till she has exposed herself in some public place or other, and [he] can never expect her to do it with so little expense or inconvenience" (176). While Elizabeth tries to convince her father to check Lydia's behavior, she is unsuccessful, and off Lydia goes to Brighton with the militia, full of excitement and exuberance. Mr. Bennet's inaction makes him a foil to the invisible "good father," a male figurehead who would value his daughter's well-being over his own peace and even her momentary happiness. This unspoken relationship highlights the need for paternal protection if the domestic sphere is to function correctly. The desire for Lydia's behavior to be checked is a function of the reader's awareness of its crass implications and Elizabeth's full understanding of how her society operates. True to form, Austen plays on both our romantic desires and intelligent grasp of the situation to make her point. After a few weeks of non-descriptive letters to the family, communication is received that Lydia

has run away with Mr. Wickham. Although her decision is rash and irresponsible, *we* know it is only the by-product of immaturity and too much freedom. While Wickham's actions cannot be justified, Lydia at least assumed they would be married. The letter she leaves for Mrs. Forster says "what a good joke it will be" when she can write to her family signing the name of Lydia Wickham (221). She does not think of the consequences of her actions, and the guardians appointed to her by societal norms do not seem to care about her enough to point them out.

Lydia's reckless actions serve to highlight Elizabeth's control over her own emotions, especially because they involve her former suitor. The reader does not indict Lydia in the same way as Charlotte, mostly because Lydia's situation is more easily blamed on the failures of others. Similar to the function of John Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, the unrestrained passion of Lydia critically demonstrates how the domestic sphere has failed to protect women. With nothing to take up her time besides gossip and the rituals of a marriage-driven society, it is only natural that Lydia falls into the cycle of passionate flirting. Her father fails to protect her from herself, Colonel Forster fails to protect her from others, and Wickham fails to protect her from the ills of society. If it is the man's job to preserve women under the ideology of the domestic sphere, then Lydia has slipped through the cracks. The function of a romance reading becomes more complicated here. One on level, the reader is relieved that this fate did not land upon the beloved heroine; however, it seems decidedly unfair on Lydia's shoulders as well. Whether Lydia is seen as a victim of society, or an innocent and passionate girl who fell into the wrong hands, the critical and pleasure reader agree that her fate is too harsh for her crime. While Mr. Collins asserts that "the death of [Lydia] would have been a blessing in comparison of this," the reader is more inclined to follow Elizabeth's example and feel pity (225). The punishment for Lydia's extreme passion is permanent separation from the family unit, which is critical in Austen's society. While both the Darcys and the Bingleys help Lydia out with debts from time to time, she still has to suffer her marriage, which quickly turns to one of indifference, alone. Lydia's situation is a harsh criticism of social realities: she is alienated from her community because of the ways in which the domestic sphere fails to protect her.

While Elizabeth's story alone would be pleasing, Austen's use of character foils multiply the pleasure because they highlight Elizabeth's possible fates had she not been the perfect heroine. Critically, Charlotte and Lydia show how social norms that allegedly protect women actually fail them in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Charlotte falls victim to the failures of marriage itself, which is often turned into an economic exchange. Lydia, on the other hand, is victimized by the ideology of the woman's sphere, which says that women will be protected by their place in society but fails to deliver. From a perspective of pleasure reading, Charlotte and Lydia suffer equally undesirable fates, but the logic behind them is built on the fairy-tale ending. Charlotte chooses rationality over love, which alienates her from the possibility of happiness. Lydia embraces love with all of her heart, but it is not true love. She settles for whatever semblance of passion comes her way, and in the end her impatience is rewarded with a sham of a marriage. Both are failed versions of the fairy-tale, where happily-ever-after was never realized due to the obstacles of society. The gap between what happened and what the audience knows *should* have happened is filled by Elizabeth's more intelligent and romantic approach. She is the one who balances economy and passion, choosing a true love who is wealthy enough to pay the bills. While this is not always a realistic option, that is part of the romantic magic of Austen. *Pride and Prejudice* is a fairy-tale, complete with impractical ending, but along the way it illuminates lasting truths about marriage in relation to economy and passion.

