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Sarah Ailwood
University of Wollongong

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**“WHAT MEN OUGHT TO BE”:
MASCULINITIES IN JANE AUSTEN’S NOVELS**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

SARAH LOUISE AILWOOD BA (Hons) LLB (Hons)

SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LITERATURES, LANGUAGES AND PHILOSOPHY

2008

CERTIFICATION

I, Sarah Louise Ailwood, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of English Literatures, Languages and Philosophy, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Sarah Ailwood

19 November 2007

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TEXTUAL REFERENCES

References to Jane Austen's writings are to the following editions:

Northanger Abbey. Ed. Marilyn Butler and Claire Lamont. London: Penguin, 2003.

Sense and Sensibility. Ed. Ros Ballaster and Claire Lamont. London: Penguin, 2003.

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Mansfield Park. Ed. Kathryn Sutherland and Claire Lamont. London: Penguin, 2003.

Emma. Ed. Fiona Stafford and Claire Lamont. London: Penguin, 2003.

Persuasion. Ed. Gillian Beer and Claire Lamont. London: Penguin, 2003.

"Jack and Alice". *Catharine and Other Writings*. Ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Douglas Murray. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Letters from Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra Austen, her nieces Anna Austen and Fanny Knight and to James Stanier Clarke are quoted from *Jane Austen's Letters*. Ed. Deirdre Le Faye. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

To Tim
what a man ought to be

ABSTRACT

“ ‘What men ought to be’: Masculinities in Jane Austen’s Novels” examines Jane Austen’s literary constructions of men and masculinity as feminine and feminist contributions to the public debate on ideal English masculinity throughout the Romantic period. It explores the problematic position of women writers in critiquing masculinity in the highly politicised context of the Romantic period and develops a theoretical approach to interpreting their constructions of desirable and undesirable masculinities as being representative of their social, cultural and feminist concerns. Throughout her novels, Jane Austen’s representations of the desirable male – of ‘what men ought to be’ – are informed by her fundamental concerns regarding the realisation of female selfhood and the fulfilment of women’s desires, and the political survival and moral wellbeing of the English nation. This thesis argues that Austen’s novels seek to reform socially-approved codes of gentry masculinity by endorsing a model of male identity that is not dependent on the submission or passivity of women in courtship or domestic relationships, promoted by conventional patriarchal ideologies. Austen’s novel’s dramatise the process by which men can choose to forge a masculine identity that allows women a greater socially and publicly participatory role, both enabling the fulfilment of female desire and ensuring the security and wellbeing of the English nation.

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INTRODUCTION

During her visit to Bath in *Northanger Abbey* Catherine Morland drives to Claverton Down with John Thorpe, the brother of her friend Isabella. This drive provides Catherine with an opportunity for assessing John's manners, conversation and character. Jane Austen articulates Catherine's response to John's company in the following terms:

Little as Catherine was in the habit of judging for herself, and unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely suppress a doubt, while she bore with the effusions of his endless conceit, of his being altogether completely agreeable (65).

This episode encapsulates two important aspects of Jane Austen's critique of masculinities in *Northanger Abbey* and throughout her novels. Firstly, Catherine's response assumes that there exists an idea or "notion" of "what men ought to be": a model (or models) of masculinity publicly considered desirable, appropriate or ideal, and which individual men are advised to emulate. Secondly, Catherine's judgment of John also indicates that it is appropriate for young unmarried women such as Catherine, and indeed all Austen's heroines, to assess and judge men for themselves and to compare them with their own "notions of what men ought to be". Catherine may be "Little ... in the habit of judging for herself", but there is no suggestion that such a judgment or assessment of masculine character would be an inappropriate thing for her to do.

The question of "what men ought to be" recurs throughout Jane Austen's novels, and her complex responses to this question form the central concern of this thesis. Austen's interest in "what men ought to be" – to women, and to the English nation – informs her characterisations of men and her representations of desirable and undesirable masculinities from *Northanger Abbey* through to *Persuasion*. Her treatment of the issue develops throughout her writing career and is informed by shifts in public constructions of masculinity throughout the Romantic period¹ and by the literary masculinities of her predecessors and contemporaries. Throughout the earlier phase of her writing career, Austen is particularly concerned with examining the assumption underlying the question of "what men ought to be", that men should strive to achieve particular socially sanctioned or publicly approved models of masculinity.

Her first three novels – *Northanger Abbey* (written in the years 1798-99 and published posthumously in 1817), *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) – analyse this assumption by exploring the means through which masculine genders are socially and culturally constructed, scrutinising the desirability or undesirability of such masculine ideals (particularly in relation to women's needs and desires) and exposing the implications for individual men, as well as for women, of socially imposed male gender identities. These novels all present men as potential social victims, and to a greater or lesser extent positively endorse the pursuit of individual happiness within an oppressive social and economic patriarchal order. Simultaneously, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* all seek to reform the largely stereotyped models of literary masculinity which Austen inherited from her predecessors, laying a foundation for the more complex, humanised and flawed male characters which feature in her later works.

Austen's later three novels – *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816) and *Persuasion* (published posthumously in 1817) – treat the question of "what men ought to be" quite differently from her earlier works. There is a decisive shift between *Pride and Prejudice* – the novel which perhaps more than any other validates the pursuit of individual desire, and in which Austen created a male character who in the twenty-first century has become iconic with a particular model of desirable masculinity – and *Mansfield Park*, which is almost entirely devoid of men who, in Austen's world, are either competent or desirable. Austen's treatment of "what men ought to be" between *Pride and Prejudice* and her later novels changes from challenging the assumptions that underpin the question, to instead seeking to answer it in the context of contemporary political and social unrest, particularly in relation to Britain's conflict with France throughout the Napoleonic Wars. In the later phase of Austen's writing career, her constructions of desirable masculinity are informed by a view that men's possession of power at international, national and local levels imposes particular obligations and responsibilities upon them for the security and preservation of the English nation, and that only certain types of men are capable of wielding this power appropriately. These novels are deeply concerned with exploring which men can and cannot be trusted with the possession of political, social and economic power, and thus the care of the nation.

Yet it is vital to note that Austen's constructions of desirable masculinity – both initially as they interrogate the social and cultural processes of masculine gender formation, and later as they are linked to England's national interests – are always based, first and foremost, on the needs and desires of women. In *Mothers of the Nation*, Anne Mellor asserts that throughout the Romantic period, “many women novelists aggressively offered an alternative vision of political governance, one grounded on radical reform of the social construction of gender” (105). Mellor writes:

The women's novel in the Romantic period played a key role in the construction of a new political ideology, one that initially grounded the salvation of the nation on the reform of the British family. This required ... the construction of a new system of gender roles, one based on the fundamental equality – but not necessarily the *sameness* – of women and men (*Mothers of the Nation* 104).

Anne Mellor reasons that this social reconstruction of gender required “the cultural production of a ‘new woman’” who was “rationally educated, who was capable of channelling her sexual passions into a judiciously chosen egalitarian marriage, and who was equipped to carry out the responsibilities of maintaining an efficient, well-managed, and nurturing household” (*Mothers of the Nation* 105-06). She identifies the construction of such a “new woman” as a central concern of Jane Austen's novels, and particularly locates Austen's endorsement of this figure in her characterisation of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*.

What Mellor describes as the “reform of the British family” as a means of effecting social and political change could not be achieved solely by the creation of a “new woman”. It would also require the creation of a “new man”; one who could respond to women's needs and desires – for equality, for mutual respect, for social and political participation – and also satisfy both the international and domestic demands of the English nation. My thesis demonstrates that the narrative structures and thematic concerns of Austen's courtship novels dramatise the extent to which the realisation of social and political change for women was dependent on a man who could respond to and enable the fulfilment of female desire. Austen's exploration of “what men ought to be” encapsulates her concern with creating such a model of English masculinity. Throughout her novels, Austen uses the cult of English domesticity and her position as a woman speaking for the nation to reveal the importance of this “new man” to the needs of women and the nation, to explore how he might be constructed or defined and

to celebrate the future possibilities which he would offer men, women, and English society.

My analysis of “what men ought to be” in Jane Austen’s novels emerges from three fields of scholarship: firstly, the treatment of Austen’s male characters in the context of feminist literary criticism that has dominated Austen scholarship over the last three decades; secondly, the growing scholarly interest in literary and artistic representations of masculinities by female artists and writers; and thirdly the burgeoning critical and particularly historical interest in public constructions of masculinity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This thesis draws on each of these scholarly developments to analyse and interpret Jane Austen’s male characters as political, social and literary expressions of masculine gender.

While most of the countless studies of Austen’s work which have been published during the last two centuries address her male characters in some respect, few have undertaken detailed considerations of them *as men*: as political, social, cultural and literary constructions of masculine gender within the context of the Romantic period. Devoney Looser identified the absence of such scholarship in a 1996 article, in which she asks: “If feminism has broadened our insights into women’s rights and roles in Austen’s novels, what of the men’s movement? A great deal less scholarly work has been done to assimilate that more recent gender studies movement into Austen’s milieu” (“Jane Austen ‘Responds’” 159). Looser argues that “there remains a great deal of work to be done on the subject of Austen and masculinities” (“Jane Austen ‘Responds’” 163), particularly in light of the revival of Austen’s popularity throughout the 1990s. This popularity can now be seen to have continued into the twenty-first century. Joseph Kestner has similarly identified the relevance of “Men’s Studies and masculinity theory” to Austen’s novels, noting: “Scholars recognize that the formation of modern ideologies of masculinity occurred precisely at the time of Austen’s formation as a novelist” (“Jane Austen” 147). His article remains a pioneering study of Austen’s male characters in *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* as responses to constructions of masculinity that emerged in England during the Napoleonic Wars.

Michael Kramp’s recent study *Disciplining Love: Austen and the Modern Man* is to date the most comprehensive and analytical consideration of Austen’s male

characters in the light of scholarly developments concerning masculinity history and theory. Kramp argues: “Austen criticism remains notably silent on the sexuality and behavior of the heterosexual male lover” (*Disciplining Love* 4). He attributes this perceived critical silence to the nature of feminist critiques of Austen’s novels since the 1980s, which, he argues:

often isolated Austen’s representations of female characters, effectively disregarding the symbiotic and complex processes of gender formation in Austen’s narratives; moreover, this concentration on her portrayal of the heroine has traditionally theorized (either implicitly or explicitly) a simple and static man who is the opposite and/or oppressor of women (4-5).

Kramp’s study seeks to redress this critical absence by analysing Austen’s male characters through the lens of theories of masculine subjectivity, sexuality and romantic love developed by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Kramp is particularly concerned with articulating relationships between Austen’s male characters, the popularity of her novels and their screen adaptations throughout the 1990s and what he identifies as a late twentieth-century “crisis in masculinity” within American culture. The crux of his analysis of Austen’s men turns on what he sees as the conflict between the many and varied models of “proper” masculinity which post-Revolutionary English society offered them and the pursuit of their individual sexual desires. Kramp argues that Austen’s men ultimately sacrifice their own individual desires to enable them to fulfil the greater demands which society places upon them as men:

Austen’s work offers us portraits of men who relinquish the ‘heavenly nuptials’ and powerful desire theorized by Deleuze and Guattari in favor of a disciplined model of modern love endorsed by post-Revolutionary England. This modern love solidifies stable individual identities for men and women, and, by ensuring strict gender polarity, it ultimately helps to justify and maintain hegemonic structures that support modern patriarchy (3).

My thesis is fundamentally different from Michael Kramp’s analysis of Austen’s male characters in several key respects. Firstly, while Kramp’s analysis utilises contemporary theories of the male subject to articulate continuities between Austen’s male characters and current conceptions of Western masculine subjectivity, my thesis analyses Austen’s male characters as expressions of her broader political, social, cultural and particularly feminist concerns, within a social context in which the

construction of masculinity was complex and politicised, particularly for a female novelist. Secondly, while Kramp states that “Austen’s corpus provides us with a unique opportunity to study masculinity and male sexual development” because, among other reasons, “it demonstrates the important dialectical process of gender formation” (6), his analyses of Austen’s male characters tend to isolate them from the heroines, much in the same way that, Kramp argues, analyses of Austen’s heroines by feminist literary scholars have isolated them from her heroes. My analysis, by contrast, presents Austen’s constructions of desirable masculinity as inextricably linked to the realisation of female selfhood. Austen’s novels repeatedly present the fulfilment of female desire as both dependent on and productive of desirable men, both between individual characters and within the broader thematic concerns of the courtship narrative. While it is true that much feminist literary critique of Austen’s novels has focused on the vital task of examining her exploration and representations of female selfhood, some studies have also addressed the relationships between female selfhood and men in her novels. This is particularly the case with regard to *Emma*: several critics, including Claudia Johnson, Joseph Kestner and Emily Auerbach have considered the reconstruction of masculinities in this novel and its implications for women, and my thesis seeks to build on this work through an examination of Austen’s reform of the patriarchal family. In this way, my thesis extends or supplements feminist literary scholarship’s exposition of Austen’s concern with female selfhood by arguing that Austen presents its realisation as, at least in part, enabled by men adopting particular models of masculinity. Those men who are capable of promoting the realisation of female selfhood are constructed as Austen’s vision of “what men ought to be” and didactically endorsed throughout the novels. Such models of masculinity signal a desire not for the justification and maintenance of “hegemonic structures that support modern patriarchy” (Kramp 3), but rather for “the reform of the British family” and through it, social and political change (Mellor *Mothers of the Nation* 104).

Thirdly, Kramp’s argument that Austen’s men struggle to negotiate the “various and conflicting standards for proper masculinity” throughout the 1790s results in a conclusion that Austen’s novels “reveal that these men’s efforts repeatedly compel them to relinquish their identities as lovers and discipline their sexual desire” (7). While I agree that Austen’s men do struggle to negotiate the many and varied constructions of masculinity of the Romantic period, I argue that their capacity for romantic love is in

fact integral to Austen's vision of desirable masculinity, even in circumstances where it disrupts the stability of the self and risks social rupture. Indeed, for many of Austen's male characters (such as Edward Ferrars, Mr Darcy and Edmund Bertram), stability and security are only possible through marriage to the heroine. Finally, Kramp has a tendency to pathologise Austen's male characters, particularly by speculating on their emotional and psychological motivations and their (sub)conscious decisions to "discipline their sexuality". While this approach produces interpretations of Austen's male characters which reflect current understandings of changes in masculine gender formation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there is little evidence which supports these interpretations within the texts themselves. Seeking to determine the motivations of Austen's male characters is particularly problematic given Austen's almost universal evasion of representing their consciousness or psychology through either focalisation or any other narrative technique: Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* are the only exceptions to this rule. Kramp's book represents significant progress in scholarship on Austen's men. Despite our differences in approach, there are several areas of common interest and interpretation in our work – such as the many different social conceptions of masculinity that characterised the post-Revolutionary period and Austen's concern with responding to them – which will be incorporated throughout my discussion of Romantic masculinities and the novels.

The second scholarly development to which my thesis contributes is the presently emerging interest in women's literary and artistic representations of masculinity. Sarah S.G. Frantz's thesis, titled "*How were his sentiments to be read?*": *British Women Writing Masculinity, 1790-1820*, is to date the most comprehensive treatment of female novelists' representations of masculinity in the Romantic period and considers Austen's male characters in relation to the work of Elizabeth Inchbald, Mary Brunton and Hannah More. Frantz has noted the general dearth of scholarly interest in male characters written by women:

Feminist literary criticism has been concerned with examining the manufacture, significance, and ideological consequences of female characters in texts written by women. Recent pro-feminist masculinist literary studies, on the other hand, has begun the process of examining the male characters of texts written by men

... There is little consideration, however, by either branch of criticism of the male characters in texts by women (*How Were His Sentiments to Be Read?* 7).

Frantz argues that in the Romantic courtship novel, “the hero whom the heroine marries is as fundamental to the marriage plot as the heroine ... the construction of ideal domestic masculinity is, therefore, as essential to the project of the domestic novel as the construction of ideal femininity” (*How Were His Sentiments to Be Read?* 5).

Drawing on Nancy Armstrong’s argument in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* that desire forms part of political history, Frantz asserts:

understanding the appeal of the masculinity that female authors presented as desirable to their heroines and understanding how and why it was constructed as such are vitally important projects if we are to understand the role domestic fiction has had on constructing modern subjectivity (*How Were His Sentiments to Be Read?* 7).

My thesis builds on Frantz’s analysis by examining Jane Austen’s appropriation of masculine subjectivity for her own purposes and considering her characterisations of men as actively engaged in the political, social and cultural construction of masculine genders in the Romantic period. Chapter One particularly seeks to consolidate and extend current scholarship on the problematic position of female writers and artists in constructing masculinities. It examines the obstacles Jane Austen faced in writing men, the impact of these obstacles on her characterisations of men and the literary techniques she developed to resolve them, with a view to developing a broader theoretical approach to women’s literary representations of masculinity.

The third scholarly field I draw on is the burgeoning historical and critical interest in public constructions of masculine gender in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1996, Devoney Looser commented that “reconstructions of masculinity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century are at such a fledgling state that the best we can hope for is ““partial truths”” (163). The intervening years have seen the publication of extensive research into constructions of gender during this period, some devoted entirely to masculinities, enabling an analysis of Austen’s representations of masculinity of the kind that Looser called for more than ten years ago. Indeed, gender historians have also expressed a desire for literary studies to respond to this critical development, with Robert Shoemaker noting that “much more work needs to be done on representations of masculinity in literature, especially since by the end of the period

‘manliness’ had become a frequent topic of discussion” (43). Chapter Two uses primary source material together with recent histories of masculinity to investigate public constructions of masculinity during the Romantic period, on which the later interpretations of Austen’s novels are based.

Chapters Three to Eight examine Jane Austen’s novels in the light of the theoretical approach to women’s literary representations of masculinity developed in Chapter One, and in the context of public constructions of masculinity discussed in Chapter Two. Chapter Three explores Austen’s reversal of the sexual politics of courtship in *Northanger Abbey* and her introduction of the essential qualities of desirable masculinity in her characterisation of Henry Tilney. In Chapter Four, I examine Austen’s dual projects of debunking popular myths about social and literary masculinities and educating the reader to appreciate realistic portraits of men through her characterisation of John Willoughby, Colonel Brandon and Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*. This chapter also explores Austen’s use of Edward to critique the processes by which socially-approved models of masculinity are produced and enforced and their ramifications for individual men. Chapter Five considers Austen’s further exploration of this theme in her characterisation of Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, particularly focusing on his development throughout the novel to reconcile a gentry masculine identity with his sexual desire for Elizabeth and the expressive emotional life she demands. In *Mansfield Park*, the subject of Chapter Six, Austen’s focus shifts from exploring the impact of socially-produced models of masculinity on individual men to instead examining the ramifications for women and the nation of men’s failure to adequately fulfil the domestic, social and national responsibilities they are allocated within patriarchal ideology. Whereas *Mansfield Park* refrains from offering the reader a model of desirable masculinity, in *Emma*, the focus of Chapter Seven, Austen creates in Mr Knightley a male protagonist who is not only equipped to serve the national interest, but who can also fulfil the desires of women by forging a masculine identity that is not dependent on their submission or passivity within ideologies of sexual difference. Finally, Chapter Eight explores Austen’s use of the navy to reconstruct desirable English masculinity away from the domestic space itself, enabling a reform of the conventional family that allows women such as Anne Elliot the greater publicly participatory roles they desire.

In *The Courtship Novel, 1740-1820: A Feminized Genre* Katherine Sobba Green asks, “is it possible for women, accultured by a social system that privileges male and bourgeois interests, to express themselves counterideologically, or are all such divergent voices fated ... to be assimilated by the hegemony?” (5). This thesis demonstrates that in relation to Jane Austen’s constructions of masculinity through the medium of the courtship novel, the answer to this question is “yes”. Although Austen felt disadvantaged by her position as a female novelist in her creation of male characters, she developed innovative literary techniques and drew on the authority accorded her by ideologies of domesticity and nationalism, to create powerful and effective male characters within the highly politicised environment of the Romantic period. Austen’s treatment of the question of “what men ought to be” and her resulting portraits of desirable and undesirable masculinities provide insights into her political, social and literary concerns, which are prompted by the needs and desires of women and the English nation.

¹ Recognising that there is some latitude in the definition of the “Romantic period”, my use of the phrase is to refer to the period between 1780 (prior to the French Revolution) and 1830 (before the accession of Queen Victoria).

CHAPTER ONE

Women Writing Masculinity in the Romantic period

In her 1812 novel *The Englishman*, Medora Gordon Byron,¹ a now little-known Minerva Press novelist, digressed from what is otherwise a straightforward fashionable courtship narrative to consider her position as a female novelist writing an English male protagonist:

It is, perhaps, a task above the abilities of a female scribbler to depict the character of an *Englishman* accurately: I know there are many touches of excellence which should grace the portrait; and that the picture might be made transcendently perfect, by culling the virtues of the race, rather than by *mixing* the colours with the simplicity with which Nature usually decorates *her* works (Vol 1 230).

Byron presents the literary construction of masculinity by women writers as a problematic task, the difficulties of which are exacerbated by the gender and nationalist politics that characterised the aftermath of the French Revolution. Aware of the difficulties of her project in *The Englishman* and of the public criticism she might receive either for attempting the task itself or for her resulting portrait of English masculinity, Byron uses her position as a woman to launch a pre-emptive strike against critics who might view her character as unrealistic, inaccurate or otherwise deficient. She satirically implies that the “task” of “depicting an Englishman accurately” is so great as to be beyond a woman’s intellectual and creative abilities. Her satire is enhanced by her description of the “touches of excellence which should grace the portrait” and the “virtues of the race”, statements which reference the hyperbolic celebration of English masculinity in public discourse of the Romantic period.

Although Byron’s satire appears self-deprecating, she also suggests that it is not the excellence of the English male character that might defy the creative genius of the female novelist but rather the complexity of contemporary English masculinities. Using the same satirical tone, Byron describes what she sees as the simplistic, generic images of English masculinity of her literary predecessors:

The heroes of former works (I mean works of fiction) were prodigies of valour; they fought like giants, and they fed like giants; to them all seasons were the same; they could repose in the open air, or languish in dungeons for periods

indefinite, and emerge from them ready and able to meet all contingencies (Vol 1 230).

She contrasts these “heroes” with the complex, often contradictory masculinities that characterised contemporary English culture:

Such are not the men of the present day; many are frivolous and highly degenerate; numbers are pedantic, without a clue to guide us to the reason for such an assumption; one is a philosopher; another never thinks at all. Again, one views this world as the terminating system of his existence; another bears the chequered scenes of this temporal estate with fortitude, for he looks beyond its sphere (Vol 1 230).

Byron’s comparison of the “heroes of former works” with “the men of the present day” suggests a view that fiction has constructed men who are “transcendently perfect” rather than realistic and that this approach is inappropriate for the contemporary novelist, if not for her predecessors. Her commitment to characterising men by “*mixing* the colours” – presenting them as complex characters composed of both virtues and flaws – increases the difficulty of her task. Byron concludes by reverting to her disadvantaged position as a woman writing a male protagonist: “while I allow Nature to be thus various, and tremble lest my pen should betray my ignorance, like the most bigoted of my defined genus, I am tempted to go on. I feel that I shall be forgiven, though I err, for I am a woman” (Vol 1 230). Here Byron places herself within a tradition of women writers who persist in writing a subject – masculinity – which may have been considered unsuitable for a woman. Her confidence that she will be forgiven if she fails in the task arises from a common understanding of women’s lack of experience of or access to the public and private lives of men.

Medora Gordon Byron’s apology raises several issues concerning the position of women writers in constructing literary masculinities, both generally and specifically to the Romantic period. The obstacles she identifies to her effective or successful construction of English masculinity in *The Englishman* include her lack of education and experience of the professional or political world in which men were the central actors; a perception that in constructing masculinity she is moving beyond the permissible subjects for women’s writing; the nature of the fictional genres available to her and the models of literary masculinity she inherited from her predecessors; and the complexity and politicisation of masculinity which characterised her society. These

problems were not unique to Byron: on the contrary, they recur in the experience and commentary of many women writers and artists of the Romantic period. Yet, that Byron raises the issue of her position as a female novelist writing masculinity is interesting in itself, because the dynamics of this relationship – between the female writer or artist, and a male subject or character – has received only limited theoretically or analytically rigorous critical attention. Some critics have noticed a general reluctance by women writers and artists to represent men at all, a reluctance which is particularly stark when compared to the history of men’s writing about women. As Harrison Steeves has noted, “while the world acknowledges a place for a ‘man’s woman’, we find less enthusiasm for the ‘woman’s man’” (223). In *A Room of One’s Own* Virginia Woolf recognised a “strange phenomenon” of men writing about women, and noted that it seemed to be “confined to the male sex”. “Women do not write books about men,” writes Woolf with relief, “for if I had first to read all that men have written about women, then all that women have written about men, the aloe that flowers once in a hundred years would flower twice before I could set pen to paper” (35). In *Men by Women*, Janet Todd similarly noted: “men as a gender, as opposed to particular types of men – are not much studied by women. In contrast to women, who are constantly probed, investigated and reviled by men” (1).

Yet despite this perceived reluctance of women to write about men, it is obvious that male characters pervade historical and contemporary women’s writing. It is vital to an understanding of women’s writing to analyse both the dynamics of their position *as women* writing masculinity and to consider their literary masculinities as providing insights into their political, social, cultural and feminist concerns. The importance of considering women’s constructions of masculinity as expressions of their broader concerns has been noted by several critics but rarely explored or developed in detail. In *Unnatural Affections*, George Haggerty argues that a woman writer’s “portrayal of the male and modes of male response” provides an insight into a different world she may be imagining for herself: “the symptom of female desire will be discovered, among other figures and other situations, in the figure of the man as he is depicted in these novels” (4). Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Morreau have similarly argued that female artists who take men as their subjects do so to investigate much broader topics (1), and Rozsika Parker has also commented that “women’s writing about men ... reveals women’s fantasies and desires, fears and defences, rather than providing a concrete picture of the

man they purport to describe” (44). Sarah Frantz has likewise identified the critical need to interpret the male characters of women’s novels in terms of women writers’ broader political concerns:

male characters in novels by women do not merely act as catalysts for the subjectivity of the female characters, sparking in them emotional reaction and ideological resistance while remaining themselves unchanged and unchangeable. Rather, the male characters themselves represent the authors’ negotiations with the ideologies of gender, class, and sexuality (*How Were His Sentiments to Be Read?* 6).

Finally, Isabel Achterberg has argued in relation to Amelia Beauclerc, another Minerva Press novelist and a contemporary of Jane Austen, that novels were a means by which women could both respond and contribute to the public renegotiation of masculinity during the Romantic period: “through the writing and reading of novels, women joined actively in the discussion and added to it their own criticism of male authority in general, thus participating in [the] process of constant deconstruction and construction of masculinity concepts” (4).

