

AUSTEN'S UNSUITED COUPLES

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Defense: April 24, 1991 at 2:30 p.m.

INTRODUCTION

The casual reader of Jane Austen will wonder at the need for a discussion of her historical context. Such a reader might argue that Austen's work seems timeless because it contains few historical reference points. What this reader fails to see, however, is the deeper historical significance found in Austen's work. Austen provides for her audience a different kind of history, one based upon manners and morals instead of politics. She is a miniaturist concerned with detail and nuances which reveal the true nature and motivations of her characters; by employing her power of observation, she fathoms the considerations which prompt their behavior. Austen was "a keen observer of the nuances of social differences, a discriminating spectator of performances in public places" (Duckworth 237). For all of these reasons, her popularity remains constant today.

Austen's favorite activity is the study of marriage, courtship, and their accompanying behavior. Marriage is the most important single accomplishment of the women in Austen's novels and in her society. For as Alistair Duckworth states, women "through good marriages, acquire comfortable domestic establishments" (227). The achievement of marriage also influences men for they must acquire heirs. Thus Emerson's accusation that Austen's major theme is marriageableness is well-founded. What Emerson fails to realize, however, is that Austen uses the details of courtship as a commentary upon both the women of her class and the expectations placed on them by their society. By detailing the processes of courtship, Austen, in her self-appointed role of social historian, is examining the event which was most central to a

person of her status: a white, middle-class female. By examining the social function of acquiring a mate as the essential event in a woman's life, Austen creates a conjunction between her real world and the novel form which demands the realistic representation of the world. The paradoxical ability of the novel to both provide a realistic view of the world while also inciting change provides another facet of the novelistic philosophy that Austen employs. Fiction is not a static representation of a society at a given interval; fiction is a dynamic view of history which both mirrors its reality while simultaneously shaping it. My argument is that Austen's intent is to both criticize and shape her society's perception of the "ideal woman." My contention is that she accomplishes this feat through a type of couple which appears in all of her novels. By placing this married couple in the role of minor characters, Austen has more leeway in her commentary; in working with them, she has none of the narrative pressures of plot to consider in shaping their characters. Thus her criticism has more room to strike and define its intended targets.

A basic understanding of the historical and social context within which Austen worked and the expectations placed upon a woman of her status and social-standing is necessary to my argument. I will argue that even though Austen displays a considerable evolutionary process in her heroines, she consistently uses a certain "type" as both a foil for her characters and a commentary upon her society. This "type" is the relationship between a married couple which consists of a man of average to superior intelligence and a woman of less-than-satisfactory mental means. The woman allows Austen to comment upon the tenets which her society demanded of a married female and provides Austen with an

opportunity to display its fallacies. These "types" violate the codes of behavior expected by the then-existing and forming ideal of woman. These marriages are described by Tony Tanner as "ill-suited couples" who are trapped in "prisons of ennui if not of torment--machines for the 'production' of misery" (10). Austen describes this type herself in Sense and Sensibility as "the strange unsuitableness which often existed between husband and wife" (1.21.101). An appreciation of this "type" can only come about with a corresponding understanding of the expectations of Austen's society. The importance of this type emerges when one considers that Austen is operating from within this ideology while actually attempting to reform it. Her very ability to accomplish these feats simultaneously demonstrates the dynamic nature of an ideology, an adherence to the evolutionary vision of a social order. Austen's *emic* position allows her an unique position from which not only to criticize the ideology while suggesting reform measures but also to show the other pressures working within the system. Thus she mirrors the social forces which "shaped and deformed women's desires" while putting forth alternatives (Poovey 47). All within her given period and from her small sitting room which she shared with her mother and sister, Austen deals with the world in what G. H. Lewes described as her "two-inch bit of ivory" (Kent 89). To define my argument, I must first place Austen in her general historical context.

Austen's Historical Period and the Existing Status Quo

With the accompanying bold movements of both revolution and industrialization, a distinctive class structure was beginning to emerge in the early nineteenth century. Besides this stratification of society into a new and distinct class structure, the view of woman and her role

in society was changing. Within the specific class fraction that Austen describes, however, change is more gradual and evolutionary; its very indirect and incremental nature requires her obsession with minute detail. Because of change's small, gradual steps, Austen's novels maintain a timelessness similar to a Shakespearean comedy within a very dynamic social and historical climate. One must observe the behavior within the novels even more carefully than so that they are not simply dismissed as static oases but are regarded as episodes within an evolutionary process.

One of the views which had not changed, however, was the Mary/Eve dichotomy (this view would not evaporate until the height of the Victorian period). During this time, women were regarded as either angels or temptresses. Even though Austen's novels do not concentrate upon this dichotomy, it still influences her portrayal of women. The dichotomy also gives one further explanation for the importance of marriage: in a husband, marriage provides a woman with not only a source of reason but also an outlet for redirecting her passions. One view of woman held her as the repository of the spiritual and the feminine (such Austen characters as Fanny Price and Jane Bennet exemplify this); the other portrayed her as a wanton creature controlled by all the dark passions of the body and untouched by the balancing feature of true reason (witness the women led astray in Austen: Maria Bertram, Miss Darcy, Eliza Williams, and Lydia Bennet). This tension serves to explain many of the requirements for the ideal woman's self-control and restraint. Though at this point and in Austen's work, the view of woman is already shifting more to the Victorian ideal.

Besides these traditional views of womankind, the period also

displays a changing view of woman's role which reflects the corresponding changes in society. Moreover, each of the new classes brought its own individual set of expectations for the females contained within it. Austen works within the upper middle classes, or as Sir Walter Scott describes them, "the middling classes" (Johnson, Intro. xviii). Poovey notes that this period contained two major social movements seeking simultaneously both to make a place for and to put woman in her place: the rise of the Evangelical religion and of the middle class itself. Both of these movements "tended to formulate female nature in a way that would accommodate [the] female energy" (Poovey 7). Therefore these movements were providing women with outlets to respectably exercise their position in society. Historically, Austen perches on the borderline between the outgoing eighteenth century and the incoming nineteenth century. Effectively, however, she falls most squarely into the earlier camp by following the traditional, conservative status quo. Tanner agrees that "Jane Austen does both expose and criticise the ideological assumptions which ground her society and which may seem to constrain her fiction" (6). She remains on the border though in that she is maintaining tradition while simultaneously moving forward in the idea of woman's intelligence and usefulness. Her characters display both the nurturing traits of the two major social movements while maintaining the rigid requirements of their sex such as remaining at home and not dirtying their hand in any activity which could be labelled manual. In determining Austen's political position, I do not believe that she entirely agreed with either the conservatives or the reformists of her day. I do, however, agree with Claudia Johnson's analysis that Austen selected the best

traits from each: "Because Austen . . . [was] fully aware that the codes employed by the two opposing camps [conservative and reformist polemicists] are not always so discrete and mutually exclusive, [she was] more able to take a measured view of social and political problems, and are more willing to give quarter to opposing platforms than . . . more partisan counterparts" (Intro. xxii-xxiii). Perhaps this ability to perceive both sides developed from the fact that Austen was relatively isolated from actively participating in either group, and thus she became the first political independent.

The reader, therefore, must understand the narrow section of society dealt with by Austen and that section's specific expectations of women. She is fulfilling the adage of "write what you know." Her characters exist within the small chamber of society known as the upper middle class, landed gentry, and lower nobility. Austen's characters are clergymen, lords, businessmen, college students, and career navy men. No factory workers or butchers populate the pages of Jane Austen's novels. Women who appear as noteworthy characters are housewives and marriageable daughters, these being the only acceptable occupations for women in her society. Thus all of the important female characters are either married or attempting to marry. In Emma, for example, the heroine feels patronizing and pitying towards her rival in the community, Jane Fairfax, because Jane has been reduced to acting as a governess for the children of the gentry: "offices for the sale--not quite of human flesh--but of human intellect" (E 300). This view fits nicely with that described by Nancy Armstrong. In Armstrong's analysis of this period, she describes the view of governesses, women who labored for money, as comparable to that of a prostitute (79). Such a view

further exemplifies the social pressures constraining the acceptable outlets of expression for women. Therefore, the reader must appreciate the fact that Austen is working within a very narrowly-defined group. And within this group, the winds of social change are being felt only indirectly. Yet this small cross-section contains very specific yet paradoxical demands and expectations for its ideal woman.

The Ideal Woman

The women and marriages that I will be examining in Austen's texts have numerous similarities. The basic characteristic shared by the women is the mold from which they are constructed. During this period, an ideal woman was being defined, and Austen sought not only to display this developing ideal, but also to aid in shaping it. Linda C. Hunt gives a concise definition of this ideal as the "'angel in the house,' . . . submissive, chaste, modest, reserved, gentle, and physically frail" (1). She attempted this task by portraying the strengths and weaknesses of each characteristic held by this ideal. This portrait of the Ideal Woman can be broken into three major divisions: "the Female and the Feminine," "Domesticity and the Home," and "Motherhood and Maternity." The importance of marriage in a woman's life is emphasized by the role it plays in determining the Ideal Woman: the first category deals with the virtues which will gain marriage; the second with those which will continue the "good" marriage; and the third with the perpetuation of the first two. Since my types are all married couples, my analysis deals mainly with the latter two.

"The Female and the Feminine"

As Tony Tanner notes, the well-known women's-adviser of the day Hannah More described the best type of women as those possessing "all

the qualities of the heart, [the ability] to keep their proper places and due bounds, to observe their just proportions and maintain their right station, relation, order and dependence" (34). Other critics note that meekness and acceptance were major feminine virtues. As Poovey writes in her description of this period's "Proper Lady":

"self-effacement, if not natural, is at least proper for women, and . . . women's behavior must significantly differ from that of men, who express their own wishes, make their own choices, and imprint their images on the receptive glass [of woman]" (4). Also according to Poovey, this concept sees "the woman as desiring subject is 'blackness,' a cultural void, a negative that comes into view only when it interferes with the ideal woman, who cannot be seen at all" (22). This definition presents the first of numerous paradoxes we will find in defining the Ideal Woman. This particular one deals with the image as being a creature who is noticed only when not present, an object taken for granted.

One example of this paradox is the adage that a woman should be seen and not heard. Translated into Austen's social structure this means that a woman must signal her virtue by a physical "intentness" which must only be visible via a negative means, by not speaking, by not demonstrating any knowledge of sexuality (Poovey 24). Her only tool is an expressive countenance which does not violate ideal modesty (24). In his advice to his daughters, the late-eighteenth century Dr. John Gregory admonishes that "one of the chief beauties in a female character is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration" (26). In polite company, Dr. Gregory states that a woman "may take a

share in conversation without uttering a syllable" (28). Such examples enable Armstrong to assert that "a woman's participation in public spectacle . . . injures her" (77).

One of Poovey's primary arguments, moreover, is that her "Proper Lady," our ideal woman, must be understood both in the context of the ideal woman's paradigm and the paradoxical portrayal of her nature. The primary paradox exists because, on the one hand, woman is the spiritual superior and guiding force, while, on the other, "because. . .sexual desire momentarily undermines self-control, women are voracious; because the future is uncertain, they are inconstant; because life is full of contradictions, women are irrational; because mortality perpetually mocks the will, women are vampires, heralds of death and decay" (Poovey 5). Even as the idealized image of woman was arising, St. Paul's analogy between woman and the flesh was still present (Poovey 5). This paradox is the expression of the angel/devil dichotomy which marked this era's view of women. This paradox is perhaps explainable in that women fulfilled the role of reproduction: "a woman's craven appetite could jeopardize the hold on immortality her husband had through his land" and "property was the source of present income, the measure of social prestige, the basis of political power, and the legacy that carried a man's name beyond his grave" (Poovey 5). This fear became especially important in the England of this time. For to keep the estates intact, marriage articles contained a policy of "strict settlement," whereby primogeniture was the rule and only the oldest child inherited the estate (Poovey 12). The idea that the first child might be a bastard and strip the inheritance from any rightful heirs was a concern of all families. Thus the fear of a woman's infidelity was not only the

province of her husband but of the entire family and generations to come. This concern with women's chastity and faithfulness in marriage is but one concern with what Joan Perkins defines as the "supreme paradox of this male-oriented system" that "marriage was the fulcrum on which its whole world tuned, and woman, as the chief instruments and match-makers, held the levers which turned it" (6).

Because a meek demeanor indicated self-control, its importance as a virtue becomes obvious. Monaghan wryly comments that meekness as a virtue is very easy to understand "since recognition of her inherent inferiority and suppression of whatever abilities she might possess were such integral parts of the woman's role" (106). Meekness was used as an indicator of a woman's chastity and purity. For to remain chaste, a woman must overcome her sexual appetites. Moreover, this society discouraged the indulgence of any of the sensual appetites for fear that they would awaken and sharpen the sexual, baser one. Even a seemingly innocent vice such as overeating would trigger the defense mechanisms of this social order. For gluttony, or overeating, was viewed as a mild form of sensual lechery and demonstrated an obsession with the physical and the sensual. Dr. Gregory describes this lapse in virtue as "a despicable selfish vice in men, but in your sex [his daughters] it is beyond expression indelicate and disgusting" (39).

Thus, if this society considered overindulging in food as an indication of moral failing, then the display of vanity was a positive sign of debauchery. Moreover, as Jan Fergus points out, "A woman's vanity is always seen as her weakest, most vulnerable point" (69). Fergus goes on to explain that "in conduct books and novels, then, vanity is the likeliest source of a woman's misconduct or undoing" (69).

Vanity is an indulgence of pride and thus higher on the ladder of appetites. Overeating is a weakening of a minor sensual nature; vanity is a placing of self above all else. Such self-elevation by a woman was antithetical to this society's requirements. Meekness should overcome vanity; thus meekness was used as an indicator of virtue. Dr. Gregory even warned against the evils of wit, for the display of it would not only call attention to a woman but also was an indication of loss of self-command: "Wit is so flattering to vanity, that they who possess it become intoxicated, and lose all self-command" (30). For Austen's society a loss of self-command was the very antithesis of meekness and could result in other types of sensual self-indulgences. The argument would be that if a woman could not refrain from such public displays then her private behavior would be even less constrained. Again the fear was of sexual impropriety.

Besides meekness, the other most valued quality was modesty. Modesty was the guardian of chastity and the sign of internal integrity. Like the other characteristics of our ideal woman, the virtue of modesty is also paradoxical. To emphasize modesty as an important feature of a woman is to advertise her self-control; conversely, it also indicates a need for self-control (Poovey 21). Yet another paradoxical feature of this seemingly unassuming virtue is that it was an effective lure for prospective husbands:

Because the glory of its eventual conqueror is directly proportional to the resistance modesty poses, its efficacy is directly proportionate to its conspicuousness. . . .Modesty announces purity in a virgin, promises fidelity in a wife, and thus will continue to be a reflection of her husband's power (Poovey 22).

Modesty then becomes yet another trait which is noticed only when absent.

To further necessitate women's compliance with its standards, this society went so far as to make the ideals of the female and the feminine synonymous by the end of the eighteenth century (Poovey 6). As Hunt explains, at the basis of this emphasis of the feminine is "the notion that women exist to meet the needs of others: to contribute to the comfort of their families, to elevate the sensibilities of 'the opposite sex,' and to socialize children properly. Thus self-abnegation and submission are moral ideals particularly appropriate for women" (2). Or as Perkins defines this ideal, "self-indulgence was something base, something to be treated with contempt" (238). Perkins, however, goes on to explain that "There was even a certain pleasure in martyrdom, in placing the needs of others above one's own" (238). Therefore, to be a female required both the presence and/or the cultivation of the feminine. To be less than feminine was then to be less than an acceptable female to this social structure. The paradox exists in that even though femininity was considered as an inherent characteristic, it still required cultivation. The cultivation came in the form of numerous conduct books and magazines such as the Lady's Magazine (1770-1830) which rarely reported on political events (Poovey 15-7). Armstrong notes that "conduct books transformed the female into the bearer of moral norms and socializer of men" (89). In these publications, women were appealed to not on personal convictions but upon established standards; they merely had to accept conclusions from an authoritative voice, a practice women were accustomed to performing.