Emma: A Pedagogical Approach to Social Responsibility

In *Emma*, the third and final novel I will be addressing in this thesis, Austen uses the technique of pedagogy to illustrate her views on the role of marriage. Emma is a unique heroine in the Austen canon because she comes from wealth. She is the daughter of the most affluent family in town, and the name of Woodhouse carries much more weight in the world than one could ever expect from Dashwood or Bennet. Her father adores her, her governess indulges her, and her community can find no fault with her. In this way, Emma "lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (5). Emma is superior in intelligence to almost everyone she knows, and constant praise from her family and friends have culminated in a false supposition that she can do no wrong. While explaining her situation, Austen goes so far as to call this inflated idea of self a "real evil," albeit one unacknowledged by Emma (5). At first glance, Austen's terming Emma's situation evil seems absurd: here, finally, is a character who does not have to marry to secure future comforts. Emma has the luxury of marrying only if she finds love, for, as she explains to Harriet, "fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want; I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield" (68). After pushing for marriages to be controlled less by economics and more by love for four novels, it is natural to wonder what Austen could possibly find to criticize in Emma's situation. Deeper engagement with the plot, however, shows that *Emma* is a calling to a higher morality; rather than a critique of the interplay between society and marriage, this novel is a pedagogical lesson designed to show women the power and responsibility of a wife in community. This new twist to the Austen marriage conversation still functions on the level of a romantic read through the humanity of Emma's relationships with others. Peripheral characters who have not been as lucky as Emma, such as Harriet and Miss Bates, fire the audience's desire for the fairy-tale ending. They also serve to highlight Emma's failures – and eventual successes – as guardian of the ideal social order.

The first example of Emma's relationships with others comes from Harriet Smith, who becomes her friend early in the novel. Miss Taylor, Emma's former governess, has recently taken the name of Mrs. Weston and moved away to live with her husband. Emma chooses Harriet, a boarder at the local finishing school, as her new companion mostly because of her potential for improvement. She approaches this role with condescension disguised as humility: "*she* would notice her…she would form her opinions and manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming of her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers" (19-20). The irony of this initial claim lies in its juxtaposition of later events. While Emma's intentions concerning Harriet are generally pure, the naiveté stemming from her unchallenged position in society causes her to guide Harriet in a harmful way. She treats Harriet's life as a novel she is authoring, making decisions for her own amusement rather than with Harriet's best interests in mind. For example, Harriet is proposed to by a farmer named Mr. Martin early in the novel. Emma, while knowing that Harriet has feelings for Mr. Martin, convinces her to reject the proposal. She wants Harriet to marry a more "romantic" hero, such as the vicar Mr. Elton. Mr. Elton comes from a higher social class and a more respectable vocation than Mr. Martin; in addition, this marriage would keep Harriet in Emma's social circle. Despite Emma's best-laid plans, however, Mr. Elton does not propose. He declares he never meant to attract Harriet's attentions, and Emma's poor friend is devastated. Throughout the vignette, Emma guides Harriet from an inwardly focused perspective rather than an external awareness. The responsibility that comes with her familial position is to protect those less fortunate

than herself, but Emma is too involved in authoring the stories of others to do this role justice. Critically, Emma fails to fulfill her social function of promoting Harriet's well-being when she manipulates Harriet's fate for personal enjoyment. She has the power to bolster traditional society, but her consistently self-centered approach does not allow her to see this opportunity. Emma needs to grow up by realizing the potential of her actions to either help or harm those around her. From a romantic standpoint, Emma is leading Harriet down a dangerous road. While Mr. Elton more fully embodies the theoretical hero, Mr. Martin is the realistic choice, the one who will love and care for Harriet. Emma cannot see past the tale she is attempting to write, and in this way she plays with Harriet's future happiness without heeding the potential consequences. She is too invested in the story, treating people as plotlines rather than humans. Both approaches ultimately lead the reader to agree with Mr. Knightley, who berates Emma by saying that she has "been no friend to Harriet Smith" (50). By using Harriet for her own authorial pleasure, Emma is ignoring her social responsibilities to guide others in her community in a helpful way.

The line of argument thus far ignores the redeeming qualities that keep the audience invested in Emma's story. While readers can agree that Emma does not treat Harriet like a true friend, they continue to hope she will eventually learn and grow into a fuller character. Once again Austen plays on her audience's inward desires, inducing an emotional response to reinforce the novel's lessons. In earlier stories this wish fulfillment was a function of the romantic ending, but here it revolves around the desire to see Emma grow into her potential. Readers see Emma's faults, but they also see her heart, which is generally filled with good. Although her actions are often unhelpful, they spring from feelings of disinterested love. Emma does not yet realize the implications of her authorship; she manipulates Harriet's life not out of spite, but because she wants Harriet to make a good match. Emma truly believes that Mr. Elton is "in the fairest way of falling in love, if not in love already" with Harriet (33-34). As a character, Emma messes up in the most relatable way possible. We can judge Emma because we can identify with her; we see in her our own faults. The wish fulfillment of this novel comes from seeing Emma grow into the responsible leader we know she can be. In one of their many arguments, Mr. Knightley tells Emma that one had "better be without sense, than misapply it as you do" (51). Through this quote he verbalizes the central problem of the novel. Emma has sense, and she has power. What she is missing is the maturity to yield them in a positive manner. Her journey is one of social awareness – that is, she must grow up and realize that she is not the center of the world. After stumbling through two botched matchmaking attempts, Emma realizes that she needs to do what is best for Harriet, even if it ends their friendship. Harriet finds her happy ending with Mr. Martin, not because of any agency on Emma's part, but because Emma has accepted the natural order and allowed it to function without her input. This transition marks a significant change from the girl who criticized the Martins as "illiterate and vulgar" and considered Harriet's potential attachment to them a banishment at the beginning of the novel (43). Emma learns to put others' needs before her desire to control destiny, thereby stepping into her predestined role as enforcer of social order. The world is no longer for her enjoyment alone - and with this realization, our dear Emma grows up.