Throughout the Romantic period, the female novelist’s characterisation of men provided her with a voice through which she could critique the exercise of male power and different public constructions of masculinity. Jane Austen’s characterisations of men in her courtship novels engaged with the numerous public constructions of masculinity that circulated throughout the Romantic period and enabled her to present a specifically feminine and feminist contribution to the renegotiation of English masculinity. Her male characters respond to the literary masculinities that dominated the works of her predecessors and contemporaries, including in relation to the eighteenth-century courtship novel, evangelical fiction and the popular rise of the Byronic hero throughout the 1810s. Several of Austen’s male characters have endured into the twenty-first century, often remodelled through screen adaptations of her novels, as symbols or icons of particular desirable or undesirable masculinities. To create such effective male characters, Austen needed to negotiate a space for her artistic voice within the limitations placed upon the female novelist in the Romantic period, some of which specifically related to the literary representation of masculinity. These limitations include those identified by her contemporary Medora Gordon Byron in *The Englishman*: her lack of education and experience of men’s lives, the conventions of

gender and genre, and the politicisation of English masculinity in the Romantic period. They are reflected in the experience of her contemporaries and have also been noted by the limited critical attention that these aspects of their texts have received. This chapter analyses these limitations and the literary techniques Austen used to overcome them, including her reform of the gender conventions of the courtship novel genre, her use of the authority accorded her by domestic and national ideologies and a range of innovative narrative techniques, to effect a publicly engaged critique of masculinities. Chapter Two focuses on the difficulties of this task within the politicised debate on English masculinity that persisted throughout the Romantic period.

Women's lack of education and their lack of access to and experience of the lives of men have been cited both by critics and by women writers themselves as central limitations on the female novelist's capacity to construct realistic literary masculinities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Janet Todd, for example, has suggested that women's limited experience of public life has meant that they have tended to refrain from writing about men in the context of politics, the professions and war (*Men by Women* 2). Jane Miller concurs with this view, commenting: "it has not just been difficult for women to write about men, but risky. They could get it wrong, and women have reason to dread the penalties for getting such things wrong" (13).² She suggests that the risk involved in incorrectly representing men in activities which would only have involved male company, such as studying, hunting, fighting or governing means that both men and these activities are frequently absent from women's texts. This view perhaps needs to be reassessed in the light of two subsequent developments in scholarship on women's writing and history in the post-Revolutionary period. Firstly, in *Rebellious Hearts* Adriana Craciun and Kari Lokke have revealed "the extent to which women writers of the Romantic period did indeed write on those most 'masculine' of subjects: politics, revolution, and war" (9). A consideration of the construction of masculinities by women writers who do address these "masculine" subjects would no doubt yield thought-provoking results in terms of women's representations of masculinities in the post-Revolutionary period, but that is beyond the scope of this study. Secondly, recent gender histories and studies of women's writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have established the fallacy and critical danger of drawing a firm or distinct separation between a "public" and a "private" sphere (Batchelor and Kaplan 4-5). The work of Robert Shoemaker, Linda Colley,

Amanda Vickery and Anne Mellor has demonstrated the many and varied ways in which women involved themselves in public life, studies on which my own argument regarding Austen's novels as contributions to the contemporary debate on English masculinity is founded. However, there is substantial evidence that throughout the Romantic period, women's formal or informal exclusion from certain aspects of public life – including politics, the professions, the military and educational institutions – hampered their ability to construct masculinities. This limitation on their creative scope resulted not only from their own lack of experience and education but also because involvement in public life of some kind, whether through education, politics, the professions, commerce or the military, was a central aspect of most men's lives and during the Romantic period was increasingly socially and culturally constructed as an integral feature of proper English masculinity.

The difficulties women writers faced in writing men in public life and what Jane Miller describes as the “penalties” for mistaking the professional lives of men are encapsulated in the experience of Maria Edgeworth in her 1814 publication, *Patronage*. *Patronage* is the story of two families – the Percys and the Falconers – and their different approaches to social advancement: the Percys through hard work, moral consistency and independence, and the Falconers through the system of patronage. Edgeworth explores this issue chiefly through her young male characters, who are drawn from the medical, legal, military, clerical and political professions. The first edition of *Patronage* received damning reviews in several publications that specifically targeted its representations of men in political and professional life. The *British Critic* specifically linked what it perceived as the novel's misrepresentation of public life to Edgeworth's femininity:

Very few of our readers can observe without a smile the palpable absurdities in which our authoress is involved, when she attempts to describe the process of legal investigation, or the practice of the courts. We fear also that she will be convicted of having passed the bounds of all probability in her views of the medical profession (165).

The reviewer further comments: “Miss Edgeworth, in the person of herself, not of her hero, penetrates into the very sources of intrigue; she sees what with common eyes she never could have seen; she knows what it is impossible she could ever have known” (166). In contrast, the reviewer praises her representations of women and domestic life,

commenting that “in her acquaintance with all the secret springs of the female heart, Miss Edgeworth appears quite at home” (171), and recommending that she confine herself to such subjects in future. The *Edinburgh Review*’s critique of *Patronage* was similarly gendered, satirically stating: “the overwhelming politeness which might be thought due to her sex, is forgotten in the contemplation of her *manly* understanding” (417). Carville and Butler have also identified “the widespread view that she was trespassing in a masculine public world” (“Introductory Note” vii), and noted that *Patronage* also sparked a furore in London professional circles (“Introductory Note” xxii).

Despite receiving more favourable reviews in *La Belle Assemblée* and the *Critical Review*, Edgeworth bowed to the pressure of the literary establishment and professional circles and changed her novel – not only to correct legal inaccuracies within the narrative, but also to alter her commentary on the system of patronage within the legal and medical professions. Her preface to the altered edition takes an apologetic rather than a confident or defensive tone: “of ignorance of law, and medicine, and of diplomacy, she pleads guilty; and of making any vain or absurd pretensions to legal or medical learning, she hopes, by candid judges, to be acquitted” (Carville and Butler “Textual Variants” 287-88). Carville and Butler argue:

the furore over what was in effect a satirical caricature of politics and the professions gives some indication of Edgeworth’s standing at this time. Often, of course, the objections were empirical, to points of fact; again, there is an implied compliment here, that she of all writers was expected to get her facts right (“Introductory Note” xxii).

This may be so, but the language of the reviews and criticism levelled at Edgeworth is distinctly gendered. The furore may be attributed not only to Edgeworth’s literary standing, but also to the fact that she was a woman writing about the professional world, and constructing particular masculinities within that world in order to critique them. Indeed, the highly defensive tone of the criticism of *Patronage* suggests that it may have been occasioned not by mistakes in Edgeworth’s presentation of the London legal, medical, and political professions, but by its accuracy. Attacking Edgeworth as a woman writer with a presumably limited knowledge and experience of professional men would have been an easy way to discredit her novel.

Edgeworth's experience with *Patronage* indicates that women writers of the Romantic period had good reason to fear "getting it wrong", to use Jane Miller's phrase, when it came to representing men in political and professional life. It is interesting that Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, which was published the same year as *Patronage* and addresses similar themes of masculinity, national character and national security, received none of the vitriolic criticism levelled at Edgeworth's novel (indeed, *Mansfield Park* was virtually overlooked by reviewers). Unlike Edgeworth, Austen chose to address these issues by using the domestic environment of the country estate as a metaphor for the national state, rather than a direct foray into political power-broking. Although *Mansfield Park* attracted little public notice, John Ward, who had reviewed *Patronage* for the *Quarterly Review*, made the following comparison between the two novels in his personal correspondence:

Have you read *Mansfield Park*? ... She has not so much fine humour as your friend Miss Edgeworth, but she is more skilful in contriving a story, she has a great deal more feeling, and she never plagues you with any chemistry, mechanics or political economy, which are all excellent things in their way, but vile cold-hearted trash in a novel (Carville and Butler "Introductory Note" xxx n.16).

For Ward, not only Austen's narrative style but also her content, allegedly devoid of subjects such as "chemistry, mechanics or political economy" which were at the time beyond the formal education and permitted experience of women, made her the superior novelist. Ward's favourable assessment of *Mansfield Park* then begs the question as to why the novel was not reviewed, in either the *Quarterly Review* or any other publication? Extracting her critique of masculinities from the overtly masculine public domain employed by Edgeworth may have been a clever and safe narrative technique to avoid the controversy surrounding *Patronage*, but it resulted in Austen's novel receiving virtually no critical attention at all.

Jane Austen herself addressed the issue of women writing men in professional life in her 1815 correspondence with James Stanier Clarke, librarian to the Prince Regent. Clarke advised Austen to "delineate in some future Work the Habits of Life and Character and enthusiasm of a Clergyman – who should pass his time between the metropolis & the Country ... Fond of, & entirely engaged in Literature" (16 November 1815, 296-97). He expanded on his vision in a later letter, suggesting that Austen depict this character in the course of performing professional duties within a country parish, at

sea with the navy, and at court (21 December 1815, 307). Austen emphatically declined Clarke's suggestions:

I am quite honoured by your thinking me capable of drawing such a Clergyman ... But I assure you I am *not*. The comic part of the Character I might be equal to, but not the Good, the Enthusiastic, the Literary. Such a Man's Conversation must at times be on subjects of Science & Philosophy of which I know nothing – or at least be occasionally abundant in quotations & allusions which a Woman, who like me, knows only her Mother-tongue & has read very little in that, would be totally without the power of giving (11 December 1815, 306).

Austen's decline of Clarke's suggestion is based on an apparent belief in her own inability to represent male characters in professional settings. This limitation of her literary capabilities is founded on Austen's perception of her own ignorance, particularly regarding her lack of a classical education. George Sand similarly cited lack of education as the central barrier to the effective or successful construction of male character as protagonists of her novels:

It is very difficult for a woman to successfully define and depict a fully worthy man and above all to *employ* him as the active protagonist in a novel. For a woman writer to know well the causes and the play of man's moral forces, she must with time, observation, and some studies unjustly reputed useless to her sex and estate become not man himself, for that would be impossible, but somewhat less of the child she was left by her early education. She will then be able to understand certain intellectual preoccupations foreign to her and not restrict the masculine role to his relationship to love or the family (Sand quoted in Schor 114-15).³

We could accept the protestations of writers such as Austen and Sand and agree that their lack of education and limited experience would have made it difficult – in Austen's view, impossible – for them to construct male characters and critique masculinities in public and professional life. This approach would attribute Austen's focus on domestic, neighbourhood life to her stated limitations as a female novelist; indeed, George Sand attributes the focus of women's fiction on romantic and family relationships to their inability to write on other subjects. However, as Naomi Schor has noted, Sand's comment on representing men in their family roles "stops well short of contesting the system of values that accords less prestige to depictions of the domestic

and erotic spheres inhabited by women than to the supposedly wider spheres in which men traditionally deploy their activities: commerce, the professions, war” (115). Indeed, other comments made by Austen on the concerns of her art and her chosen subjects enable an alternative interpretation. In a later letter to Clarke, Austen stated: “I must keep to my own style & go on in my own Way” (1 April 1816, 312). When coupled with her literary advice to her niece Anna – “3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on” (9-18 September 1814, 275) – this statement indicates a confidence in her focus on domestic life and suggests that this focus was not an inevitable result of her supposed limitations as a female novelist, but a deliberate choice as the best vehicle for addressing her social and political concerns. Austen’s novels seek to disrupt a hierarchy that devalues family and community relationships and strongly urge the importance of men’s roles and responsibilities as lovers, husbands, fathers, brothers and landlords within the domestic context. The courtship novel, therefore, is an ideal genre for Austen to launch her critique of masculinities in the arena she sought to prioritise: the family and the home.

Austen used two issues on which women were accorded a degree of authority in the Romantic period to embark on her social critique of masculinities. The first relates to contemporary ideologies of domesticity, and the model of femininity endorsed by them, which granted women a degree of authority over courtship, domesticity and community life. The second relates to the position women were accorded within ideologies of nationhood, civilisation and progress throughout the eighteenth century and within English nationalist ideology of the Romantic period, which, while related to domesticity, provided women with a degree of authority to speak publicly for the nation. Jane Austen’s critique of masculinities is founded on these dual sources of female authority. While the separation is not absolute, Austen’s first three novels – *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* – strongly draw on female authority over courtship, derived from domestic ideology, to critique masculinities; and her later three novels – *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* – instead use her authority to speak for the nation to critique men’s performance of their responsibilities regarding the social and moral condition of England.

Adeline Johns-Putra argues that the “ideology that informs Romantic women’s writing is a set of ideals that is now familiar to us as domestic ideology, an ideology

ungirded by, if not synonymous with, the doctrine of separate spheres, the idea that men and women perform distinct roles and activities” (22). Although, as I have noted, gender historians have persuasively challenged the demarcation of public and private spheres in terms of gender difference, women’s involvement in public life does not of itself discount the power of domestic ideology to influence cultural constructions of feminine gender. As Amanda Vickery has noted in relation to the conduct and periodical literature of the era, “one would search long and hard for a pundit who did not believe that a woman’s primary calling was matrimony and motherhood” (*Gentleman’s Daughter* 289). Anne Mellor has similarly commented that despite women’s extensive participation in the literate public sphere as both writers and readers, “conduct books and other forms of public discourse ... urged women to remain silent, to stay at home, to devote themselves exclusively to the activities of raising children and pleasing their husbands” (*Mothers of the Nation* 6). Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women writers used the authority that domestic ideology and the model of feminine gender identity it endorsed invested in women over courtship, marriage and the home to embark on a broader political, social and cultural critique. This argument has perhaps been most influentially developed and articulated by Nancy Armstrong in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, which argues that by “domesticating” the novel female novelists used the moral authority which ideologies of feminine gender accorded them over the domestic space to create a new political power for themselves. Armstrong asserts that this new power was socially acceptable because it was couched in terms of contemporary ideologies of femininity, and because it was created and exercised through narratives of courtship and marriage (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 29). She suggests that female novelists were able to launch a highly effective critique of the state from within the home because the political nature of the critique was concealed. Armstrong’s argument is supported by Mary Poovey’s analysis of domestic ideology as according women authority over courtship, marriage and motherhood:

the code of propriety did accommodate women’s desires, but only as long as the expression of those desires conformed to the paradoxical configuration inherent in the code itself: self-assertion had to look like something other than what it was ... As long as it was strictly confined to certain arenas and ultimately obedient to men’s will, women were also allowed to exercise considerable personal – if indirect – power (28-9).

Felicity Nussbaum has noted that the argument articulated by Armstrong, Poovey and other critics – that “domesticity became a cultural force that women mobilized in their own behalf” – has not been universally endorsed (25). She argues, for example, that some critics “have maintained that domestic power is always compromised because of its containment within the private sphere, its association with the middle class, and its failure to provide access to genuine economic power or political sway” (25). Nevertheless, despite its limitations, numerous women writers used the authority which domestic ideology accorded them over courtship, marriage and domesticity to critique a vast range of politicised subjects throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Several critics have identified the wide range of political agendas to which women writers turned their authority over domesticity, particularly through their use of the courtship novel. Lisa Wood, for example, has argued: “The domestic novel form, with its emphasis on women as subjects, and on the ‘female’ plot of courtship and marriage, provided an ideal vehicle for antirevolutionary writers’ intervention in the political discourses of the period” (117). Julie Shaffer has noted the range of Romantic-era courtship narratives in which the heroine’s “situation through most of the story along with the structure and/or balance of the story itself force our attention to other elements of her life than just her relationship to the men. To therefore classify all these texts as marriage plot novels is to ignore the main focus of many of the works” (no pag.). Mary Anne Schofield has also investigated women writers’ appropriation of “the power that lies beneath the disguise of feminine submission and marital compliance, romantic love and female powerlessness” in courtship novels throughout the eighteenth century (*Masking and Unmasking* 10). Jane Spencer further argues that “women novelists gained their accepted authority, at the price of agreeing to keep within the feminine sphere” (107) but that they could and did use this authority to “protest against society’s treatment of women”, to “make their novels didactic treatments of the heroine’s progress” and to “try to escape from the need either to conform or protest through a fantasy that transformed the feminine position” (107). Finally, Katherine Sobba Green argues that “the novel of courtship appropriated domestic fiction to feminist purposes” (2) and that it achieved this because “its domestic setting and linear plot easily accommodated not only conventional wisdom about women’s roles but also incipient resistant ideologies” (13). Green argues that “novelists find in this genre an opportunity to forward such feminist or resistant ideals as marriage for love, egalitarian

domestic relationships between men and women, and improved education for women” (7).

The critique and redefinition of English masculinity can be added to the spectrum of public and politicised subjects with which women writers engaged using the authority accorded them by domestic ideology. Women writers’ use of this authority to critique masculinity is explicitly demonstrated in Jane West’s 1803 conduct book *Letters to a Young Man*. West’s introduction reveals both her concern about her choice of male conduct and identity as a subject and her harnessing of domestic ideology to justify her commentary. West carefully sets out the basis of her authority:

Should the author ... seem to trespass on a province wisely withheld from her sex, let it be remembered, that the original idea of this work is, that of a mother speaking to a child on whose improvement she had bestowed considerable attention from his earliest years. In this light, observations may be admitted which, if introduced in the character of a public instructor, might be thought too masculine (Vol 1 xx).

West emphasises that she draws her authority on this subject from her “very retired domestic life, and the care of a young family” and uses her role as a wife, mother and homemaker to ask the reader’s patience regarding the form of the book: “the little leisure which she can borrow from her domestic duties will not allow her to bestow much time on the cultivation of logical correctness, or the graces of perspicuous polished composition” (Vol 1 xx). However, West’s apologetic tone is problematised by a firm moral and intellectual sanction for the advice which her conduct book contains: “this apology, however, is not designed to extend to the *tendency* of her observations. If the principles on which they are founded are estimable, the sex of the writer will not authorise the reader to reject them” (Vol 1 xx). West constructs the pretence of an apology for treating what was considered a “masculine” subject but in reality is decisive about the advice she offers and the source of her authority for an explicitly didactic critique of masculinity.

While domestic ideology accorded women writers such as Austen and West authority over courtship and domestic life, their use of this authority to launch a political commentary on masculinity was not without problems of its own. Even though women’s involvement in domestic and social life was of course much greater than their

involvement in political, military or professional spheres, women's opportunities for socialising with men were still quite restricted and if they were unmarried, as Austen was, an intimate knowledge of men through personal relationships may have been difficult. In the early nineteenth century, for example, England remained the only country in Europe that persisted with the tradition of women adjourning to the drawing room after dinner, leaving the men to drink, talk, smoke and gamble at the table (Cohen *Fashioning Masculinity* 34). Several contemporary novels, including both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, record this practice. Furthermore, during activities designed for mixed sociability such as balls and public assemblies, the strictly prescribed forms of behaviour to which men and women were socially required to adhere would have made it difficult for women such as Austen to gain insights into male personalities and emotions unhindered by the pressure of social performance.

Additionally, the dominance of the courtship narrative within women's novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, itself resulting at least in part from the authority women were accorded over romantic relationships and domesticity, also had significant implications for women's constructions of literary masculinities. Green describes the courtship novel as treating "the time between a young woman's coming out and her marriage as the most important period in her life" and notes that the genre was based on the premise that "the choice among suitors for the individual woman ideally depended on love and should not be decided on any other grounds" (2). Katharine Rogers has also argued for the intrinsic appeal of this genre to a female readership: "How pleasant it must have been to immerse oneself in fictional situations where a woman could refuse to marry for a livelihood or could decide between a dashing impetuous suitor and a sedate responsible one" (*Feminism* 150). Rogers and other critics including Paula Backscheider, Rachel Brownstein, Linda Hunt and Ruth Yeazell have revealed the importance of eighteenth-century courtship novels as constructions and validations of female selfhood and their role in variously endorsing, resisting and challenging constructions of feminine gender identity. The dominance of the courtship narrative within women's novels of the Romantic period and the genre's fundamental concern with rendering female selfhood mean that the most prominent constructions of masculinity within women's novels take the form of potential suitors and the heroine's father or guardian and brothers. These characters tend to feature in courtship novels to the extent that they impact upon the courtship plot.

The allocation of male roles within courtship novels, together with the genre's focus on exploring femininity and female selfhood, has generated a critical perception that the conventions of the courtship novel prevented female novelists from creating comprehensive or realistic male characters. Green, for example, argues that courtship novels "valorized the experience of the middle-class 'proper lady' by making her the central figure of the plot while reducing the male characters to minor roles" (13). Steeves contends with regard to Fanny Burney that "it would be hard to deny that Miss Burney's women are drawn with a sure hand; her men are not. But her novels are always about women; men are appendages" (223). Steeves also labels Austen's male characters "appendages" and attributes what he views as their marginal position within her novels to her inability to create convincing male characters:

The fact remains that Jane Austen's one plot (with a single exception) – the capturing of a well-placed and well-to-do husband – approaches its problem, and solves it, from the point of view of a woman's thoughts, feelings, and interests. However the husband-to-be may look like the active mind in the transaction, as Knightley does in *Emma* and Wentworth in *Persuasion*, it is the woman's experience that Miss Austen submits to analysis, because she understands it and can voice it (372).

In her early story *Jack and Alice*, Austen herself satirises the perception that male characters were mere appendages to the plot: "It may now be proper to return to the Hero of this Novel ... of whom I believe I have scarcely ever had occasion to speak" (22-23). Rogers has further argued that although the development of female subjectivity in the later eighteenth-century novel enabled a new insight into female psychology and consciousness, it tended to leave the reader uninformed of the personality and feelings of the hero, and prevented him "from developing as a character in his own right" ("Dreams and Nightmares" 9-10). She contends that the courtship novel's concern with female selfhood and its stereotypical characterisation of the romantic hero limited the ability of women writers to develop full portraits of men ("Dreams and Nightmares" 23).

There is a further critical perception that the literary masculinities which women writers *do* manage to construct in courtship novels are either feminised or in some way unrealistic and therefore inadequate. Kathleen Oliver, for example, has argued: "feminized heroes are not uncommon in eighteenth-century novels, particularly novels

written by women” (685). Janet Todd has attributed what she perceives to be a tendency for women novelists to feminise men to their desire to soften men’s potential to act as patriarchs by endowing them with qualities assumed to be feminine, such as gentleness, patience and sensitivity. Todd also proposes that by feminising men, women novelists removed their “otherness” and made the construction of their characters more familiar (*Men by Women* 3-4). Rogers has similarly argued:

Setting a woman at the center of the novel necessarily modified the presentation of male characters, who now appear in terms of their relationship to women. The heroes are considerate and thoughtful to an extent unimaginable ... The women’s heroes are as gentle and as mindful of family responsibilities as women were expected to be ... and their relationship with the women they love is and will remain all-important, transcending worldly ambition or friendship with men (*Feminism* 160).

Rogers rejects such male characters as inadequate because they display virtues that are valued by women at the expense of “male” characteristics (“Dreams and Nightmares” 10-11). She argues that such romantic heroes:

fulfil women’s dreams by making marriage for love their highest priority, by appreciating women as moral and intellectual equals rather than as mere sexual objects, by sensitively considering their feelings, by establishing their self-confidence through gentle correction of their faults or, alternatively, building their self-esteem through acknowledgment of their superior self-control and high-mindedness (“Dreams and Nightmares” 9).

Rather than viewing the roles for male characters offered by the courtship narrative as limiting the female novelist’s scope for constructing masculinities, or considering the resulting male characters as feminised or unrealistic, it is vital to consider the male characters of women’s courtship novels as “symptoms of female desire”, to use George Haggerty’s phrase. Female novelists used the conventions of the courtship novel – particularly its focus on the heroine and its presentation of potential suitors – for their own political purposes. The courtship narrative’s focus on the heroine automatically privileges female desire – and female desire for a particular man or men – as its central concern: the corollary of this is that masculine desirability and undesirability to women is a fundamental concern of the courtship novel. Rogers argues that as “the narrator or central consciousness of her novel, the heroine constantly

demonstrated her capacity to perceive and evaluate the world around her” and that Burney’s Evelina Anville, for example, “is capable of shrewd and severe judgment over those she sees” (*Feminism*, 151, 172). Heroines constantly assess and critique male characters, particularly prospective husbands, a central aspect of the courtship novel that is exemplified in Catherine Morland’s drive with John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*, discussed in the Introduction. The courtship novel’s focus on female selfhood, its privileging of female over male subjectivity and the reader’s access to the heroine’s consciousness provided female novelists with tools for a direct critique of men through the lens of masculine appeal to women. Furthermore, as Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse argue in *The Ideology of Conduct*, representations of desire are not reflections or consequences of political power, but a form of political power in their own right (2). The courtship novel’s central concern with men’s desirability to women itself offered female novelists a form of political power which they used to critique masculinities within broader social, political and cultural contexts.

Both the female novelist’s critique of masculinities within the courtship novel, and the heroine’s assessment of individual male characters, are valorised by the authority over romantic relationships which domestic ideology invested in women. However, the heroine’s critique of potential suitors is further authorised by her position as an unmarried woman who is, either actively or passively, in search of a husband within a social context that promoted companionate marriage. The virtual necessity of marriage for young middle- and lower-gentry-class women as a guarantee of financial and social security and the pervasive social expectation that marriage would be a young woman’s central goal created a parallel expectation that young unmarried women would assess and judge men. This expectation was augmented by the rise of companionate over arranged marriage among these social classes throughout the eighteenth century (Stone 390-99). Although Stone’s theory of the rise of affective individualism and companionate marriage throughout the eighteenth century has been controversial, particularly among early modern and feminist historians, Shoemaker has similarly argued that throughout the eighteenth century parental involvement in courtship lessened, enabling both men and women greater control over the selection of a marriage partner (90-101). Green has also argued that “at least within the realm of ideas – that is, within period texts – companionate marriage made a substantial impact on eighteenth-century England” (14). Green asserts: “it is precisely the change in conceptualization

and representation, the field of ideology, that must interest the literary scholar, and in this regard evidence is both extensive and persuasive” (14). The evidence of the cultural importance of companionate marriage, Green argues, lies in conduct and periodical literature for women. This literature emphasised the vital importance of young women choosing their husbands for themselves and above all making an appropriate choice for their future happiness, and sought to equip them for the task. As Green has commented, “if women were to be responsible for choosing in a new matrimonial game of chance with higher stakes, it followed that they had to be educated about how to weigh the odds, how to play their hands, and how to read the faces opposite theirs” (19). Conduct and periodical literature by both male and female authors not only testifies to the importance of companionate marriage throughout the period: the advice it provides to young women in choosing a husband also establishes unmarried women’s right to assess and judge men.

Female conduct literature of the long eighteenth-century period, as Mary Poovey has highlighted (17-24), is contradictory in its representation of female desire. Within these texts, it is suggested on the one hand that women do not experience sexual desire or strong attractions to individual men, and simultaneously on the other that women have voracious sexual appetites that constantly need to be controlled and regulated. Whether female desire was presented as non-existent or desperately in need of control, conduct literature configured the power relationship within courtship by constructing men as active, desiring subjects and women as passive (whether by nature or nurture) objects and recipients of their desire. This view of female sexuality and the courtship hierarchy is encapsulated in John Gregory’s *Legacy to his Daughters*, which Austen satirises in *Northanger Abbey*: “As nature has not given you that unlimited range in your choice which we enjoy, she has wisely and benevolently assigned to you a greater flexibility of taste on this subject” (37). This approach to courtship was modified by other works of conduct literature that, while not seeking to challenge the gender hierarchy of courtship relations, were deeply concerned with securing young women’s future happiness within the existing courtship paradigm. Such texts generally acknowledged the existence of female sexual desire (albeit by stressing its inadequacy as a basis for marital choice) and impressed upon their female readership the vital importance of making their choice based on rational consideration and judgment. The *Young Woman’s Companion*, for example, advised women:

As the choice of a husband is of the greatest consequence to your happiness, be sure to make it with the utmost circumspection. Do not give way to a sudden sally of passion, and then dignify it with the name of love. Genuine love is not founded in caprice; it is founded in nature, on honourable views, on virtue, on similarity of tastes, and sympathy of souls (540).