This negative perception of women's intellectual capabilities was

partly the fault of the women themselves but still largely due to social expectations. Because society frowned upon overt forms of self-expression, the only available avenue open for a female to express herself was an indirect one (Poovey 28). Therefore, "self-assertion had to look like something other than what it was" (28-9). This "something" else took the form of accomplishments, such as piano, singing, dancing, needlework, and painting (29). As David Monaghan states, these accomplishments were substitutions for "intellectual pursuits" which might be "overtaxing for the limited minds" of young ladies (105). Davidoff and Hall extend the reasoning behind this type of education by stating that "since women were regarded as central to the image of family status, their training was directed to that end" (289). During this period, a woman's intelligence was not deemed of great value. In fact, as Welter noted, "intellect was geared to her hymen, not her brain" (375). Even the women writers of the period "at least paid lip service to the notion that they were intellectually inferior to men" (Poovey 40). As Hunt states, even when women were given the characteristic of a rational mind, "it is usually assumed they will employ their intellects in the service of and for the good of others" (7).

Perhaps this belief in the substandard quality of woman's intellect can be justified by her ready acceptance of her role. For by the end of the eighteenth century, "women, like men, were apt to interpret the double standard not as a sign of men's distrust but as a proof of their own moral superiority" (Poovey 8). Women conversely became the perpetuators of their own inequality. For it was women who with pride maintained the "moral institution" and thus the traditional hierarchy and values of patriarchal society (9). In fact, women clung to the bonds of their slavery for fear that loss of them would equal loss of their power and prestige. Paradoxically, women by embracing the ideals of chastity and modesty could attain a very selfish end: "because to do so enhanced her social value and promised her the eventual gratification of the very desires that modesty was supposed to deny" (Poovey 23). For this display of meek, retiring perfection gained a female a husband, and marriage became the opportunity for a form of power and freedom: "Freedom is a relative concept, and for most women marriage meant release from a childlike and humiliating dependence on the parental home, the possibility of sharing on however unequal terms the creation of a home and family of their own" (Perkins 3). In defining how women expected to gain freedom when they were "the legally subordinate partners" in marriage, Perkins describes that wives merely "worked out a technique of cajolery and persuasion that was more subtle and more effective than an outright and independent wilfulness" (258). This idea of persuasion fits with the idea of the female as the weak creature dependent on her husband, but it successfully undermines the idea of the woman as ineffectual. Clearly, such an idea belongs to the ever-lengthening list of paradoxes of this society's ideal woman: where

the confrontation between the ideal at the real seems hopelessly opposed. This distance is exactly one of the absurdities Austen seeks to demonstrate in her work.

"Domesticity and the Home"

In this period the evangelical view of woman was gaining dominance in the middle class. This view held that women have a greater "natural modesty, passivity and delicacy, and . . . superior ability to control and to renounce her passions". Consequently, women had a "greater moral and spiritual strength" (Rendall 208). (Certain historians have even suggested that women purposefully perpetuated this idea of passionlessness as a means to "refuse sexual relations within marriage and, perhaps, control the number of births" (Rendall 208).) The Evangelical reform movement gained great acceptance among the female members of the middle class because it was a natural evolution for the women of the domestic sphere (Poovey 9). Such activity expanded women's sphere and gave them legitimate avenues for the exercise of power and control beyond their geographic-domestic front. The women merely expanded the organizational and nurturing skills from their nuclear family into their family of humanity.

The augmented importance of housewives also carried a corresponding amount of duties. After achieving their goal of marriage, their social order provided yet another series of expectations and methods of measuring their progress. The increased "leisure" of the middle class wife, caused by the increased number of servants she was able to afford, increased expectations for the well-running of her household: "A properly ordered household had to rely on the direction of the mistress" (Davidoff 176). Rendall also points out that "the

domestic interior and its qualities were to display above all the achievement of the mistress of the home, the emotional strength, the creativity, which went into it" (212). Monaghan's estimation of the housewife and her domain is that "symbolically, that those who order their houses well are securing the health of the nation, while those who neglect them are damaging it" (114). All of these conceptions lay a heavy burden on the young female who was expected by society to metamorphosize overnight from the meek, modest feminine ideal into the super-efficient, yet equally quiet housewife.

Poovey too emphasizes the importance of domesticity in the ideal woman. Poovey, moreover, assigns the rise of the importance of the family unit to Puritan doctrines which placed the family as the "unit of religious and social discipline" (7). Drawing on the patriarchal ideology of the Scriptures, Puritanism deemed it necessary to "restrict women's activity to narrowly defined domestic duties" (7). Puritan ideals augmented the paradoxical definition of woman:

By emphasizing the spiritual importance of the family unit, Puritanism simultaneously reinforced the injunctions against the free expression of female desire and provided women a role that seemed constructive rather than destructive (Poovey 7).

Therefore, women held onto the Puritan doctrines with their complementary views of the family unit because it provided and insured their "nexus" of power (32).

A few critics of the period called for increased education to accompany the expanded responsibility of women. Ann Martin Taylor, an author of texts on women during this period, argued for the education of

women to better fulfill their domestic duties (Davidoff 175). The case against education in the role of ideal woman, however, was that it was a threat to domestic duty and would place the woman in the public eye thus becoming "subversive of her delicacy" (Poovey 35). Dr. Gregory also frowned upon extensive education for women:

If you happen to have any learning, keep it 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. . . .A man of real genius and candour is far superior to this meanness. But such a one will seldom fall in your way; and if by accident he should, do not be anxious to shew the full extent of your knowledge (31-2).

Thus education for girls was repressed because it would interfere with the concepts of meekness and modesty and only serve to draw attention away from the males and to the females.

Davidoff and Hall note that although "stress on domestic virtues, on marriage, home and children was by no means new," this era saw these virtues move into "upper echelons of the bourgeoisie" (155). A reason for this new importance placed upon the concept of domesticity relates to the fact that "when separation between the home and the workplace became the middle class rule rather than the exception" the "superintendence of family integrity" became an awesome responsibility (Poovey 8). Naturally, such increased responsibility carried with it increased respect and power for the women who wielded it. Rendall states that during this period "domestic management was not a job but a vocation" (207). In their quiet, flowing manner, wives were expected to run their homes like well-oiled machines.

Armstrong agrees with this opinion and says that a woman's desirability as a mate "hinged upon an education in frugal domestic practices" and not in the realms of such masculine areas as sciences and languages (59). Taylor's writing also sought to define "a new path for women, recognizing their capacity and potential while elevating them from drudgery and insignificance" (Davidoff 177). This elevation was made possible by the developing class structure; middle class women were gaining servants to deal with the manual labor of housekeeping. Thus these women were gaining more time to devote to supervision of home and family. Rendall also argues that this domestic control provided women with a "powerful role in the purchase and the creation of demand for the consumer goods which were a product of the new industrial world" (213). Furthermore, Armstrong states the role of woman in this regard as a "complement [to] his [her husband's] role as an earner and producer with hers as a wise spender and tasteful consumer" (59). For the duties of a middle-class wife included home support of capitalistic values:

The sympathetic, nonjudgemental affection the ideal wife offered her husband helped offset the frustrations and strains a man suffered in his workplace and thus both contributed to the rewards associated with work and helped a man renew his energies for another day's labors (Poovey 10).

Thus the woman's service in this regard was yet an echo of the division of labors found in the capitalistic system (10). Besides the smooth running of their home, a married woman was expected to facilitate all the domestic operations. This society demanded that women act as social facilitators as well. Women were the ones who arranged parties,

gatherings and conversations. Women were the tempering substances which kept conversations away from volatile subjects. As Perkins describes, with the aid of their role as chief-conversationalist, wives "helped their husbands on in their professions by 'oiling the social wheels', and 'spied out the land' for advantageous marriage partners for their children" (74). The final use of a wife's conversation becomes part of role of motherhood.

"Motherhood and Maternity"

Besides the running of the home, women also dealt with the procreation and care of the children, or the next generation. Davidoff and Hall note with regard to writings of the day that "both parents are seen as having awesome responsibilities, but the duties of the mother are given particular attention" (175). They go on to outline the differences:

Expectations for mothers differed from the father's role in significant ways. Mothers were to be relied upon for personal care and emotional rather than economic support. While for fathers involvement with their children's lives was a matter of choice, it was regarded as natural for women to take up the whole duty of motherhood (335).

Rendall concedes that "the task of motherhood in particular had become the most demanding of vocations" (207). The importance of motherhood was seen as paramount, for mothers were the first instructors of "good manners." Tanner notes:

Good manners and morals were seen as essential to the preservation of order in society. They alone could or should do what excessive laws, and often recalcitrant

militia, and the absence of any properly organised police force were. . .unable to do. It was as if the security and stability of the nation depended on good manners. . . .they became England's answer to the French Revolution (27).

Tanner then goes on to state that therefore Austen's concern with manners was actually a "form of politics--an involvement with a widespread attempt to save the nation by correcting, monitoring and elevating its morals" (27). David Monaghan also argues that "those who control manners and the home have a crucial role to play in preserving the status quo" (110). He further states that Austen therefore "tends to place her main emphasis on the part played by women in preserving manners and morals" (112). Thus he too makes the connection between manners and social stability, thereby emphasizing the educational function of mothers. Manners not only taught children morality but also the discipline and self-control necessary to create yet another generation of competitors and capitalists (Poovey 10). (This argument complements Rendall's argument, already discussed, on the importance of the wife in the capitalist system.) The instruction of manners, moreover, was an extension of a mother's expected involvement in her children's overall education. Davidoff and Hall relate that "Spiritual training began in infancy, and mothers . . . were expected to give or at least overlook the first lessons, including reading, writing and spelling" (340).

Besides being an important social function, motherhood forged yet another component in the role of the ideal woman: the creation of the next generation, especially of women. The reason for the emphasis on

the mother-daughter relationship is that "sons would inevitably take their own way to a greater extent than daughters" (Davidoff 341). With their subjugated role in society, women soon lost their sons' respect as they assumed the dominant role of the male. Davidoff and Hall point out that this was a natural progression because "Mothers bore the added disadvantage of themselves often being ignorant of some aspects of the 'world'" (341). Mothers, however, were the designated educators of daughters who must assume that self-same role in society. All responsibilities also carry a corresponding degree of power, and motherhood was no exception. After marriage, a woman's greatest weapon was her "power of influence" over her children and thus the next generation (Poovey 29). The ideals of feminine behavior were passed on through both word and example, mother to daughter. Thus the maleducation of the mother would not be corrected in the daughter, merely transmitted. Or as argued by David Monaghan, Austen "perceives direct links between the child's ability to effect the transition into adulthood and the kind of training she has received from her mother" (112).

Austen, however, perceived these negative traits and sought an impact upon the still-metamorphosing view of woman. Austen saw "her society threatened, but mainly from inside: by the failures and derelictions of those very figures who should be responsibly upholding, renewing and regenerating that social order" (Tanner 18). Thus Austen used her fiction dynamically to challenge and form the gender construct then in formation. With these definitions of her society's expectations, my argument concerning Austen's purpose in her fiction becomes more viable. In each instance of the female member of my type,

Austen has taken one or more of the aspects of her society's ideal and shown its negative characteristics. By showing the weaknesses in her society's version of the ideal woman, Austen shapes the perceptions of her society.

Structure of Paper

Therefore when considering the behavior of any of Austen's female characters, one must consider that "a woman's social position depended completely on her obedience to men's will" (Poovey 23). And a woman's autonomy was purchased at the cost of social ostracism (35). As I explore Austen's texts, I will demonstrate how Austen uses marriage as a sign of a woman's maturity or lack of it (47). Each of the married women I will be examining in some way reflects the tenets of our Ideal Woman. In discussing them, I plan on employing the device of text/countertext (see McCanles). This technique looks at not only the outcome of a character's actions but the motive that prompted them. By discovering the motives, the reader will there find Austen's commentary on our ideal image.

I will be dealing with five of Austen's major texts (excluding only Emma). I will handle them in my interpretation of the development of my type couple. I will examine the women, how they relate to their husbands, their world, and our ideal. By the end of this examination, Austen's role as social historian becomes easily discernible. The presence of this type I am examining becomes even more important when one considers that the evolutionary development of the main characters is not echoed in these minor characters. My argument is that this does not occur because Austen merely needs a "type" character and a reliable foil but because these are the portrayal of how Austen really saw the

world. In the protagonists, Austen reveals her answer to the problems she sees in the expectations placed upon women in her society. True to role as realist, however, Austen presents each of these characters as a mixture of faults, some blameable on their environment and others on their nature. Since I am dealing with couples, I consider not only the wives but also the husbands and the "dialectical" or "dialogical" nature of relationships. Austen demonstrates the fallacies in the concept of the "ideal woman" by placing them in context, and this environment includes the husband and our evaluation of him. Austen condemns the men for accepting and perpetuating the social criteria for woman. Thus all the judgements and ambiguities attached to the female halves of my type apply also to the men. The question is multiple choice one: does the fault lie with a) the wife, b) the husband, or c) the society? Austen's humorous ambiguity is in itself a testimony to the importance of my type.

After a very long and exhaustive examination of five of Austen's novels, I will be able to state that the type-couple which I have examined throughout my paper exist as more than a mere foil for the eventual happiness and marital bliss of the main characters. In each chapter, I will highlight the criticism of one or more of the characteristics with which this society defined its ideal woman. In each instance, the couples will be similar enough to fit the generic mold, yet individual enough for discernible purposes to be exposed. And each wife displays a distinct obsession with one characteristic which marks her from the others.

With the Palmers in Sense and Sensibilities, I discuss the negative effects of the conditioning of women and its consequences; for

example, Charlotte's defense mechanism of self-negation. This chapter also displays for criticism the image of mother as the seller of the daughter in the marriage market (a view which becomes the central issue in the case of the Bennets) and the process by which the faults of the mother are perpetuated in the child. With these multiple targets of criticism, Charlotte Palmer's prime dysfunction is that of conversation. Austen uses Charlotte to demonstrate that with insufficient education or flexibility of topic it is unreasonable, and disastrous, to expect a woman to act as the facilitator of conversation. Austen also demonstrates the impossibility of the view of woman as always positive and accommodating. In her desire to please everyone, Charlotte misleads her listeners.

In the case of the Musgroves from Persuasion, Austen continues her criticism of the lack of education for women. The target this time is the idea of the wife acting as spiritual guide for her husband. In Mary Musgrove, Austen is also able to depict the extreme instance of what happens to a woman who has nothing meaningful in her life with which to exert admiration, no quantitative work. Mary's obsession, however, is with rank and place, and Austen is able to show how such concerns run awry of the ideals of nurturing and care for all.

In the instance of the Allens in Northanger Abbey, Austen is at her most Johnsonian by depicting the consequences of a woman without children, unable to make the transformation into the maternal housewife. In Mrs. Allen, Austen creates the virtue of an economic, pragmatic housewife carried to the absurd. Mrs. Allen's "passion" is for clothes and cloth and everything associated with them. This thriftiness is not the only virtue of the ideal with which Austen confronts. Mrs. Allen

thinks and believes everything her husband tells her to but with no internal or real understanding. She gains no respect from her husband or anyone else in the novel. In this work, Austen also reiterates the concept of self-negation but this time it is for a less noble cause.

The most comic of Austen's couples the Bennets of Pride and Prejudice give us the same lack of respect found in the Allens. Mr. Bennet displays a cruel-teasing and hideous neglect of his wife. Mrs. Bennet, however, is unable to appreciate what is going on around her. Her only concerns are gossip and the successful marriages of her daughters. Austen highlights Mrs. Bennet's faults by copying them in her daughter Lydia and juxtaposing both with the intellectual and witty Elizabeth. Mrs. Bennet displays an uncontrolled speech pattern that rivals that of Charlotte Palmer. Mrs. Bennet's speech, moreover, embarrasses and wounds far more than the well-intentioned Charlotte.

And in the Bertrams of Mansfield Park, Austen creates her most developed version of my type. Very little dissatisfaction with his wife appears in the behavior of Sir Thomas, but the novel seems to indicate that it will come later. Lady Bertram's obsession is the most frightening of all, that of total enervation and dependence on others. Austen had taken the image of the languid, nonphysical ideal lady to its most extreme embodiment. To accentuate this extreme, Austen has juxtaposed Lady Bertram with her sister Mrs. Norris, thus forming Austen's version of a social menage a trois. Mrs. Norris always appears busy without ever accomplishing anything tangible (again Austen criticizes the lack of quantitative work allotted to women). The novel sees the education of Sir Thomas in the value of women and marriage. His total disillusionment with Mrs. Norries is a forerunner of the

dissatisfaction he will feel towards his wife at the completion of his education. With these explanations in mind, I will begin my discussion.