In addition to changing her outlook on the world as her plaything, Emma must also undergo a maturation process with respect to comprehending the power of her position in society. If Harriet teaches Emma that her actions affect the lives of others, then Miss Bates shows Emma that she sets a precedent for the rest of her community. Miss Bates is an unmarried woman who lives alone with her mother. This family represents a class that falls between the old agrarian order and the new industrial order, with waning wealth and no

male to continue bringing in money. While they live in town and are members of Emma's circle, they are moving down the social ladder and are mostly dependent on charity to subsist. As the novel opens, Emma visits the Bateses because it is her role as parishioner. Miss Bates's incessant talking, which rarely comes to a point, irritates Emma, leading her to despise the duty. She initially does not see Miss Bates as a person worth appreciating, but rather as an odious task to which she must attend. Their relationship climaxes at a picnic scene on Box Hill. The attendants, including Miss Bates, are to say one thing that is clever, two that are moderately clever, or three dull things for a game. As the scene unfolds, Emma makes a joke of Miss Bates's ceaseless chatter by saying that "there may be a difficulty… you will be limited as to number – only three at once" (291). Austen simultaneously winks at Emma, laughing at the comedic remark, and reprimands her for this insensitive quip when she declares that "Emma could not resist" (291). Emma could not resist taking pleasure in her own power, using her intelligence to laugh at Miss Bates's failures rather than to help her improve. Emma's witticism represents the aggression that can often be found behind comedy: it is cruel because it of its solid basis in a reality that polite circles have agreed not to discuss. Lovable Miss Bates does talk too much, but the censure of a young girl with greater social importance than herself is humiliating. Miss Bates feels the sting of the comment, as do others in the circle. Mr. Knightley criticizes Emma for her unkind remarks, pointing out that she was in the presence of people who "would be entirely guided by *your* treatment of her" (295). With this sentence, Emma is at last held accountable for her social responsibilities. The scene ends with Emma in tears, for she has finally realized the weight of her role in traditional society. Others with whom she interacts are not only for her pleasure; rather they are real people, and her actions make a difference by setting the standard. Once again, the maturation process shifts Emma's focus from herself to her community. Critically, Emma's situation works as an argument that ethics matter. Her treatment of Miss Bates is not critical to her personal well-being, but it *is* critical to the plot of the novel. Austen pushes for a change in social order that goes past the simple marriage relationship and into the realm of the community as a whole. With respect to the pleasure read, Miss Bates never gets the romantic ending the audience may want, but she at least receives the compassion deserved by a woman of her circumstances. Emma works to fix their relationship, and as the novel closes, she visits the Bateses not only out of responsibility but also out of feeling. The audience's wish to see Emma redeemed is met in her new, real relationship with her fellow townspeople. She has grown into her role as leader of the social order, which Austen parallels to the role of the wife.

Emma's journey of self-growth is ultimately tied to the concept of marriage. It is an independent journey, and she does not begin with the intention of finding a husband. However, the role of social leader and the role of wife have the common theme of outward focus. To succeed at either one a woman must have a focus outside of herself, realizing and responding to the needs of others. Austen uses Emma to show how this maturation process occurs, manipulating the emotional response to convince her audience that social responsibility is important. Her marriage to Mr. Knightley as the novel closes, however, is not mere coincidence. While many critics have used this "training" of Emma to argue that Austen does not push for social change, the novel is really about the societal responsibilities associated with Austen's idea of a moral marriage. Emma's maturation allows her to see Mr. Knightley as a romantic figure despite deviations from her concept of the ideal hero. Initially, Emma's need to write her own storylines obscures reality, and only when she stops attempting to change the world to suit her whims can she look outside herself and realize that Mr. Knightley is the man with whom she belongs. In this way, Austen parallels

Emma's comprehension of social responsibility to her maturation into competent wife. The two processes cannot be separated, and in the same vein the role of the wife cannot be separated from social responsibilities.

In addition, it is important to remember the audience at this point. Austen's target audience was women, and she tailored her plotlines specifically to this demographic. It is only natural that the ideal example of maturation for her audience would be a woman; and if growth is to occur, pedagogy is essential. While Emma does undergo a guided maturation process, the question of who critiques her behavior only serves to distract from Austen's main point. Emma is not the story of a man teaching a woman how to be his perfect wife; rather, it is the story of a woman understanding her social responsibility and realizing her true potential.