Young women were repeatedly reminded: “on our conduct in the choice of an Husband depends our future happiness or misery, at least in *this* world, if not in the next” (*Pleasing Reflections* 148). Writers of female conduct literature almost uniformly attempted to debunk the myth that “the best husband is a reformed rake”, including Lady Sarah Pennington, who instead advised her daughters to seek out a man of virtuous principle, good sense, and particularly good nature, because this “in the private scenes of life, will shine conspicuously in the dutiful son, in the affectionate husband, the indulgent father, the faithful friend, and in the compassionate master” (60-61). Conduct books attempted to elucidate the qualities young women should look for in a husband, including sobriety, prudence, a “virtuous disposition”, a “good understanding” and a “competent fortune” (*Pleasing Reflections* 148-49). Women were advised that “the man of pleasure” was to be avoided because “however agreeable soever he may appear to us abroad, he never can be so long at home; his happiness is to be found only in variety” (*Pleasing Reflections* 149). They should instead seek out a man of liberal education, as this would “ever furnish him with some new and pleasing discourse; his conversation will improve our minds, refine our taste, and better our judgments” (*Pleasing Reflections* 149). Writers of advice literature were deeply concerned that their readers would become the victims of deception by men who only appeared to possess these desirable qualities, and emphatically cautioned them against deceiving men:

The more engaging and accomplished a young woman is, the more she should be on her guard, against the snares of artful and designing men. Under a pleasing and insinuating address, treachery lies often concealed ... However respectful their behaviour, however devoted they may profess themselves, however attentive their civilities, the whole may be only a bait, by which they mean to deceive (*Moral Essays* Vol 2 21).

Lady Sarah advised her daughters:

to lay no stress on outward appearances, which are too often fallacious, but to take the rule of judging, from the simple, unpolished sentiments of those, whose

dependent connections give them an undeniable certainty – who not only see, but who hourly feel, the good or bad effects of that disposition, to which they are subjected (63).

Conduct literature for women of the Romantic period indicates that a young woman's correct choice of a husband was viewed as a personal duty in terms of her own future happiness and a social and spiritual duty regarding the moralising influence she was expected to exert over him after their marriage. These duties paradoxically gave unmarried women a degree of authority to assess and judge men as prospective husbands. By dramatising the process of a young woman choosing a husband, a critique of desirable and undesirable masculinities is an obvious, appropriate and indeed necessary subject for the courtship novel, as Sarah Frantz has persuasively argued (*How Were His Sentiments to be Read?* 7). Lisa Wood has likewise noted: "Who is loved in novels, and why, is important: the desire of characters provides a template for the desire of readers. Sentimental novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries worked openly to teach women whom to desire, and how to recognize masculine exemplarity" (125). While Mary Poovey argues that in *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility* "female desire is a natural force that is, at best, morally ambiguous; at worst, it is a force capable of distorting reality, of disrupting social relations, and of turning back on itself to fester or erupt in destructive sickness of body and mind" (208), it is precisely the force of female desire which Austen uses throughout her novels to critique public constructions of masculinity and to present her male protagonists as expressions of "what men ought to be". By considering the male characters of Austen's novels as "symptoms of female desire", their pursuit of marriage for love and their treatment of women as moral and intellectual equals become not signs of their feminisation (as Katharine Rogers and other critics have suggested), but instead essential attributes of Austen's vision of desirable masculinity.

However, the desirability or undesirability of Austen's male characters is determined by much more than their attitudes to marriage and their behaviour towards women. Austen presents female desire as informed by a range of political, social and cultural issues that influenced the construction of masculinities throughout the Romantic period and which directly impact upon her treatment of the question of "what men ought to be". In the latter phase of Austen's writings career, these issues are

increasingly related to the security and wellbeing of the English nation. Indeed, the growing interest in analysing and defining the concept of nationhood throughout the eighteenth century, its expression in the literary public sphere, the intensification of English nationalist sentiment in the post-Revolutionary period and the positions and roles accorded to women within nationalist discourse provided Austen and other women writers with a new source of authority in addition to domesticity. Domestic ideology became increasingly invested with ideas of civilisation, national progress and national character, producing a cult of English domesticity in which the image of the domestic woman was presented as both definitively English and also as the keystone on which English nationhood, society and culture depended. The growing consciousness of English nationhood as being constituted through a literate public sphere gave women – as writers and readers – new opportunities for social and political participation. Austen and her female contemporaries used this opportunity for public engagement to critique masculinities within the politicised context of nationalist ideology.

Women occupied a politically significant position in understandings of the progress of civilisation and the development of the modern English nation that emerged throughout the eighteenth century. Texts such as *An Essay on Female Influence*, for example, argued that “the rank which females hold in society, and the general regard paid to them, is, in some measure, a test of civilization ... the estimation of the female character in our own country, is one evidence of its superiority to other nations in refined cultivation” (Simple 5). This text exemplifies Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall’s argument that the “idealized position of women was a central theme in nationalistic claims to English superiority advanced by radicals and conservatives alike” (19). Harriet Guest has explored this theoretical trend, which she identifies as “that leitmotif of later eighteenth-century theories of civilization in which the position of women is represented as the key – sometimes the cause, sometimes the effect – of the nice and difficult distinction between corruption and refinement, degeneration and progress” (158). She argues that towards the end of the eighteenth century, female involvement in the public sphere was increasingly justified by the relationship between English patriotism and the social position of women, even as it was articulated in terms of domestic ideology: “it is the association between femininity and the private virtues appropriate to the domestic and maternal role that underpins the alliance, and affords femininity an acceptable public face” (195). Felicity Nussbaum has also explored the

elevation of women within eighteenth-century discourses of national progress, particularly in terms of motherhood. She argues that the cult of English domestic motherhood provided women with authority to speak for the nation: “the domestic woman gained power to shape the public realm, particularly the nation, through procreation and education of her children” (48).

Several scholars have argued that women writers used the public association of the English national interest with the cult of the domestic woman as an additional source of women’s authority to speak for the nation in the post-Revolutionary period. Amanda Gilroy, for example, has argued that “domesticity was increasingly figured in terms of a refuge, a haven or private space away from public turmoil” and that “the rhetoric of home inflects the discourses of gender and nationality: in the context of war, English homes and English women provide both a refuge and an anchor, a point of stability in an unstable discursive arena” (31). Gilroy asserts in relation to the poetry of Felicia Hemans and Joanna Baillie that from “within this private space the domestic woman disseminated national cultural values” (30). Commenting on contemporary reviews of Romantic women’s poetry, Gilroy argues that the “woman writer is circumscribed within the parameters of the home, the space of domesticity and femininity, though, crucially, this circumscription is the key to public success (as well as grounding the wider agendas of national identity)” (32). Anne Mellor makes a similar point regarding the authority women derived from the elevation of their domestic roles to assuming a national importance. She argues that throughout the Romantic period, women were configured as responsible for directing public policy and social reform in relation to the family, the community and the national wellbeing, and that this authority expanded women writers’ scope for social and political commentary at the national level (*Mothers of the Nation* 9). Mellor contends that, as both writers and readers, women influenced the formation of public opinion to the extent that the values of the private sphere infiltrated and finally dominated the discursive public sphere (*Mothers of the Nation* 11). Leanne Maunu has similarly argued that women “entered into debates about the British nation” and stated that “their discussion of gender politics took place, in fact, within and through national politics, as they made use of nationalist discourses to promote their own claims about women’s role within the nation” (2).

In her later three novels, Jane Austen uses the authority she was accorded within nationalist ideology to articulate a strong parallel between men's capacity to fulfil female desire and their ability to perform the social and political responsibilities to protect the English nation that they are allocated within patriarchal and national ideology. Desirable masculinity is demonstrated as being capable of fulfilling both female desire and the demands of the nation. Throughout her novels, Austen used the authority women were accorded over courtship and marriage by domestic ideology, and over the wellbeing of the nation by nationalist ideology, to launch a politicised critique of the public constructions of masculinity that dominated England throughout the Romantic period. Her access to these sources of authority enabled her to construct masculinities within domestic and courtship contexts that were then projected into contemporary social and political discourses. However, although these sources of authority were available to her, and the courtship novel provided her with a tool through which she could deftly critique desirable and undesirable masculinities from a feminist perspective, Austen's concern with "what men ought to be" also had to negotiate the extreme politicisation of masculine gender throughout the Romantic period.

¹ Medora Gordon Byron is one pen name used by an early nineteenth century novelist who also used the pseudonyms "Miss Byron" and "A Modern Antique". There is no biographical information currently available on this novelist, and nothing to suggest a relationship between her and George Gordon, Lord Byron.

² This is the only critical text that aims to comprehensively address the specific issue of women writing masculinity; as Naomi Schor has noted, it lacks theoretical and analytical rigour (130-31).

³ This quote is Schor's translation from the French in Janis Glasgow. *Une Esthétique de comparaison: Balzac et Sand*. Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1977.

CHAPTER TWO

Social and Literary Masculinities in the Romantic Period

In her 1996 article “Jane Austen ‘Responds’ to the Men’s Movement”, Devoney Looser asks: “isn’t it possible that Austen, who has been so influential in our histories of women, is also an important voice in histories of men, masculinities and the novel?” While Looser did “not have an authoritative answer to this question”, she suggested: “‘All signs point to yes’” (164). This chapter demonstrates that Austen’s novels are indeed the “important voice” in the history of social and literary masculinities that Looser postulates. Austen’s constructions of masculinities and their development throughout her writing career reflect changes in the social and literary masculinities that dominated the English public domain throughout the Romantic period. Recent studies of masculinities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, together with contemporary works of male conduct literature, reveal that the Romantic period was characterised by a complex and highly politicised debate on desirable and undesirable masculinities which were culturally reinforced through different literary genres. Throughout her novels, Jane Austen’s concern with the question of “what men ought to be” variously endorses, resists and challenges these different public constructions of masculine gender. Austen’s novels chart the development of socially-produced masculinities throughout the Romantic period, and preface the models of masculinity that would come to dominate the Victorian era.

Eighteenth-century understandings of gender have recently been explored by Dror Wahrman in *The Making of the Modern Self*, which argues that “the firm grounding of sex in nature made possible the conceptualisation of masculinity and femininity as social and cultural attributes, distinct from male and female bodies” (42-43). Wahrman contends that this separation of sex and gender meant that “occasionally, at least, eighteenth-century Britons could imagine – without being overly disturbed – a person’s gender roaming away from his or her sex, or even a person donning and doffing gender identity at will” (43). However, Wahrman argues that the final two decades of the eighteenth century saw “the sweeping closure of the eighteenth-century space for imaginable gender play”, creating a “gender panic” that resulted in “recognizably ‘modern’ notions of gender” which were inextricably tied to the sexual body (44). Wahrman’s analysis of a “gender panic” during the late eighteenth century

is corroborated by much historical work that specifically addresses constructions of gender, and particularly of masculinity, throughout the period. The question of what forms, models or styles of masculine gender were socially and nationally desirable occasioned much public debate, as Michael Kramp has noted: “in the years following the French Revolution, political, philosophical, and literary writers actively engaged in public debates about the appropriate social/sexual identities for men and women” (17). This preoccupation with understanding, defining and controlling gender is reflected in the abundant quantity of conduct literature for both women and men published in the Romantic period. Jane West commented on this phenomenon in *Letters Addressed to a Young Man*: “the numerous publications, on education and morals, which daily issue from the press, might well deter a more sanguine spirit from pursuing such a beaten track” (Vol 1 ix). Associated with the rise of literacy and print culture and viewed as signalling a desire for self-improvement, the genre achieved huge popularity with several works being published in new editions well into the nineteenth century. The reliability of conduct literature as an indicator of the social realities of gender demarcation and understandings of masculinity and femininity is uncertain. Kate Behr has suggested that it “probably reflected the way eighteenth-century society desired to see itself, rather than life as it really was” (55), and Anna Bryson has argued that conduct books “are concerned with ideals, and may themselves give little indication of the distance between these ideals and real behaviour” (6). Despite the uncertainty of its application, conduct literature dominated the construction of gender identities at the level of discourse and ideology throughout Austen’s period.

Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse have posited several influential arguments regarding the relationship between conduct literature and fiction throughout the eighteenth century, particularly regarding constructions of femininity and the development of the novel. They identify female conduct literature as a mechanism for the creation and regulation of desire, and examine the process by which this genre instilled and reproduced culturally approved forms of the ideal domestic woman (*The Ideology of Conduct* 2-3). Armstrong argues that by endorsing the female domestic model that was presented as desirable in conduct literature, novelists transformed the genre into “polite literature” (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 96-98). While the arguments of Armstrong and Tennenhouse with regard to female conduct literature and the novel are persuasive, they simplify the roles played by men and male conduct

literature within relationships of gender, desire and literature during the period. In *The Ideology of Conduct*, male conduct literature is considered as valuable or useful only as a source of insight into social and political history (4), rather than in relation to the history of masculinities and the politics of desirable masculinity. Armstrong and Tennenhouse suggest that by the mid-eighteenth century the genre of male conduct literature gradually merged into other forms because the model of the social and political leader who had dominated aristocratic male courtesy literature of the seventeenth century was no longer considered a valid intellectual or moral goal. This approach overlooks the considerable body of conduct literature published for men throughout the eighteenth century and its potential influence on the fictional literature of the period.

Additionally, Armstrong and Tennenhouse assign to men only the role of the desiring subject: “... in determining what kind of woman a woman should desire to be, these books also determine what kind of woman men should find desirable. Thus the genre implies two distinct aspects of desire, a desired object, and a subject who desires that object” (*The Ideology of Conduct* 5). Armstrong takes a similarly unilateral view of desire in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*: “the novel, together with all manner of printed material, helped to define what men were supposed to desire in women and what women, in turn, were supposed to desire to be” (251). Yet the construction of gender by way of recommending socially-approved conduct was equally the project of male conduct literature as of female conduct literature throughout the eighteenth century. Male conduct literature operated to create and regulate conceptions of desirable masculinity in the same way that female conduct literature sought to create ideals of desirable femininity. The prevalence and content of male conduct literature indicates that a range of models of masculinity were variously endorsed or discredited by male and female writers, generating a public and increasingly politicised debate on desirable masculinity throughout the Romantic period.

However, male conduct literature differed from female conduct literature in one crucial respect. It constructed society, rather than women, as the desiring subject. Female conduct literature repeatedly stressed women’s need to be desirable to men as the central motivation for its readership to adopt a particular model of feminine gender. The reverse, however, cannot be said of male conduct literature, which sought to

motivate its readers to adopt a particular gender identity for reasons such as their acceptability to their male peers, their development of a public reputation or their service to the national interest. With the exception of military manuals (which drew on chivalric discourse to implore men to deserve the heart and hand of their beloved through acts of courage and valour), men were rarely, if ever, advised to adopt a particular model of masculinity because they would thereby become more attractive or desirable to women. At the level of discourse in conduct literature, notions of “what men ought to be” were informed by what English society viewed as necessary for its enrichment, prosperity and ultimately survival, not by what women found desirable in men.

This is not, however, how Jane Austen and her female contemporary novelists viewed the relationship between desire and the public construction of masculinities. Whereas representations of masculinity in the public domain were informed almost exclusively by social, political and national interests, Austen and her female contemporaries used the courtship novel to imagine and endorse masculinities that were desirable primarily to women. Indeed, through her heroines and their convictions of “what men ought to be”, Austen presents female desire – what women want in men – as a reliable indicator of those models of masculinity which are also socially and nationally appropriate. Austen particularly targets two trends in the public constructions of masculinity throughout the Romantic period as desirable simultaneously to women and to the English nation. The first of these trends concerns the growing dominance of middle-class values and specifically the link they establish between productive work, domesticity and socially-approved masculinity. The second trend refers to the transition in socially-approved gentry masculinities from being constituted through refined approaches to sociability to being grounded in English nationalist ideology. Austen’s novels demonstrate that these developments in public constructions of masculinity are capable of serving the interests of both women and the nation. Furthermore, the models of masculinity Austen endorses in her final two novels effect a reform of the patriarchal family and household structure that enables the realisation of female selfhood without compromising either masculine identity or the national interest.

Several gender historians have noted the growing dominance of middle-class values in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and explored their influence on public constructions of masculinity. John Tosh, for example, has described the period from 1750 to 1850 as witnessing two key changes in the social construction of masculinity: “the elevation of work as a ‘calling’, and the moralising of home as the focus of men’s non-working lives” (“Old Adam” 219-20). Tosh particularly emphasises the integration of these two aspects of masculine gender identity: “domestic steadiness was conducive to success in business, while the rigours of bread-winning were rewarded by the comforts of home” (“Old Adam” 220). Similarly, Robert Shoemaker has argued that although the “ideology of domesticity for women and the ideal of the breadwinning husband” had currency in the early modern period, it was particularly strongly articulated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (113, 118). The public proliferation of models of masculinity associated with the middle-class values of productive work and domesticity was reinforced by the rise of Evangelicalism, which particularly critiqued the relationship between manliness and worldly reputation. Tosh argues that Evangelicals sought to replace the formation of masculine identity through public reputation with the concept of “*character*, by which they meant the inner resources of heart and mind transformed by God’s saving grace” (“Old Adam” 233). Davidoff and Hall have also asserted that “the principles which should characterize Christian manhood in the early nineteenth century – piety, domesticity, a proper sense of responsibility about business – these were the attributes of the new man” (113). These dual responsibilities – productive work and domesticity – were reflected by the Evangelical clergyman Thomas Gisborne in his popular conduct book *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men*:

The member of the legislature, the minister of state, the counsellor, the merchant, is also a subject, a husband, a parent, a landlord, or a master ... I request the reader, of whatever description he may be, not to confine his attention to the chapter appropriated to the station or profession to which he belongs; but to consider those chapters also which include the general duties of subjects, and the special obligations of private and domestic life (6).

As Graham Dawson has noted: “The ideal of Christian manliness imagined a ‘gentleman’ equally at home in the public as well as the private sphere” (“Imaginative Geography” 42).

Work, occupation or profession was increasingly presented as integral to desirable masculinity throughout the Romantic period, a result of the growing strength of the middle classes as a political and economic force and of the rise of Evangelicalism. Tosh, for example, has argued: “The new commercial society was made possible by, and in turn reinforced, a new manhood. The man of substance and repute came to be someone who had a steady occupation in business or the professions, instead of receiving rents or trading in stocks” (“Old Adam” 219). Shoemaker has likewise noted that during this period “men came to be identified more strongly with their occupation. Although men’s occupational identity had always been far stronger than women’s ... over the course of our period men’s, but not women’s, occupational identities acquired greater fixity and importance” (204). Davidoff and Hall have further emphasised the importance of work to middle-class and gentry masculinities in the early nineteenth century, arguing that masculine identity “was equated with an emerging concept of ‘occupation’” (30). The relationship between masculinity and work was also, they argue, the keystone on which the middle classes sought to establish themselves as a moral authority in contrast to the aristocracy: expertise in commerce “was regarded as a quintessentially masculine skill and prerogative” and “was an essential part of the middle-class challenge to the aristocratic male whose skills lay with gambling, duelling, sporting and sexual prowess” (205). Evangelicalism particularly elevated the concept of work as a necessary component of masculine identity (Davidoff and Hall 112, Tosh “Old Adam” 234).

Conduct literature from the Romantic period reflects this increasing importance of work or occupation to public constructions of masculine gender. In addition to professional manuals for men entering the clergy, the law or the military, other publications offered more generic advice to men working in the professions, trade or commerce with regard to the establishment of “character”. Gisborne, for example, advised men on their duties as members of parliament, executive officers of government, lawyers, justices of the peace and magistrates, clergymen, physicians, and in the course of trade and business. Vicesimus Knox’s *Essays, Moral and Literary* contained advice on a similar range of subjects. Furthermore, advice for men who inherited fortunes or estates, and who therefore did not need to work for a living, was also included in these publications. Knox, for example, emphasised the importance of

men “who are designed for the life of what is called a gentleman without a profession” being active and useful:

first, because it is a duty he owes the community in return for the protection of his person and property; and, secondly, because it is a duty he owes himself to be as happy as possible; which he will not be, notwithstanding all the real and pretended gratifications of riches, without useful activity (Vol 1 229).

He advised young men to embark on a liberal education to prepare them for roles in parliament, as justices of the peace, as public benefactors, “and to encourage all works of national ornament and utility” (Vol 1 232).

From *Northanger Abbey* through to *Persuasion* Jane Austen unequivocally endorses productive employment as an essential attribute of desirable masculinity and one necessary for men regardless of class or wealth. Landlords responsibly managing their estates (Mr Darcy and Mr Knightley), professionals including clergymen (Edward Ferrars and Edmund Bertram), sailors (Captain Wentworth and William Price) and lawyers (Mr John Knightley), businessmen in trade and commerce (Mr Gardiner) and tenant farmers (Robert Martin), are presented as equally and importantly engaged in productive work. Characters such as John Willoughby, Henry Crawford and Sir Walter Elliot demonstrate that, in Austen’s world, idleness is fundamentally undesirable in men. In her earlier novels, work is presented as important for young men as it gives them purpose and direction; in her later novels, it is strongly equated with community and national responsibility. Austen’s endorsement of productive work as an essential component of desirable masculinity, regardless of a man’s class or whether his income is dependent upon it, reflects and endorses the increasing dominance of middle class values within public constructions of English masculinity. As Anne Mellor has noted: “Jane Austen’s allegiance remains solidly with the middle classes, those who *earn* their living” (*Romanticism and Gender* 61).

Despite the increasing ideological emphasis on men’s working lives as core aspects of their masculine identity, it is also vital to consider the impact of the growing importance of domestic values on social constructions of desirable masculinity. As Tosh has noted, “men operated at will in *both* spheres; that was their privilege” (“Old Adam” 230). Indeed, the debunking of the doctrine of the separation of spheres positively calls for an investigation of men’s approaches to domestic life to complement

the considerable research which has explored women's participation in the commercial and public sectors. As Lisa Wood has noted, "our attention to the celebrated domesticity of women obscures the increased domesticity of men during the nineteenth century" (125). Domestic life was essential to two aspects of masculine identity throughout the Romantic period. Firstly, domestic life was a key component in the formation of an adult masculine identity. Tosh has argued that marriage and the formation, maintenance, protection and control of a household was crucial to the formation of a "socially validated" adult male identity, a crucial aspect of masculinity that remained unchanged from the pre-modern to the modern era ("Old Adam" 223; *Man's Place* 4). He further argues: "*establishing* a household creates the conditions for private life, but it has also long been a crucial stage in winning social recognition as an adult, fully masculine person" (*Man's Place* 3). Shoemaker has likewise emphasised that marriage gave men "the status of householders, which made them liable to taxation and gave them a political voice in the community" (91), and McCormack has also noted the relationship between a man's status as a householder and father and his entitlement to the franchise (123). Davidoff and Hall have similarly identified the formation of a household as necessary to the creation of a fully masculine adult person: "To become adult men within their own terms they must provide a livelihood which made possible a domestic establishment where they and their dependants could live a rational and morally sanctioned life" (229). The role of household formation and family government in establishing an adult masculine persona is reflected in Knox's *Essays, Moral and Literary*: "Every family is a little community, and he who governs it well, supports a very noble character, that of the *pater familias*, or the patriarch" (Vol 1 233).

Conduct literature repeatedly stressed the importance that men act with benevolence and gentleness in the exercise of family and household authority. William Cobbett strenuously reminded his readers of the sacrifices their wives had made when they married them, and the duties that such sacrifices imposed on men as husbands:

she makes a surrender, an absolute surrender, of her liberty, for the joint lives of the parties; she gives the husband absolute right of causing her to live in what place, and in what manner and what society, he pleases; she gives him power to take from her, and to use, for his own purposes, all her goods, unless reserved by some legal instrument; and, above all, she surrenders to him *her person* ... when

we consider these things, how can a just man think any thing a trifle that affects their happiness? (157).

In *Advice to the Teens*, Isaac Taylor advised men: “Manliness is superiority and power certainly; but it is power gained by superiority of character, not of vociferation; won by gentleness, propriety, usefulness; rather than inherited by family, purchased by wealth, or gained by station” (87). *Moral Essays* similarly advised husbands: “Power is never so amiable, as when clothed with moderation; and superiority of understanding is always conspicuous, when it condescends to forgive, or to relieve the weakness of others” (Vol 2 59).

It is important to differentiate men’s roles and responsibilities as the head of a family and household and the adult masculine status that was thereby politically and socially conferred, from the second aspect of the relationship between masculinity and domestic life, which related to the concept of “domesticity”. Tosh articulates this distinction in *A Man’s Place*:

Domesticity represents something else. It denotes not just a pattern of residence or a web of obligations, but a profound attachment: a state of mind as well as a physical orientation. Its defining attributes are privacy and comfort, separation from the workplace, and the merging of domestic space and family members into a single commanding concept (in English, ‘home’) (4).

Clara Tuite has discussed domesticity as an imagined concept, defining it as “the vast investment in the *idea* of the family across a range of social, cultural and political discourses and practices” (“Domesticity” 126). Tosh writes that throughout the nineteenth century, “home was widely held to be a man’s place, not only in the sense of being his possession or fiefdom, but also as the place where his deepest needs were met”, and further comments that men’s attitudes towards the home were “influenced not only by the particular web of relationships they found themselves in, but by their sense of what was right and proper for themselves as men” (*Man’s Place* 1-2). He argues that the cultural authority which domesticity acquired in the Victorian era had its origins in the Georgian period, in the rise of companionate marriage and the conception of home as a source of physical and psychological comfort (*Man’s Place* 29-30). Tosh notes that England was “the domestic nation *par excellence* ... The English placed domestic values at the heart of their culture” (*Man’s Place* 5). Philip Carter has also noted the

importance of domesticity within discourses of male refinement throughout the eighteenth century (*Men and the Emergence* 89-90, 97-98).

These accounts of the development of the concept of “domesticity” as an attachment or orientation to home life and its increasing centrality to socially-approved masculinities in the Georgian and Victorian periods are exemplified by male conduct literature of the Romantic period. Indeed, Tosh has noted: “Questions to do with domestic affections and domestic authority permeated the advice books read by men” (*Man’s Place* 1). Collections of moral essays extol the virtues of companionate marriage and the benefits of a domestically orientated lifestyle. Jane West advised working men to maintain a domestic outlook: “the affectionate husband, the kind father, the good master, the laborious student, the polished cultivator of elegant arts, is contented to limit his renown to the bosom of his family” (vol III 48). Husbands were encouraged to develop an active emotional life with their wives:

his daily ambition should be to please the woman he has chosen for his partner for life; he must, in every thing, promote her ease; he must share with her his every joy, and with a delicate tenderness, let her partake also of his griefs; it is a mark of confidence due to her, it eases her mind of suspense, and gives her, as it were, a melancholy pleasure (*Pleasing Reflections* 114).