Chapter 1--The Palmers

In Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen presents one of her most thinly veiled mismatched couples, the Palmers. In this, her first, published work, Austen has not yet learned to integrate her cynicism into her text without leaving markers. In fact, this novel first ignited the concept of my "type," the unsuited couple which pairs a reasonably intelligent man with a woman of less-than-acceptable capabilities. Upon further study, the "type" can be seen in five of her major works, but the Palmers still provide the most biting commentary. Charlotte Palmer is the perfect example of Austen's view upon the forming image of the ideal woman. Charlotte is a new wife and during the course of the novel becomes a new mother. She therefore undertakes both of the major shifts of character required by her society in a short period of time: maiden to wife and wife to mother. Austen's emphasis seems to be more on the shifts required by her society than on the actual phases themselves. The society initially requires a self-effacing, young woman who can convince a man of her goodness and worthiness only with her eyes and countenance and without calling conspicuous attention to herself. This young lady must then transform herself into the domestic woman who can make the household flow smoothly for the comfort of her husband. And finally, this woman must become the perfect educator in both secular and moral matters for her children, the next generation of society. These unreasonable shifts of character receive the brunt of Austen's criticism.

Charlotte serves as a commentary on what can befall a woman attempting to take part in polite conversation without being equipped with either the taste or the education. Charlotte is a parody of the

socially-dictated function of woman as the facilitator of free and easy conversation. The social standard for the ideal woman calls for the meek, mild maid to metamorphose into the matron upon completion of a ceremony. This matron is expected to come complete with all the soothing social graces which make domestic society flow smoothly. Charlotte, however, has not made this transition dictated by her society. Her verbosity displays a lack of both knowledge and learning. Constrained by the expectations of the ideal woman, Charlotte complicates rather than facilitates conversation which is the focal point of life within Austen's novels. Charlotte fails the requirements of the ideal woman because she does not balance the prerequisite traits. The fault does not lie in her intentions, however, but in the constraints which limit her ability to execute them. We see first Charlotte's response to Mr. Palmer and his character in her new status of wife. We then see her repetition of the motherly role taught to her by her own maternal predecessor.

As Claudia Johnson notes, "the Palmers live without affection, talent, or moral culture, and they complement Austen's relentlessly harsh satire on contemporary marriage" (55). Johnson may overemphasize the directness of Austen's satire, but Johnson's description of the Palmers is accurate and well taken. Johnson oversimplifies the response Austen hopes to achieve, for as Tony Tanner notes "there is every evidence that Jane Austen intended a complex and not a complacent response" (102). Austen did not wish us to be either merely amused or disgusted at the Palmers. She intended to show the discrepancy between what society defined as an ideal marriage and the reality of a happy marriage. Mrs. Palmer lives in the continuous state of happiness which

the poet Thomas Gray described as the "bliss" of "ignorance." Mr. Palmer, on the other hand, is a gruff individual who fulfills the manly requirement of not displaying his emotions: "fond of his child, though affecting to slight it" (SS 3.6.266). Mr. Palmer has fallen into the habit of men after marriage in assuming what Allison Sulloway describes as a "casual disdain for domestic timetables and the convenience of his wife and her staff" (203). Thus socially this marriage has all the ingredients of the ideal: a pretty, "agreeable" wife expecting their first child and a well-to-do husband running for Parliament. Realistically, this marriage contains an overly agreeable, vociferous woman and an egotistical, cruel man.

Austen values her realism and presents her characters with both good and bad points. Such realism brings forth an ambiguous or "complex" response in her audience; she wants an emotional response but also an intellectual one. If the audience begins to pity Mr. Palmer cursed with such an inane wife, his very distant nature inhibits full sympathy: "Her husband was a grave looking young man of five or six and twenty, with an air of more fashion and sense than his wife, but of less willingness to please or be pleased. He entered the room with a look of self-consequence . . . took up a newspaper from the table and continued to read it as long as he staid" (SS 1.19.92). Even when directly invited by his sister-in-law and hostess Lady Middleton to join the conversation, he shortly declines. When called upon to admire the improvements made by the Dashwoods to their cottage, he merely notes that "the room . . . was very low pitched, and . . . the ceiling was crooked" (SS 1.19.93). Even when entreated by his wife, he "made no answer; and . . . began complaining of the weather" (SS 1.20.95).

Elinor too attempts to justify Mr. Palmer's boorish temper as being the result of living with such a wife, but she also fails to convince even herself of this explanation:

His temper might perhaps be a little soured by finding, like many others of his sex, that through some unaccountable bias in favour of beauty, he was the husband of a very silly woman,--but [Elinor] knew that this kind of blunder was too common for any sensible man to be lastingly hurt by it.--It was rather a wish of distinction she believed, which produced his contemptuous treatment of every body, and his general abuse of every thing before him. It was the desire of appearing superior to other people. (SS 1.20.97)

Elinor's conclusion both absolves and damns Mrs. Palmer, but it speaks even more harshly of her society. This passage describes a society which conditions its men to choose their mates on the basis of beauty instead of education and character. The social order is further to blame in that with its requirements of modesty and retirement, the men have little more than fleshly appearance by which to judge the women. Thus, since this society does not provide intellectual criteria by which to evaluate women, Mr. Palmer can judge his wife only by the intellectual standards provided by his own masculine norm. Mr. Palmer condemns his wife for her misuse of conversation and attributes it to her lack of knowledge:

'He cannot bear writing . . . ' [Charlotte] continued--'he says it is quite shocking.'

'No;' said he, 'I never said any thing so irrational. Don't palm all your abuses of language upon me' (SS 1.20.98).

Yet here Mrs. Palmer's flippancy at the abuse by her husband keeps the audience from becoming too concerned for her: "There now ; you see how droll he is. This is always the way with him! Sometimes he won't speak to me for half a day together, and then comes out with something so droll" (SS 1.20.98). Charlotte even notes that "Mr. Palmer is just the kind of man I like" (SS 1.20.101). Thus, just as our sympathies are about to swing totally in the direction of Charlotte, she dissuades us with a comment. As a matter of fact, Charlotte evokes a split attitude or ambivalence from the reader. At times, we feel sorry for her and overly sympathetic for her position in society. But she also calls forth a cruel amusement at her seeming ineptitude and stupidity. These varying emotions cause the reader to be constantly reevaluating her response to Charlotte. Even though Charlotte is a more likable person than her husband, Austen constructs the text so that the reader does not utterly condemn Mr. Palmer, but merely dislikes him for "his selfishness, and his conceit" (SS 3.6.266). Even though Mr. Palmer is irrevocably paired (divorce was not an option except under the most extreme circumstances of adultery or abandonment) with a woman who is seemingly his inferior, the reader is left with the feeling that she is a monster much of his own making. The possibility remains that Mr. Palmer could improve both his wife with attention and compassion and perhaps the society which spawned her. After all, he did buy into the status quo which dictated how he chose her.

But the inanity attributed to Mrs. Palmer is not all of her own doing. Upon closer examination of her character, we find that instead of truly violating the decrees of the ideal woman, she is merely carrying the requirements of femininity too far. Before her marriage,

Charlotte was what Allison Sulloway describes as one of the "marriageable women [who] were customarily required to be 'sweet'" (127). Women of this time were expected to grow into the domestic and maternal roles while simultaneously maintaining the modesty and meekness of the maiden. Depending upon certain personality traits, women reacted differently to this expectation. Charlotte carries the agreeableness of the maiden and the wife to a point beyond femininity. She has transformed society's view of the socially ideal woman into a jabbering, inane creature. Her misuse of language derives from the society which requires a woman not to display her knowledge. Charlotte's society maintained a double standard for truth in discourse. First was the logical discourse adopted by men. Second was the social discourse used by women in the parlors and all other aspects of their lives. And Charlotte's fluctuating sympathies and acquaintances arise from her attempt to appear congenial and polite; she knows much of Willoughby when she believes that such knowledge will bring pleasure to Marianne, and she resolves to drop the fictional acquaintance when knowledge of Willoughby distresses Marianne. Her faults, therefore, spring from her inability to balance the demands of wisdom and manipulation required by her new domestic role. Charlotte is merely attempting to fit the mold assigned to her by society. Her failure reflects not only on herself but upon the society as well. Her actions are negative; her intentions are positive. Or as Tony Tanner states, "People with good intentions may in fact work to secure bad ends" (89). What Charlotte attempts is to facilitate conversation and thus social harmony, a noble and appropriate endeavor for the ideal woman. What Charlotte actually succeeds in providing is a parody of this social harmony. She is

dysfunctional; she disrupts the social cohesion. Instead of acting as the oil in the cogs and wheels of conversation, she is the grit which slows it down.

Charlotte's inability to contribute intelligently in the conversation is also mirrored in her dealings with Marianne. In attempting to reassure Marianne of the worthiness of Willoughby by claiming her own knowledge of him, Charlotte notes: "I think he is extremely handsome. We do not live a great way from him in the country Not above ten miles, I dare say" (SS 1.20.95). Her ever-sensitive husband corrects her: "Much nearer thirty" (SS 1.20.95). Yet her intentions are perfectly harmless and acceptable. When she is further questioned on the subject by Marianne, Charlotte's lack of knowledge becomes even more apparent:

Oh! dear, yes; I know him extremely well . . . Not that I ever spoke to him indeed; but I have seen him for ever in town. . . . However, I dare say we should have seen a great deal of him in Somersetshire, if it had not happened very unluckily that we should never have been in the country together. He is very little at Combe, I believe; but if he were ever so much there, I do not think Mr. Palmer would visit him, for he is in the opposition you know, and besides it is such a way off
(SS 1.20.98-9).

As with most of her speeches, each successive sentence negates the one directly before it. In fact, Charlotte's constant negation of her own remarks seems to act almost as a defense mechanism. Charlotte appears to be negating her own remarks before anyone else can (as demonstrated by Mr. Palmer's critical correction discussed earlier). To avoid the

ridicule of others, Charlotte constructs her speech so that she cannot be held to any one statement or fact. Yet in her mind, which is controlled by the social discourse's less demanding standard of truth (which she has distorted to the point that it is even less demanding), all of her speeches make perfect sense. In her overwhelming desire to add to the conversation, Charlotte has literally lost the ability to communicate. She does not use the same standards of truth as the other participants. Mrs. Palmer merely wishes to appear polite and knowledgeable, but she demonstrates a total inability to accomplish the latter. Her heart, however, is properly motivated. She creates the knowledge and acquaintance of Willoughby only while attempting to be of value to Marianne. In Charlotte's mind, she does know Willoughby, for she has defined acquaintanceship merely as knowing of someone. When Willoughby's dishonorable treatment of Marianne is known, Charlotte

determined to drop his acquaintance immediately, and she was very thankful that she had never been acquainted with him at all. She wished with all her heart Combe Magna was not so near Cleveland; but it did not signify, for it was a great deal too far off to visit; she hated him so much that she was resolved never to mention his name again, and she should tell everybody she saw, how good-for-nothing he was. (SS 2.10.187)

Charlotte goes on to demonstrate her good will by obtaining all of the knowledge of Willoughby's approaching marriage to pass on to Elinor (SS 2.10.187). Again her manner seems simultaneously laughable and horrible, but Charlotte is merely trying to fulfill the role she believes has been assigned to her. She can demonstrate her displeasure only by withholding of her acquaintanceship; this power is the only one provided by her society for her gender.

In her even more recently acquired role of mother, Mrs. Palmer seems to be attempting to fulfill the role required of her by society rather than the authentic emotional one. In this role as well, she allows the element of the feminine ideal to outweigh that of the maternal. She treats her child as yet another amusement, another conversation piece. When her party begins its journey to Cleveland, "the hours passed quietly away. Mrs. Palmer had her child, and Mrs. Jennings her carpetwork" (SS 3.6.265). Such an unflattering parallel equates the child with the diversion of needlework. Mrs. Palmer treats the child as yet an additional item of interest for her very sparse conversational repertoire. He is a piece to be "busily . . . shew[n] . . . to the housekeeper" (SS 3.6.264). Even when removing the child from the danger of contamination by Marianne's infection, Mrs. Palmer appears to be as excessive in her over-reaction as she is in her conversation. For the apothecary's diagnosis of Marianne "gave instant alarm to Mrs. Palmer on her baby's account. . . . and [Mrs. Jennings] confirming Charlotte's fears and caution, urged the necessity of her immediate removal with her infant" (SS 3.7.268). Charlotte's overwhelming concern for her child can also be related to the fact that this male child is heir to his father's estate and will eventually be the one to take care of Charlotte. Davidoff and Hall have written that "some mothers seemed to feel that their helplessness denied them their son's respect, and feared being neglected in old age or widowhood" (341). This factor contributes to Charlotte's need to imprint her care upon and protect her child. She must accomplish all of this in his first six years to insure his care after his father's death. But Charlotte seems to carry this type of care to the point that she does not view this child as a future

individual. He is not even given a name, but is merely identified as her baby, a possessed object. This treatment in itself is contrary to the ideal behavior of the time. For as Davidoff and Hall have noted, "the fact that these women bore so many children seems to have done nothing to lessen the grief at their [individual] loss" (339). The ideal maternal behavior demands a different, individual treatment that Charlotte has not yet achieved.

Yet Charlotte can not be scolded for her apparent inept "playing" at motherhood. Her behavior becomes reasonable when we consider her maternal role model. Her own mother is "ill-bred" and a busybody (SS 1.20.96). Mrs. Jennings proves that the faults of the mother are passed on rather than corrected in the child, especially the daughter. Just as Charlotte believes she has fulfilled her role by removing her son from the path of disease, so too Mrs. Jennings believes that she has fulfilled her role very well in finding her daughters husbands. She taunts Mr. Palmer with her accomplishment: "You may abuse me as you please . . . you have taken Charlotte off my hands, and cannot give her back again. So there I have the whip hand of you" (SS 1.20.96). Here also, however, Austen purposefully prevents the audience from feeling too sorry for Mrs. Palmer when her reaction to such a maternal statement is to

laugh heartily to think that her husband could not get rid of her; and . . . she did not care how cross he was to her, as they must live together. . . . The studied indifference, insolence, and discontent of her husband gave her no pain: and when he scolded or abused her, she was highly diverted. (SS 1.20.96)

From such a reaction, the reader may conclude that Charlotte has become

immune to such derogatory comments. In such a negative situation, Charlotte has two options: laugh out loud or suffer in silence. With her social conditioning, Charlotte obviously does not see the second as a viable option. Also, Charlotte's attempt to fit the picture of the ideal woman would prevent her from retaliating. Before marriage a woman speaks not at all; after marriage a woman speaks only what her husband desires her to say.

The maternal example of Mrs. Jennings appears even more disturbing in that she believes herself to be an exemplary mother. While attempting to persuade the two eldest Miss Dashwoods to accompany her to London, she argues:

I am sure your mother will not object to it; for I have had such good luck in getting my own children off my hands, that she will think me a very fit person to have the charge of you; and if I don't get one of you at least well married before I have done with you, it shall not be my fault. I shall speak a good word for you to all the young men. (SS 2.3.132)

Mrs. Jennings' intentions are not bad, merely misdirected. Instead of defining a "good match" as a happy one where two personalities work together, she defines it only in terms of economic security. This misconception can be attributed to her time. Mothers were to educate their children in the correct values of the society and the next participants in the status quo. Her apparent lack of concern for Charlotte is false; she spends entire days with her daughter before, during, and after her delivery. Merely her value systems have been skewed by her society. Society has defined Mrs. Jennings' duty as that of preparing Charlotte for marriage and in aiding her in finding an

appropriate and secure match. Mrs. Jennings' instruction and aid are not bad, especially when one considers the alternative. Spinsters fared the worst in society of all the females. A multitude of problems and criticisms were ascribed to them. As noted by Alison Sulloway, Samuel Johnson in The Rambler No.112 had described old maids as "distempered by a 'peevishness' that is 'generally the vice of narrow minds.'" For when 'female minds are imbittered [sic] by age or solitude, their malignity is generally exerted in a rigorous and spiteful superintendence of domestic trifles'" (19). Therefore, the alternative for Mrs. Jennings is even less appetizing than the reality we find in the novel. Thus Mrs. Jennings only crime lies in not allowing her instinctual feelings of maternal love (the same ones evidenced in her daily visitation of Charlotte after the child's birth and her attendance upon Elinor at Marianne's sickbed) to control her; instead she lets society dictate them to her. And this is Charlotte's model for rearing her own child, the son who will be raised to pick a wife in the same way as his father. Therefore the mistakes are transmitted to the next generation in a self-perpetuating cycle.