The joy of *Emma* comes from the relatable characteristics of the heroine. Every reader has screwed up in some way. We follow Emma on a bumpy ride through maturation, and in the end there is grace and a happy ending to boot. If the naïve Emma can find redemption after all of her mistakes and can still manage to be a productive wife and leader of society, then maybe we can too. From a critical standpoint, Mr. Knightley teaches the lessons of social responsibility with logic and poise. He is the only character who finds fault with Emma, and he patiently explains his reasoning to her time and again. For the pleasure reader, trial and error, along with emotional responses such as guilt, point Emma and the reader to an ultimate understanding of her role in society. The logical and emotional arguments intersect and play off each other; one can long for Emma's maturation while simultaneously agreeing with the coherent reprimands of Mr. Knightley. *Emma* is a journey, a process of maturation, and the reader experiences failure and success with Emma throughout the story. This allows the reader to sympathize with Emma while also understanding the frustrations of Mr. Knightley. The tension between the approaches is a productive one because both paths lead to the same conclusion: Emma needs to shift her focus outwards, away from herself and onto the larger world. In doing this, she becomes an advocate of traditional community. This transition allows her to fulfill the role of the wife as a mature individual who makes wise choices, rather than a young girl seeking an imaginary fairy-tale. Only when she lets go of her need to narrate life and understands the implications of her choices can Emma step into her destined role as Mrs. Knightley. Austen uses *Emma* to show that women do have power in society, and this power comes with the responsibility of answering to a moral calling.

Marriage Revisited: How Jane Austen Uses Marriage to Give Us What We Want

Sense and Sensibility, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma* all use the marriage plot as a way to address cultural problems and the role of women in relation to matrimony. This is no accident, but rather a strategic move on the part of Austen. She knowingly presents her arguments from both critical and romantic angles to reach a range of readers perusing her novels. This "back and forth" approach allows Austen to present complex discussions about gender and marriage, taking all sides of the arguments into account. Her novels are rife with tension between these different aspects, and that is one of the reasons so much debate circulates around Austen. She uses both idealistic and cynical approaches to marriage, allowing the audience to decide where between the two extremes they believe marriage should fall. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice* the failures of Charlotte Lucas and Lydia Bennet bolster the ideal marriage of Elizabeth, but the two foils also serve as cynical warnings about social realities. In a similar way, Austen uses irony to illuminate the economics

of marriage in *Sense and Sensibility,* just as she uses pedagogy to display the social responsibilities of a wife in *Emma*. Austen utilizes critical and pleasurable approaches in all three novels, but the tension between these approaches contributes to the joy of reading and places the burden of determining her true meaning upon the reader. As exemplified earlier through the closing of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's arguments are rarely simplistic or straightforward. However, the continuing popularity of Austen's novels implies that we, as an audience, find joy in the tensions.

While the two approaches to Austen provide different readings of the novels, they also find common ground, leading readers to the same, or at least very similar conclusions about characters and situations throughout the canon. Readers do not necessarily have to choose one approach in defiance of the other; instead, Austen plays upon both intelligence and emotion to unite her audience and mediate a discussion about the social implications of marriage. This is not a new phenomenon, but rather a truth that has existed since the first publication of the Austen canon. The popularity of Austen stems from the joy we find in her novels, joy which is not by chance but by meticulous plan. She knows what is at stake in her argument, and she is also a brilliant artist who knows how to make it stick. Austen uses the marriage plot to advance her own social critiques, and she purposely does this by giving us what *we* want. We, as generations of readers invested in the novels, want the romance and the fairy-tale; we want to hope that everything can turn out perfectly. So Austen grants our wishes, adding important lessons and morals veiled behind witticisms and ironies to keep us interested. We get what we want, but so does she. Everyone in this story ends up happy – then, now, and hopefully forever after.

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About the Author

Hannah Eberle graduated from The University of Tennessee in May 2011 as a Top Graduate in the Biological Sciences. As a student of the Chancellor's Honors Program, she had the freedom of writing her senior thesis outside of her core area of study. A love of reading and Jane Austen led to this rewarding project, which could not have been completed without the help of her advisor, Dr. Misty Anderson. Hannah is currently a first year student at The University of Tennessee's College of Pharmacy in Memphis, TN. She will graduate with a Pharm.D. in May 2015.

About the Advisor

Dr. Misty G. Anderson received her B.A. from Yale University in 1989 and received her M.A. in 1991 and her Ph.D. in 1995, both from Vanderbilt University. She is an associate professor in the Department of English at the University of Tennessee. Her research interests include eighteenth century literature, critical theory, feminist theory and gender studies, and theater. She serves as editor of the journal *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*.