Fathers were prompted to care for and play with their children, and specifically reassured that such involvement in parenting would not render them “effeminate”. Knox commented, for example: “to partake with children in their little pleasures, is by no means unmanly. It is one of the purest sources of mirth. It has an influence in amending the heart, which necessarily takes a tincture from the company that surrounds us” (vol 2 361). Cobbett similarly argued: “Being fond of little children argues no *effeminacy* in a man ... I have never observed effeminacy was at all the marked companion of fondness for little children” (159). Conduct literature particularly focused on the importance of men spending time at home with their families for their own wellbeing. *Pleasing Reflections* described a man’s home as “his heaven on earth” (115), and Knox cited historical figures, such as Hector and Andromache as symbolising the value of domestic life as a respite from the public world: “we are refreshed with the tender scene of domestic love, while all around breathes rage and discord” (vol 2 361). Finally, commentators specifically linked a man’s approach to

private life with his public reputation and his attitude to community responsibility.

Cobbett, for example, commented:

To say of a man, that he is fond of his family, is, of itself, to say that, in private life at least, he is a good and trust-worthy man; aye, and in public life too, pretty much; for it is no easy matter to separate the two characters; and it is naturally concluded, that he who has been flagrantly wanting in feeling for his own flesh and blood, will not be very sensitive towards the rest of mankind (212).

Essays and Reflections similarly argued that “the duties we owe to our children and our families, stand foremost, either for our own interest, for theirs, and for the interests of the community” (120), suggesting the prominence of domestic responsibilities within discourse on masculinity and a link between domesticity and benefits to the community and nation.

The emergence of domesticity as a core element of socially approved masculinity had significant ramifications for other aspects of masculine identity. Tosh has argued: “As a social identity masculinity is constructed in three arenas – home, work, and all-male association” (*Man’s Place* 2), and that all-male association was important for men as it “reflected the central role of peer approval in confirming masculine status” (“Old Adam” 229). Carter has also argued that in terms of male refinement, gentlemanly masculinity was “a sociable category in which gender identity was conferred, or denied, by men’s capacity for social performance” (*Men and the Emergence* 209). Davidoff and Hall’s interpretation of gentry masculinity as “based on sport and codes of honor derived from military prowess, finding expression in hunting, riding, drinking and ‘wenching’” (110) also reinforces the location of masculinity in peer-group approval. Throughout the Romantic period, adult masculine status was conferred or denied by a man’s peer group according to his social performance – whether in the coffee-house or the tavern, the ballroom or the hunt. However, as home rather than all-male socialising became the focus of men’s non-working lives, this form of affirmation was increasingly difficult to achieve.

Furthermore, the increased emphasis on domestic family life and particularly its association with Evangelicalism also had implications for male sexuality. The eighteenth century is frequently interpreted as witnessing a relaxation in social attitudes to male and female heterosexuality, particularly in relation to masculine libertinism and

the considerable expansion in the market for pornography. Anthony Fletcher has discussed the relaxation of attitudes to male sexuality within gentry and aristocratic circles:

the eighteenth century upper class Englishman took from the Enlightenment that the pursuit of pleasure was the central purpose of their life, including a liberation of the libido ... regular sexual activity was thought to be healthy ... Parents of upper-class sons intended and expected that they would prove their manhood in this way (342).

Julie Peakman has also commented: “For most post-pubescent youths, sowing their wild oats was part of the process of coming of age, an activity encouraged by their peers and condoned by society” (46). Permissive social attitudes towards male heterosexuality also evolved into a culture of predatory sexuality and libertinism among the upper classes (Hitchcock 21-22, Turner 174). However, Shoemaker has commented that men’s sexual aggressiveness became a subject of concern by the early Victorian period (64), and that “men could come under significant pressure to exercise self control, particularly among the middle classes and at times of intense religiosity (such as early-seventeenth century Puritanism and late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century evangelicalism)” (72-73). Tosh has also noted the Evangelical emphasis on the repression of male sexuality: he argues that men were expected to marry and to shun both libertine sexuality and the sexual licence implicit in codes of gallantry and civility (“Old Adam” 234).

As discussed in Chapter One, Jane Austen’s novels repeatedly address the relationship between masculinity and the domestic – both in terms of men’s roles and responsibilities as householders, husbands and fathers, and in relation to the more modern concept of “domesticity”. Her novels strongly reflect the relationship between men’s approaches to their families and domestic life and the performance of their broader community and national responsibilities. They endorse both the increasing investment of socially-approved masculinities with a sense of domesticity throughout the Romantic period and the resulting implications of this emphasis on the domestic for other aspects of masculine identity, including all-male association and male sexuality. Austen unequivocally presents men’s attitudes to their domestic roles and responsibilities and to “domesticity” as reliable indicators of their worth and value as men. Male characters’ domestic orientation – or lack thereof – is demonstrated through

their attitudes to women, their siblings, their parents, their dependents and other members of their household, and also by their attitudes to settled domestic life itself. Austen also foregrounds the important relationship between masculinity and domesticity by specifically associating domestic spaces – usually an estate or other permanent home – with her male characters. Austen’s novels repeatedly use houses, gardens and landscapes as symbols, images and indicators of desirable and undesirable masculinities. Indeed, this trope features so consistently and so prominently that it could be argued that within Austen’s novels, domestic spaces are in fact gendered as masculine rather than feminine. It is more than a little discomfiting for a feminist scholar to reach this interpretation of Austen’s work, particularly considering the important role which domesticity played for writers including Austen in providing a source of authority for social and political commentary. “If domestic spaces are masculine rather than feminine, what place is left for women?” is the next logical question. Yet it remains that throughout Austen’s novels the most prominent narrative, descriptive and thematic representations of estates and landscapes concern male rather than female characters.

Austen uses men’s houses, gardens and landscapes to provide the reader and sometimes her heroines with insights into her male characters’ personalities and values: who they are as men. This is a particularly useful device in the characterisation of her male protagonists because Austen only rarely allows her reader access to their consciousness and interiority. In *Turning Houses Into Homes*, Clive Edwards states that “most agree that home is a symbolic environment, representing one’s identity through the things therein” (4), and this is the use to which Austen puts the home in the characterisation of her protagonists and other male characters. This application also reflects early nineteenth-century changes in public understandings of the home and its personal and social roles. Edwards argues that “forms of self-consciousness (in the sense that individuals were knowingly able to express themselves) were well established by the eighteenth century”, and that individual choice in the style and furnishing of the home can be attributed not only to fashion, a desire to emulate others or for public display, but also to a desire to establish a personal identity (81-85). As with the connection between masculinity and domesticity in the sense of family relationships, the Georgian period was a time of transition in consumption practices, and Edwards draws a distinction between the earlier eighteenth-century emphasis on the

home as a form of social performance and display, and the nineteenth-century view of the home as an expression of personal identity (144). Austen's contemporary readers would have understood and appreciated her approach to characterising men through their homes.

Duckworth has noted: "Throughout Jane Austen's fiction, estates function not only as the settings of action but as indexes to the character and social responsibility of their owners" (*Improvement of the Estate* 38). What has been less considered, however, is the relationship between houses, gardens, landscapes and men; not as conduits of particular historical, social and cultural values but in terms of masculine gender itself. Yet throughout her novels the home plays a vital role in the characterisation of Austen's male protagonists and provides a unique insight into their masculine identity. In *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, the heroine visits the male protagonist's home in an episode which functions as more than a glimpse of her future married life: it is used as a defining moment in the heroine's understanding of the male protagonist and their relationship and provides the reader with an insight into the male protagonist is otherwise unavailable. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen employs the estate/state metaphor to embark on an overtly politicised critique of masculinities. In *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*, the absence of the home is equally important to Austen's constructions of masculinity: it reflects Edward Ferrars' dependence and his uncertain masculinity throughout the novel, and in Captain Wentworth it enables the construction of a new model of masculinity away from the ownership and control of land.

Austen's use of the home as a signifier of masculinity needs to be considered in relation to the different political and cultural meanings invested in images of the estate, the garden and landscape in the context of the Romantic period. Firstly, in the post-Revolutionary and Regency period, the image of the estate was repeatedly used as a metaphor for the broader political state or nation. This metaphor has been particularly associated with conservative politics: Duckworth, for example, has noted Edmund Burke's repeated use of the image of the altered house or estate as symbolising destructive and radical change to the state or nation in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (*Improvement of the Estate* 45). Critics of Austen's novels have tended to view her use of the estate and the estate/state metaphor as indicative of a conservative

political position: Duckworth has argued that in her novels the estate is symbolic of “an entire inherited culture” and “a physical emblem of a cultural heritage” (*Improvement of the Estate* 55, 184), and Roberts has contended that her use of the estate signifies her advocacy of Burkean values (44). However, as Roger Sales has argued, the estate/state metaphor was widely used “by both conservatives and radicals” throughout the 1790s and the Regency period including, for example, in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Jane Austen 89). The image of the estate was invested with significant national meanings across the political spectrum, as was the garden (Cross 55) and landscape, including landscape painting (Helsing 32 n8). Rather than interpreting Austen’s usage of these images throughout her novels as signalling her conservatism, they should instead be considered as indicative of her concern with England’s national wellbeing. Austen’s association of masculinity with these images and her interest in men’s responsible and irresponsible management of their estates signify her deep concern with men’s performance of their social and national responsibilities, rather than her association with a particular political stance. She uses the relationship between masculinity and the estate to pursue a range of political agendas.

Secondly, Austen’s association of the home with masculinity also needs to be considered in terms of eighteenth-century and Romantic aesthetic approaches to garden design and landscape improvement. Throughout the Romantic period the central aestheticians in this field were Humphry Repton, a landscape improver who followed the tradition of formal garden design established by Lancelot “Capability” Brown in the eighteenth century, and Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight, who preferred a less ornate and more natural style of landscape and garden design labelled “picturesque”. Jill Heydt-Stevenson has argued that the central debate between the two was “whether to preserve or alter, and thus whether to maintain or use, though both camps believed they were preserving what was distinctly English” (“Liberty, Connection, and Tyranny” 262). Concerns with the improvement of landscape and the principles according to which it should be undertaken recur throughout Austen’s novels. Duckworth has noted that “it is difficult to derive from her novels a view consistent with that of any one of the major proponents” (“Landscape” 282); however, on balance Austen does indicate a preference for picturesque aesthetics and a gradual approach to estate improvement. Austen’s chief concern is again with the nation: men’s attitudes to the improvement of

their estates speak not to a particular political agenda, but rather to their capacity to appropriately serve the nation.

Finally, Austen's association of masculinity with the estate, garden and landscape must also be considered in relation to feminist interpretations of the connection of landscape with liberated or empowered femininity. Barbara Britton Wenner, for example, has recently argued that "Austen illustrates ways of achieving a sense of power by her placement of women in the natural landscape" (7). Heydt-Stevenson has similarly asserted that "picturesque aesthetics constitute an instance in which the issues of the body, of sexuality, of women, and of the desire for liberty intertwine" (267) and that Austen "explores the junction between the boundaries of personal liberty allowed to women and those allowed to the landscape itself, privileging for her own heroines bonds with the wilder, unornamented, picturesque landscape" (261). The connections Britton Wenner and Heydt-Stevenson draw between landscape and Austen's female characters are important developments in scholarship on Austen's feminist project and the realisation of female selfhood in her novels. These critics do not, however, investigate the implications for Austen's constructions of masculinity, which are particularly important where the estates, gardens or landscapes in which the female characters achieve either empowerment or liberation are also associated with or in fact controlled by men. Britton Wenner's focus on the feminist viewpoint positions men and their landscapes as part of a homogenous "existing patriarchal culture" with which the heroines of necessity have an adversarial relationship, and Heydt-Stevenson, quoting Toril Moi's *Textual/Sexual Politics*, has commented: "the picturesque offers ... one of those 'paradoxically productive aspects of patriarchal ideology (the moments in which the ideology backfires on itself, as it were)' (64)" (271). In a broader sense, Mezei and Briganti's article "Reading the House" also simultaneously acknowledges the importance of domestic spaces to female subjectivity and the fact that "domestic space is designed and controlled by the patriarchy" (840) without exploring or even raising the relationship between domesticity and masculinity. Austen's use of landscapes controlled by men to enable the realisation of female selfhood itself points to a revision of masculinity, and its constitution through patriarchal ideology, which also needs to be explored.

Indeed, Austen's association between masculinity and domestic spaces strongly informs her project of reforming the conventional patriarchal family. Estates are used to draw a distinction between the twin aspects of the relationship between masculinity and domestic life throughout the Romantic period discussed earlier: the conception of home as a domain to be controlled, and the understanding of "home" as an affective concept. In each of Austen's novels, the association between masculinity and domesticity in the latter sense – the new appreciation of "home" as the focus of men's non-working lives – is strongly endorsed through the male protagonist. Without fail, all of the men Austen's heroines marry strongly value domesticity, either in the form of the domestic space itself or in terms of family relationships. However, Austen also addresses the former aspect of the relationship between masculinity and domesticity – in terms of the establishment of an adult male identity through the control of a family and household – and explores this issue differently throughout her novels. Her treatment of this issue dramatises her reform of the patriarchal family and household structure. In *Northanger Abbey* and to a lesser extent in *Mansfield Park*, masculine rule of the domestic environment is presented as a source of oppression, particularly to women and other subordinated members of the family and household, and this relationship of control and subservience is reflected in the estates owned and managed by General Tilney and Sir Thomas Bertram. These novels clearly challenge conventional domestic patriarchy. In *Sense and Sensibility*, however, the establishment of an adult masculine identity through the formation of a family and a household is presented as oppressive not only to women but also to men such as Edward Ferrars, who is unable and unwilling to assume this social role. Austen's second novel challenges domestic patriarchy not only by illustrating its damaging effects on the Dashwood women but also by highlighting its unsuitability as a universal model of masculinity. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen creates a relationship between a man and his home that represents a utopian "best possible scenario" for women, servants and other domestic subordinates, while also preserving the association between masculinity and domestic control. Anne Mellor has also noted that the relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth does not itself revise the conventional gender hierarchy within marriage:

He remains the master of Pemberly [sic], controlling the 'liberties' of all the women enclosed within ... Jane Austen advocates a marriage of genuine equality between husband and wife – and has seduced many readers into believing that such is the case with Darcy and Elizabeth – but she is honest

enough to remind us that such marriages may not yet exist in England
(*Romanticism and Gender* 57).

Such marriages do, however, exist in Austen's final two novels, *Emma* and *Persuasion*, in which the male protagonists form socially recognisable adult male identities without relying on the relationships of control and subservience that inhere in patriarchal family and household hierarchies. In *Emma*, this development in masculine identity is dramatised by Mr Knightley's physical movement away from the Donwell Abbey estate to Emma's home at Hartfield. Mr Knightley is able to move to Hartfield without compromising his masculine status because he views masculine gender as a matter of individual interiority and consciousness rather than being established through external social factors such as the governance of a family and household. In this sense, Mr Knightley, uniquely within Austen's novels, reflects a modern conception of gender identity as it has been articulated by John Tosh:

Modern notions of masculinity (and femininity also) emphasise the inner consciousness of the individual. Masculinity may be culturally determined, in the sense of featuring only a limited repertoire of traits, but it is also understood to be an expression of the self, and up to a point can be a matter of individual choice, tormenting and liberating as the case may be. Authenticity is the exacting standard by which contemporary gender identities are judged ("Old Adam" 232).

Mr Knightley's approach to masculine gender is grounded in the more modern standard of authenticity, and it is this standard which he applies to Frank Churchill throughout *Emma* and against which Frank is ultimately found wanting. In *Persuasion*, by removing the courtship narrative entirely away from the domestic space of the estate and focusing instead on the nature of relationships between men and women, Austen constructs another male protagonist who is able to form an adult masculine identity that is socially validated but also not reliant on the submission of women. Unlike Mr Knightley, Captain Wentworth's masculine status remains externally established through social factors – particularly through his naval career – but he nevertheless undertakes a development throughout the novel which specifically alters his attitudes towards women, and which enables him to enter an equal marriage with Anne. In this way, Austen's different configurations of the relationships between men and domestic spaces allow her to challenge, resist and ultimately reform the establishment of adult

male identity through patriarchal family and household structures. This effects a reform of the patriarchal family that serves the needs and desires of women, but does not impair men in the construction of an adult male identity or the service of the English nation.

Throughout the Romantic period, men's relationships to domesticity and their involvement in productive work were also related to "independence", a further feature of adult masculine identity which was endorsed by middle-class values and which Austen presents as vital to desirable masculinity. Matthew McCormack's detailed study of the relationship between the concept of independence and Romantic constructions of masculinity argues that the "idealised figure of the 'independent man' was ... held up as the epitome of manliness, citizenship and national character" (1). McCormack argues that independence "connoted not just autonomy, but the condition in which self-mastery, conscience and individual responsibility could be exercised" (2). He notes that "personal freedom was a prominent aspect of a Georgian man's sense of his gender – as well as his social and political being – and this was commonly articulated in terms of "manly independence" (2). Tosh has commented that in the Victorian period "independence" was a central indicator of adult masculine status that combined "dignified work, sole maintenance of the family, and free association on terms of equality with other men" (*Manliness and Masculinities* 39). Davidoff and Hall have similarly noted "the middle-class equation of masculine honour with independence", and argued that it resulted from the growth of a mercantile economy away from aristocratic and landed interests (199). McCormack (4-5) and Davidoff and Hall (199) additionally stress the perceived relationship between financial and moral independence, political participation and the appropriate exercise of power.

McCormack has identified a transition "between the early Georgian association of 'independence' with the social, intellectual, and political elite, and its Victorian association with manhood *per se*" (113). Jane Austen's novels can be considered as participating in this transition. They consistently present independence as an essential quality of desirable masculinity and dramatise the uncertain masculinities of men who are either financially dependent on others or lack moral and intellectual independence. Some of her male characters, such as Henry Tilney and Edward Ferrars, undertake personal journeys to becoming financially and/or morally independent throughout the

novels. For others, such as Edmund Bertram, a lack of independence in the sense of moral consistency results in severe and lasting damage. Other men such as Mr Darcy and Mr Knightley possess both financial and moral independence and this forms a defining feature of their desirability as men. In her final three novels, financial and moral independence are also presented as essential to the proper exercise of political power: *Persuasion* particularly dramatises the distinction between the landed aristocracy, obsessed with the ties of kinship and patronage, and the independent and hence politically responsible middle class.

Throughout her novels Jane Austen emphatically presents middle-class masculine values – a solid professional work ethic, a strong value for domestic life and financial and moral independence – as necessary attributes of desirable masculinity. She does not, however, view men’s patriarchal roles and responsibilities in terms of conventional family and household structures as necessary either to the social establishment of an adult masculine identity or to desirable masculinity. On the contrary, her novels construct and endorse approaches to masculinity through which men can create socially-recognisable adult male identities (such as through work in the national interest) that are not reliant on female submission (thus serving the needs of women). Austen’s presentation of desirable masculinities is also informed by a second trend in public constructions of masculinity throughout the Romantic period. Socially-approved models of masculinity also changed from being grounded in refined or polite sociability to instead being based in contemporary understandings of English national character. Michèle Cohen has commented that “historians of masculinity agree that the early nineteenth century saw a change in the definition of the gentleman and that this change had consequences for the definition of masculinity” (“Manners” 312), and Austen’s novels can be interpreted as dramatising this change. The modifications Austen makes to discourses of male refinement, nationalism and chivalry throughout her novels endorse a model of masculinity that can simultaneously meet the needs of the nation and the desires of women.

Most gender historians agree that discourses of male refinement – comprising polite sociability and later sentimental masculinity – dominated public constructions of masculinity throughout the eighteenth century.¹ This view is not *universally* held by gender historians: Davidoff and Hall (110) and Fletcher (325-29), for example, have

highlighted the resilience of the image of the boorish country squire England inherited in the eighteenth century, which is perhaps typified in Elizabeth Shackleton's description of her husband:

as the absolute antithesis of the polite partner, his varied offences revealing the myriad of rules of civility in the breach rather than in the honouring. Throughout the 1770s John Shackleton sought escape from and compensation for the problems of his marriage in hunting, shooting and fishing. To this end, he habitually left the house before his wife had emerged from the bedroom and only returned well after dark, fortified by liquor (Vickery *Gentleman's Daughter* 214).

However, at the level of discourse, male refinement was a culturally dominant model of ideal gentry masculinity throughout the eighteenth century and a key discourse with which Jane Austen and her contemporaries engaged. Philip Carter has argued that the image of the "polite man" emerged as a result of social and economic changes in the early eighteenth century and the growing perception that as a more powerful, prosperous, tolerant and civilised nation, England required a new model of sociable masculinity (*Men and the Emergence* 1). Politeness "would allow men to display their refinement while also maintaining a masculine identity" (Carter "Men About Town" 49), and provided the means to develop a refined yet virtuous personality which was superior to earlier forms of manly virtue deemed incompatible with polite sociability because of their links to elitism, violence and boorishness (Carter *Men and the Emergence* 1). In her 1812 novel *The Absentee*, Maria Edgeworth succinctly illustrates the distinction between traditional and more modern, polite masculinities in her characterisation of Mr Berryl, a "country gentleman": "not meaning by that expression a mere eating, drinking, hunting, shooting, ignorant country squire of the old race, which is now nearly extinct; but a cultivated, enlightened, independent English country gentleman" (41).

Politeness was underpinned by the perceived synthesis of internal moral virtue with refined outer behaviour (Carter *Men and the Emergence* 23). Inner complaisance and moral virtue were believed to be expressed externally through manners, conduct and conversation that were pleasing, gentle and refined. Michèle Cohen has argued that "according to the system of manners embodied in politeness, the 'complete' eighteenth-century gentleman was a man of conversation, distinguished by his civility, good breeding, manners, and his ability to please and make others feel easy" ("Manners")

325). Instruction in developing politeness dominated male conduct literature throughout the eighteenth century. *Farrago*, for example, defined politeness as “the assimilation of our behaviour to the practice of all those qualities that form the most refined pleasures of social intercourse, the appearance of universal benevolence, generosity, modesty, and of making our own happiness spring from the accommodation of others” (Vol 1 96). This definition emphasises the role of politeness in facilitating social relationships and suggests that it ensured the fulfilment of responsibilities to others in a civilised society regardless of class distinctions. In *Essay on Politeness*, John Harris similarly endorsed the role of politeness in interpersonal relationships, but also emphasised its function in relation to manners and personal conduct, defining politeness as “that temper of mind and tenour of conduct which make persons easy in their behaviour, conciliating in their affection and promoting every one’s benefit; that renders reproof palatable, obligation a pleasure, and kind offices never to be slighted or forgotten” (18). Michèle Cohen has argued that travel through continental Europe, known as the “Grand Tour”, was also viewed as enhancing male refinement and considered as “the ‘crown’ of a liberal education, without which no gentleman could be considered accomplished” (“Without Polish” 219).

Women were accorded a specific and important position within polite discourse. Firstly, like the social position of women discussed in Chapter One, politeness was considered to be an indicator of a civilised and enlightened society. Respectful treatment of women was therefore an absolutely essential attribute of the polite man. The Earl of Chesterfield, for example, advised his son: “Civility is particularly due to all women; and remember that no provocation whatsoever can justify a man in not being civil to every woman ... It is due to their sex, and is the only protection they have against the superior strength of ours” (60). Another commentator remarked: “the minds and manners of men, exhibit more or less of that kind of polish and refinement which meliorate human life, as more or less of a respectful and mental estimation is made of the fair sex” (Simple 6). Secondly, the conversation of women was repeatedly and emphatically presented as essential to cultivating polite masculinity. James Forrester, for example, asserts: “It is the conversation of Women that gives a proper Bias to our inclinations, and, by abating the Ferocity of our passions, engages us to that Gentleness of deportment, which we stile Humanity. The Tenderness we have for them softens the ruggedness of our own nature” (71). He concluded: “Politeness can be in no other way

attained ... it is the acquaintance of the Ladies only which can bestow that Easiness of address, whereby the Fine gentleman is distinguished from the Scholar, and the Man of Business” (68). Women’s role in fashioning the polite man was also reinforced in periodical literature:

Men were formed more noble, and women to soften and refine their sentiments, to moderate their passions, and make them rational. Men without women would be little better than savages: they are obliged to our sex for the politeness and address which renders them agreeable (“On the Errors” 132).

Michèle Cohen (*Fashioning Masculinity* 50-52), Philip Carter (*Men and the Emergence* 66-70) and Laura Runge (43-50) have also noted women’s role within polite discourse.

The cultural dominance of the “polite man” as a model of masculinity was reinforced by its recurrence in novels throughout the eighteenth century, particularly as they sought to define and construct the “gentleman”. The eighteenth-century novel’s concern with defining the ideal gentleman resulted in the creation of the literary icon of the morally exemplary gentleman, which several critics have particularly located in the protagonist of Samuel Richardson’s *History of Sir Charles Grandison* (Gilmour 30-1, Sheriff 19-26, 59-72, Shroff 11). E.J. Clery has commented that “Sir Charles was born out of discussion and debate, and it is as a nexus of issues concerning the definition of masculinity that he is best understood” (157), highlighting the relationship between social constructions of masculinity and their reflection in the literary form of the novel. The model of the morally exemplary polite man encapsulated in Sir Charles Grandison is relevant to a consideration of relationships between female desire, the novel and public constructions of masculinity for two reasons. Firstly, his characterisation was strongly informed by a circle of literary women who Richardson consulted throughout the composition of the novel. As Clery has commented: “Richardson began canvassing every woman he knew for hints for the creation of an ideal man ... In one sense he was asking them to reveal their innermost desires ... to literally *make* the man they would have as a mate” (154. Betty Schellenberg has also noted this aspect of the text (599)). Secondly, it has been argued that as a morally exemplary ideal, Sir Charles became an influential literary model of masculinity in women’s writing. Gerard Barker has noted the prominence of this stereotype in women’s novels throughout the eighteenth century, arguing that Sir Charles “seemed tailor-made to fit the needs of the burgeoning feminine novel” (13). He argues that Sir Charles is virtually infallible, “a paragon of

virtue through whom Richardson intended to show that moral perfection need not preclude manliness or gallantry” (25-6), who “soon became the prototype for the gentle, sensitive, but manly hero who abounds in the feminine novel of the latter half of the century” (47). Barker further contends that Sir Charles’ very improbability as a character made him “such an attractive prototype for the feminine novel of the latter part of the century” (36), implying, like Harrison Steeves, that female novelists were unable to represent men accurately or realistically. Barker states: “Sir Charles’ idealized, shadowy character offered women novelists who, like Fanny Burney and Frances Sheridan, were ill at ease in the world of male psychology, a means to create a hero perfectly equipped to complement their genteel heroines” (36). Katharine Rogers has similarly discussed the dominance of the perfectly moral man as the romantic hero of eighteenth-century women’s novels, noting that he tends to be a complement to the exemplary conduct of the heroine, imbued with virtues rather than faults (“Dreams and Nightmares” 9, 13).