The reader cannot totally dislike Charlotte, for all of her intentions are good even if their outcome is bad. Austen describes a society which expects women to be able to switch into totally different and diverse roles, but which refuses to properly educate them. Charlotte is a prime example of these expectations. She has been caught in the movement between phases. Overwhelmed at the verbal freedom allowed a married woman (in strong contrast to the meekness and modesty of a young lady), Charlotte has unwittingly transformed the conversational sociability of the young matron into nonsensical

babbling. Her move into the realm of maternity seems also to be fraught with a frantic attempt to fit the role. She again seems "over-agreeable." Charlotte understands the role required of her by society; but she does not have the necessary skills to fulfill it. She has never been given the correct knowledge to proceed. Thus what she comes up with is a ludicrous improvisation which points out all of the weaknesses in the social structure. This dilemma is a common theme in the female halves of the couples I will explore in the following pages.

Chapter 2--The Musgroves

Persuasion contains the most ambiguous and least sympathetic of all my type-couples. The Musgroves break no new ground and appear to disadvantage when compared to the hilarious Bennets or Allens, to the Bertrams, or even the Palmers. Charles and Mary each appear childish and immature in turn; each maintains a personal obsession which blinds them to the people around them. One argument might be that the Musgroves are handled more harshly because the mature Austen was losing patience with her society. This argument substantiates the importance of my type-couple. In this text, the Musgroves demonstrate the absurdity in expecting a wife to educate her husband when she lacks maturity herself. The equation, however, is never completely one-sided, and the husband's inattention merely aggravates the wife's ineptitude and produces an unhealthy cycle. Besides the narrator, we gain our perception of Mary through her relationship with her husband, her in-laws, and her children. With these relationships, we can evaluate her comparison with the ideal woman of the period; Austen demonstrates in Mary the destructive nature of certain of these characteristics (such as the total enervation and obsession with rank) when present, while simultaneously pointing out some of the worthwhile traits which are negative when absent (tranquility, intellect, and care of others). With Mary's substandard guidance, we foresee the proliferation of both her and Charles' negative characteristics in their two sons. Austen, moreover, inserts the character of Sir Walter Elliot, Mary's and Anne's father, for our judgement. His presence not only removes some of the guilt for Mary's behavior from her shoulders as we see her parental role model, but it also reiterates the fact that faults

manifested in the parent are usually transmitted to the child (the heroine Anne is saved through her likeness to her mother and her stabilizing relationship with Lady Russell). Also, with the Musgroves, Austen presents what the lack of purpose and education in a female can lead to in the home.

"Any body between fifteen and thirty may have me for asking. A little beauty, and a few smiles, and a few compliments. . .and I am a lost man. Should not this be enough" states Captain Wentworth on his decision to take a wife (P 7.52). Unfortunately, except for the financial considerations, Captain Wentworth defines well the roster of characteristics that most gentlemen of his period used to evaluate their prospective mates. One of the main omissions in this equation is the quality of the lady's mind. Wentworth's sister Mrs. Croft admonishes him for this oversight and appears to speak with Austen's voice: "you talking so. . . as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures" (P 8.59). Of course, Captain Wentworth is an atypical male for this period and does use quality of the lady's mind in choosing his mate. Unfortunately for Charles Musgrove, he is not as far-sighted as Captain Wentworth. Charles' saving grace, however, is the fact that he tried for better. The text tells both Captain Wentworth and us that Charles' first proposal was to Anne, Mary's sister and Wentworth's eventual wife (P 10.75). Charles' second proposal though successful in that it was accepted was unsuccessful in that it gained him a substandard mate. Mary fairs poorly when compared to her sister Anne:

Mary had not Anne's understanding or temper. While well, and happy, and properly attended to, she had great good humour and excellent spirits; but any indisposition sunk her completely; she had no resources for solitude; and inheriting a considerable share

of the Elliot self-importance, was very prone to add to every distress that of fancying herself neglected and ill-used (P 30).

Thus instead of the comforter and nurturer required by the concept of the ideal woman, Mary becomes the one who must be cared for and pampered. Yet even in this introductory passage, Austen is already dividing the fault between Mary and her parentage. Mary's nature, however, is less than exemplary. Austen portrays her as a very petty, egocentric person. Mary craves the attention that nature has not given her the physical presence to achieve. Her attention-getting schemes include complaints and hypochondria. Mary's selfishness can be witnessed upon her father's removal to Bath: "Upon my word, I shall be pretty well off, when you are all gone away to be happy at Bath!" (P 6.35). Mary's envy of others appears often throughout the text: "Mary sat down for a moment, but it would not do; she was sure Louisa had found a better seat somewhere else, and she would go on, till she overtook her" (P 10.74). Her childish behavior even arises upon such a simple occasion as her sisters-in-law supposing that she would not care for a very long walk: "Mary immediately replied, with some jealousy, at not being supposed a good walker" (P 10.70). Yet another example is when walking with Charles and Anne, Mary complains because she must walk "on the hedge side, while Anne was never incommoded on the other" (P 10.77). The consequence to this childish behavior is that Charles refuses to lend his arm to either lady. Thus Mary's petty behavior has benefited her none and cost harm to both herself and Anne.

Mary's petty self-centeredness appears to greater disadvantage when Louisa is injured. Wentworth and Charles choose Anne to stay behind to care for Louisa, and Mary becomes infuriated:

When the plan was made known to Mary, however, there was an end of

all peace in it. She was so wretched, and so vehement, complained so much of injustice in being expected to go away, instead of Anne;--Anne, who was nothing to Louisa, while she was her sister, and had the best right to stay . . .! Why was not she to be useful as Anne? And to go home without Charles, too--without her husband! No, it was too unkind! And, in short, she said more than her husband could long withstand; and as none of the others could oppose when he gave way, there was no help for it: the change of Mary for Anne was inevitable (P 12.99).

Mary's behavior during such a crisis is at total variance with the expected behavior of the ideal woman. Not only does she cause needless fuss when all attention should be centered on Louisa, but she also argues openly with her husband, disagreeing with him before others. The irony of the piece lies in the fact that Charles is yet again being forced to substitute Mary for Anne against his prior judgement.

Mary's childishness not only demonstrates Mary's lack of maturity but also a selfishness which is totally antithetical to the retiring, caring image required by this society's ideal woman. Her hypochondria also depends on her selfishness; when attention is turned from her, illness calls it back: "Mary's ailments lessened by having a constant companion" (P 6.38). Mary uses her hypochondria to seek a companion to avoid being alone because as the narrator has already stated, she is not a self-sufficient person.

Of course, Mary's need for such behavior also derives from the requirements of an ideal lady. Mary's society dictates that women have no employment like men by which to gain attention and admiration. In assuming the role of lady-of-the-house, Mary becomes a supervisor and

lacks any quantitative means by which to demonstrate her worth. Austen has taken Mary's lack of useful employment to the extreme limits. Mary has never been shown (lacking a mother and having only Sir Walter for a model) to turn her energy to raising her children or home. By attempting to fulfill the masculine ideal of employment (as transmitted by her father), Mary can find no means by which to activate herself. Mary does not appreciate the work of women, as demonstrated by her first conversation with Anne, when she inquires as to what delayed Anne:

'Dear me! what can you possibly have to do?'

'A great many things, I assure you. More than I can recollect in a moment: but I can tell you some. I have been making a duplicate of the catalogue of my father's books and pictures. I have been several times in the garden with Mackenzie, trying to understand, and make him understand, which of Elizabeth's plants are for Lady Russell. I have had all my own little concerns to arrange--books and music to divide, and all my trunks to repack, from not having understood in time what was intended as to the wagons. And one thing I have had to do, Mary, of a more trying nature; going to almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave. . . . all these things took up a great deal of time.'

'Oh! well; '--and after a moment's pause, 'But you have never asked me one word about our dinner at the Pooles.' (P 5.32)

Being confronted with Anne's very busy life, Mary attempts to regain control with an interjection of her own. Upon Anne's courteous inquiry, Mary describes the dinner as "nothing remarkable" (P 5.32). This phrase defines Mary's dissatisfaction: there is nothing in her life upon which she can make any real remarks. Thus, Mary must

invent things to discuss and call attention to herself (this very need to call attention to one's self, however, is antithetical to the nature of the ideal woman).

Mary's importance to both her society and her father lies in her marriage: "Mary had acquired a little artificial importance, by becoming Mrs. Charles Musgrove" (P 1.3). The inference here is that until her marriage, Mary had no importance or purpose to her father. This statement provides a very scathing criticism of this society's regard for women. Therefore, Mary's rise to worth comes about because of Charles Musgrove, whose description substantiates my claim to Austen's purpose in representing this couple:

Charles Musgrove was civil and agreeable; in sense and temper, he was undoubtedly superior to his wife; but not of powers, or conversation, or grace, to make the past, as they were connected together, at all a dangerous contemplation; though, at the same time, . . . a more equal match might have greatly improved him; and that a woman of real understanding might have given more consequence to his character, and more usefulness, rationality, and elegance to his habits and pursuits (P 36).

Charles presents a picture of the potential for a nice, mildly intelligent man. This part of the description indicates that the fault lies with Mary in not being able to bring Charles to his full potential. Yet, Austen contrives to show us that Charles is part at fault for not having a better wife, in that he does not seek to improve the one he has (he after all has the superior intellect). He ignores her, and Austen goes on to point out certain similarities in Charles and Mary:

He had very good spirits, which never seemed affected by his wife's occasional lowness; bore with her unreasonableness . . . ;

and, upon the whole, though there was very often a little disagreement, . . . they might pass for a happy couple. They were always perfectly agreed in the want of more money, and a strong inclination for a handsome present from his father; but here, as on most topics, he had the superiority, for while Mary thought it a great shame that such a present was not made, he always contended for his father's having many other uses for his money (P 6.36).

Thus, Charles' inattention to Mary demonstrates a lack of affection and regard on his part and only aggravates their marital situation. The agreement on want of money indicates that they are similar individuals and that the reason Charles could not get a better wife is because he is not a better person. Charles is reminiscent of Mr. Bennet and Mr. Allen in affecting a form of escapism by leaving his wife to go hunting and to go to the party. He is not as sympathetically treated, however, as he leaves an apparently-ailing wife. Austen masterfully establishes a destructive cycle which demonstrates the difficulty of enacting any change as Charles' lack of attention merely leads Mary to greater displays of temper.

The strongest defining characteristic of the Musgroves' marriage is their propensity for public disagreements, an occurrence considered uncouth in this society. This trait becomes an even greater sin in the eyes of this society because Mary instigates all of these conflicts (as discussed in the introduction, a wife was to act as a mirror of her husband and always agree with him). As Marvin Mudrick points out, however, Austen intends for us to blame Charles as well as Mary: "Neither ever convinces the other, and neither ever feels the need to

convince: Mary has her ailments to turn to; Charles is too contemptuous of his wife's logic, and too shallow and easy" (233). When Charles attempts to induce his wife to walk a little further to visit his aunt, Mary declared, "Oh! no, indeed!--walking up that hill again would do her more harm than any sitting down would do her good" (P 10.73). In retaliation for this, "Charles . . . was out of temper with his wife. Mary had shewn herself disobliging to him, and was now to reap the consequences, which consequence was his dropping her arm almost every moment" (P 10.76-7). To which behavior Mary demonstrates her characteristic peevishness: "Mary began to complain of it, and lament her being ill-used" (P 10.77). Charles and Mary even disagree over the suitability of Charles Hayter's suit to Henrietta. Mary views him as "a most improper match for Miss Musgrove of Uppercross" (P 9.65). Charles disagrees, so Mary waits until he leaves the room to confide to her sister: "Charles may say what he pleases, . . . but it would be shocking to have Henrietta marry Charles Hayter; a very bad thing for her, and still worse for me" (P 9.65). Thus Mary's petty disagreement springs from the fact that she does not believe a clergyman to be an acceptable relation. An even more embarrassing disagreement arises over whether Charles will attend an evening party with the Elliots or go to the theatre:

Charles and Mary still talked on in the same style; he, half serious and half jesting, maintaining the scheme for the play; and she, invariably serious, most warmly opposing it, and not omitting to make it known, that however determined to go to Camden-place herself, she should not think herself very well used, if they went to the play without her (P 22.194).

Mary compounds her unladylike disagreement with her husband by not only holding it in public but by also being very childish in determining that to go to the play without her would be equally bad. Mary defies the tenets of the ideal woman which call for all of the wife's thoughts and purposes to be those of her husband. Of course, Charles does not help matters by deliberately teasing her and joining in the arguments. Again, Charles merely perpetuates the cycle by teasing his wife; he seems to be a younger, less charismatic Mr. Bennet (whom I discuss in an upcoming chapter).

Mary's relationship with her in-laws is scarcely less ladylike as defined by her culture. Mary also believes herself to be very ill-treated by her in-laws. She complains of not having a carriage of her own and being forced to ride with the elder Musgroves because "They are both so very large, and take up so much room!" (P 5.32). The irony of this statement rests in the fact that Mary is complaining that they take up too much room both literally and metaphorically. Mary believes that she has done them all the honor in marrying Charles and providing a connection with such an old family as the Elliots. Besides the stereotypical mother-in-law versus daughter-in-law sparring on matters of homemaking and child-rearing, "it was Mary's complaint, that Mrs. Musgrove was very apt not to give her the precedence that was her due, when they dined at the Great House" (P 6.38). Besides tension with her mother-in-law, Mary's relationship with her two younger sisters-in-law is equally fractious. The Miss Musgroves take offense at Mary's superiority and insistence on her "place": "Nobody doubts her right to have precedence of mamma, but it would be more becoming in her not to be always insisting on it" (P 6.38). Mary's preoccupation with her station

is all-encompassing, and her jealousy of Mrs. Musgrove is unquenchable. Mary at first dislikes a Mrs. Harville because she "had always given Mrs. Musgrove precedence" (P 14.109). Mary's estimation of Mrs. Harville takes a distinct upward swing when "she had received so very handsome an apology from her on finding out whose daughter she was" (P 14.109).

Thus Mary's only pre-requisite is in how she is treated; she does not care what people honestly think about her. She never delves below the surface, caring only for appearances. This type of judgement is evident in her opinion of the Crofts. When they fail to inform her that they are going to Bath and do not offer to carry anything to her family there, Mary says "I do not think they improve at all as neighbors" (P 18.140). Yet only a few lines later, Mary receives "a note from Mrs. Croft . . . offering to convey any thing to [Anne]; a very kind, friendly note indeed, addressed to [her], just as it ought" (P 18.141). After this Mary's attitude undergoes a complete shift: "I shall be truly glad to have them back again. Our neighborhood cannot spare such a pleasant family" (P 18.141). Mary's self-negation lacks the intricate social pressures of a Charlotte Palmer (as discussed in the previous chapter, Charlotte's self-negation acts as a defense mechanism) and rises only from a very egocentric estimation of other people.

Besides being a egocentric wife and relation who totally defies the role required of her by society, Mary also does not fit the mold of caring mother. Mary's own description of her sons states that they are "unmanageable" and that "little Charles does not mind a word [she] say[s], and Walter is growing quite as bad" (P 5.31). The children's unruliness can be blamed on their mother's lack of discipline, both of

them and of herself. Even Anne notes that her nephews "loved her nearly as well, and respected her a great deal more than their mother" (P 6.35). Again, Mary's inability to fulfill her prescribed role appears at a moment of crisis, an accident, this one involving her elder son Charles. Her first reaction is an understandable and predictable near bout with hysterics. And this same reaction is evident in both father and mother later that evening when it is suggested that they leave their child for a dinner party: "both father and mother were in much too strong and recent alarm to bear the thought" (P 7.46). Admittedly, the first desertion does come from Charles on the next day, since "this was quite a female case, and it would be highly absurd in him, who could be of no use at home to shut himself up" (P 7.46). Mary's complaint on this matter is long and invariably selfish:

So! You and I are to be left to shift by ourselves, with this poor sick child--and not a creature coming near us all the evening! . . . This is always my luck! . . . I must say it is very unfeeling of him, to be running away from his poor little boy . . . and because I am the poor mother, I am not to be allowed to stir;--and yet, I am sure, I am more unfit than any body else to be about the child. My being the mother is the very reason why my feelings should not be tried. . . . I hope I am as fond of my child as any mother--but I do not know that I am of any more use in the sick-room than Charles (P 7.47).