It is widely believed that Jane Austen admired Richardson and *Sir Charles Grandison* in particular, and several critics have outlined relationships between Sir Charles and Austen’s male characters. In *Jane Austen’s Art of Memory*, Jocelyn Harris comprehensively explores Austen’s novels in relation to her admiration for Richardson and examined the influence of Richardson’s literary men, including Sir Charles Grandison, on a range of Austen’s male characters. Carol Flynn has located “the benevolent male monitor”, a figure that she argues Austen uses in *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, in *Sir Charles Grandison* (112) and Darryl Jones has suggested that Sir Charles was the inspiration for Austen’s depictions of “virtuous masculinity” in Mr Darcy and Mr Knightley (47, 99). Jennifer Preston Wilson has also identified a relationship between Darcy and Sir Charles in *Pride and Prejudice*, arguing that Austen’s narrative bias towards Elizabeth may result from her “better insight into the female mind or her choice of an ideal and distant Grandisonian male figure for her hero” (no pag.). This interpretation would seem to support Barker’s view that female novelists appropriated the Grandison figure because of their inability to accurately represent male psychology. While arguments regarding the influence on Austen of Sir Charles Grandison and similar eighteenth-century literary figures are persuasive, it is important to recognise that Austen’s characterisations of men not only reflect but also strongly reject elements of the literary masculinities of her predecessors, particularly in

relation to the model of polite masculinity which had become ensconced in the idealised morally exemplary romantic hero. Austen's male characters are more complex and more flawed than either Sir Charles Grandison or the image of morally exemplary masculinity he symbolised. In fact, Sir Charles embodies a myth regarding masculinity that in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* Austen specifically debunks. Indeed, Austen's novels can be interpreted as reflecting and even promoting the decline of politeness in the Romantic period, and for the reasons which have been identified by gender historians: its susceptibility to dissimulation and corruption, its complexities for women and gender relationships and its incompatibility with a strongly masculine national character.

The focus of polite discourse on external public display left open the possibility that men could simulate or cultivate refined manners, conduct and conversation without possessing the moral virtue and genuine goodwill towards others which politeness was intended to secure. As the writers of female conduct literature discussed in Chapter One foresaw, "the high premium put upon manners as social performance meant that a successful but dishonest performance was always in danger of being mistaken for the real thing" (Gilmour 19). Philip Carter argues that the publication of Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son* in 1774 crystallised this issue because his advice not only highlighted "how external manners might exist independent of inner virtue" but also encouraged "a brand of male refinement characterised by self-advancement disguised under a civil veneer" (*Men and the Emergence* 79). Jenny Davidson has also discussed the public outrage that followed the publication of Chesterfield's correspondence, noting: "in his model, manners encroach so far into the field of morals that they leave no core of character uncorrupted. The chameleonic individual he favors is perceived by many readers to be absolutely amoral, a creature of address rather than integrity" (58). Throughout Austen's novels, numerous male characters including General Tilney, Robert Ferrars, Mr Collins, Mr Elton and Mr Elliot highlight the failure of politeness to secure complaisance towards others through the external cultivation of refined sociability.

The culture of sensibility provided one solution to the inability of politeness to guarantee moral virtue. Carter has discussed the reliance of sensibility on the concept of sympathy, which was "broadly defined as the quality by which one person

reproduced and came to experience the feelings of another by observation” (“Polite ‘Persons’” 345), to produce a new form of refined sociability. The culture of sensibility and the associated concept of sympathy influenced the public construction of masculinities in two key respects. In the first instance, the strong value which sensibility placed on emotion, on feeling and on their spontaneous expression supposedly guaranteed the authenticity of inner moral virtue that the physical control and self-command of politeness could not. As Carter has commented, it “restored the link between moral and physical refinement” (*Men and the Emergence* 90). This prompted the development of sentimental masculinity, which was characterised by the external expression of heightened emotional sensitivity through physical responses such as facial expressions, gestures, trembling, fainting, weakness and tears. As with politeness, the novel played an important role in developing and publicising this model of sentimental masculinity, specifically through the figure of the “man of feeling” who was typified in Lawrence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* and Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (Barker-Benfield 142-44, Spencer 186).

Secondly, sensibility was also associated with Scottish enlightenment writers, and this is the model of sensible masculinity with which Austen’s novels are chiefly concerned. Recent accounts of the relationship between sensibility and eighteenth-century social theories tend to focus on Adam Smith and particularly his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Laurenz Volkmann has argued that Smith’s “notion of human sympathy – defined as compassion or empathy, approval of the other person – as an intrinsic psychological mechanism to feel with other people” is the basis of his ethical theory (196). However, Smith argued that rather than an excessive or outlandish display of emotions, “practical assistance was the best response” (Carter *Men and the Emergence* 103). Such a response was dependent on controlling sensibility through self-command and an “overt show of forbearance and dignity” (Carter *Men and the Emergence* 96). Carter argues that Smith was not alone in his “call for men’s displays of refined feelings to be evaluated in terms of their provision of practical assistance” (*Men and the Emergence* 104), as he was prefigured by David Hume and joined by his contemporary Vicesimus Knox. As Carter has commented, “Smith’s method for illustrating the manly elements of sympathetic exchange presents a model of virtuous male behaviour far removed” (104) from images of sentimental manliness, such as the “man of feeling”. It is this conception of masculinity associated with the culture of

sensibility with which Austen is chiefly concerned, particularly in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

Sense and Sensibility also responds to the “man of taste”, a model of masculinity linked with the refinement of both politeness and sensibility. The man of taste was recognised as possessing artistic, literary and musical discernment, and was used as a means of demonstrating “distinction from the world and above the vulgar” (Barker-Benfield 206; see also Saisselin 120 and Cottom 2). However, like politeness and sensibility, taste was also invested with particular moral qualities: it was “a means of showing virtue and merit quite aside from one’s possession of wealth ... the true artist, the true *virtuoso*, and thus true gentleman is a man of integrity in whom taste and morality are inseparable” (Saisselin 121). Barker-Benfield has described the aesthetic concept of taste as an attempt to spiritualise or moralise consumerism and argued that the culture of sensibility insisted on a tasteful relationship between the individual and the goods and commodities supplied by consumer society (205). He analyses the equation of taste with morality as simultaneously enabling pleasure and control: taste permitted the experience of pleasure within controlled, morally permissible circumstances; a failure to cultivate taste was a failure to control pleasure, and thus an indicator of immorality (207). The concept of masculinity associated with taste is vital to Austen’s characterisation of John Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*.

Like politeness, masculinities associated with the culture of sensibility were also susceptible to duplicity and affectation. It was increasingly recognised that the expression of emotion or the display of taste could be used to convey a false sense of morality and to pursue self-interest. Furthermore, Austen highlights throughout her novels that all forms of masculine refinement – politeness, sensibility and taste – had serious implications for women through their association with gallantry. Jenny Davidson has discussed the dual definitions of “gallantry” as “refined address to women” on one hand, but “vicious love; lewdness; debauchery” on the other (47). She argues that the susceptibility of women to gallantry within “polite” conversation was clearly delineated by the Earl of Chesterfield, who “suggests that men may manipulate women even more easily than they manipulate other men” (60). Laura Runge has also argued that throughout the eighteenth century, women writers repeatedly illustrate “the danger and ambiguity of male conversation ... The same language, indeed the same

conversation, that marks the speaker as polite might also function as seduction” (45). She notes that “the open-ended rhetoric of compliment incorporates hyperbolic flattery and indirection that can mask the intentions of the speaker” (52), and argues that women writers “raised questions about the clarity and trustworthiness of male speech, about the assumptions of male intellectual superiority, and ultimately about the objectives of such conversation” (59). Davidson also notes that throughout the 1790s, women writers from across the political spectrum “objected very vocally to the ideology of gallantry” (103). Throughout her novels and particularly in *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* Jane Austen repeatedly illustrates the vulnerability of women to men’s “polite” or “gallant” conversation and the moral degradation of women who choose to respond to it. In this respect perhaps more than any other, Austen thoroughly discredits politeness as a desirable model of masculinity.

Indeed, male refinement’s association with women and femininity increasingly brought it into disrepute as a socially acceptable model of masculinity, particularly by critics who viewed female company as exerting a feminising influence over men. Carter has argued that social commentators sought to defend manhood from what they viewed as the destruction of moral and physical standards and the degradation of men into effeminacy (*Men and the Emergence* 2). Public commentators were also increasingly concerned that England’s young men were returning from the Grand Tour “Frenchified and effeminate” rather than learned and accomplished (Cohen “Without Polish” 220). In *Addresses to Young Men* James Fordyce, for example, criticised the Grand Tour for producing men “more depraved and foolish than they went” and scorning “every thing sober, sedate, and manly” (vol 2 152). The negative perception of the relationship between male refinement, effeminacy and French language and culture lead several commentators to reject it for its “incompatibility with a masculine national character” (Cohen “Manners” 314). John Brown’s 1757 *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* particularly expressed concern over the future of the English nation if refinement continued to dominate public discourse on masculinity. Brown writes: “There are three leading circumstances, on which the internal *Strength* of every Nation most essentially depends: These are, the *Capacity*, *Valour*, and *Union*, of those who *lead* the People” (vol 1 72). He examines “how far the false Delicacy and Effeminacy of present Manners may have weakened or destroyed the *national capacity*” (vol 1 73), and argues that refined masculinity destroys “the national bodily *Strength*,

Hardiness, Courage, and Principle (vol 1 87) which is required for the defence of the nation.

Arguments that deplored male refinement and endorsed a stronger, more traditional model of masculinity intensified in the post-Revolutionary and Regency period as nationalism became increasingly prominent in England. Gerard Newman has described English nationalism during this period as “pricked into being by a general sense, cultural and aesthetic as well as political, social, economic and religious, that all was not well; a sense that the dominant culture of the nation was far too much under the spell of France” (51-2). A new anthropological interest in the concepts of national character and identity also contributed to this public national consciousness (Langford *Englishness Identified* 7). Langford writes that it was during the Romantic period that the words “Englishness” and “un-English” have their first recorded usages, and that the phrase “national character” became a fashionable term (*Englishness Identified* 1, 7). The word “English” as a cultural signifier is used frequently in Austen’s later novels, particularly *Emma*. Langford argues that throughout the Romantic period, national character was understood to be transitory, susceptible to the successes and failures of the nation, and therefore as requiring constant maintenance and remedial attention (*Englishness Identified* 8-9). Kathleen Wilson has similarly described “Englishness” as “less a stable and eternal entity ... than a continually contested terrain” (4).

Throughout the Romantic period England was viewed as requiring a strong national character not only to defeat Napoleon but also to differentiate itself culturally from France. As exemplified by John Brown, English national character was understood to reside principally in English men. Men were constructed as the protectors of the nation both in real terms in relation to the conflict with France and in more abstract terms as the guardians of English national character and identity. Gerald Newman argues that English national identity and character was created in the mid- to late-eighteenth century within an anti-French mould and founded around the ideal of “sincerity” (124-27). “Sincerity” denoted innocence and purity in the absence of artfulness and deception; honesty; originality, or spontaneity; frankness, or a “courageous forthrightness of address”; and finally moral independence, “a certain directness not only of speech and address but of opinion and action, logically based on a conception of behaviour consistently related to inward standards of purity and honesty”

(Newman 129-133). Linda Colley has similarly argued: “There was a sense at this time ... in which the British conceived of themselves as an essentially ‘masculine’ culture – bluff, forthright, rational, down-to-earth to the extent of being philistine – caught up in an eternal rivalry with an essentially ‘effeminate’ France” (252). Michèle Cohen’s argument that in the last quarter of the eighteenth century educational practices and policies became much more concerned with producing distinctive Englishmen in this mould (“Without Polish” 220) is certainly reflected in the conduct literature of the period. In *An Inquiry into the Duties of Men*, Thomas Gisborne described patriotism as a moral duty incumbent on all men (Vol 1 111) and William Cobbett similarly commented on nationalism and masculinity: “Love of one’s native soil is a feeling which nature has implanted in the human breast, and that has always been peculiarly strong ... in Englishmen” (333). Karen Harvey has argued that the perceived relationship between masculine strength and national security also influenced the depiction of the male body in eighteenth-century erotica, which “exposed concerns about nationhood, military threats and the relative strength and potency of the male population” (*Reading Sex* 126). English national character and a strong sense of patriotism were also presented as compatible with other aspects of desirable masculinity which characterised the Romantic period. Knox, for example, argued that “a bad husband, a bad father, a profligate and an unprincipled man, cannot deserve the name of a patriot” (vol 1 59), illustrating a relationship between patriotism, domesticity and self-control. McCormack has also argued that “independence” was characterised by attributes of the English national character – such as sincerity and straightforwardness – and that it came to be seen as integral to Englishness and patriotic in itself (2).

English nationalist discourse further reinforced a view that men were responsible not only for defending the nation and preserving the national character, but also for the safety and protection of women. Colley has noted that women themselves were vocal in their condemnation of men who failed “in their masculine as well as in their patriotic duty to protect them” (257). Men’s responsibilities to protect women were strongly articulated in contemporary conduct literature. Deploring the refinement and fashion of contemporary youth, Fordyce asks “are these the persons that must shortly sustain the characters of lovers, husbands, fathers, masters, friends? Say, my Country, are these the young men whom thou hast destined to protect thy daughters ... ?” (*Addresses to Young Men* Vol 2 157). He compares England to Athens and Rome,

and argues that these states were strong while they retained their “masculine spirit”, “the frugality and simplicity of their manners”, and “their respect for the sweets of home”, for “female decency” and for “conjugal fidelity” (*Addresses to Young Men* Vol 2 141). Tamara Hunt has similarly noted a relationship between masculinity, women and the nation in representations of Britannia in political cartoons throughout the later eighteenth century: “her image was changing to one that emphasized femininity, either as a caregiver or maternal figure, or as a woman who needed the support of a man” (125).

Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published in 1790 in the wake of the French Revolution, exemplifies the characterisation of England as an essentially masculine nation, extols the preservation of qualities traditionally associated with masculinity in English men and signals the revival of chivalry as a socially-approved model of desirable masculinity. *Reflections* celebrates aspects of English national character that Burke viewed as differentiating it from the French. His text is overwhelmingly masculine in its emphasis, particularly as it dwells on “duty”, “liberal and manly morals” and male-dominated institutions of power such as the monarchy, the clergy, parliament, magistrates and estates. Throughout *Reflections*, English religion and worship, English freedom, English sentiment, English heroic enterprise, English pride and the management of English estates are all described as “manly”. As Fulford has stated, “Burke decided that the paternalist state in which he believed must itself be defended by an awesome and masculine rhetoric” (*Romanticism and Masculinity* 48). *Reflections* is also particularly concerned with masculinities associated with the chivalric code, encapsulated in Burke’s relation of the demise of Marie Antoinette:

little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour, and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone ... On this scheme of things, a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order. All homage paid to the sex in general as such, and without distinct views, is to be regarded as romance and folly (65-66).

Although Burke lamented the demise of chivalry, Tim Fulford and Michèle Cohen have argued that his publication of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* actually marks the point at which an English revival of chivalry began (Fulford *Romanticism and Masculinity* 9, Cohen “‘Manners’” 316). Cohen contends that the revival of chivalry throughout the Romantic period was prompted by the surge of English nationalism and the public need for a model of masculinity that was compatible with a strongly masculine national character. She contends that chivalry’s capacity to unite the refinement and gentleness of politeness and its “enlightenment notions of progress and civilisation” with an emphasis on qualities traditionally associated with masculinity made it particularly suitable to meet the demands of the English nation (“‘Manners’” 315). Cohen argues that chivalry was associated with “manliness, bravery, loyalty, courtesy, truthfulness, purity, honor, and a strong sense of protection toward the weak and oppressed” (“‘Manners’” 326), and that the incorporation of these qualities with existing conceptions of male refinement produced a new ideal of desirable masculinity in the early nineteenth century. In *The Return to Camelot*, Mark Girouard similarly discusses the revival of chivalry in the early nineteenth century. He defines chivalry as a code of conduct for elite warriors which accepted that fighting was both necessary and glorious and softened barbarity by a commitment to high standards of behaviour (16). Girouard attributes the revival of chivalry in the Romantic period to a renewed interest in the middle ages, citing the publication of Richard Hurd’s 1762 *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* and other texts from the mid-eighteenth century, and later the novels of Walter Scott, as indications of its growing popularity (19-38). The influence of chivalric approaches to masculinity over public constructions of the ideal English male throughout the Regency period has also been noted by Tim Fulford. He argues that Admiral Lord Nelson’s self-made success in battle contrasted sharply with the aristocratic pretensions and self-indulgences of the Prince Regent and the Duke of York and that Nelson effectively reclaimed chivalry for the middle classes. Fulford contends that the royal sex scandals of the Regency and the associated perception of a degenerate aristocracy prompted a “redefinition of the social and political order” which “relocated chivalric ideals from the aristocracy to the gentry and to the growing professional classes” (“Romanticizing the Empire” 171). Fulford particularly focuses on the role played by Nelson within this process, arguing that he was “a hero who redefined chivalric duty and courtesy in terms of a self-controlled and self-sacrificial patriotism ... Nelson, in the popular imagination, saved the nation – a view which

depended not least on the belief that he had vindicated British manliness” (*Romanticism and Masculinity* 7).

Interestingly, Fulford’s connection between the revival and redefinition of chivalry with the naval masculinity which saved Britain conflicts with Cohen’s analysis of its development, which specifically dissociates the redefinition of chivalry from Britain’s military involvement. Cohen instead asserts that “chivalry did not present models of heroic martial masculinity for late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century military action” because of its association with uncivilised barbarism, and argues instead that contemporary commentators praised the notions of courtesy, honour and education associated with chivalry rather than its emphasis on military prowess (“‘Manners’” 321-22). However, the revival of chivalric masculinity clearly coincides with both a resurgence of English nationalism and Britain’s military involvement in the Napoleonic Wars, suggesting the existence of a relationship between chivalric and military masculinities throughout this period. Cohen, perhaps, overlooks the extent to which British public culture – particularly instructional manuals and novels, including those by Austen – sought to celebrate naval masculinity as a combination of military prowess and gentlemanly refinement. In *Persuasion* Anne Elliot strongly argues against “the too-common idea of spirit and gentleness being incompatible with each other” (161-62) in relation to the naval commander Captain Benwick. Fulford has similarly noted that “the literary idealization of naval heroes” was a significant part of chivalry’s revival and its relocation in the middle classes (“Romanticizing the Empire” 171).

As with discourses of male refinement and ideologies of nationalism and English national character, women and constructions of femininity played a specific part in chivalric discourse, both historically and throughout the Romantic period. Traditionally, gender relationships within chivalry had been composed of a dichotomy between men as the defenders and protectors of women and the nation, and women as dependent on male protection and the reward of male exertion (Girouard 16). This dichotomy is reflected, for example, in Edmund Burke’s description of French men and Marie Antoinette. Relationships between men and women within chivalric discourse were also strongly influenced by a tradition of courtly love (Girouard 16), which is not dissimilar to the gender hierarchy at work within eighteenth-century discourses of polite

conversation and male refinement. Cohen has highlighted the similarity in the roles women were allocated in codes of chivalry and politeness: “Women were central to this model of progress and civilization, because the relations between the sexes and the respect accorded to women were the mark of a civilized and refined nation” (“Manners” 318). Linda Colley has also argued that chivalric gender roles were particularly pronounced throughout the Napoleonic Wars and that women themselves were instrumental in reviving chivalric masculinity. She contends that the flourishing cult of heroism, which was intended to motivate men to take up arms to defend the nation, was particularly driven by female enthusiasm for and participation in military pageants and celebrations and the memorialisation of military victories. Colley argues that intensely romantic and blatantly sexual fantasies developed around admirals and generals, particularly the Duke of Wellington and Lord Nelson (257). Both Colley and Walker have cited the naked statue of Achilles which commemorated the Duke of Wellington, and was commissioned and funded by British women, as evidence of the revival of chivalric masculinities and femininities throughout the period (Colley 257, Walker 208). This enthusiasm for military men is articulated by Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*: “the profession, either navy or army, is its own justification. It has every thing in its favour; heroism, danger, bustle, fashion” (102).

Popular culture in the form of songs and ballads reinforced military models of masculinity and specifically addressed military men’s relationships with women. Men’s responsibilities as the protectors of women were strongly reflected in the patriotic songs of the period. “Rule Britannia”, for example, praises “manly hearts to guard the fair” (Fulford “Romanticizing the Empire” 163) and the chorus of a contemporary poem “How blest The British Sailor” reinforces the perception that women were the reward of male exertion: “When safe on shore, / All cares are o’er, / Where beauty’s smile / Rewards his toil, / How blest the British sailor”. Conduct books further reinforced this relationship. *The Military Mentor*, for example, assumes that relationships between military men and women are characterised by the protector/protected dichotomy, cites romantic relationships as “the source of many noble and heroic actions” and states that “true gallantry never excluded any of the military virtues” (188). The text describes the supposed effect of pure and true love on military men in the following terms:

Audacious and daring, when called upon to defend the interests of its fair-one; timid and bashful, when required to state its own pretensions; this sacred enthusiasm of a great and generous soul in all that related to the object that inflamed it, was capable of efforts the most heroic and surprising (191).

The Military Mentor also draws upon the desire for female approval (or fear of female disapproval) as a motivating factor for military prowess. The text pities the man who enters the military before considering whether he has the requisite bravery and courage, because he will “find himself exposed to the derision of his fellow-citizens, and above all, to the contempt of the fair sex, who hold the character of a coward in abhorrence” (33). Indeed, women’s apparent role in influencing the prowess of young warriors is reflected in the experience of William Price in *Mansfield Park*:

The Portsmouth girls turn up their noses at any body who has not a commission. One might as well be nothing as a midshipman. One *is* nothing indeed. You remember the Gregorys; they are grown up amazingly fine girls, but they will hardly speak to *me*, because Lucy is courted by a lieutenant (230).

However, while contemporary discourses of nationalism and chivalry presented women and femininity as in need of male protection, this is not the view adopted by Austen throughout her novels. *Emma* and *Persuasion* specifically renounce both the position women were accorded within chivalric discourse and the model of masculinity that the chivalric code endorsed. Men such as Mr Knightley and Captain Wentworth reflect the image of masculinity endorsed by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* rather than the masculine ideal Burke celebrated in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft argued that the enslavement, oppression and enforced ignorance of women not only damaged women but also corrupted men. Anne Mellor has noted this aspect of Wollstonecraft’s argument:

She argued that English men have been forced to assume the social role of the master and thus taught to be demanding, self-indulgent, arrogant, tyrannical. Treating their women as inferior dependents has undermined men’s ability to understand the needs of others, to act justly or compassionately, to be good leaders (*Romanticism and Gender* 37).

Wollstonecraft strongly argued that “the sexual distinction which men have so warmly insisted upon, is arbitrary” (*Vindication* 318), and this is the understanding of sexual difference and relationships between men and women taken by Mr Knightley, and ultimately also by Captain Wentworth. Wollstonecraft realised that the way for women

to be released from their position of subservient ignorance was to convince men that they too would benefit from women's liberation and education: "Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens" (*Vindication* 263). She places the power of women's liberation in the hands of men: "Let men take their choice" (*Vindication* 296). In her final two novels, Austen dramatises this process, as Mr Knightley and Captain Wentworth make individual choices about their own masculine identities that enable them to enter equal marriages with Emma Woodhouse and Anne Elliot.

Anne Mellor has precisely captured Jane Austen's feminist project:

Jane Austen espoused a value system firmly grounded on a belief in women's capacity for intellectual and moral growth, in the desirability of egalitarian marriages based on rational love and mutual esteem, and in the prototype of domestic affection and responsibility as the paradigm for national and international political relations (*Romanticism and Gender* 52).

Mellor contends that Austen viewed "a more egalitarian and gender-free society" as the way to achieve this realisation of female selfhood (*Romanticism and Gender* 61), an argument that Wollstonecraft had also used in *Vindication*: "I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society" (147). However, Austen's constructions of "what men ought to be", particularly as they respond to and modify the models of masculinity which dominated public discourse throughout the Romantic period, suggest that although she wanted a "more egalitarian" society, she did not view the realisation of female selfhood as dependent on the erosion of gender or a movement toward androgyny. Rather, Austen's constructions of desirable masculinity articulate approaches to "being a man" which are socially validated and which serve the interests of the nation, but which are ultimately not dependent on the submission of women within a patriarchal familial and social order. To Austen, what is required is a reform but not an elimination of gender difference. Austen's novels dramatise this process of reform by charting, and modifying for a feminist agenda, transformations in public constructions of masculinity throughout the Romantic period.

¹ See for example Carter “Men about Town”, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, “Polite ‘Persons’”; Langford *A Polite and Commercial People*, “The Uses of Eighteenth-Century Politeness”; Cohen *Fashioning Masculinity*, “Without Polish”.

CHAPTER THREE

Introducing Desirable Masculinity in *Northanger Abbey*

The question of “what men ought to be” is first pondered by Catherine Morland, the heroine of Austen’s first completed novel, *Northanger Abbey*, during her drive with John Thorpe. The Introduction briefly discussed Austen’s use of this episode to raise the issue of “what men ought to be” and to endorse the authority of unmarried women to assess individual men, particularly potential suitors. This episode also reveals Catherine’s reluctance to form a view of men which contests men’s opinions of themselves and what women should find attractive in them. Advised by her brother James that John is ““a little of a rattle; but that will recommend him to your sex I believe”” (49), Catherine is hesitant to form her independent and negative assessment of his friend:

It was a bold surmise, for he was Isabella’s brother; and she had been assured by James, that his manners would recommend him to all her sex; but in spite of this, the extreme weariness of his company, which crept over her before they had been out an hour, and which continued unceasingly to increase till they stopped in Pulteney-street again, induced her, in some small degree, to resist such high authority, and to distrust his powers of giving universal pleasure (65).

Yet despite her inexperience in dealing with men beyond her own neighbourhood and her hesitation to form an independent opinion of John, Catherine *does* judge men throughout *Northanger Abbey*, from her initial meeting with Henry Tilney, throughout her social encounters with John Thorpe and Captain Tilney, to the negative view she forms of General Tilney (both in her delusion that he is a gothic villain and in her more accurate assessment of him after he evicts her from his house). Austen may state that Catherine is “Little ... in the habit of judging for herself” (65), but her thoughts and behaviour throughout the novel conflict with Austen’s characterisation of her as a naïve, artless girl unschooled in polite sociability and particularly in dealing with men. On the contrary, Catherine’s thoughts are consumed, almost above all else, by the men she encounters in Bath and later by her relationship with Henry. Austen specifically highlights the tendency of Catherine’s thoughts to dwell on Henry when the Allens decide to extend their stay in Bath: “What this additional fortnight was to produce to her beyond the pleasures of sometimes seeing Henry Tilney, made but a small part of Catherine’s speculation” (131). In this respect, *Northanger Abbey* exemplifies the

exploitation of the courtship novel and its construction of the heroine as a tool to critique masculinity from a female perspective, and the men who feature throughout the novel reflect the variety of public constructions of masculinity discussed in Chapter Two. Austen uses Catherine – through her journey as a courtship heroine in search of a suitable husband, and through the reader's access to her consciousness – to critique masculinity.

Austen's exploitation of the heroine and conventions of the courtship plot further extends to a critique and ultimately a reversal of the usual sexual politics of courtship. Chapters One and Two discussed the conventional gender hierarchy within courtship and the widespread construction of men as the subjects of desire, and women as the objects of their desire, within female conduct literature. In *Northanger Abbey* Austen reverses this configuration by repeatedly presenting Henry as the object of Catherine's desire. Austen's reversal of the traditional courtship hierarchy to present a female desiring subject and a male object of her desire effectively foregrounds the heroine's desire as one of the novel's central concerns. This is significant of itself and also because it simultaneously works to foreground the heroine's views on the men she meets, augmenting Austen's critique of masculinities. This reconfiguration of the gender politics of courtship is enabled by the authority that Austen, as a female novelist, derives from domestic ideology and the necessity that the heroine selects a suitable husband within a social context of companionate marriage.

Yet such a validation of female desire, particularly as in *Northanger Abbey* it is used to critique masculinities and also presented as a sound basis for marital choice, could potentially be viewed as a quite radical endorsement of a shift in power between the sexes. Throughout the novel, Austen tempers the potential radicalism of this transformation through her use of comedy, particularly parody and satire. *Northanger Abbey* has been exhaustively discussed as a parody of the gothic novel; however, it is also important to recognise that, particularly in volume one, it also satirises the model of courtship endorsed by female conduct literature and parodies the literary courtship narrative. Darryl Jones has noted that *Northanger Abbey* "is a novel of courtship which deploys, in a highly and consistently self-conscious fashion, the conventions of the marriage plot" (41). Additionally, Austen's presentation of Catherine as an essentially comic figure, particularly by exaggerating her ordinariness, her ignorance and her

inexperience with social forms and practices, means that at face value *Northanger Abbey* is a humorous tale of the romantic adventures of a naïve and inexperienced girl. However, it is through her satire of courtship and her parody of the courtship plot, together with Catherine's naivety, that Austen successfully reverses the gender politics of courtship. Throughout the novel, Catherine's desire for Henry is almost always revealed, spoken or enacted simultaneously either with Austen's satire of courtship, her parody of the courtship narrative, or her presentation of Catherine as a comic heroine.

Austen's use of comedy to enable her reversal of the politics of desire has complex and potentially problematic results. On one hand, her use of satire and parody and her comedic characterisation of her heroine can be interpreted as enabling her reform of the courtship hierarchy. Its potential radicalism is mellowed by the fact that the reader is either amused by Austen's wit or openly laughing at Catherine and the almost slapstick scrapes she gets herself into. On the other hand, the reader's amusement at Austen's satire or laughter at Catherine tends to blunt the political nature of Austen's critique. Indeed, the potential for Austen's comedy to mask her reform of courtship is illustrated by the fact that this aspect of the novel has been virtually overlooked by literary scholarship. Yet despite this complexity within *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's reversal of the courtship hierarchy builds an important foundation for her later novels. It affirms and validates female desire, and presents what women want in men as fundamental to the public construction of desirable masculinities. It explores narrative techniques for the presentation of the male protagonist as sexually attractive or interesting to the heroine, to which Austen particularly returns in *Pride and Prejudice*. It also enables Austen to embark on a broader social critique of masculinities, as Catherine directly contrasts Henry with the other men she meets throughout the novel, particularly John Thorpe, Captain Tilney and General Tilney.

Austen's satire of the conventions of the courtship narrative commences in her first chapter with her self-conscious characterisation of Catherine as the heroine of a romance novel: "when a young lady is to be a heroine, the perverseness of forty surrounding families cannot prevent her. Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way" (18). Austen's positioning of these sentences in a separate paragraph within the text ironically inflates the drama of Catherine's life, ostensibly presenting her as the heroine of a gothic or romantic adventure rather than a country girl on a visit to

Bath. This satirical characterisation of Catherine as a fictional heroine also works to raise the issue of her relationships to men. Both the conventions of the courtship novel and Austen's satire lead the reader to expect the introduction of various potential suitors for Catherine's judgment, and her success or failure as a heroine will turn on her ability to assess their suitability as husbands. Henry Tilney is the first potential suitor presented for Catherine's scrutiny, and when speaking with him after their dance, Catherine finds him "as agreeable as she had already given him credit for being" (25). This suggests that Catherine has formed a favourable opinion of Henry based on his appearance, his inviting her to dance and perhaps also on the knowledge of heroes she has gleaned from her reading of gothic and romantic fiction. Although Catherine's judgment of Henry on their first meeting seems to be based on superficial qualities, it is the result of her natural inclination towards him and ultimately proves correct. Although Catherine's judgment is not always so accurate, on this most important of subjects – potential husbands – her judgment does not fail.

Catherine leaves the ball "with a strong inclination for continuing the acquaintance" (29), and Austen commences her satire on social courtship practices by speculating on her thoughts and dreams:

Whether she thought of him so much, while she drank her warm wine and water, and prepared herself for bed, as to dream of him when there, cannot be ascertained; but I hope it was no more than in a slight slumber, or a morning doze at most; for if it be true, as a celebrated writer has maintained, that no young lady can be justified in falling in love before the gentleman's love is declared, it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her (29).

This passage directly satirises the gender hierarchy of conventional courtship practices. In her notes to the 2003 edition of the novel, Marilyn Butler states that Austen footnoted her reference to a "celebrated writer" as a letter from Samuel Richardson published in *The Rambler* (245-46). Butler also discusses Mary Wollstonecraft's condemnation of female passivity in courtship relations, which particularly targeted John Gregory's *Legacy to his Daughters*. Gregory writes, for example:

love is not to begin on your part, but is entirely to be the consequence of our attachment to you ... Some agreeable qualities recommend a gentleman to your common good liking and friendship. In the course of his acquaintance, he

contracts an attachment to you. When you perceive it, it excites your gratitude; this gratitude rises into a preference, and this preference perhaps at last advances to some degree of attachment (36-37).

As discussed in Chapter One, *Legacy for his Daughters* reflects the influential eighteenth-century view of female desire as passive and the dominant configuration of the sexual politics of courtship. Austen's description of Catherine's thoughts and dreams satirises the approach to romantic relationships and courtship articulated in such works of female conduct literature. The method of falling in love endorsed by John Gregory is presented as patently ridiculous. Austen's revelation of Catherine's attraction to Henry through her thoughts and dreams appears sensible and natural in comparison.

It quickly becomes clear that with regard to Henry Tilney, Catherine has no intention of following traditional courtship practices. Throughout *Northanger Abbey* and particularly during her stay in Bath, Austen decidedly allocates Catherine the role of the desiring subject and positions Henry unequivocally as the object of her desire. Despite her ostensibly "unfixed ... notions of what men ought to be", Catherine fixates on Henry from their initial meeting, pursues him throughout Bath and promotes their relationship during her stay at Northanger Abbey before their eventual marriage at the novel's conclusion. In her study of the female subject of desire in the novels of Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, Judith Mitchell identifies the look, language and enactment of desire as marks of the female erotic subject (9-10). Throughout volume one of *Northanger Abbey* Austen similarly uses the look, language and enactment of Catherine's desire for Henry to effect a reversal of the conventional courtship hierarchy. However, unlike the heroines discussed by Mitchell, Catherine does not demonstrate an awareness of social restraints as being sexually repressive. Instead, she uses every social opportunity to advance her relationship with Henry in a manner that is faithful to her feelings but within the bounds of social propriety. As Emily Auerbach has remarked, Catherine "has not acquired adult dishonesty, indirection, or guile" (85), and her artlessness in her relationship with Henry is particularly emphasised through comparison with Isabella Thorpe. Whereas Isabella seems to be in Bath for the sole purpose of obtaining a husband and seeks to manipulate the rules of courtship for her own ends (albeit unsuccessfully), Catherine pursues her

relationship with Henry with a lack of pretension or affect which is both endearing to Henry and ultimately successful.

From the day following their introduction, Catherine's eyes constantly seek out Henry in the public places of Bath: "With more than usual eagerness did Catherine hasten to the Pump-room the next day, secure within herself of seeing Mr. Tilney there before the morning was over, and ready to meet him with a smile" (30). Catherine is consoled for Henry's absence by her introduction to Isabella, and Austen's comment that friendship "is certainly the finest balm for the pangs of disappointed love" (32) comically exaggerates the overnight development of Catherine's interest in Henry into "disappointed love". Later at the theatre Catherine looks "with an inquiring eye for Mr. Tilney in every box which her eye could reach" (32). His absence, and Catherine's search, continues the following day:

He was no where to be met with; every search for him was equally unsuccessful, in morning lounges or evening assemblies; neither at the upper nor lower rooms, at dressed or undressed balls, was he perceivable; nor among the walkers, the horsemen, or the curricule-drivers of the morning. His name was not in the Pump-room book, and curiosity could do no more (34).

Catherine pursues Henry relentlessly but fruitlessly throughout most of the social venues of Bath. Austen shifts the focus away from Catherine's purposeful pursuit of Henry by reintroducing her satire of the courtship plot, and particularly the characterisation of the romantic hero. She writes: "This sort of mysteriousness, which is always so becoming in a hero, threw a fresh grace in Catherine's imagination around his person and manners, and increased her anxiety to know more of him" (35). Austen simultaneously amuses the reader with her satire on the conventions of romance and reveals Catherine's amplified fantasy about Henry's "person and manners". This deflects the reader's attention away from the active nature of Catherine's desire and its potentially radical disruption of the courtship hierarchy.

When Catherine finally does track Henry down at the next ball, Austen continues to parallel both her representation of Catherine's desire and her satire of the courtship plot. Austen describes "the smile and the blush, which his sudden reappearance raised in Catherine", but tempers this physical expression of her desire by returning to her satire of the courtship heroine, adding that her smile and blush "passed

away without sully her heroic importance” (52). Austen’s balance between revealing desire and satirising the courtship narrative continues when Catherine automatically assumes that the young woman who accompanies him is his sister, “thus unthinkingly throwing away a fair opportunity of considering him lost to her forever, by being already married” (52). Austen uses this opportunity to satirise the melodramatic behaviour of romantic heroines by comparing it with Catherine’s measured response: “instead of turning a deathlike paleness, and falling in a fit on Mrs. Allen’s bosom, Catherine sat erect, in the perfect use of her sense, and with her cheeks only a little redder than usual” (52). Austen implies, however, that Catherine’s response may have been somewhat different, and perhaps more akin to that of a conventional courtship heroine, had she discovered that Henry was in fact already married.

Throughout this episode, Austen consistently uses Catherine’s gaze to reveal her desire for Henry. Austen writes: “Catherine, catching Mr. Tilney’s eye, instantly received from him the smiling tribute of recognition. She returned it with pleasure” (53). Unfortunately on this occasion, Catherine has already agreed to dance with John Thorpe; yet John’s conversation and behaviour does not “interest her so much as to prevent her looking very often towards that part of the room where she had left Mr. Tilney” (54). Following the completion of her dance she is “ever willing to give Mr. Tilney an opportunity of repeating the agreeable request which had already flattered her once” (56), but discovering that he has a partner she becomes “disappointed and vexed” (57). Austen writes that Catherine “seemed to have missed by so little the very object she had had in view” (57), demonstrating both her desire for Henry and her intention to attract his notice. Catherine concludes that “to go previously engaged to a ball, does not necessarily increase either the dignity or enjoyment of a young lady” (54), and this proves to be a “useful lesson” that she acts upon it at the next ball. Austen writes that “though she could not, dared not expect that Mr. Tilney should ask her a third time to dance, her wishes, hopes and plans all centred in nothing less” (72). She again reverts to her parody of the courtship narrative by adding: “Every young lady may feel for my heroine at this critical moment, for every young lady has at some time or other known the same agitation” (72). Catherine judiciously avoids John’s notice: “she fidgeted about if John Thorpe came towards her, hid herself as much as possible from his view, and when he spoke to her pretended not to hear him ... [t]hat she might not appear, however, to observe or expect him, she kept her eyes intently fixed on her fan” (72).

Her delight in successfully manipulating the social codes of the public assembly to avoid John and attract Henry is obvious: “With what sparkling eyes and ready motion she granted his request, and with how pleasing a flutter of heart she went with him to the set, may be easily imagined ... it did not appear to her that life could supply any greater felicity” (73).

Catherine later watches Henry intently at the theatre: “every other look upon the average was directed towards the opposite box; and, for the space of two entire scenes, did she thus watch Henry Tilney, without being once able to catch his eye” (88). Here she is looking covertly: she may be attempting to catch his eye, but she is also voyeuristically watching him while his attention is directed toward the play. Catherine fears that she has offended Henry by driving out with the Thorpes instead of walking as they had planned, and when she eventually manages to catch his eye the ceremony of his response leaves her “restlessly miserable; she could almost have run round to the box in which he sat, and forced him to hear her explanation” (89). This reveals a physical dimension to Catherine’s desire for Henry and, once again, Austen tempers its impact through her satire of the courtship heroine, writing: “Feelings rather natural than heroic possessed her” (89). Austen contrasts the coquettish behaviour of the courtship heroine with Catherine’s ingenuous response: “she took to herself all the shame of misconduct, or at least of its appearance, and was only eager for an opportunity of explaining its cause” (89). When Catherine finally does explain herself to Henry she says “I have been quite wild to speak to you, and make my apologies ... if Mr Thorpe had only stopped, I would have jumped out and run after you” (89). This statement further reveals Catherine’s willingness to physically pursue Henry while also presenting her as comically naïve. This physical dimension of Catherine’s desire is more strikingly revealed the following day when John Thorpe again interferes in her planned walk with the Tilneys. On this occasion Catherine pushes through a crowded public assembly, runs down the street to the Tilneys’ home, bursts in the front door and runs up the stairs without waiting to be introduced. Her explanation concludes with “I did not care what you thought of me. – I would not stay for the servant” (97), suggesting a willingness to disregard forms of social propriety in pursuit of Henry. She is simultaneously presented as a comic figure – a naïve and inexperienced young girl who repeatedly manages to get herself into the most uncomfortable and awkward situations – and also a young woman

in pursuit of the object of her love, and, on this occasion, willing to flout social conventions to achieve it.

In the novel's second volume, Austen's focus shifts from building the relationship between Catherine and Henry to parodying the gothic novel, but her revelation of Catherine's desire for Henry continues, albeit less prominently within the narrative. When she is invited to visit the Tilneys at Northanger Abbey, Austen writes: "Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney – and castles and abbies made usually the charm of those reveries which his image did not fill" (134). This statement succinctly combines a revelation of Catherine's "passion" for Henry with Austen's parody of the fictional heroine. When Henry leaves for Woodston Catherine "walked to a window in the hope of catching another glimpse of his figure" (166). Her response to the proposed visit to Woodston also reveals the strength of her desire:

A ball itself could not have been more welcome to Catherine than this little excursion, so strong was her desire to be acquainted with Woodston; and her heart was still bounding with joy, when Henry, about an hour afterwards, came booted and great coated into the room where she and Eleanor were sitting (197). Catherine thoroughly breaks John Gregory's rules of courtship by indulging her supposition that Henry is in love with her: "She did – almost always – believe that Henry loved her, and quite always that his father and sister loved and even wished her to belong to them" (207).

The physical nature of Catherine's desire for Henry is plainly illustrated when he arrives at Fullerton to propose marriage at the end of the novel, when Austen describes her as "the anxious, agitated, happy, feverish Catherine" (226). Desire, passion, physical attraction – qualities which Austen is often considered by both admirers and critics as either lacking, or debasing in preference for sober rational judgment (Menon 15-17) – are in *Northanger Abbey* presented as a sound basis for marital choice. Patricia Menon has also recognised the importance of sexual attraction to Austen's depiction of courtship relations: "although she considers the possibility in her explorations of love's relationship to judgment, [Austen] does not conclude that the two are inescapably in conflict, challenging a longstanding view of sexual love that was current in the conduct books at the time she wrote" (3). Comparing Austen with

Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot, Menon writes: “Austen feels less threatened by the power of sexual attraction, for though she recognizes that it may induce blindness, she also affirms that it is not necessarily in conflict with judgment, and indeed may prove a stimulus to better choices than may rational consideration” (2). In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland clearly makes a correct choice on the basis of emotional and physical instinct. Indeed, Catherine’s choice of Henry on the basis of her natural inclination to him is far more successful than the initial choices made by Austen’s next two heroines, Marianne Dashwood and Elizabeth Bennett, who unlike Catherine have developed their own “notions of what men ought to be” and are confident in their opinions and judgments of desirable masculinity.

Henry’s response to being pursued by Catherine indicates Austen’s endorsement of men who accept a more active role for women in courtship relations. Although Henry’s thoughts and feelings about Catherine remain largely unknown to the reader, there is substantial evidence to suggest that he enjoys being pursued by her. He is offended neither by her obvious attraction to him nor by her willingness to act upon it. Throughout *Northanger Abbey*, Austen uses Henry and particularly his conversation and behaviour towards women to parody the dominant role of the male within conventional courtship. On several occasions, for example, he indicates that he does not take seriously the allocation of gender roles within mixed sociability or courtship. In their first conversation at the assembly rooms he lampoons the socially allocated role of the male partner:

‘I have hitherto been very remiss, madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concern; and how you like the place altogether’ (25).

He then, “forming his features into a set smile, and affectedly softening his voice” (26), proceeds to humorously ask Catherine this series of questions. Henry’s suggestion that Catherine should note him in her journal as “‘a queer, half-witted man who would make me dance with him, and distressed me by his nonsense’” (26) – that she should satirise him – further indicates that he does not take the gender hierarchy of their present social environment seriously. Referring to the gallantry of politeness and chivalry, Michael Kramp has noted Henry’s fluid approach to the gender politics of sociability, commenting: “Henry recognizes the artifice involved in the genteel code of manners

that accompanies this archaic ideal of male sexuality” (47). Kramp has further argued that Henry’s analogy between marriage and dancing reveals his acknowledgment and disapproval of “the subordination of the woman in this arcane gender structure” (47).

Not only does Henry satirise his own position as the dominant male partner, but Austen also uses him to reinforce her satire of conventional courtship. Firstly, Austen presents Henry’s love for Catherine as arising from his realisation that she is attracted to him. This is signalled early in their relationship when Henry responds to Catherine’s explanation for breaking their plans. When Catherine says “‘if Mr Thorpe would only have stopped, I would have jumped out and run after you’”, Austen asks: “Is there a Henry in the world who could be insensible to such a declaration? Henry Tilney at least was not” (90). His “sweeter smile” is positive encouragement to Catherine. On their last dance in Bath, Austen writes that Catherine “enjoyed her usual happiness with Henry Tilney, listening with sparkling eyes to everything he said; and, in finding him irresistible, becoming so herself” (125). This both reinforces Catherine’s desire and indicates that it is the source of Henry’s own interest in her. The novel’s conclusion strongly articulates Henry’s position as the object of Catherine’s desire, and its function in initiating his attraction to her:

though Henry was now sincerely attached to her, though he felt and delighted in all the excellencies of her character and truly loved her society, I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought (227).

Austen again uses satire to deflect the reversal in the politics of desire she has effected throughout the novel: “It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine’s dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own” (227).

Kramp has used this passage to argue that Henry’s decision to marry Catherine is the result of his adherence to reason, which he contends allows Henry to form a masculine identity that is undisrupted by passionate love. He interprets the source of Henry’s love in gratitude as evidence that he “maintains stable and ostensibly rational preferences for the heroine rather than uncontrollable amorous passions” (53). Laura Mooneyham White has likewise noted the origin of Henry’s love in gratitude, which she

describes as “a suspiciously narcissistic beginning for romance. He may genuinely love Catherine, but the genesis of this love – love of self – is disturbing” (*Romance* 18). Both Kramp and Mooneyham White fail to appreciate the vital role this passage plays in consolidating Austen’s reform of the sexual politics of courtship throughout *Northanger Abbey*. She does not present Henry as a demonstrative lover during his proposal because it would undermine the reversal of the courtship hierarchy that has governed their relationship. Furthermore, love of self in the form of gratitude – on the part of the woman – is exactly the prescription of conventional discourse on courtship for commencing a romantic relationship: is this similarly narcissistic and disturbing? On the contrary, Austen’s description of Henry’s love for Catherine is an affirmation of her satire of female conduct literature (specifically John Gregory’s use of the word “gratitude” to describe women’s emotional participation in courtship), her reversal of the gender hierarchy within courtship relations and her positioning of the male as the object of female desire. Rather than gratifying his vanity, Henry’s image as a desirable man is in part based on his willingness to let Catherine take the more active role.

Secondly, Austen also uses conversations between Henry and Catherine to satirise the role of the ostensibly dominant male partner. Catherine struggles to participate in several conversations throughout *Northanger Abbey*, and in which Henry appears to be instructing her. During their first meeting, Catherine observes “an archness and pleasantry in his manner which interested, though it was hardly understood by her” (25), and she enjoys his witty banter though she is unable to participate in it. Later, Catherine struggles to involve herself in Henry’s conversation because he speaks on topics beyond her knowledge and experience – though not her interest – such as drawing, the picturesque, language and education. These episodes have led several literary scholars to target Henry for particular criticism, describing him as condescending, egotistical and concerned with his own amusement rather than Catherine’s entertainment.¹ Alison Sulloway, for example, has described Henry as:

the archetypal male pedagogue, pleasantly and condescendingly instructing a young woman who adores his Oxonian polish as much as he relishes her ignorance ... He is drawn to Catherine for her conditioned deficiencies, and he relishes the control over the relationship that they offer him (124).

Henry has also been interpreted as possessing superior wisdom that he uses to educate Catherine with regard to the real world of rational English society and its remoteness

from Gothic fantasy. In this regard Leroy Smith has analysed their relationship in terms of teacher and pupil, noting Catherine's "worshipful regard for his superior understanding and rationality" and arguing: "the basis of their union is a tacit assumption by each that it is fit and natural that Henry play the dominant role ... As his regard for the naïve and idealistic young woman grows, he assumes in a way gratifying to both the roles of confidant, protector and teacher (61). Critics have also taken seriously Henry's ostensibly disparaging remarks about women's intellect."²

Criticisms of Henry as condescending and patronising towards Catherine, as taking on the role of her teacher or mentor and as dismissive of female intelligence both underestimate Catherine's intelligence and misunderstand Henry's characterisation. When Henry uses wit and banter in their first conversation, Catherine knows that he is joking; she may be unused to his particular conversational style, but her replies are designed to promote rather than suppress or escape it. Furthermore, during his conversation with Mrs Allen about muslins Catherine instantly identifies Henry's amusement with others as a potential flaw in his character: "Catherine feared, as she listened to their discourse, that he indulged himself a little too much in the foibles of others" (29). Her love for Henry does not blind her to his faults; rather, she chooses instead to overlook and enjoy them. Additionally, the conversations in which Henry appears to be instructing Catherine actually work to advance Austen's satire of conventional courtship. For example, Austen writes of Catherine's ignorance of drawing and the picturesque:

Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind, is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can (106).

Here she is clearly again satirising *Legacy for his Daughters*:

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 (15).

Austen's satire continues: "Catherine did not know her own advantages – did not know that a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail

of attracting” (106). The joke is on Henry, not Catherine; and throughout the novel he proves himself different from “the men” discussed by John Gregory. Jan Fergus has also noted Henry’s primarily comic and satiric role, arguing that *Northanger Abbey*’s status as a comic novel is strongly drawn in the character of the romantic hero: “His function ... is to make jokes about literary and social convention” (14). Menon has made the related point that “much of what Henry says is said for the pleasure of the saying”, the enthusiasm of a man who is free from the oppression of his father, “pleasantly shaken to the point of exhilaration by the uncritical admiration of a pretty girl” (20). Emily Auerbach has also noted that it is not only Henry, but also Austen, who indulges in “the foibles of others”, and that Henry “seems to be one of the few Austen heroes invested with his creator’s dry humor, flair for words, and ability to mock society” (83).

Furthermore, it is extremely doubtful whether Catherine’s development throughout the novel results in any way from Henry’s teaching or instruction. On questions where real judgment is required Catherine reserves her own judgment independent of Henry. This is clearly demonstrated in their different interpretations of Captain Tilney’s behaviour to Isabella and James: Catherine steadfastly refuses to condone his conduct, resisting Henry’s contrary view with the words “it is very right that you should stand by your brother” (205). Catherine’s suspicions about Captain Tilney and her opinion that his liaison with Isabella will end in misery prove to be right. Catherine has naturally good principles: her maturation throughout the novel involves a refinement of her judgment and an education in social behaviour through experience, rather than a moral enlightenment provided by Henry. As Jan Fergus has commented, “even if Catherine can be said to learn anything from Henry, it does not amount to a moral growth of any kind” (15). Similarly, suggestions that Henry genuinely believes his apparently disparaging remarks about female intelligence also ignore much textual evidence to the contrary. Eleanor, for example, rebukes him, saying ““you may as well make Miss Morland understand yourself – unless you mean to have her think you intolerably rude to your sister, and a great brute in your opinion of women in general”” (108). Clearly, she does not feel bullied or disparaged by him; in fact, much of their mutual enjoyment in each other’s company involves shared intellectual pursuits. Furthermore, in his initial conversation with Catherine, Henry states “in every power, of

which taste is the foundation, excellence is pretty fairly divided between the sexes” (27).

The active role Catherine takes in pursuing Henry throughout Bath, his obvious pleasure in being pursued and Austen’s satire on the social mechanics of courtship and parody of its literary conventions, clearly call into question interpretations of *Northanger Abbey* which characterise Henry as domineering and Catherine as dominated. Austen’s presentation of Catherine as an active subject of desire and Henry as her object serves several important functions both in *Northanger Abbey* and throughout her fiction. It establishes the importance of female desire and positions women as vital stakeholders in the Romantic debate on desirable and undesirable masculinities. Although Austen’s later novels are rarely so overtly concerned with the heroine’s desire or her pursuit of the male protagonist, this relationship between female desire and the question of “what men ought to be” endures throughout her work. *Northanger Abbey* also strongly illustrates the use of the courtship novel to establish a narrative framework through which Austen can embark on a broader social and political critique of masculinities from a uniquely female perspective.

It is also vital to recognise that, despite Austen’s presentation of Catherine’s attraction to Henry as instinctive, her romantic success is also the result of her accurate distinction between desirable and undesirable masculinities. Henry is endowed with several qualities, including his attitudes towards women and his approach to family responsibilities and domesticity, which make him deserving of Catherine’s love and remain undisputed and essential aspects of desirable masculinity throughout Austen’s novels. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen endorses these aspects of his personality through Catherine’s comparison of Henry with John Thorpe, his brother Captain Tilney, and his father General Tilney. Other aspects of Henry’s character, such as his profession, and his own personal development throughout the novel to achieve independence from the external authority of his father, also resonate with Austen’s later male protagonists. In this respect, Henry Tilney can be considered a “base model” of “what men ought to be”.

The first volume of *Northanger Abbey* is primarily concerned with exploring appropriate and inappropriate masculinities in the context of mixed sociability, and specifically with conversation and conduct towards women. Set in the fashionable

Georgian spa resort of Bath, concerned with upward class mobility and representative of literate culture, *Northanger Abbey* encapsulates some of the key elements of eighteenth-century polite society, allowing Austen to explore politeness as a model of desirable masculinity. In *We Write As Women*, Margaret Lawrence comments of Austen: “The men of her stories should not be studied as men, but rather as symbols of masculinity such as would have to do with the ever-whirling merry-go-round [of matrimony]. So, she portrays types” (55). This approach to the characterisation of men is reflected in Austen’s investigation of politeness as a model of desirable masculinity in *Northanger Abbey* (though, I argue, Austen specifically sets out to reform the reader’s expectations of such “types” in *Sense and Sensibility* and strongly rejects the stereotyping of masculinity in her later novels). Henry Tilney is portrayed throughout the novel as an image of eighteenth-century male refinement. His desirability is confirmed through his contrast with the boorish John Thorpe, the gallant Captain Tilney and the vacuous General Tilney. Although Austen’s characterisation of these men is largely drawn from stereotypes associated with eighteenth-century politeness, her guiding principles for determining their value as men are their attitudes towards and their treatment of women. Austen uses politeness and these comparatively unsophisticated male characters to argue that men’s relationships with women should form a key element in determining “what men ought to be”.