Thus with little more than using Anne as a mirror to reflect her justifications and rationalizations, Mary decides to leave her child in the care of others and go to the Musgroves' dinner party. Mary not only lacks the sincere love of a mother, but she also demonstrates no added

regard that this child is her husband's heir, the means to carry on the family. Mary demonstrates a complete inability to fulfill the maternal role which requires her to be teacher and model.

Our view of Mary is tempered, however, by Austen's description of Mary's own parental role model, the "self-mesmerised" Sir Walter (Tanner 209). Lady Elliot, whom Anne takes after, died when Mary was only ten and her rearing and finishing were left to her father to assume the maternal role. Sir Walter's description begins the novel for us, so he is meant to leave an impression. We find out immediately that the only book he reads is the Baronetage and then only his family's entry (P 1.1). Thus the root of Mary's preoccupation with her "place" is easily established. Marvin Mudrick unsympathetically states that "Mary has little energy to spare from her hypochondria, but what she has she devotes to upholding her notions of consequence, small scattered echoes of Sir Walter's grandiose self-congratulation" (232). The description of Sir Walter also explains Mary's reliance upon appearances; they are all her father considers. For example, his opinion of Bath centers upon its "number of plain women" (P 15.120). He considers the men little better and arrogantly states "It was evident how little the women were used to the sight of any thing tolerable, by the effect which a man of decent appearance produced" (P 15.120). Of course, he has witnessed this response first hand. Overall, Mary's parentage was a poor one in everything but birth: "Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation" (P 1.2). His character is firmly defined when Admiral Croft complains of having to remove several large mirrors from Sir Walter's former room, evidence of the root of Mary's self-centered concerns (P 13.108). And moreover,

he was a "conceited, silly father" (P 1.2). With such a role model, Mary's domestic and maternal faults are understandable if not excusable. With the transmittal of Sir Walter's faults to his daughter (with the lack of a maternal role model), Austen reiterates the fact that Mary's sons will fare little better, but merely be caught in the cycle.

The greatest fault in Mary, however, lies in the fact that she approves of the social system which has trapped her into this marriage and way of life: "I do not think any young woman has a right to make a choice that may be disagreeable and inconvenient to the principal part of her family, and be giving bad connexions to those who have not been used to them" (P 9.64). Austen's criticism here is directed at the women who accept and perpetuate the system. Mary is the least sympathetically treated of all my types, but she fits the definition very tightly.

Chapter 3--The Allens

Northanger Abbey is usually categorized with Austen's Juvenalia, the reason for this being that in this text: "Austen has yet neither the mature skill to direct wholly within the action of her novel, nor the social qualms to replace by bourgeois morality, her characteristic response of irony to all the phenomena she is willing to recognize" (Mudrick 52). This novel satirizes the romantic Gothic novel which was so popular at the time. The Gothic, as defined by Kate Ferguson Ellis, dealt with the "failed home" by "focusing on crumbling castles as sites of terror, and on homeless protagonists who wander the face of the earth" (Intro. ix). That Austen should deal with such a genre is explainable in Ellis' contention that this style embodied the "two epi-phenomena of middle-class culture: the idealization of the home and the popularity of the Gothic" (Intro. x). The novel continually referred to in the text is Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho. With such an obvious target, one would expect all the levels of satire to be as blatant. Yet even while poking fun at her day's most popular genre, Austen still continues to include a more subtle commentary on her society's expectations of women. I agree with Ellis' statement that "it is this enforced stupidity on which Austen has been ironically commenting that is the real object of her mockery" (7). Thus, I feel justified in analyzing Mrs. Allen in the same manner as Charlotte Palmer and Mary Musgrove without belaboring the satire of the Gothic novel. Austen's criticism of this genre deals directly with the fact that it was another instance of the prohibition on education of the female (witness Henry Tilney's and John Thorpe's disdain for the Gothic as a literary form). Austen's condemnation of her society is in line with

the Lockian argument that "neither principles nor ideas are innate" but learned (Book I, Essay Concerning Human Understanding). Austen is pointing out that if the only learning afforded to women is Gothic romances then they cannot be judged by the standards of learning and logic set for men.

In this text, we find a couple who exhibit several of the same tendencies found in the Palmers. The Allens are a childless couple who have been married a great many more years than the Palmers. Thus each observation must be examined in the light of whether or not the narrator is being satirical of Mrs. Allen's inability to function within such a novel or within this novel. The novel is working on two separate planes of satire: satire of the genre and of the society. Thus the description of the Allens is at times rather heavy-handed and at others more sly: "Austen's sentence thus prohibits us from reading naively, . . . , for her style continually makes itself subject to doubt" (Johnson 30). At first glance, Mr. Allen seems to be the complete antithesis of Mr. Palmer; yet each ignores his wife to a degree. Mrs. Allen's speech patterns bear a striking resemblance to those of Charlotte Palmer. She demonstrates the same type of dysfunctional conversation as Charlotte. Also in her movement into the realm of domesticity, Mrs. Allen has carried to the extreme certain traits which her society uses to define the ideal housewife. These traits can be viewed through her relationships with other characters such as James Morland, Mrs. Thorpe, Henry Tilney, her husband Mr. Allen, and Catherine Morland. We see Mrs. Allen both through her interactions with these characters and their views of her. Also demonstrating the further evidence for the early quality of this work is the direct characterizations of Mrs. Allen made by the narrator.

Our first introduction to Mrs. Allen is an example of Austen's more blatant commentary:

Mrs. Allen was one of that numerous class of females, whose society can raise no other emotion than surprise at there being any men in the world who could like them well enough to marry them. She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner (NA 2.7).

The narrator is no more kind than any other of Mrs. Allen's acquaintances. Mrs. Allen's one obsession is her clothing, the price, quality, wearability, cut, and style: "Dress was her passion" (NA 2.7). This theme is recurrent in all of her speeches. The word passion is a key to the flaw in Mrs. Allen's character. The display of passion of any kind was antithetical to the character of the ideal woman. Also, passion is the direct opposite of the masculine virtue of reason. In her attempt to facilitate conversation, Mrs. Allen uses discussion of clothes in much the same manner that others talk of the weather. Tanner explains the importance of dress in feminine conversation by saying that "the female trapped on immobility and triviality by a predominantly insensitive--and boring--male world" turns "through deflection and displacement by way of compensation we find a notable obsession with dress" (60). Almost all of Mrs. Allen's time and consideration is directed toward the consideration of her attire. One of Austen's first views of Mrs. Allen is to relate that upon the journey to Bath conducted by the Allens and Catherine the worst calamity was Mrs. Allen's fear that she had left her clogs at a hotel. The narrator then goes on to assure us that this fear was groundless (NA 2.6). The only other direct comment on Mrs. Allen by the narrator is equally negative:

Mrs. Allen, whose vacancy of mind and incapacity for thinking were

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such, that as she never talked a great deal, so she could never be entirely silent; and therefore, while she sat at her work, if she lost her needle or broke her thread, if she heard a carriage in the street, or saw a speck upon her gown, she must observe it (NA 9.43).

Since the remark that Mrs. Allen does not speak much seems ironic, then one may also assume that the one stating her lack of intelligence may be equally so. Instead of demonstrating a lack of thought capacities, Mrs. Allen's commenting on incidental matters merely serves as conversation motivators: a technique to make her guests feel at their ease and included in her thoughts.

Even in such a minor relationship as that with Catherine's brother James, Mrs. Allen's two characteristic speech patterns emerge. Upon his arrival at the Allens' lodgings in Bath, Mr. Allen invites James to dinner and is asked by Mrs. Allen to "guess the price and weigh the merits of a new muff and tippet" (NA 7.35). Mrs. Allen falls back on a discussion of her clothes when she is in doubt of what is appropriate for conversation. This topic is her attempt at meeting the social requirements of avoiding any speech which would be unpleasant or upsetting to her guest. The other characteristic displayed by Mrs. Allen in her dealings with James is her inability to recognize the proper importance of a subject. When told of James' engagement to Isabella Thorpe, Mrs. Allen instead of being surprised or demonstrating any strong emotion merely wished them luck. Her strong feelings are reserved for her dismay at finding that James has returned home to his parents and she was unaware and thus unable to send her regards to them (NA 15.102). Again the apparent silliness of such a reaction is

deceptive. In a society where conversation and visiting constituted the majority of one's life, failure to send one's regards to others would seem a breach in the social order. Upon hearing of James' engagement, Mrs. Allen makes the proper noise of congratulations. Her emotions, however, become involved only when she believes that she has not executed the proper and expected behavior.

All of Mrs. Allen's conversational tendencies can also be viewed in her dealings with her recently-reunited Mrs. Thorpe. Mrs. Thorpe is a former schoolfellow of Mrs. Allen's whom she has not seen for many years yet their joy at finding one another is immense for it gives each an "acquaintance" in Bath: "Their joy on this meeting was very great, as well it might, since they had been contented to know nothing of each other for the last fifteen years" (4.16). Again Mrs. Allen's behavior seems false and suspect. Yet she is very glad to see Mrs. Thorpe again because the alternative is not knowing any one in Bath. (Later in the discussion of Mrs. Allen's relationship with Catherine, I will describe the embarrassment they faced at their first ball in Bath because of this lack.) Mrs. Thorpe expounds upon the glories of her children, an area in which Mrs. Allen cannot compete with her. Therefore as in all situations wherein Mrs. Allen is not sure of her response, she takes comfort "with the discovery, which her keen eye soon made, that the lace on Mrs. Thorpe's pelisse was not half so handsome as that on her own" (4.17). Again this reaction seems quite petty on the surface, yet the alternative is that Mrs. Allen could feel herself a failure for not having achieved the status of motherhood. This relationship can be summed up as

Mrs. Allen was now quite happy--quite satisfied with Bath. She had found some acquaintance, had been so lucky too as to find in

them the family of a most worthy ^{old} friend; and, as the completion of good fortune, had found these friends by no means so expensively dressed as herself. . . . [she was] never satisfied with the day unless she spent the chief of it by the side of Mrs. Thorpe, in what they called conversation, but in which there was scarcely any exchange of opinion, and not often any resemblance of subject, for Mrs. Thorpe talked chiefly of her children, and Mrs. Allen of her gowns (NA 3.21).

The commentary here is directed at the fact that society approves any conversation which keeps all participants happy and avoids any distressing subjects, regardless of the actual worth of the speech. Even Mrs. Allen's "vacancy of mind" cannot totally account for this speech; it goes far deeper to the roots of women's understanding of what is required of them in the conversational arena. Mrs. Allen cannot be judged totally negatively because Mrs. Thorpe achieves her desires as well. Mrs. Allen is performing her prescribed social role in allowing Mrs. Thorpe a perfect arena in which to air her very subject, her children. Mrs. Allen is even understanding when Mrs. Thorpe mistakenly claims Mrs. Allen's compliment to Mr. Tilney for her son John in a mix-up of words: "This inapplicable answer might have been too much for the comprehension of many; but it did not puzzle Mrs. Allen, for after only a moment's consideration, she said, in a whisper to Catherine, 'I dare say she thought I was speaking of her son.'" (NA 8.41-2). Here Mrs. Allen is intelligent enough to understand how and why the mistake was made and courteous enough not to remove the accolades which so delighted Mrs. Thorpe.

The hero of the work, Mr. Henry Tilney who acts as the measuring

rod of reality in the work, is Mrs. Allen's greatest critic. He describes her as "a picture of intellectual poverty" (NA 10.60). His statement is a cruel assessment, in that, he has only met Mrs. Allen three times and those only briefly. Also, he is measuring her against his own male-measuring rod of intelligence and truth. Thus even though we may sympathize with Henry's assessment, we recognize the unfairness of it. This society expected married women to be charming and lead a smooth conversation. It desired neither wit nor brilliance in them because those characteristics did not fit into their domestic roles.

Henry's negative view of Mrs. Allen probably arose from their initial encounter, in which, again, Henry takes unfair advantage of Mrs. Allen. He uses his natural "male" wit to amuse himself at her expense. Mrs. Allen engages or is engaged by Mr. Tilney in a discussion of the merits of muslin (NA 3.13). Mr. Tilney teasingly/braggingly boasts that he buys his own cravats and has been allowed by his sister to select gowns for her; all of which gains him Mrs. Allen's admiration: "Mrs. Allen was quite struck by his genius. 'Men commonly take so little notice of those things,' said she. 'I can never get Mr. Allen to know one of my gowns from another. You must be a great comfort to your sister, sir.' " (NA 3.14). Mrs. Allen then goes on to invite him to judge the worth of Catherine's gown, which he does. Of course, Mr. Tilney's behavior is rather ungentlemanly in encouraging Mrs. Allen on her favorite subject only for his own amusement. The second glaring fact here is the reference to Mr. Allen's lack of interest in the matter. I cannot find it hard to believe that after fifteen plus years of marriage, Mr. Allen cares not for Mrs. Allen's gowns. More likely, the topic never concerned him overly much. The final and most important

point raised by this exchange is that Mrs. Allen should not have made any disparaging comments, no matter how innocent, against Catherine. In first calling direct attention to Catherine's attire, Mrs. Allen is violating the code of decorum which requires no attention to be drawn to itself. Secondly, by questioning Catherine's practicality in buying such a garment, Mrs. Allen is putting into issue whether or not Catherine will make a good housewife who can handle her money. All of this is done before a man who appears to be a very possible suitor. Of course, Mrs. Allen does none of this intentionally; she is merely carrying out her role of conversationalist on her topic of choice. Having no daughters of her own whom she has groomed for marriage, Mrs. Allen can perhaps not see her own misconduct. Her society, however, would have.

In several ways, poor Mrs. Allen fairs little better in her relationship with her husband. From the text, we know that Mr. Allen is very rich, has no heirs, and is a temperate drinker (NA 9.46). We also find that Mr. Allen is very conscientious in his role as guardian for Catherine while in Bath. When he sees Catherine keeping company with Mr. Tilney at the ball, he made sure that he "was not an objectionable as a common acquaintance for his young charge" (NA 3.15). As a matter of fact, Mr. Allen had "taken pains to know who her [Catherine's] partner was, and had been assured of Mr. Tilney's being a clergyman, and of a very respectable family in Gloucestershire" (NA 3.15). Also Mr. Allen is the one who remarks upon Catherine's return from an unsuccessful outing to Bristol that "I am glad you are come back. It was a strange, wild scheme" (NA 11.70). The best way to introduce the topic of Mr. Allen's relationship with his wife is the fact that she was

the one who allowed Catherine to start out on the aforementioned "strange, wild scheme." The narrator conjectures that "The air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind, were all that could account for her [Mrs. Allen] being the choice of a sensible, intelligent man, like Mr. Allen" (NA 2.7). The difference between Mr. and Mrs. Allen is explicated in yet another scene. When Catherine applies to Mr. Allen to state his opinion upon the weather for the day, he "not having his own skies and barometer about him, declined giving any absolute promise of sunshine" (NA 11.63). Thus, Mrs. Allen gives a very pragmatic response designed to prevent the false raising of Catherine's hopes. Mrs. Allen, on the other hand, gives a much more positive opinion: "'She had no doubt in the world of its being a very fine day, if the clouds would only go off, and the sun keep out'" (NA 11.63). Her forecast is soon proven doubly wrong.

Thus we have a picture of a gentleman who at first glance appears to be the complete antithesis of Mr. Palmer: he is courteous, good-natured, and attentive. Closer examination does, however, provide a significant similarity to Mr. Palmer. Mr. Allen's attentiveness extends to everyone except his wife; in this instance, Mr. Allen and Mr. Palmer are alike. Their inattentiveness is a defense mechanism against the incessant prattle of their wives; Mr. Allen, however, is less obvious about it. Mr. Allen has decided that the best way to promote domestic tranquility is to spend little time in his wife's company. The trend begins on their first night in Bath, when upon reaching the ball "Mr. Allen . . . repaired directly to the card-room, and left them [Mrs. Allen and Catherine] to enjoy a mob by themselves" (NA 2.7). Moreover, upon visiting the Pump-room, Mr. Allen "after drinking his glass of

water, joined some gentlemen to talk over the politics of the day" leaving the ladies to walk "about together" (NA 10.53). And Mr. Allen is not deterred in the slightest when his wife finds the clime "too dirty . . . to accompany her husband to the Pump-room" as "he accordingly set off by himself" (NA 11.64).