Henry is described as “a very gentlemanlike young man” (25), a phrase Austen repeats throughout her novels to describe men who have adopted elements of refinement in their conversation and personal behaviour. Henry’s refinement is chiefly demonstrated through his conversations with and respectful treatment of women. On his first meeting with Catherine, Henry is described as conversing “with fluency and spirit” (25) and is interesting and entertaining to both Catherine and Mrs Allen. Catherine is continually impressed by his conversation throughout their stay in Bath, and she and Eleanor strongly value his company at Northanger Abbey. Henry’s relationship with his sister demonstrates a value for women’s intellect and a sensitive awareness of women’s dependence on men’s generosity and consideration.

Henry’s refined conversation and conduct are strongly contrasted with the manners and behaviour of John Thorpe. Austen’s presentation of the Thorpe family reflects the relationship between politeness and socio-economic changes in the middle

and gentry classes throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are several indicators that the Thorpes are a middle-class family on a comfortable, if not affluent, income. Mrs Thorpe and her three daughters are holidaying in Bath, attending public assemblies, concerts and the theatre, and shopping for dresses, accessories and luxury items. Isabella purchases and reads novels, indicating a participation in literate culture. John is studying at Oxford and has a sufficient income to keep his own carriage, horses and hunters and to hold private parties, expenses that James Morland, for example, is unable to afford. The Thorpe family encapsulates the middle-class desire for social advancement. However, Austen's characterisation of John indicates that the Thorpes are not truly "polite" because they lack the social graces required for entry to polite society. While Henry is introduced as a gentleman and his conduct throughout the novel confirms this status, Austen introduces Catherine to John in the following manner:

while he slightly touched the hand of Isabella, on her he bestowed a whole scrape and half a short bow. He was a stout young man of middling height, who, with a plain face and ungraceful form, seemed fearful of appearing too handsome unless he wore the dress of a groom, and too much like a gentleman unless he were easy where he ought to be civil, and impudent where he might be allowed to be easy (44).

This introduction positions John between politeness and the unrefined, boorish and homosocial style of masculinity identified by Vickery (see Chapter Two). The difference in his behaviour towards Catherine and Isabella, his bow and his dress indicate that he misunderstands polite sociability. John's impolite conversation with women is revealed in his later greeting to his mother and sisters: " 'Ah, mother! how do you do?' said he, giving her a hearty shake of the hand: 'where did you get that quiz of a hat, it makes you look like an old witch? Here is Morland and I come to stay a few days with you, so you must look out for a couple of good beds some where near'" (48). Austen writes that "on his two younger sisters he then bestowed an equal portion of his fraternal tenderness, for he asked each of them how they did, and observed that they both looked very ugly" (48). Despite having a family of three sisters and therefore constant access to female company, it becomes increasingly clear that John has totally failed to cultivate refined conversation and behaviour. His dismissive and unfeeling attitude towards his sisters is unfavourably contrasted with Henry's sensitive affection for Eleanor.

John's conversation with Catherine is dominated by subjects that are beyond her interest and usually concern homosocial pursuits. Their first conversation concerns the time it has taken him to travel the distance from Tetbury to Bath, the strength of his horse and the price he paid for his gig, subjects to which he constantly returns. John has clearly not read the *New Polite Instructor*, which advised men, "private and domestic affairs are no less improper to be introduced in conversation. What does it concern the company how many horses you keep in your stables? Or whether your servant is more knave or fool?" (63). On their walk home, "her companion's discourse now sunk from its hitherto animated pitch, to nothing more than a short decisive sentence of praise or condemnation on the face of every woman they met" (47). At the ball that night, John keeps Catherine waiting to dance and then entertains her with descriptions of "the horses and dogs of the friend he had just left, and of a proposed exchange of terriers between them" (54). James's description of John as a "rattle" is fully borne out during his drive with Catherine, during which unnecessarily warns her about his horse, discusses men's drinking habits and his own parties at Oxford, boasts of his hunting and riding prowess and deplores James's gig to emphasise "the merits of his own equipage" (63). Austen emphasises Catherine's inability to contribute to a conversation on subjects which were not only entirely homosocial but also of no interest to her:

She followed him in all his admiration as well as she could. To go before, or beyond him was impossible. His knowledge and her ignorance of the subject, his rapidity of expression, and her diffidence of herself put that out of her power; she could strike out nothing new in commendation, but she readily echoed whatever he chose to assert (63).

Throughout the drive John breaks numerous rules of polite conversation while believing himself to be impressive to Catherine. In *A Present for a Son*, Forrester argues that "of all the follies which men are apt to fall into, to the Disturbance of others, and Lessening of themselves, there is none more intolerable than continual Egotisms, and a perpetual inclination to Self-Panegyric" (50). Austen says of John that "all the rest of his conversation, or rather talk, began and ended with himself and his own concerns" (64), drawing a clear distinction between the "conversation" which is associated with the refined masculinity of Henry Tilney, and the "talk" which characterises John Thorpe's relentless chatter.

Whereas John Thorpe is characterised as a boorish man who has failed to develop any aspects of politeness, particularly towards women, Captain Tilney embodies the negative association between politeness and gallantry and particularly the dangers which it posed for women, as outlined in Chapter Two. Isabella's initial conversation with Captain Tilney is characterised by empty gallantry and superficial flattery:

'I begged him to excuse me, and get some other partner – but no, not he; after aspiring to my hand, there was nobody else in the room he could bear to think of; and it was not that he wanted merely to dance, he wanted to be with *me*. Oh! such nonsense! – I told him he had taken a very unlikely way to prevail upon me; for, of all things in the world, I hated fine speeches and compliments' (128).

Captain Tilney's gallant conversational style is also illustrated in the conversation Catherine overhears between him and Isabella:

“ ‘I wish your heart were independent. That would be enough for me.’

‘My heart, indeed! What can you have to do with hearts? You men have none of you any hearts.’

‘If we have not hearts, we have eyes; and they give us torment enough.’” (139).

The liaison between Captain Tilney and Isabella results directly in the severance of her engagement to James Morland, suggesting that Austen, like the women writers discussed in Chapter Two, associated gallantry with seduction and adultery. While Henry rightly attributes the majority of the blame for the severance of the engagement to Isabella, Catherine steadfastly refuses to absolve Captain Tilney: “ ‘I must say I do not like him at all. Though it has turned out so well for us, I do not like him at all. As it happens, there is no great harm done, because I do not think Isabella has any heart to lose. But, suppose he had made her very much in love with him?’” (204). Although the potentially damaging consequences for women of men's gallantry and its association with seduction and adultery are not illustrated in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine raises an important point. Her own ignorance of Captain Tilney's intentions itself illustrates the vulnerability of young women to men's gallantry. Through later characters such as Mr Wickham and Henry Crawford, Austen strongly casts politeness in the form of superficial gallantry as deeply undesirable and inappropriate in men.

Henry's refined manners and conversation are also contrasted with the empty politeness of General Tilney. When Catherine is introduced to him, she is “received by

him with such ready, such solicitous politeness” (98) and during her visit to their house in Bath he treats Catherine with a degree of politeness and attention which she finds excessive and unwarranted: “in spite of their father’s great civilities to her – in spite of his thanks, invitations, and compliments – it had been a release to get away from him” (123). The General’s immoderate attentions to Catherine continue when she arrives for breakfast before their journey to Northanger Abbey:

she doubted whether she might not have felt less, had she been less attended to. His anxiety for her comfort – his continual solicitations that she would eat, and his often-expressed fears of her seeing nothing to her taste – though never in her life before had she beheld half such a variety on a breakfast-table – made it impossible for her to forget for a moment that she was a visitor (146).

After Henry’s proposal, it becomes clear that General Tilney’s excessive politeness is the result of his mistaken belief that Catherine is a wealthy heiress and his desire to court her for his son. His politeness is based on the Chesterfield model and designed to promote self-interest through superficial refinement and empty gestures. Even Henry and Eleanor “had seen with astonishment the suddenness, continuance and extent of his attention” (229). Furthermore, General Tilney’s behaviour after he discovers his mistake – evicting Catherine from his house and sending her alone and unprotected back to Fullerton – represents a brutality and disregard for others that is not only the opposite of true politeness, but which his cultivation of refinement has successfully masked. Eleanor is particularly concerned about the circumstances of her father’s decision to immediately evict an unprotected young woman: “‘After courting you from the protection of real friends to this – almost double distance from your home, to have you driven out of the house, without the considerations even of decent civility!’” (210). The General’s behaviour towards Catherine reveals a particular insensitivity to the dangers and the claims for protection of young women in Catherine’s situation.

The boorishness of John Thorpe, the superficial gallantry of Captain Tilney and the empty politeness of General Tilney are strongly contrasted with Henry’s approach to polite masculinity, which not only demonstrates a respectful attitude towards women but also, in the second volume, is revealed to be a sincere and authentic reflection of his inner compassion for others. After he has learnt of Catherine’s suspicions regarding General Tilney’s involvement in his mother’s death, Austen writes: “the only difference in his behaviour to her, was that he paid her rather more attention than usual. Catherine

had never wanted comfort more, and he looked as if he was aware of it" (187). Henry's compassionate understanding of Catherine's feelings indicates that the politeness he demonstrates throughout their relationship is the product of a sincere regard for her and genuine care for others and that at least in his case, if not in many others throughout Austen's novels, a refined exterior does indeed reflect inner morality and virtue. Austen writes: "The evening wore away with no abatement of this soothing politeness; and her spirits were gradually raised to a modest tranquillity" (187), specifically linking Henry's manners with his goodness and demonstrating the positive effect of his conduct on others. Catherine's later reflection on Henry's behaviour reflects Austen's endorsement of politeness when it is the result of true concern for others: "Henry's astonishing generosity and nobleness of conduct, in never alluding in the slightest way to what had passed, was of the greatest assistance to her" (189).

Kramp has interpreted Austen's comparison of Henry with the other male characters of *Northanger Abbey* as endorsing a rational approach to romantic love in opposition to "unmanaged males" who are "vulnerable to the irrational power of amorous emotions" (50-51). However, it would seem rather that Austen's guiding principle in differentiating Henry from John Thorpe, Captain Tilney and General Tilney is not their "rational" or "irrational" approach to romance but their attitudes towards women. True politeness, Austen suggests, is superior to boorish and superficially gallant styles of masculinity because it accords women a degree of value, respect and protection which they would otherwise be without, and which they need in a society controlled by men. Austen's concern with the relationship between desirable masculinity and attitudes towards women continues in volume two of *Northanger Abbey*, though her focus shifts from spaces of mixed sociability to domestic family life. In *Northanger Abbey* and throughout her novels Austen presents a value for companionate marriage and a domestic orientation as essential attributes of desirable masculinity. Her male protagonists are invariably endowed with these values and their importance and desirability is frequently established by favourably contrasting the romantic love and domesticity of the younger, modern male protagonist with an older and often aristocratic generation of patriarchs (or matriarchs overseeing a patriarchal system), whose approval of arranged or mercenary marriages are presented as archaic. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen illustrates this generational shift in men's attitudes to companionate marriage, family life and domesticity by contrasting Henry's love for

Catherine, his generous and loving approach to his family and his strong sense of domesticity with General Tilney's mercenary approach to marriage and his dictatorial approach to his family and household management. The different approaches taken by General Tilney and Henry to their families and to domestic life are inscribed in Austen's presentation of their homes, Northanger Abbey and Woodston, which reflect key aspects of their personalities. An anonymous moral essayist commented on the subject of men's behaviour at home that "power is never so amiable, as when clothed with moderation" (*Moral Essays* Vol2 59) and volume two of *Northanger Abbey* dramatises the truth of this advice, particularly as it impacts the lives of women.

Throughout *Northanger Abbey* General Tilney demonstrates a traditionally patriarchal attitude to his family and home. He seeks to control the lives of his children, particularly their romantic relationships, and this dominance extends to his household management. His reprimand to Captain Tilney for being late for breakfast leads the Captain to comment to Eleanor "'How glad I shall be when you are all off'" (147). Indeed, his presence casts a shadow over his children and over Catherine. After Catherine's journey to Northanger Abbey Austen writes: "It was only in his presence that Catherine felt the smallest fatigue from her journey" (158). During their walk around the Abbey's gardens the following day, Catherine and Eleanor choose a different path from the General and "Catherine was shocked to find how much her spirits were relieved by the separation" (169). Throughout her visit she feels oppressed by the regimentation of his domestic life, noting the difference when General Tilney leaves for London:

The happiness with which their time now passed, every employment voluntary, every laugh indulged, every meal a scene of ease and good-humour, walking where they liked and when they liked, their hours, pleasures and fatigues at their own command, made her thoroughly sensible of the restraint which the General's presence had imposed, and most thankfully feel their present release from it (206).

At the novel's conclusion General Tilney's authoritarian approach to his family and to domestic life is revealed to extend to the arrangement of his children's marriages. His demand that marriage bring an increase in wealth and status is signalled when the relationship between Captain Tilney and Isabella is suspected and both Henry and Eleanor "were perfectly agreed in considering Isabella's want of consequence and

fortune as likely to throw great difficulties in her way of marrying their brother” (195). It is also revealed that General Tilney has orchestrated the relationship between Catherine and Henry in the mistaken belief that she is wealthy, and he attempts to divide them despite their mutual love. It is further exposed that General Tilney has opposed Eleanor’s marriage to a man she loves because of his lack of fortune. General Tilney’s attempts to control his children’s marriages and his view of marriage as a means of financial and social gain rather than to secure mutual love and affection reveal his deeply mercenary nature, which Austen presents as inappropriate and outdated.

General Tilney’s patriarchal approach to family and household management, his mercenary attitude to marriage and his empty politeness are reflected in the style and furnishing of his home. Catherine, expecting to be confronted with a gothic mansion, is a keen observer of Northanger Abbey upon her arrival. Her eagerness to lose herself in mystery and intrigue quickly turns to disappointment as she observes the General’s taste in home interiors, furniture and decoration: “The furniture was in all the profusion and elegance of modern taste. The fire-place, where she had expected the ample width and ponderous carving of former times, was contracted to a Rumford, with slabs of plain though handsome marble, and ornaments over it of the prettiest English china” (153). General Tilney’s constant provision of details regarding the size of the rooms, the modernity of the furnishings and their cost and the abundance of his gardens’ produce, together with his nauseatingly false modesty, suggest that he views his house as a vehicle for social performance and display rather than as a home for himself and his children. His domestic values lie in his patriarchal role as a householder whose house guarantees wealth and social position, rather than in the modern conception of domesticity and its value for a warm and loving home life.

Henry’s approach to his family responsibilities and his attitudes towards domestic life are very different from General Tilney’s. This is demonstrated most clearly in his loving and attentive attitude to his sister. In addition to their shared literary pursuits and mutual affection, Eleanor’s needs and interests also have a strong claim on Henry’s time and attention and rather than stifling her personality he does whatever he can to promote her enjoyment. He is clearly concerned about Eleanor’s family situation when he thanks Catherine for her visit: “His sister, he said, was uncomfortably circumstanced – she had no female companion – and, in the frequent

absence of her father, was sometimes without any companion at all” (149). His words ““I am always sorry to leave Eleanor”” (149) reveal the sense of responsibility he feels towards her. As Patricia Menon has commented, “Henry is, like William Price, a testament to Austen’s pleasure in brotherly love” (19).

In the same way that Northanger Abbey is symbolic of General Tilney’s preoccupation with wealth, display and social performance, Woodston is presented as an expression of Henry’s personality. Catherine’s visit to Woodston functions not only as a confirmation of her new preference for everyday life over gothic fantasy but also provides the reader with an additional insight into Henry’s values. Catherine is greatly impressed with Woodston, a small but prosperous English village: “in her heart she preferred it to any place she had ever been at” (199). Henry’s parsonage house is a welcoming image of domestic simplicity and happiness:

At the further end of the village, and tolerably disengaged from the rest of it, stood the Parsonage, a new-built substantial stone house, with its semi-circular sweep and green gates; and, as they drove up to the door, Henry, with the friends of his solitude, a large Newfoundland puppy and two or three terriers, was ready to receive and make much of them (185).

Whereas Northanger Abbey is a large, old house modernised for the superficial display of wealth, Woodston parsonage is a small and simple new house with a functional kitchen garden and orchard, surrounded by meadows and connected to a rural English village. Catherine is particularly struck by the house’s interior. When she enters the dining parlour “she perceived in a moment that it was the most comfortable room in the world” (199). When she walks through to the drawing room – “a prettily-shaped room, the windows reaching to the ground, and the view from them pleasant, though only over green meadows” – Catherine “expressed her admiration at the moment with all the honest simplicity with which she felt it” (200). On her walk around the grounds, she finds it “prettier than any pleasure-ground she had ever been in before though there was not a shrub in it higher than the green bench in the corner” (201). Henry’s parsonage house is built for functionality rather than display, reflects his warmth and sincerity and demonstrates his value for domestic life. The General’s comments on Woodston highlight their different attitudes to domesticity:

We are not calling it a good house ... We are not comparing it with Fullerton and Northanger – We are considering it as a mere Parsonage, small and

confined, we allow, but decent perhaps, and habitable; and altogether not inferior to the generality; - or, in other words, I believe there are few country parsonages in England half so good. It may admit of improvement, however. Far be it from me to say otherwise; and any thing in reason – a bow thrown out, perhaps – though, between ourselves, if there is one thing more than another my aversion, it is a patched-on bow (199).

Whereas General Tilney views the parsonage only as a house, speaks of it using the language of “improvement” and negatively compares it to the larger, grander Northanger Abbey, to Henry it is a home, perfectly suited to his profession and lifestyle and possessing all the connotations of personal attachment and loving family relationships that the word implies. The newness of the Woodston parsonage house reflects Henry’s modern value for domesticity and companionate marriage, and for the idea of “home” in its late Georgian and Victorian meaning.

In addition to its concern with relationships between masculinity, women and different approaches to domesticity, volume two of *Northanger Abbey* addresses two further issues concerning adult masculine identity that are vital determinants of desirable masculinity and which Austen explores in greater detail in her later novels. Firstly, while Henry’s profession as a clergyman is not particularly significant to his characterisation, the fact that he works for a living provides him with financial independence and his own household. These are vital for establishing independence from his father and a socially recognised adult masculine identity. General Tilney is strongly supportive of his sons’ professions, commenting to Catherine: “‘I am sure your father, Miss Morland, would agree with me in thinking it expedient to give every young man some employment. The money is nothing, it is not an object, but employment is the thing’” (166). Austen’s later novels more comprehensively explore the issue of men’s occupations or professions, the ramifications of lack of employment and the relationship between work and desirable masculinity.

Northanger Abbey also raises the issue of independence and the role it plays in forming an adult male identity. Although Henry has a profession, his own house and financial independence from his father for much of the novel he is not, to use John Tosh’s phrase, “an adult, fully masculine person” (*A Man’s Place* 2-3) because he remains to some extent under his father’s authority and control. He visits Bath to find

accommodation for his father; his early departure for Woodston occurs as a result of his father's intended visit and the demands this places upon him, suggesting that he remains under his control even in his own home; and he is instructed by his father first to court and then to abandon Catherine. As discussed in Chapter Two, independence from external authority (including parental authority) and the ability to act independently and consistently were presented as key elements of adult middle-class masculinity in the early nineteenth century, and are qualities which are absolutely essential to Austen's representations of desirable masculinity. Henry acquires this form of independence from his father in the course of *Northanger Abbey*. Patricia Menon has argued that Henry is held in a compromised position between independence and obedience to his father's wishes by his strong affection for his sister, and that it is not until he meets Catherine that he finds another affection, obligation or inducement strong enough to force him to assert independence from his father (20). Henry reaches this breaking point when he learns that Catherine has been evicted from Northanger Abbey and the circumstances of her eviction. His "indignation on hearing how Catherine had been treated, on comprehending his father's views, and being ordered to acquiesce in them, had been open and bold" (230). Austen writes of Henry's response to the General:

his anger, though it must shock, could not intimidate Henry, who was sustained in his purpose by a conviction of its justice. He felt himself bound as much in honour as in affection to Miss Morland, and believing that heart to be his own ... no unworthy retraction of a tacit consent, no reversing decree of unjustifiable anger, could shake his fidelity, or influence the resolutions it prompted (231).

It is significant that Henry is prompted to propose to Catherine not only because of his love, but also because of his "conviction of its justice" and his feeling that he is "bound as much in honour as in affection". Kramp has interpreted this revelation in the following terms: "Henry appears determined to marry Catherine not because of his strong affection for her, but because he was urged to gain a "heart" for her by his father – and Henry will not allow himself to renounce an emotion he has rationally attained" (53). However, this interpretation totally ignores the vital role which Henry's love for Catherine plays in effecting his independence from his father: rather than viewing romantic love as a disruptive force, it is the means by which Henry attains a fully masculine adult personality. To Henry, relinquishing Catherine would not only destroy his happiness but would also be dishonourable. This reflects a deep personal commitment to his own moral code that is clearly very different from his father's, a

view with which Menon concurs. She has also noted that Henry's independence from parental authority is consolidated by his decision to break with his father even before Eleanor has been liberated through her marriage (Menon 27).

Henry's decision to propose to Catherine despite his father's opposition and their subsequent marriage signify not only the formation of his own family but also a psychological separation from the General's control. While Henry had earlier ironically stated "I will be noble. I will prove myself a man, no less by the generosity of my soul than the clearness of my head" in relation to Catherine and Eleanor's comic misunderstanding (108), this is in fact what Henry achieves because of his relationship with Catherine, not despite it, as Kramp suggests. Austen underlines the significance of this transformation in Henry with her concluding statement: "I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (219). Her novel's conclusion, and her clear endorsement of moral independence as an essential attribute of desirable masculinity throughout her novels, suggests that for Austen independence of parental authority is necessary, even where filial disobedience is required to achieve it.

Northanger Abbey establishes Austen's use of the courtship narrative to critique masculinities from a female perspective. Her construction of the relationship between Catherine and Henry conflates the conventional sexual politics of courtship, validating Catherine's desire and foregrounding her assessment of potential suitors within the narrative. In this sense, *Northanger Abbey* exemplifies the use of the courtship novel as a voice through which women as authors and heroines can participate in the public debate on "what men ought to be". The novel endorses Henry's performance of a male role within courtship that is not dependent on female passivity, and the mechanics of his courtship with Catherine endorses a willingness by men to allow women a more active role, forecasting the equal marriages that Austen would create in her later novels. *Northanger Abbey* also introduces several qualities in men – including sensitive treatment of women, affective attitudes towards marriage and domesticity and financial and moral independence – that are constructed as necessary attributes of desirable masculinity throughout Austen's novels. *Northanger Abbey* forms a foundation for the more complex explorations of female desire and desirable masculinities that would feature in Austen's later novels.

¹ See for example Hudson 110, Kramp 49-50 and Roberts 189. Menon 17 has also noted this trend.

² See for example Johnson *Jane Austen* 37, Mooneyham *White Romance* 19 and Sulloway 124.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Too much in the common Novel style”: Educating the Reader in *Sense and Sensibility*

Jane Austen’s advice to her niece Anna on her manuscript novel is among the few surviving sources in which she speaks as a literary artist. Among her many detailed observations, Austen expresses the following opinion of one of Anna’s male characters: “Henry Mellish I am afraid will be too much in the common Novel style – a handsome, amiable, unexceptionable Young Man (such as do not much abound in real Life) desperately in Love, & all in vain” (28 September 1814, 277). This opinion succinctly reveals the image of literary masculinity Austen viewed as dominating the “common Novel” – “handsome, amiable, unexceptionable” – and suggests that she disapproved of the novel’s tendency to depict images of masculine perfection rather than the men of “real Life”. Austen’s letter to Anna indicates that she endorsed a realist function for the novel in its representation of masculinities, and her 1811 novel *Sense and Sensibility* illustrates her advice. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen embarked on the major projects of analysing social constructions of masculinity, reforming the literary masculinities she disdained in the contemporary novel and educating her reader to understand and welcome complexity in the literary construction of masculine gender. *Sense and Sensibility* dramatises on a broader, literary scale the essence of Austen’s advice to Anna.

Historically, the male characters of *Sense and Sensibility* have challenged and troubled scholars of Austen’s work, particularly regarding the perceived unattractiveness of Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon, the men Elinor and Marianne eventually marry, and the fact that John Willoughby, who most critics cast as the villain of the piece, is in many respects its most attractive male. Scholarly comment on the inadequacy of the male characters of *Sense and Sensibility* – both as men, and as illustrations of literary masculinity in a courtship novel – is seemingly endless. This critical trend has similarly been noted by Peter Knox-Shaw: “*Sense and Sensibility* centres, as its title signals, in the relationship of the sisters – hence no doubt the recurring criticism that its heroes are drawn, for once, short of full length” (147). It is Colonel Brandon and Edward, rather than Willoughby, who come in for particular critical condemnation. Laura Mooneyham White, for example, has argued that “the

marriages have failed to engage the interest of many readers, not merely because they wish Brandon and Edward were more handsome and interesting, though surely this must be the case” (“Jane Austen” 78), and has also asserted:

Colonel Brandon and Edward Ferrars are heroes only because they marry heroines. They are little seen and rarely heard. The cad Willoughby cuts a more prominent – and interesting – figure than the two heroes combined. Heroes by narrative fiat only, Brandon and Edward fail to engage more than nominal interest and sympathy (*Romance* 31).

Mary Poovey has further argued, “Edward and Brandon seem inert fixtures of the plot, incapable of energetic gallantry and attractive only to the most generous observer” (185). John Wiltshire has also commented that “*Sense and Sensibility* is, as A. Walton Litz said, a novel over which hangs an air of depression. Partly this must be because two of the main male figures are themselves lacking in spirits, having their own unhappy, disillusioned and secret pasts” (51). Marilyn Butler has noted that “rather to the detriment of their vitality, Jane Austen’s characteristic word for them is ‘diffident’” (*Jane Austen* 190), and Margaret Madrigal Wilson has asked “how many young women, or readers, would find Edward Ferrars or Colonel Brandon as exciting, as romantic, or even as interesting, as Willoughby?” (182). Colonel Brandon has been described as “an unconvincing paragon of male virtue” (Tuite *Romantic Austen* 92) and Edward as “the familiar, hapless Edward” (Brownstein “Northanger Abbey” 48). Finally, Tony Tanner has commented that “we miss in this book any notion of a man who might be something between the notably unexciting ‘house-builders’, Brandon and Ferrars, and the rather second-rate ‘dancer’ that Willoughby turns out to be” (97).