Even when Mrs. Allen speaks directly to Mr. Allen, he endeavors not to speak directly to her. Upon discussing the social disaster that the first night in Bath turned out to be, Mr. Allen's remark seems to pass by Mrs. Allen and direct itself to Catherine instead: "We shall do better another evening" (NA 2.10). The only time that Mr. Allen directly addresses his wife is in a matter concerning the propriety of Catherine's behavior:

Young men and women driving about the country in open carriages! Now and then is very well; but going to inns and public places together! It's not right; and I wonder Mrs. Thorpe should allow it. I am glad you do not think of going; I am sure Mrs. Morland would not be pleased. Mrs. Allen, are you not of my way of thinking?

Do not you think these kind of projects objectionable? (NA 13.83). To which entreaty, Mrs. Allen replies in the correct manner of a proper wife: "Yes, very much indeed" to which she adds her own characteristic evaluation:

Open carriages are nasty things. A clean gown is not five minutes wear in them. You are splashed getting in and getting out; and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction. I hate an open carriage (NA 13.83).

To which she later adds that she "cannot bear to see it" (NA 13.83). The irony here is the fact that before this time, Mrs. Allen has never

warned Catherine that her behavior in riding with Mr. Thorpe was in any way improper. Only at the tutoring of her husband does Mrs. Allen come to this conclusion. Moreover, Mrs. Allen still does not see the moral wrong but merely the inconvenience to one's attire. The irony in her speech lies in the phrase "a clean gown is not five minutes wear in them." From Mr. Allen's moral perspective, a clean reputation fares little better. This failure by Mrs. Allen almost caused damaged to Catherine; it also presents a moral failure in Mrs. Allen for she still does not understand the significance of her own discrepancy. Mrs. Allen almost becomes an authentic Gothic chaperon in spite of herself with this near blot on Catherine's reputation. This argument fits with Ellis' statement that "Northanger Abbey is a Gothic novel as well as a parody of the genre" (4).

Mrs. Allen's response is again determined by Mr. Allen upon their learning of General Tilney's reprehensible treatment of Catherine:

Mr. Allen expressed himself on the occasion with the reasonable resentment of a sensible friend; and Mrs. Allen thought his expressions quite good enough to be immediately made use of again by herself. His wonder, his conjectures, and his explanations, became in succession her's, with the addition of this single remark--'I have not patience with the General'--to fill up every accidental pause. And, 'I really have not patience with the General,' was uttered twice after Mr. Allen left the room, without any relaxation of anger, or any material digression of thought (NA 29.198).

Here, Mrs. Allen has carried to the ridiculous the tenet of the ideal woman which calls for her to support her husband in every viewpoint and

have no thought but his. This view, of course, is Austen's intent. Austen's intent and Mrs. Allen's character converge so that when Mrs. Allen is bereft of the input of her husband, she must revert to her normal, narrow speech patterns:

A more considerable degree of wandering attended the third repetition; and, after completing the fourth, she immediately added, 'Only think, my dear, of having got that frightful great rent in my best Mechlin so charmingly mended before I left Bath, that one can hardly see where it was. I must shew it your some day or other' (NA 29.198).

When applied to further, Mrs. Allen hopscotches in her speech from the wearability of her silk gloves to her disgust with the General to the reletting of his rooms (NA 29.198-9). In between, she remembers the first night Catherine danced with Mr. Tilney only because she had on her favorite gown (NA 29.199). Her clothing becomes not only her refuge but also her frame of reference. Therefore, the reason for Mr. Allen's constant removal from his wife's presence becomes apparent. Unlike the newly-wedded, grumpy Mr. Palmer, Mr. Allen with fifteen-plus years experience has learned to gracefully ignore his wife. He applies to her only when absolutely necessary and with no malice, knowing she will follow wherever he chooses to lead.

With Mrs. Allen's less than exemplary success on the domestic front, we are not amazed to find her maternal role to be less than perfect. Since Mrs. Allen has no children of her own (which is definitely a blessing since the poor bairns would be in a constant state of paranoia over the state of their clothing), Catherine fulfills the role of offspring in this text. Mrs. Allen never actively harms

Catherine's cause, yet she does not promote it and protect her in the expected manner. Mrs. Allen is completely well-intentioned with regards to Catherine, and "in one respect she was admirably fitted to introduce a young lady into public, being as fond of going every where and seeing every thing herself as any young lady could be" (NA 2.7). The reference to Mrs. Allen as a "young lady" suggests a stunted development, further proof that Mrs. Allen's shift from the feminine to the domestic has been less than successful. And Mrs. Allen is very sympathetic and simultaneously wholly ineffectual their first night in Bath as she continually wishes for some acquaintances and that Catherine could have a partner to dance with (NA 2.8,9,10). This statement also proves that Mrs. Allen lacks the objectivity provided by age and maturity to judge Catherine's situation.

Yet Mrs. Allen's attention to her appearance causes Catherine some embarrassment this first night. Mrs. Allen refuses to leave a table full of strangers onto which she and Catherine have intruded in the crush for fear: "one gets so tumbled in such a crowd" (NA 2.9). Mrs. Allen further harms Catherine's cause and gives her undue embarrassment in the episode with Mr. Tilney which has already been discussed. She also harms Catherine's case with Mr. Tilney for when Catherine applies to her for substantiation that she would rather have spent the day with Mr. and Miss Tilney, Mrs. Allen's only reply is "My dear, you tumble my gown" (NA 12.73). Mrs. Allen's attention to clothing is not always harmful, however. When Catherine decides to call upon Miss Tilney, Mrs. Allen advises, "Go by all means, my dear; only put on a white gown; Miss Tilney always wears white" (NA 12.71). Mrs. Allen has the best of intentions but also the worst of results.

Mrs. Allen also demonstrates a total ignorance of what is the correct behavior for a young lady when it comes to gentlemen. As has already been mentioned, Mrs. Allen saw no objection to Catherine buggy-riding with Mr. Thorpe until Mr. Allen demonstrated his disapproval. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Allen had encouraged Catherine's behavior. When Mr. Thorpe applies to Catherine to go with him for a ride, Catherine desires to stay behind to wait on Miss Tilney, but "Catherine's silent appeal to her friend [Mrs. Allen], meanwhile, was entirely thrown away, for Mrs. Allen, not being at all in the habit of conveying any expression herself by a look, was not aware of its being ever intended by any body else" (NA 9.44). And even more painfully, when Catherine directly applies to Mrs. Allen for advice her response is one of "placid indifference": "Do just as you please, my dear" (NA 9.44).

Even when Catherine directly seeks knowledge from Mrs. Allen concerning Mr. Tilney, Mrs. Allen is little help. She can tell Catherine all about Mr. Tilney's mother's trousseau and jewelery, but when applied to concerning whether or not he is the only son, Mrs. Allen replies, "I cannot be quite positive about that, my dear" (NA 9.51). Information which a mother would deem vital for the interests of her daughter, Mrs. Allen finds of no consequence. In this respect, she falls below the mark of Mrs. Jennings, who was concerned even with procuring husbands for Elinor and Marianne.

Another characteristic Mrs. Allen holds in common with Charlotte Palmer is negating her speech. This characteristic is displayed often in her relationship with Catherine. No doubt, it also appears in her relationship with Mr. Allen but he has become accustomed to it whereas

Catherine has not. In the discussion concerning the state of the weather with Mr. Allen and Catherine, Mrs. Allen attempts to be positive and merely negates her own conclusions. She also falsely raises Catherine's hopes and causes her unnecessary pain. When the rain begins, Mrs. Allen blandly states, "I thought it would," when only a few lines prior she has stated the clearness of the day (NA 11.63). But half a page later, she consoles Catherine's thought that it would be a dry day with "Any body would have thought so" (NA 11.64). After John Thorpe enters to try and entice Catherine on a trip to Bristol (the same trip which Mr. Allen later condemned), Catherine calls on her to say that she is expecting Miss Tilney who still may call: "Mrs. Allen agreed to it" (NA 11.65). Yet a few lines later, "Mrs. Allen was called on to second" Mr. Thorpe in persuading Catherine. To which entreaty, Mrs. Allen responds, "Well, my dear, . . . suppose you go" (NA 11.67). Then later, when Mr. Allen raises his objections to the carriage rides and Catherine appeals to Mrs. Allen on why ~~she~~ never warned her before, Mrs. Allen replies, "And so I should, my dear, you may depend on it; But one must not be over particular" (NA 13.83). Then as if realizing that she has been treading closely to philosophic ground, Mrs. Allen hastily retreats to a subject she knows: "You know I wanted you, when we first came, not to buy that priggish muslin, but you would. Young people do not like to be always thwarted" (NA 13.83). Clearly, Mrs. Allen's loyalties are not properly arranged. Mrs. Allen does not purposely mislead Catherine; she merely wishes to be agreeable to everyone. Again like Charlotte Palmer, she has carried the role of social harmonizer to the absurd. She attempts to do the impossible by fulfilling everyone's wants.

Thus, Mrs. Allen's faults fulfill those of my type. Her wrong-doings are not intentional but merely her attempt to act out the role of ideal woman demanded by her society. She tries to facilitate conversation by keeping a running commentary herself to prevent silences. She negates her own speech before others and circumstances can, not because she is a liar but because her frame of reference is different from those of men. And whenever, she feels that conversation is moving beyond the topics deemed "safe" and appropriate by her society, she falls back upon the ladies' choice, dress. Her concern with material and its quality also appears as a parody of the pragmatism and thrift expected of an upper middle class housewife. The problem lies in the fact that she carries all of these good causes to the extreme and ends with the absurd and the ridiculous.

Chapter 4--The Bennets

Pride and Prejudice is by far Jane Austen's best known and most popular work. Besides having a vivacious heroine and a dark, dashing hero, this text also provides me with one of Austen's most amusing couples. Elizabeth's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, are simultaneously hilarious and pitiful as they achieve their status as one of my "types." Mr. Bennet is the portrait of an intelligent, witty gentleman who married beauty and found a flake. Mrs. Bennet is the quintessential scheming mother trying to marry off five daughters. Claudia Johnson states that of all Austen's novels, this one is especially concerned with "pursuing happiness" as "the business of life" (80). With the character of Mrs. Bennet, the business of life is more appropriately the pursuit of husbands; they equal happiness for Mrs. Bennet. Austen's critique of her society's developing ideal woman appears as we view her jibe-ridden marital relationship. Moreover, Mrs. Bennet's maternal ineptness emerges in her interactions with her daughters Lydia and Elizabeth. The difference between her relationship with her two daughters is that Lydia is Mrs. Bennet at that age, flighty and headstrong, while Elizabeth is influenced by her father, witty and intelligent. Mrs. Bennet is the product of her society, a woman of little intelligence and a society which has merely highlighted her deficiencies.

The narrator introduces Mrs. Bennet in the following way:

She was a woman of mean understanding, little information and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news (PP 1.1.3).

The mean here refers to substandard or common. Tony Tanner defines Mrs. Bennet as being

incapable of reflection, loses herself in her performance.

Unfortunately she has a very limited view of the requirements of that performance; lacking any introspective tendencies she is incapable of appreciating the feelings of others and is only aware of material objects . . . and marriage, not as a meeting of true minds but as a disposing of redundant daughters. (124)

As stated, Mrs. Bennet is not difficult to comprehend; the society which augmented such natural deficiencies, however, is a bit more complicated to grasp. This description establishes and ranks the two concerns of Mrs. Bennet's life: marrying her daughters and gossiping with people. This quote also delineates Mrs. Bennet's coping device, her nerves. Mrs. Bennet fancies herself nervous in much the same manner that Mary Musgrove believes herself ill. Whereas, Mary wishes to draw attention to herself, Mrs. Bennet wishes to play the martyr. Since Mrs. Bennet lacks the capacity to appreciate the potential role of martyr in the social-dictated function of the self-sacrificing wife and mother, she chooses the more apparent role of nervous sufferer. And the one person who has the contact and authority necessary to help correct Mrs. Bennet's deficiencies, namely her husband, is her greatest detractor.

Charlotte Lucas Collins' statement that "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance" is very appropriate for the Bennets (PP 1.6.19). Mr. Bennet rolled his dice and got snake eyes:

[Mr. Bennet] captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour, which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for

her. Respect, esteem, and confidence, had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown. But Mr. Bennet was not of a disposition to seek comfort for the disappointment which his own imprudence had brought on, in any of those pleasures which too often console the unfortunate for their folly or their vice. He was fond of the country and of books; and from these tastes had arisen his principal enjoyments. To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement. This is not the sort of happiness which a man would in general wish to owe to his wife; but where other powers of entertainment are wanting, the true philosopher will derive benefit from such as are given (PP 2.18.209).

The very fact that she "captivated" him suggests that the marriage was caused by Mr. Bennet's own "imprudence" in being led by passion instead of reason. Mr. Bennet also appreciates the fact that his folly in passion led him to his present predicament. For this reason, Mr. Bennet sees some of his own foolishness in the behavior of Wickham and remarks to Elizabeth: "I admire all my three sons-in-law highly, . . . Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite" (PP 3.17.337). Austen condemns her society not only for conditioning Mr. Bennet to judge his future mate by "youth and beauty" and for failing to improve the condition of Mrs. Bennet, but she also berates Mr. Bennet for not having considered better. Austen further intimates that Mr. Bennet also contains a measure of "ignorance and folly" (much in the same vein that the Musgroves though seemingly ill-matched have enough common points to deserve one another) in being led by superficial attractions, or "appearance". Austen's irony here is

directed squarely towards Mr. Bennet, at the man who was fond of books and yet ignorant of people. Austen's description of Mr. Bennet as a "true philosopher" is laden with irony on two obvious levels. First, a true philosopher would have had the wisdom not to be led astray by appearances and would have evaluated another person by her mental capabilities, or reason. Secondly, a true philosopher would accept a given situation and do all in his power to improve it, rather than aggravate the circumstances by making others his fools.

Mr. Bennet, however, is anything but a true philosopher. Instead, his only contact with his wife is to tease her and amuse himself at her expense. And unfortunately, Mrs. Bennet does not understand either her husband or his needs:

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop (PP 1.1.3). Consequently, he hides in his library and has dealings only with his daughter Elizabeth. His only amusement is in baiting his wife and producing comments whose sarcasm transcends her comprehension. He recognizes her faults but does little to aid in their repair: "I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least" (PP 1.1.3).

Mrs. Bennet's situation is likewise unenviable. She does not fully recognize her husband's caustic behavior (much like Charlotte Palmer, any response is constricted equally by social custom and expectation), yet she must go through him for almost all major

decisions. When she hears of the arrival of a new, highly eligible young bachelor in the community, Mrs. Bennet attempts to persuade her husband to call on Mr. Bingley and gain his acquaintanceship:

Mr. Bennet was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bingley. He had always intended to visit him, though to the last always assuring his wife that he should not go; and till the evening after the visit was paid, she had no knowledge of it (PP 1.2.4).

And even when Mr. Bennet does inform his wife of his visit, the means is a roundabout address to his daughters and wife. Isobel Armstrong describes Mr. Bennet's disclosure of this matter as "exemplif[ying] the despotism exercised over information" (Introduction xxvi). Again, Mr. Bennet is in complete control and his family are bonded actors for his amusements. His behavior is motivated by his own need to avoid boredom, even at his wife's expense. Mr. Bennet serves the function of filtering information that his society does for all women. Mrs. Bennet, however, takes the news gladly and immediately jumps to the conclusion that "I knew I should persuade you at last" (PP 1.2.5). Mrs. Bennet even persuades the family's removal to Bath (a primary hunting ground for acceptable husband material). In typical Mr. Bennet fashion, he does not intend to go but teases his wife along: "Elizabeth saw directly that her father had not the smallest intention of yielding; but his answers were at the same time so vague and equivocal, that her mother, though often disheartened, had never yet despaired of succeeding at last" (PP 2.16.197). Mrs. Bennet has only one weapon allotted her by her society, her voice and ability to cajole, both of which she uses extensively. Mrs. Bennet's obsession is to get all of her daughters

married and settled close by her. This obsession, however, does not at all interest Mr. Bennet.

Mr. Bennet is equally unconcerned when his wife and daughters return from the Lucases' ball and their first interaction with Bingley and his party. His only interest is in seeing the fantastic hopes of his wife dashed:

They found Mr. Bennet still up. With a book he was regardless of time; and on the present occasion he had a good deal of curiosity as to the event of an evening which had raised such splendid expectations. He had rather hoped that all his wife's views on the stranger would be disappointed (PP 1.3.10).

His disappointment is complete when his wife goes on to describe her extreme happiness and Mr. Bingley's great desirability and his attention to their eldest daughter Jane. Armstrong describes Mr. Bennet as "assuming a stance of objectivity which actually allows him to express contempt for his wife and daughters, [and] has the characteristics of scepticism" (Introduction xvii). Mr. Bennet's petty desire to see his wife's hope smashed arises from the fact that his own hopes were destroyed. Instead of gaining a partner with whom to grow old, he acquired a rambling, witless creature from which his society allows no acceptable escape except death.

In Mr. Bennet's case, I may safely argue that he forcefully took many of his pleasures at his wife's expense. Sulloway's contention is that this situation is entirely Mr. Bennet's fault: "[He] had married a stupid woman because he thought too little of women to hope that he might find an intelligent one" (129). I think Sulloway carries her point too far; Mr. Bennet's society had never taught him to evaluate the

mind of his prospective mate. Yes, he suffered from having chosen incorrectly based on the evidence of his wife's character allowed him before marriage. Yet she too has suffered at the hands of that same society and continues to suffer, for her daughters will receive small portions from the family estate, and an entail removes the bulk from them because they are female.

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's views also differ drastically on their children. When Mr. Bennet accuses Kitty and Lydia of being "two of the silliest girls in the country," Mrs. Bennet chides him by saying, "I am astonished, my dear, . . . that you should be so ready to think your own children silly. If I wished to think slightingly of any body's children, it should not be of my own however" (PP 1.7.24-5). The reader completely believes Mrs. Bennet's statement for two reasons: first, she very seldom "thinks at all"; and second, she turns vicious comments on any female who is any competition to her own girls. Each wife of my type demonstrates a characteristic of the ideal woman taken to the extreme, an excess (Charlotte Palmer's was the facilitating of conversation; Mary Musgrove's was the consciousness of rank and place; and Mrs. Allen's was thriftiness and practicality). Mrs. Bennet's excessiveness lies in seeing only good in the behavior of her and her own family. Mrs. Bennet's primary excessive quality is her preoccupation with getting her daughters married. Mr. Bennet's behavior is equally as excessive but also lies at the opposite end of the spectrum from his wife. Where she persists in viewing all of their children as gifted, Mr. Bennet desires to see the worst in them: "This is the only point, I flatter myself, on which we do not agree. I had hoped that our sentiments coincided in every particular, but I must so

far differ from you as to think our two youngest daughters uncommonly foolish" (PP 1.7.25). The irony of this statement is that Mr. Bennet never openly agrees with his wife and he takes pride in that. This pronouncement summarizes his relationship with his wife.

Lydia is the youngest and most like Mrs. Bennet, and Austen wants the correlation to be clear. When the militia leaves town, Lydia's distress calls up similar emotions in her mother:

Their affectionate mother shared all their grief; she remembered what she had endured on a similar occasion, five and twenty years ago.

'I am sure,' said she, 'I cried for two days together when Colonel Millar's regiment went away. I thought I should have broke my heart.'

'I am sure I shall break mine,' said Lydia. (PP 2.18.203)

The emotions and reasoning are the same even though Mrs. Bennet has over twenty-three years of experience that should temper her feelings. I do not find it difficult to project that Lydia shall retain the same vehemency of feeling. For Mrs. Bennet has passed all of her own fallacies on to Lydia, and as Jane Nardin states, "she has failed to teach . . . Lydia . . . anything at all about the importance or function of decorous behavior" (52).

The empathy that Mrs. Bennet has for Lydia does not allow her to see any wrong in her darling child, again her misreading of her children comes into play. Even when Lydia runs away with Wickham, Mrs. Bennet places the blame on other shoulders:

poor dear Lydia had nobody to take care of her. Why did the Forsters ever let her go out of their sight? I am sure there was some great neglect or other on their side, for she is not the kind

of girl to do such a thing, if she had been well looked after. I always thought they were very unfit to have the charge of her; but I was over-ruled, as I always am. Poor dear child! (PP 3.5.253)

Thus in the space of a few lines, Mrs. Bennet is able to place the blame on the Forsters and her husband while totally deflecting blame from Lydia and herself. Yet, like Mary Musgrove, Mrs. Bennet can display a self-serving form of negation, when after Lydia's marriage she uses the Forsters as part of her argument for Lydia not moving North: "She is so fond of Mrs. Forster, . . . it will be quite shocking to send her away!" (PP 3.8.277).

Mrs. Bennet's lack of "prudence enough to hold her tongue" continually manifests itself throughout the novel (PP 3.5.254). Even as her brother-in-law Mr. Gardiner departs for London to aid in the search for Lydia, Mrs. Bennet's concerns are of the totally superficial:

And now do, when you get to town, find them out, wherever they may be; and if they are not married already, make them marry. And as for wedding clothes, do not let them wait for that, but tell Lydia she shall have as much money as she chuses, to buy them, after they are married. (PP 3.5.254)

Mrs. Bennet's inane discussion of clothes at such a time is reminiscent of Mrs. Allens' estimation of their importance.

Mrs. Bennet's reaction upon hearing the news of Lydia's marriage is even more inappropriate: "She was disturbed by no fear for her felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of her misconduct" (PP 3.7.270). Mrs. Bennet's attention has again been monopolized by her one superseding passion in life: to get her daughters married. Her attention also is still wandering to the subject of clothes:

'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! But the clothes, the wedding clothes! I will write to my sister Gardiner' (PP 3.7.270)

And her mesmerization with the thought of a daughter married at sixteen continues for another page, until her second favorite topic reenters her head--gossip:

'I will go to Meryton,' said she, 'as soon as I am dressed, and tell the good, good news to my sister Phillips. And as I come back, I can call on Lady Lucas and Mrs. Long. . . . Oh! here comes Hill. My dear Hill, have you heard the good news? Miss Lydia is going to be married. (PP 3.7.271)

With the introduction of the word marriage, Mrs. Bennet effectively forgets the circumstances which caused the marriage. Again, she has no deep understanding and cannot see beyond the immediate circumstances and her own plans.

One the most tell-tale signs of Lydia's similarity to her mother is in her assumption of the role of husband-hunter for her sisters: "And then when you go away, you may leave one or two of my sisters behind you; and I dare say I shall get husbands for them before the winter is over" (PP 3.9.280). Austen's emphasis here is again not only on the similarities between Mrs. Bennet and Lydia, but also upon the cyclical effect of education in her society. Austen is demonstrating that without outside education, the mother will merely pass her faults on to the daughter.

If Lydia is the kindred spirit of Mrs. Bennet, then Elizabeth is that of Mr. Bennet. Because of the similarities between Mr. Bennet and

Elizabeth, she and Mrs. Bennet are constantly at odds and thwarting one another. Elizabeth is what Mr. Bennet could have been had he not been saddled with his wife. Mr. Bennet sees his own past potential in Elizabeth and warns her to take care: "I know your disposition, Lizzy. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery" (PP 3.17.335). Unfortunately, Mr. Bennet is speaking from hard-learned experience. For this reason, and his love of teasing his wife, Mr. Bennet supports Elizabeth's refusal of Mr. Collins:

'Very well. We now come to the point. Your mother insists upon your accepting it. Is not it so, Mrs. Bennet?'

'Yes, or I will never see her again.'

'An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents.--Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do.' (PP 1.20.100)

Again, Mrs. Bennet does not understand or appreciate her husband's humor but Elizabeth does.

Austen summarizes Elizabeth's feelings toward both of her parents and her criticism of this system of marriage:

Elizabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what she could not overlook . . . that continual breach of conjugal obligation . . . in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own

children But she had never felt so strongly. . . the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents. (PP 2.19.210)

Elizabeth condemns her father for his choice of a wife rather than her mother for being such a wife and mother. Elizabeth, however, has every right to condemn her mother for she is the cause of pain and embarrassment. In her attempt to catch husbands for her daughters, Mrs. Bennet was the impediment to the unions of her two oldest ones. Miss Bingley continually provokes Darcy on his infatuation with Elizabeth with such comments as "You will have a charming mother-in-law, indeed, and of course she will be always at Pemberley with you" (PP 1.6.23). Miss Bingley further advises Darcy to give his "mother-in-law a few hints, when this desirable event takes place, as to the advantage of holding her tongue; and if you can compass it, do cure the younger girls of running after the officers" (PP 1.10.45). The criticism of Mrs. Bennet is twofold here: not only can she not control her own tongue, but her poor example prevents her from controlling the behavior of her younger daughters. All of which adds to the pain of Elizabeth, for Mrs. Bennet is constantly "exposing herself" to shame and ridicule (PP 1.9.39). And thus "Elizabeth blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation" at the words and actions of her mother (PP 1.19.89-90). And again later, "Elizabeth, [was] ashamed of her mother's ungracious and reluctant good wishes" (PP 2.3.130).

Mrs. Bennet's behavior upon hearing of Elizabeth's engagement to Darcy fits her character. After spending the greater part of the text detesting him (albeit over his initial slight of Elizabeth (PP

1.1.8)), Mrs. Bennet is quickly converted by the presentation of such an advantageous connection:

Oh! my sweetest Lizzy! how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane's is nothing to it--nothing at all. I am so pleased--so happy. Such a charming man!--so handsome! so tall!--Oh, my dear Lizzy! pray apologize for my having disliked him so much before. I hope he will overlook it. Dear, dear Lizzy. A house in town! Every thing that is charming! Three daughters married! Ten thousand a year! Oh, Lord! What will become of me. I shall go distracted. (PP 3.17.336)

Thus as before with the engagement of Jane, she became the favored daughter over Lydia. Elizabeth ascends to this position with her wealthier engagement. Mrs. Bennet's concern is only with the present circumstances, and she gives no thought to what has been or will be.

In this work, Austen takes a stronger stand against marriage as a commodities market. In expanding upon the issue raised with Mrs. Jennings in Sense and Sensibility, Austen removes the ambiguity of perception. Whereas, we could appreciate Mrs. Jennings because the alternative to husband-hunting was spinsterhood, we cannot appreciate Mrs. Bennet because she is her own greatest impediment. And the portrait of Mr. Bennet functions as an expansion of the character of Mr. Palmer. In Mr. Bennet, we have every indication that he is a good and an intelligent man; his only flaw is in the treatment of his wife. By making her audience sympathetic to his predicament, Austen emphasizes the fallacies inherent in marrying by the characteristics approved by her society. The Bennets are so painful, that Austen had to make them amusing so that we could tolerate the lesson.

Chapter 5--The Bertrams

"They will now see what sort of woman it is . . . that can attach a man of sense" (MP 30.300). Henry Crawford makes this announcement to his sister Mary in Mansfield Park, Austen's last novel published before her death. This work is unique in three ways in its treatment of my type-couple. First, the male half of the couple, Sir Thomas Bertram, learns the truth in Crawford's statement, but he learns only insofar as it affects his son, not himself. Next, Sir Thomas is the only husband in my type-couple who does not demonstrate his dissatisfaction with his mate in any way. My argument, however, is that since he learns his lesson only at the end of the novel that his discontent with his wife will begin then, or that, in effect, this work constitutes a bildungsroman for him. The third distinguishing characteristic of this work is the juxtaposition of Lady Bertram and her sister Mrs. Norris. Mrs. Norris, who performs many other dramatic functions, is necessary in any discussion of the Bertrams as a couple. In certain regards, Sir Thomas' relationship with Mrs. Norris resembles the normal one of man and wife. He relies on her to fulfill certain duties that would normally fall to his wife.

Lady Bertram is certainly the most lethargic creature Austen ever created. And thus to see the Bertrams as a further example of my type, we must examine first Sir Thomas' character, attitudes, and relationship with his wife. Next, descriptions of Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris and a discussion of their relationship will demonstrate this strange, symbiotic relationship which Austen creates. Finally, Lady Bertram's relationships with her children and her dependent niece Fanny Price shows her dual failure in her maternal role: first, she fails in that

she lacks both the energy and the intelligence to take a proficient role in their upbringing; and second, she allows the inept and prejudiced Mrs. Norris to take control of them in several regards. By using Mrs. Norris as an example of Lady Bertram's opposite, Austen succeeds in making a double statement on motherhood. Lady Bertram is unsuccessful because she does not take an active role, and Mrs. Norris is equally unsuccessful because she takes too active of a role. Each lacks the correct understanding for the task, yet Mrs. Norris is the worse because greed is her chief motivation. With such foils, Austen is able to eliminate the two extreme positions, clearly advocating moderation.

Sir Thomas is clearly the most likable of the husbands which compromise my type-couple, yet his problems are easily discernible. When Crawford proposes to Fanny, Sir Thomas thinks she should accept even though she does not love Crawford:

There is something in this which my comprehension does not reach. Here is a young man wishing to pay his addresses to you, with every thing to recommend him; not merely situation in life, fortune, and character, but with more than common agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to every body (MP 32.316).

Moreover, when Fanny refuses to marry Crawford because she does not love him (she cannot tell Sir Thomas that she has serious doubts about Henry's character because of his flirtation with Sir Thomas' daughters Maria and Julia, or the fact that she is in love with Sir Thomas' son Edmund), Sir Thomas becomes exasperated:

I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting. . . . But you have now

shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse, that you can decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you" (MP 32.318).

His reason for all of this condemnation is that this is the best offer Fanny could ever hope: "you may live eighteen years longer in the world, without being addressed by a man of half Mr. Crawford's estate, or a tenth part of his merits. Gladly would I have bestowed either of my daughters on him" (MP 32.319). Sir Thomas' attitude arises not from an insensitivity towards Fanny but from the incorrectness of the education provided for him by his society; rather, Sir Thomas is a symbol of a patriarchal-social attitude toward women and marriage.

In the course of the novel, Sir Thomas relearns how to judge people, this time by what they are, not who they are (i.e. how much they are worth). Thus a proper education in the requirements of a good marriage is the treatment that this example of Austen's type takes. Sir Thomas states that he is "an advocate for early marriages, where there are means in proportion" (MP 32.317). One senses that this belief was the cause of his own marriage. Sir Thomas' wrongs arise not from bad intentions but from the fact that he calculates everything according to reason. He blinds himself to the bad traits of others. His character is neatly summed up by Austen's description of his willingness to aid his wife's family: "Sir Thomas Bertram had interest, which, from principle as well as pride, from a general wish of doing right, and a desire of seeing all that were connected with him in situations of respectability, he would have been glad to exert for the advantage of Lady Bertram's sister" (MP 1.41). Sir Thomas delves no farther than the surface; he sees only appearances, not motives. This tendency explains how

About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram . . .and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's wife (MP 1.41).

Sir Thomas attempts to be a thinker and not a feeler. Yet the very introduction of the word captivate would appear to suggest that he is a man ruled by passions and not reason. It indicates that there is a flaw in his logic which must be corrected, and this is exactly what happens in the course of the novel. Even when considering taking a child from his sister-in-law's over-populated family: "Sir Thomas could not give so instantaneous and unqualified a consent. He debated and hesitated;--it was a serious charge" (MP 1.43). His concern with appearances pops up again when deciding how Fanny shall be treated in the family. Sir Thomas' concern is "the distinction proper to be made between the girls as they grow up; how to preserve in the minds of my daughters the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin" (MP 1.47). His preoccupation with appearance and only seeing what he wants to see is evident in the scenes which follow Sir Thomas' return from Antigua. He does not see that everyone is nervous and jumpy and less than glad to see him. He does not perceive the guilt in his own children. Even so, his rebukes are not directed at his wife but at Mrs. Norris: "He could not help giving Mrs. Norris a hint of his having hoped, that her advice might have interposed to prevent what her judgement must certainly have disapproved" (MP 20.203). Mrs. Norris' act of competence and influence totally beguiles Sir Thomas; he realizes only too late that she has neither: "Mrs Norris was a little confounded, . . . for she was ashamed to confess having

never seen any of the impropriety which was so glaring to Sir Thomas, and would not have admitted that her influence was insufficient" (20.204).

Sir Thomas attempts to be a good father but he lacks emotional attachment and understanding: "Sir Thomas did not know what was wanting, because, though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him" (MP 2.55). His mistake is in perceiving the vociferously confident Mrs. Norris as being as clever and good as she thought she was. He leaves the care of his children to her instead of to his wife: "He could not think Lady Bertram quite equal to supply his place with them, or rather to perform what should have been her own; but in Mrs. Norris's watchful attention . . . he had sufficient confidence" (MP 3.66).

The reason that Sir Thomas learns to rely on Mrs. Norris lies not only in his own inability to read Mrs. Norris, but also in the fact that his wife is unable to perform her duties. Lady Bertram's main concern in her life is her pet pug. Upon discussing the addition of Fanny to their household, Lady Bertram's main consideration is "I hope she will not tease my poor pug . . . I have but just got Julia to leave it alone" (MP 1.47). Lady Bertram suffers from the same misconception of appearances that her husband does; she too places too much emphasis on surface indicators: "she felt all the injuries of beauty in Mrs. Grant's being so well settled in life without being handsome" (MP 3.65). This reference to Lady Bertram's preoccupation with physical appearances occurs at other points in the text: "She had been a beauty, and a prosperous beauty, all her life; and beauty and wealth were all that

excited her respect" (MP 33.330). In regard to her obsession with appearance, Lady Bertram comes very close to the female equivalent of Sir Walter Elliot, expressing similar conceptions of vanity and selfishness as well. Lady Bertram is a selfish woman because she is too lazy to be any other way:

Lady Bertram did not ~~at~~ all like to have her husband leave her; but she was not disturbed by any alarm for his safety, or solicitude for his comfort, being one of those persons who think nothing can be dangerous or difficult, or fatiguing to any body but themselves (MP 3.66).

This selfishness continually reappears, in that, she can only perceive a situation insofar as it affects herself: "Lady Bertram was not certain of any body's dress, or any body's place at supper, but her own" (MP 29.287). The sentence appearing most through the text to describe Lady Bertram is "Lady Bertram was half asleep" (MP 7.101; first of many, this condition is referred to again on 13.151). This is a symbolic moral napping while her recalcitrant offspring plan a play which will not meet with their father's approval. She is a completely passive person, lacking both the initiative and the motivation to act: "Lady Bertram seemed quite resigned to waiting" (MP 18.187). In the character of Lady Bertram, Austen has developed the ultimate example of the languorous ideal lady who never dirties her hands. In some respects, Lady Bertram also uses this as a shield or defense mechanism in the same manner that Mrs. Palmer and Mrs. Allen used self-negation. Total apathy allows Lady Bertram to be completely selfish and care for no one else.

Yet with all of the apparent problems existing in their relationship, neither partner expresses any dissatisfaction. They have

gotten just what their society has taught them to expect in marriage.

The union appears almost nauseatingly harmonious at times:

By not one of the circle was he [Sir Thomas] listened to with such unbroken unalloyed enjoyment as by his wife, who was really extremely happy so see him, and whose feelings were so warmed by his sudden arrival, as to place her nearer agitation than she had been for the last twenty years. She had been almost flattered for a few minutes (MP 19.195).

Of course, Lady Bertram's emotional response concerns only the here-and-now; she does not deal in abstracts. One must remember that immediately after Sir Thomas' departure, she "was soon astonished to find how very well they did even without" her husband (MP 4.68). Lady Bertram, moreover, fulfills the proper role of the ideal wife in that she "did not think deeply, but, guided by Sir Thomas, she thought justly on all important points" (MP 47.436). And thus, unlike either the negative comments of Mr. Palmer or Mr. Bennet or the ignoring of Mr. Allen, Lady Bertram "was always heard and attended to" and when she called "Sir Thomas came back" (MP 23.230). Only once in the text does Austen ever hint that Sir Thomas is dissatisfied with his mate. When Lady Bertram must make the critical decision of whether to play Whist or Speculation at a dinner party, she calls upon her husband to aid her: "Sir Thomas, after a moment's thought, recommended Speculation. He was a Whist player himself, and perhaps might feel that it would not much amuse him to have her for a partner" (MP 25.248). (An interesting point here in conjunction with my overall argument is that Mrs. Norris is Sir Thomas' partner in this after-dinner entertainment.) Austen, however, quickly retracts such a negative view of the relationship with a conciliatory

"Twice had Sir Thomas inquired into the enjoyment and success of his lady" (MP 25.249). This treatment of a marital mismatch is Austen's most kind up until this point, expressing only minute examples of distress. These instances, however, occur prior to Sir Thomas' education.

The Bertrams' marriage is marked considerably by the juxtaposition of Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris. As sisters, they are highly dissimilar: "Lady Bertram . . . was a woman of very tranquil feelings, and a temper remarkably easy and indolent . . . but Mrs. Norris had a spirit of activity" (MP 1.42). Repeated throughout the text, Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris are the two extremes of the spectrum, one the totally indolent lady, the other the too-ordered housewife: "Lady Bertram holding exercise to be as unnecessary for every body as it was unpleasant to herself; and Mrs. Norris, who was walking all day, thinking every body ought to walk as much" (MP 4.70). Each is equally selfish but in opposing manners; thus, Austen is able to condemn both. Where Lady Bertram is the picture of easy wealth, Mrs. Norris is the miserly spendthrift (an educatable, female Scrooge). In true Johnsonian manner, Austen attributes Mrs. Norris' stinginess to a physical sterility: Had there been a family to provide for, Mrs. Norris might never have saved her money" (MP 1.45). Thus Mrs. Norris is less well off financially and with regard to children than her sister. Her deprivation becomes complete when her husband dies; then she attempts to take not only material wealth from her sister, but a husband and children as well.

Mrs. Norris is a pitiable creature if taken out of context. In context, however, she cannot be liked. Upon Sir Thomas' unexpected

return, Mrs. Norris is angry because she did not know of it first:

"Mrs. Norris felt herself defrauded of an office on which she had always depended, whether his arrival or his death were to be the thing unfolded" (MP 19.196). Mrs. Norris attempts to build up her own importance and usurps her sister's role: "She must be the doer of every thing; Lady Bertram would of course be spared all thought and exertion, and it would all fall upon her" (MP 26.261). Even sweet-natured Fanny recognizes this usurpation and negative influence of Mrs. Norris on Lady Bertram: "the still greater evil of a restless, officious companion, too apt to be heightening danger in order to enhance her own importance" (MP 45.422). Mrs. Norris believes that she is the best arranger and smartest of her own acquaintanceship. Thus the text is peppered with such statements as there "arose more . . . partiality for her own scheme because it was her own" and "Mrs. Norris thought it an excellent plan, and had it at her tongue's end, and was on the point of proposing when [someone else] spoke" (MP 8.108, 109). Mrs. Norris' favorite role at all times is long-suffering martyr. Yet for all of her speech, Mrs. Norris appears to always be "running about" without accomplishing anything (MP 26.262). Like Chaucer's Man of Law, Mrs. Norris likes to appear busier than she really is.

With regard to her nephews and especially her nieces, Mrs. Norris also likes to believe that she is indispensable: "Mrs. Norris in promoting gaieties for her nieces, assisting their toilettes, displaying their accomplishments, and looking about for their future husbands, had so much to do as, in addition to all her own household cares, some interference in those of her sister" (MP 4.68). Yet Lady Bertram allows her sister's usurpation, particularly with her children, and appears

almost glad of it because Mrs. Norris accepts the physical activities and leaves Lady Bertram with the name of mother:

Lady Bertram did not go into public with her daughters. She was too indolent even to accept a mother's gratification in witnessing their success and enjoyment at the expense of any personal trouble, and the charge was made over to her sister, who desired nothing better than a post of such honourable representation, and very thoroughly relished the means it afforded her of mixing in society without having horses to hire (MP 4.69).

Mrs. Norris' affections particularly fall to her eldest niece Maria, for whom she zealously promotes a materially advantageous match: "Mrs. Norris was most zealous in promoting the match, by every suggestion and contrivance, likely to enhance its desirableness to either party" (MP 4.72). Mrs. Norris even goes so far as to force physical activity upon her sister in this matchmaking behalf: "she even forced Lady Bertram to go through ten miles of indifferent road, to pay a morning visit" to the prospective groom's mother (MP 4.72). Mrs. Norris carries Sir Thomas' belief in a material marriage to the extreme; she disregards the personality of the man entirely. For the groom she promotes for Maria is described by Edmund rather negatively: "If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow" (MP 4.73). Thus, Mrs. Norris suffers from the same misconception which retards Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram: the acceptance of surface appearance. Hers is worse because it is even more self-centered than either of the other.

Because Lady Bertram allows Mrs. Norris to usurp the maternal role, damage is done to her children. Since Sir Thomas is not demonstrative, Mrs. Norris is not respected, and Lady Bertram is not

energetic, the children fall into a sad state. The eldest son Tom must endure a potentially mortal illness before maturing; prior to this, he led a life "full of spirits, and with all the liberal dispositions of an eldest son, who feels born only for expense and enjoyment" (MP 2.54). Lady Bertram's fault with her daughters is even more pronounced, since it is to them that society has particularly entrusted the care and education:

To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter, when it did not put herself to inconvenience (MP 2.55).

Austen presents Lady Bertram's maternal ineptitude in numerous ways, some of them even more potent for a seeming innocuousness. Upon the marriage of her eldest daughter and the removal of her youngest daughter with her, Austen states that "Even their mother missed them" (MP 21.218). Here the word even takes what should have been an obvious statement and makes it a further condemnation of Lady Bertram. Another example of Austen's criticism is Lady Bertram's behavior at Maria's wedding: "[Lady Bertram] stood with salts in her hand, expecting to be agitated" (MP 21.217). Her interest in the removal of her children by marriage and age is a purely selfish one: "They are all going away I think. I wish they would stay at home" (MP 29.289). Yet when Tom proves to be edging towards death, "The real solicitude now awakened in the maternal bosom was not soon over" (MP 44.417). The condemnation here is implicit in the turn of events required to raise such normal,

maternal concern. Yet "Lady Bertram was the happiest subject in the world for a little medical imposition," even when the others see through it to the severity of Tom's illness (MP 45.419). Lady Bertram is incapable of seeing through appearance to reality.

Sir Thomas, moreover, is also not entirely guiltless in the proper supervision of his children. Only upon his return from Antigua (like a pastoral, a change of place in Austen indicates a change in character) does Sir Thomas begin noticing--imperfectly-- the emotional state of his children. In the instance of Maria's engagement to the less-than-brilliant Mr. Rushworth, Sir Thomas finally begins to notice that "indifference was the most favourable state they could be in" (MP 21.214). Yet even when Sir Thomas moves to discuss this with Maria, he is easily and gratefully convinced that he was mistaken: "Sir Thomas was satisfied; too glad to be satisfied perhaps to urge the matter quite so far as his judgement might have dictated to others. It was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain" (MP 21.215). Thus, Sir Thomas is as selfishly blind as his wife. His blindness is far more dangerous because he does not recognize it as such.

Lady Bertram's most redeeming relationship is the one she has with her niece Fanny. In this instance, her selfishness is at its very lowest point. Even in the beginning, Lady Bertram attempts to befriend Fanny in the only ways she knows how: "in vain did Lady Bertram smile and make her sit on the sofa with herself and pug" (MP 2.50). (The presence of pug making this the ultimate in treats delivered by Lady Bertram!) Even when Lady Bertram causes Fanny distress, it is at the behest of her sister Mrs. Norris: "I was afraid it would be too much for her, . . . but when the roses were gathered, your aunt wished to

have them, and then you know they must be taken home" (MP 7.102). This explanation occurs when Fanny has developed a hideous headache from working outside. Of course, Lady Bertram also manages to make her excuse and sympathy totally self-centered as she notes: "I am very much afraid she caught the headache there, for the heat was enough to kill any body. It was as much as I could bear myself. Sitting and calling to Pug, and trying to keep him from the flower-beds, was almost too much for me" (MP 7.103). The containment of Pug is the most physical labor performed by Lady Bertram throughout the entire text.

Lady Bertram even takes up for Fanny on occasion, even with her sister Mrs. Norris: "her kinder aunt Bertram observed on her behalf" (MP 18.186). And when Fanny is to attend her first ball, Lady Bertram "sent her own maid to assist her; too late of course to be of any use" (MP 27.277). Of course, the ineffectuality of her gesture never penetrates Lady Bertram's consciousness as she replies to each compliment given Fanny, "I sent Chapman to her" (MP 28.278 and repeated 282). She even claims that this was the impetus for Henry Crawford's falling in love with Fanny (MP 33.331).

Lady Bertram's standard answer to Fanny leaving for any reason is "I cannot do without her" (MP 29.290). This concept appears numerous times: "the doubt of her Aunt Bertram's being comfortable without her"; "Lady Bertram's reply--'. . . . I am sure I shall miss her very much'" (MP 37.365). Lady Bertram quits this stance only in the face of Crawford's proposal to Fanny. Lady Bertram appreciates and approves of the system which gained her such an advantageous marriage:

No, my dear, I should not think of missing you, when such an offer as this comes in your way. I could do very well without you, if you were married to a man of such good estate as Mr. Crawford.

And you must be aware, Fanny, that it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this. (MP 33.331)

And as if to gloss the offer, Lady Bertram even offers Fanny a puppy from Pug's next litter, "which is more than [she] did for Maria" (331). And since this was the only "piece of advice, which Fanny had ever received from her aunt in the course of eight years and a half," I find it easy to believe that this was more than Lady Bertram had ever done for her own daughters (331). And even when Fanny marries Edmund, Lady Bertram accepts it only because she now has a replacement for Fanny: "Selfishly dear as she had long been to Lady Bertram, she could not be parted with willingly by her. No happiness of son or niece could make her wish the marriage. But it was possible to part with her, because Susan remained to supply her place" (MP 48.456).

In the face of all his experience with his wife's deficiencies, Sir Thomas learns the true value of marriage only after his daughter Maria's disgraceful elopement from her husband with Henry Crawford. In this single act, Sir Thomas must confront his own fault in not stopping Maria's marriage to Rushworth and in his estimation of Crawford whose suit to Fanny he had encouraged:

Sir Thomas, poor Sir Thomas, a parent, and conscious of errors in his own conduct as a parent, was the longest to suffer. He felt that he ought not to have allowed the marriage, that his daughter's sentiments had been sufficiently known to him to render him culpable in authorising it, that in so doing he had sacrificed the right to the expedient, and been governed by motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom. (MP 48.446)

Or as Nardin describes, "Sir Thomas' basically good principles are

warped by a large infusion of the false wordly [sic] values of money and status" (90). He not only realizes his own fault in being too severe, but he also becomes totally disillusioned with Mrs. Norris whom he had cast in the role of surrogate wife (MP 48.447). Sir Thomas's guilt is compounded by the elopement of Julia with Mr. Yates. With all of these hard lessons, Sir Thomas' conversion is little to be wondered at when Edmund decides to marry Fanny for purely emotional reasons:

It was a match which Sir Thomas' wishes had even forestalled.

Sick of ambitious and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper, and chiefly anxious to bind by the strongest securities all that remained to him of domestic felicity, he had pondered with genuine satisfaction on the more than possibility of the two young friends finding their mutual consolation in each other. (MP 48.455)

Thus, even after being "educated," Sir Thomas still misses Fanny's total disregard for Crawford and persists in believing that she is disappointed (perhaps his masculine thinking will not allow him to realize that she was always a better judge of character than he was). Even though Sir Thomas' textual dissatisfaction is directed at Mrs. Norris, I believe that I have shown how he used her as a substitute in some ways for his wife. Also, I would argue that with the departure of Mrs. Norris from the house and Sir Thomas' new appreciation of women and marriage that his vocal dissatisfaction with Lady Bertram will begin. I also feel safe in assuming that Sir Thomas will spend a lot of time with Edmund and Fanny. Thus, I find it ironic to end my study of Austen's criticism of her society when Sir Thomas' criticism of his wife is about to begin.

And by the way, the question I left you with in the introduction concerning who is to blame: the answer is d) all of the above. I cheated. I chose the realistic answer, just like Austen did.

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