In addition to criticism of the inadequacy of *Sense and Sensibility*’s male characters, there is also a tendency for scholars to compare them unfavourably with the men of Austen’s other novels, particularly *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. G. B. Stern, for example, has commented: “Knightley is definitely attractive, where Colonel Brandon is a dreadful bore” (122). Claudia Johnson has also compared Willoughby and Edward unfavourably with Austen’s other male protagonists:

As different as Edward and Willoughby are individually, as English gentlemen many of their failures are identical. In marked contrast to the Darcys and Knightleys of this world, they are weak, duplicitous, and selfish, entirely lacking

in that fortitude and forthrightness with which Austen is capable of endowing exemplary gentlemen when she wishes (*Jane Austen* 58).

Like other scholars, Johnson's assessment of the male characters of *Sense and Sensibility* is based on several assumptions regarding desirable masculinity both throughout the Romantic period and within the courtship novel genre. Her assertion that Willoughby and Edward fail as "English gentlemen" is unsupported either by an explanation of what an English gentleman is or should be (either within the ideology of the period, or drawn from Austen's own use of the term), or how these men fail to fulfil the requirements of this masculine type. Johnson's description of Darcy and Knightley as "exemplary gentlemen" is drawn from a specific but unacknowledged set of values regarding "what men ought to be".

Jane Austen, however, clearly did not share the views of her critics regarding the male characters of *Sense and Sensibility*. Indeed, the negative press that Willoughby, Colonel Brandon and Edward have incited is indicative of the kinds of assumptions about desirable masculinity that Austen sought to challenge in her novel. This chapter seeks to approach the male characters of *Sense and Sensibility* without the assumptions regarding desirable masculinity – both public constructions of masculinity in the Romantic period, and literary masculinities of the courtship novel genre – which have been imposed on the text by many of its critics. Rather than censuring her male characters for failing to meet the standards of desirable masculinity demanded by readers and scholars, this chapter examines Austen's project in presenting these characters as social and literary constructions of masculinity. Emily Auerbach has recently identified the importance of reconsidering these male characters, commenting:

contemporary moviemakers miss the point of Austen's characterization when they give white horses, soul-searching glances, or a taste for poetry to Colonel Brandon or Edward, as if distrusting audiences ever to accept an unheroic hero.

Austen asks more of her readers (112).

What Austen asks of her readers is to move beyond men of "the common Novel style" and to acknowledge, understand and welcome the complexity of masculinity in "real Life" and its literary manifestations. *Sense and Sensibility* is an educative experience for the reader, not only as they are required to evaluate the different approaches to masculinity reflected in the male characters, but also in understanding that, contrary to Margaret Lawrence's argument (55), masculinity cannot be reduced to particular labels

or “types” in the social world, and should not be in literature either. *Sense and Sensibility* forces readers to confront and reconsider their assumptions about desirable masculinities in both literature and society. It builds a foundation for the more complex and frequently flawed male protagonists of Austen’s later novels.

Austen’s treatment of the question of “what men ought to be” in *Sense and Sensibility* departs from *Northanger Abbey* in several key respects. Having established female desire as an important voice in determining what is and is not desirable in men, and endorsing in Henry Tilney several attributes of desirable masculinity which endure throughout her novels, Austen’s focus shifts to interrogating the question of “what men ought to be” and the assumptions which underpin it. Catherine Morland’s musing on “what men ought to be” implies the existence of a model or “notion” of desirable or appropriate masculinity which individual men should seek to emulate, and this relationship between the social production of masculine genders and their attempted imposition on individual men is among Austen’s chief concerns in *Sense and Sensibility*. In this way, Austen’s concern with the relationship between society and the individual is absolutely central to her constructions of masculinity in this novel. Scholarship has long recognised the prominence of this issue in Austen’s work and in particular *Sense and Sensibility*’s concern with the expression of feeling and other individualist ideas associated with the culture of sensibility and Romanticism from a female perspective. However, the social world also strongly impacts upon the individual selves and lives of the novel’s three central male characters; they all come under considerable social pressure at different points in the narrative and the social strongly interferes with their attempts to achieve complete, long-term happiness. Additionally, Austen’s characterisation of men in *Sense and Sensibility* and particularly Edward Ferrars demonstrates her acute awareness of the methods by which masculine genders were socially produced throughout the Romantic period.

Social power over men is exercised through several channels in *Sense and Sensibility* including family expectations, the social value for class, wealth and status, education and most importantly the disposition of property within a patriarchal social and economic order, a system which directly impacts upon the lives of all three central male characters. While the opening chapters of the novel powerfully dramatise the impact on women of the capricious exercise of men’s power over property, men are also

indisputably the victims of this form of control. As Moreland Perkins has noted: “While patriarchy aims to suppress young women, young men in turn can be seen to be themselves the unintended victims of a social practice that is also patriarchal in origin” (119). The first male victim of patriarchal power over property is Colonel Brandon, whose father has separated him from his cousin Eliza despite their mutual love and married her instead to his elder brother, thus financially securing the family estate. Colonel Brandon states that “her fortune was large, and our family estate much encumbered” (194); he loses his love because he is a younger son, the estate succeeds to his elder brother and it needs the financial support of Eliza’s fortune. John Willoughby and Edward Ferrars are also victims of the patrilineal disposition of property. They are both dependent on elderly female relatives who control their proprietary inheritance; Willoughby as a result of his extravagant lifestyle, and Edward because of his mother’s refusal to make him independent until he marries a woman, or pursues a career, of her choice. That power over Willoughby and Edward is wielded by women rather than men highlights the fact that it is not merely tyrannical or capricious fathers, but the system of inheritance itself, which leaves the disempowered vulnerable. Austen also uses Willoughby and Edward – two young men of the gentry, in their mid-twenties and educated but lacking in a profession, occupation or other sense of purpose – to suggest that the models of “what men ought to be” which society endorses for gentry young men do both them and women a disservice and are strongly in need of reassessment.

Austen’s characterisation of John Willoughby draws on a range of public constructions of masculinity that circulated throughout the Romantic period. When he first appears in the novel he is presented as a man of taste and feeling associated with the culture of sensibility. After he abruptly leaves Marianne and then abandons her in London, he is constructed as a male coquette who has performed the role of Marianne’s lover while having no intention of marrying her. Later, after Colonel Brandon’s conversation with Elinor reveals Willoughby’s earlier relationship with Eliza Williams, he is cast as a libertine who seduces vulnerable and unprotected women for his own sexual gratification and then deserts them. The development of Willoughby’s character in terms of these social masculine “types” is paralleled by his development in relation to two key literary masculinities of the eighteenth-century novel tradition: the “common Novel style” of the ideal morally exemplary hero, and the dangerous lover or seductive villain. Ultimately, however, Willoughby’s confession to Elinor at the end of *Sense and*

Sensibility reveals that none of these social or literary models of masculinity is sufficient to encompass his character. He is not a man of taste and sensibility, but nor is he a male coquette, or a libertine; he is not a morally exemplary romantic hero, but nor is he a villain; he is, as Carole Berger has stated, “thoroughly human” (533). While Margaret Lawrence suggests that Austen “employs types” (55) and in relation to *Northanger Abbey* this is partially true, through Willoughby Austen emphatically rejects the implication that men can be reduced to such types or labels. Rather, through a process of verisimilitude Austen educates the reader to reject masculine stereotyping and to appreciate composite characters more likely to “abound in Real life”. Each step of Willoughby’s characterisation as a particular male stereotype is presented as the “true” or “real” Willoughby to the characters in the novel and to the reader. The novel’s conclusion, however, reveals the fallacy of each of these constructions of his character, compelling readers to judge Willoughby for themselves and to understand that neither he nor other men can be reduced to masculine “types” or labels.

In contrast to Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, Marianne Dashwood has clearly defined and ostensibly fixed notions of “what men ought to be”. Marianne’s views on desirable masculinity are espoused early in the novel when she appraises Edward Ferrars as a suitable lover for Elinor. She finds that ““his eyes want all that spirit, that fire, which at once announce virtue and intelligence””, criticises his figure for not being ““striking””, and pronounces him deficient in ““real taste””:

‘he admires as a lover, not as a connoisseur. To satisfy me, those characters must be united. I could not be happy with a man whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own. He must enter into all my feelings; the same books, the same music must charm us both’ (19).

Marianne recognises that her demands are high and despairs of finding a man who can satisfy them: ““the more I know of the world, the more am I convinced that I shall never see a man whom I can really love. I require so much! He must have all Edward’s virtues, and his person and manners must ornament his goodness with every possible charm”” (20). Marianne’s prescription for the ideal man is strongly influenced by ideologies of refined masculinity and particularly associated with taste, the expression of feeling and the culture of sensibility. As Peter Knox-Shaw has commented: “Marianne, after itemizing Edward Ferrars’s defects, spells out her own specifications

for a lover – which turn out to be the ones usually found in a heroine of sensibility” (141).

From his introduction, Willoughby is presented as the refined man of taste and feeling who can satisfy Marianne’s desires. His entrance carrying Marianne causes Mrs Dashwood and Elinor to “fix” their eyes on him “with an evident wonder and a secret admiration which equally sprung from his appearance” (44) and Austen writes: “his person, which was uncommonly handsome, received additional charms from his voice and expression” (44). Austen repeatedly dwells on Willoughby’s physique and his manner is described as “frank and graceful”, importantly combining key requirements of the culture of sensibility – spontaneous openness and honesty, with refinement and elegance. Subsequent meetings quickly establish Willoughby as the embodiment of everything Marianne requires in a man. His spontaneous act of rescue indicates that he sympathises with the feelings of others and that he has the physical energy and exertion to act upon these feelings: “in his carrying her into the house with so little previous formality, there was a rapidity of thought which particularly recommended the action to her” (45). His literary, musical and artistic tastes precisely accord with her own: “His society became gradually her most exquisite enjoyment. They read, they talked, they sang together; his musical talents were considerable; and he read with all the sensibility and spirit which Edward had unfortunately wanted” (50). As their acquaintance proceeds, Willoughby is increasingly cast as possessing the mind and body of Marianne’s dream lover:

Willoughby was a young man of good abilities, quick imagination, lively spirits, and open, affectionate manners. He was exactly formed to engage Marianne’s heart, for with all this, he joined not only a captivating person, but a natural ardour of mind which was now roused and increased by the example of her own, and which recommended him to her affection beyond every thing else (50).

Indeed, Austen comments: “Marianne began now to perceive that the desperation which had seized her at sixteen and a half, of ever seeing a man who could satisfy her ideas of perfection, had been rash and unjustifiable ... Willoughby was all that her fancy had delineated” (51).

Throughout his courtship of Marianne, Austen constructs Willoughby not only as a refined man of taste and feeling, but also in the “common Novel style – a

handsome, amiable, unexceptionable Young Man". Willoughby is the incarnation of the generic romantic hero as it is described by William Hazlitt in "Why the Heroes of Romance are Insipid": "They are, or are supposed to be, so amiable, so handsome, so accomplished, so captivating, that all hearts bow before them, and all the women are in love with them without knowing why or wherefore, except that it is understood that they are to be so" (59). This passage seems to encapsulate Austen's characterisation of Willoughby and his relationship with the Dashwood women. Austen specifically links Willoughby with literary models of masculine perfection idolised by Marianne, commenting: "His person and air were equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story" (44-5). Carole Berger has similarly noted that Willoughby "is the embodiment of Marianne's impossible dream – the novel hero come to life" (532), and Deborah Kaplan has also commented: "her code of sensibility determines the kind of man Marianne wishes to meet. She imagines, in effect, the hero of a romance" ("Achieving Authority" 211). Michael Kramp has likewise noted the relationship between Willoughby and the conventional romantic hero: "Austen initially constructs Willoughby as a storybook hero: mysterious, handsome, and virile" (*Disciplining Love* 58). Willoughby's association with the figure of the romantic hero is particularly emphasised by his role in rescuing Marianne on the Devonshire downs: "A gentleman carrying a gun, with two pointers playing around him, was passing up the hill and within a few yards of Marianne, when her accident happened. He put down his gun and ran to her assistance" (43). As Mary Anne Schofield has commented: "Romance – the very word conjures visions of distressed maidens, chivalrous, rescuing knights, deeds both amorous and valorous" (*Masking and Unmasking* 18).

Austen's characterisation of Willoughby as a man of taste and feeling, and his association with the generic romantic hero, also works to present him as an ideal, morally exemplary gentleman of the eighteenth-century courtship novel. As a man of taste, feeling and refinement, Marianne assumes that Willoughby possesses the virtues of the morally exemplary literary gentleman. Her approbation is clearly demonstrated through her public devotion: "When he was present she had no eyes for any one else. Every thing he did, was right. Every thing he said, was clever" (54-55). Marianne's opinion of Willoughby's perfection is confirmed by Austen's comment: "In Mrs Dashwood's estimation, he was as faultless as in Marianne's" (50). Although the reader

is led to doubt these favourable judgments, even Elinor approves of Willoughby. In her eyes, his only fault concerns his manner, not his morals:

Elinor saw nothing to censure in him but a propensity, in which he strongly resembled and peculiarly delighted her sister, of saying too much what he thought on every occasion, without attention to persons or circumstances. In hastily forming and giving his opinion of other people, in sacrificing general politeness to the enjoyment of undivided attention where his heart was engaged, and in slighting too easily the forms of worldly propriety, he displayed a want of caution which Elinor could not approve (50).

Because Elinor's perspective is privileged throughout the narrative, the reader too identifies this flaw in Willoughby's personality. Yet Willoughby's liberty with the rules of eighteenth-century politeness does not inhibit confidence in his moral virtue: it is viewed as a matter of form rather than substance, and enhances his characterisation in terms of the culture of sensibility. Furthermore, as Carole Berger has highlighted, "his imprudence and disregard for propriety are presented in a way that allows us to interpret them as virtues. Even the cautious Elinor, who usually speaks for the author, extends to Willoughby her 'admiration' and 'sisterly regard'" (532).

Austen's presentation of Willoughby as the novel's romantic hero is very different from her characterisation of Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*. In the earlier novel, Austen used her intrusive, ironic narrator, in combination with her parody of the courtship narrative, to alert the reader to Henry's status as the novel's romantic hero, rather than through the characterisation or personality of Henry himself. This is reversed in *Sense and Sensibility*: Willoughby is endowed with all the personal qualities and character traits of the generic romantic hero of a courtship novel, but Austen's narrator remains silent as to whether he will in fact take on this role throughout the novel. Instead, her readers are allowed and in fact expected to form this assumption for themselves. While the reader may agree with Elinor's acknowledgment of Willoughby's faults, the force of his other personal traits – his taste, wit, refinement, physicality and his overall sex appeal – work to overcome this criticism, predispose the reader in his favour and create an assumption that he will perform the role of the romantic hero as the plot unfolds. The reader's active participation in the text's construction of Willoughby as its romantic hero establishes a platform for Austen's later

refutation of the assumptions about literary masculinities which the reader has brought to the text.

The happy courtship of Willoughby and Marianne is terminated by his abrupt departure. At this point in the novel, Austen's characterisation of Willoughby changes from presenting him as a man of taste and feeling associated with male refinement and moral goodness to instead constructing him as a male coquette, a mercenary, a libertine and a seductive villain. After Willoughby's departure, Elinor immediately fears "that no serious design had ever been formed on his side" (78) with regard to his relationship with Marianne. Indeed, the immediacy of Elinor's suspicion itself suggests that her response has been programmed by Austen as part of a broader agenda. Mrs Dashwood instead attributes his sudden departure to Mrs Smith's disapproval of their relationship and her desire to separate them (79), and asks Elinor "'Is he not a man of honour and feeling? Has there been any inconsistency on his side to create alarm? can he be deceitful?'" (81). Elinor, however, continues to doubt his constancy, and during her journey to London considers that "a short, a very short time however must now decide what Willoughby's intentions were" (152). Willoughby's subsequent failure to respond to Marianne's notes or to call at the house heightens Elinor's suspicions. The reader also begins to suspect Willoughby of inconstancy, conduct that is fundamentally opposed to their view of him as a moral man of taste and feeling, and to question what his "true" or "real" character might be. His behaviour toward Marianne when they eventually meet confirms the suspicions of both Elinor and the reader, as Elinor takes the view: "Absence might have weakened his regard, and convenience might have determined him to overcome it, but that such a regard had formerly existed she could not bring herself to doubt" (169). It is only after Marianne receives his letter that the supposed fallacy of their relationship is revealed. He writes:

if I have been so unfortunate as to give rise to a belief of more than I felt, or meant to express, I shall reproach myself for not having been more guarded in my professions of that esteem. That I should ever have meant more you will allow to be impossible, when you understand that my affections have been long engaged elsewhere (174).

Willoughby's letter to Marianne convinces both the characters in the novel and the reader that he had never loved her. Elinor describes it as "a letter which, instead of bringing with his desire of a release any professions of regret, acknowledged no breach

of faith, denied all peculiar affection whatever – a letter of which every line was an insult, and which proclaimed its writer to be deep in hardened villainy” (174).

Willoughby’s letter reveals the refined masculinity associated with taste and feeling to be as susceptible to duplicity and as unreliable a guide to true character as Chesterfieldian politeness. As Saisselin has noted with regard to the man of taste: “a gentleman might easily appear to be a man of taste without being one; appearance might triumph over substance ... cite the true models, see the true models, praise the true models, learn the proper language to discuss them, and you appear to be a man of taste” (122). Austen uses Willoughby to expose the problems that models of masculinity which are chiefly concerned with external display pose for women attempting to assess potential suitors within the unequal power relationship of the courtship scenario. Her revelation of the unreliability of refined masculinity as a guide to moral integrity is accompanied by a shift in Willoughby’s characterisation from a man of taste and feeling to a male coquette. Mary Wollstonecraft noted in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* that “there are quite as many male coquettes as female, and they are far more pernicious pests to society, as their sphere of action is larger, and they are less exposed to the censure of the world” (81). Rather than reflecting the image of the ideal morally exemplary hero, for the characters and the reader Willoughby retrospectively becomes a male flirt, who Margaret Lawrence has described as “a symbol of danger – a kind of golden apple that would take a woman’s attention from her goal. He was particularly dangerous because from much practice he knew what pleased women” (55). Willoughby’s mercenary marriage also reveals the fundamental incompatibility of his ostensibly “true” character with the central tenets of the culture of sensibility: as Deborah Kaplan has commented, “the romantic hero is at heart also prudent, even mercenary” (“Achieving Authority” 213).

Austen’s characterisation of Willoughby takes a further turn following Elinor’s conversation with Colonel Brandon regarding his relationship with Eliza Williams. Colonel Brandon relates Willoughby’s seduction and desertion of Eliza and their child: “He had left the girl whose youth and innocence he had seduced, in a situation of the utmost distress, with no creditable home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his address! He had left her promising to return; he neither returned, nor wrote, nor relieved her” (197-98). Colonel Brandon’s comment that “he had already done that, which no man

who *can* feel for another, would do” (197) wholly destroys the image of Willoughby as the man of strong feeling and principled morality which both the Dashwood women and the reader believed him to be. Colonel Brandon states: “His character is now before you: expensive, dissipated, and worse than both” (198), linking Willoughby’s seduction of Eliza with his broader pursuit of pleasure, which is now cast as a vulgar and immoral lack of self-control rather than the moral experience associated with the aesthetic concept of taste. On the basis of Colonel Brandon’s narrative, the characters in the novel and the reader now view Willoughby as a libertine who toys with vulnerable and unprotected young women for his sexual gratification. Marianne’s thoughts specifically raise the possibility of her own vulnerability: “his seduction and desertion of Miss Williams, the misery of that poor girl, and the doubt of what his designs might *once* have been on herself, preyed altogether so much on her spirits, that she could not bring herself to speak of what she felt even to Elinor” (200). Far from reflecting the morally exemplary gentleman of the eighteenth-century courtship novel, Willoughby is now constructed as a dangerous lover and seductive villain.

Austen, however, allows neither the characters, nor the reader, to leave the novel believing that Willoughby is an amoral libertine. This perception is thoroughly redressed by his confession to Elinor towards the novel’s conclusion. Although Willoughby admits that when he first met Marianne he had no intention of treating their relationship seriously, he demonstrates that his love for her was real and sincere:

to have resisted such attractions, to have withstood such tenderness! – Is there a man on earth who could have done it! – Yes, I found myself, by insensible degrees, sincerely fond of her; and the happiest hours of my life were what I spent with her, when I felt my intentions were strictly honourable, and my feelings blameless (299-300).

His actions in coming to Cleveland when he learns that Marianne is ill and his evident anxiety regarding the possibility of her death demonstrate the endurance of his love despite their irrevocable separation. The sincerity and constancy of Willoughby’s love and the revelation of his intention to propose to Marianne absolves him of improper conduct during their courtship and prevents either Elinor or the reader from continuing to view him as a male coquette. Willoughby also reveals that he had never thought of seducing Marianne or considered an extra-marital sexual relationship with her.

Referring to Colonel Brandon, he says to Elinor “‘how could I tell what horrid projects

had been imputed? *One* person I was sure would represent me as capable of anything” (308). Willoughby’s confession further modifies Colonel Brandon’s account of his relationship with Eliza Williams and his representation in terms of libertine masculinity. He implores Elinor: “Remember ... from whom you received the account. Could it be an impartial one?” (300), alerting Elinor to Colonel Brandon’s narrative bias and the reader to Austen’s authorial manipulation. Austen allows Willoughby to contest the view that “because she was injured she was irreproachable, and because *I* was a libertine *she* must be a saint” (300) and suggests instead that the sexual nature of their relationship was the result of mutual desire. Austen does not criticise Eliza’s desire, and while it does not justify Willoughby’s subsequent desertion of her, it does disprove the perception of both Elinor and the reader that he is a libertine sexual predator. His moral culpability lies in his abandonment of Eliza and their child, not their sexual relationship.

Willoughby’s account of his marriage to Miss Grey strongly indicates that his social environment has detrimentally influenced his development as a man. He presents his marriage as motivated by a desire to continue his expensive lifestyle, an attitude that suggests that although he may have shared Marianne’s tastes and his love for her might be genuine, Willoughby’s world view has always fallen short of the value system endorsed by Marianne and the culture of sensibility. He is in dire financial straits when he resolves to marry Marianne despite her poverty; after his rupture with Mrs Smith, that marriage becomes impossible: ““My affection for Marianne, my thorough conviction of her attachment to me – it was all insufficient to outweigh that dread of poverty, or get the better of those false ideas of the necessity of riches, which I was naturally inclined to feel, and expensive society had increased”” (301-02). Michael Kramp argues that Willoughby’s decision to marry Miss Grey rather than Marianne indicates a recognition of his need to reject the role of the lover and to adopt instead a rational approach to masculine identity (64, 69). This interpretation, however, positions Austen as endorsing social constructions of masculinity that seek to oppress individual men. On the contrary, Elinor’s reflection on Willoughby’s confession strongly foregrounds the extent to which socially-produced desires have detrimentally interfered with his development:

Her thoughts were silently fixed on the irreparable injury which too early an independence and its consequent habits of idleness, dissipation, and luxury, had

made in the mind, the character, the happiness, of a man who, to every advantage of person and talents, united a disposition naturally open and honest, and a feeling, affectionate temper (308).

Elinor suggests that without social interference Willoughby's natural qualities – his talents, disposition and temper – would have allowed him to in fact become the man he appeared to be throughout his courtship of Marianne. She reflects:

The world had made him extravagant and vain – Extravagance and vanity had made him cold-hearted and selfish. Vanity, while seeking its own guilty triumph at the expence of another, had involved him in a real attachment, which extravagance, or at least its offspring, necessity, had required to be sacrificed (308).

Despite his position as a comparatively wealthy member of the landed gentry, society has in a sense failed Willoughby because the model of masculinity it offers him as a young, wealthy and educated but idle gentry man encourages him to pursue a selfish and extravagant lifestyle rather than to seek out the more valuable lasting qualities found in human relationships. Rather than enforcing socially-produced standards of desirable masculinity on either Willoughby or her other characters, Austen suggests that the model of “what men ought to be” that Willoughby is offered by his social world is detrimental to himself and, as Claudia Johnson has persuasively argued, to women such as Eliza Williams and Marianne Dashwood.

Willoughby directly asks Elinor “do you think me most a knave or a fool?” (297), and this is the issue that Willoughby's confession raises and the novel ultimately leaves unresolved. Despite the persuasiveness of Elinor's reflection on Willoughby's confession, Austen leaves open the question of where the blame for his character and conduct should lie – whether in the man himself, or in the society that conditioned him. She wants her readers to make up their own minds about him: this is particularly clear from her narrator's steadfast refusal to judge him either during or after his confession to Elinor and it is perhaps this aspect of his characterisation that critics have found particularly troubling. It is highly unusual for Austen's narrator to fail to judge one of her characters: on the contrary, Austen's ironic tone and her intrusive narrative style repeatedly alert her reader to what they should and should not think and feel about each of her characters. The absence of this judgment in the conclusion of *Sense and Sensibility* is striking, and points to her broader project of educating her readers to

understand and think for themselves about social and literary constructions of masculinity.

Throughout *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen's presentation of the many masculine "faces" of John Willoughby forces the reader to discard the possibility that men or masculinities – either socially, or in their literary forms – can be reduced to individual types, styles or labels. This process of educating the reader in the complexity of masculinities relies on Austen's use of verisimilitude throughout the novel: at each point, both the characters in the novel and the reader are presented with what is constructed as Willoughby's authentic character or personality. Bradbrook has analysed Austen's "techniques of deflation of character and motive, involving sometimes a partial deception of the reader who is lured and persuaded to approve of the seemingly good, but wicked character to the detriment of the misunderstood, or misinterpreted personification of virtue" (84), and Austen clearly uses this technique to great effect in *Sense and Sensibility*. Carole Berger has expanded on Bradbrook's analysis, commenting that "Austen uses this form of deception most often in depicting the true hero and his rakish rival" (532). Berger argues:

The reader most apt to be dismayed by the reversal that exposes the charming Willoughby as a heartless schemer is the one who shares Marianne's 'eagerness' and 'excess of sensibility'. But the matter is more complicated than this, for even the reversal proves deceptive. The version of Willoughby as villain, as gratifying to disappointed readers as his previous role of romantic hero, gives way in the end to his depiction as a thoroughly human compound of good and bad. The process confronts the reader with his own susceptibility to overhasty judgments formed under emotional or conventional pressures (533).

Austen uses this narrative process not only to educate her readers to be cautious when dealing with men within courtship scenarios, but also to educate them *as readers* – both in terms of their susceptibility to narrative bias, and in relation to the generic assumptions about literary masculinities which they bring to the courtship novel. Ultimately, Willoughby does not wholly reflect or embody any of the many social or literary masculinities which are invested in his character throughout *Sense and Sensibility*: Austen "reduces him at the end not to shameful ignominy or penitent remorse, but just to ordinariness" (Auerbach 123). He is far more complex than any

stereotype can permit, and is much more likely to “abound in real Life” than the “handsome, amiable, unexceptionable Young Man” of the “common novel Style”.

Austen’s characterisation of Colonel Brandon and his role in *Sense and Sensibility* continue her project of reforming social and literary masculinities. Colonel Brandon is both narratively and thematically linked to Willoughby throughout the novel, through their relationships with Marianne Dashwood and Eliza Williams and as their characters exemplify masculinities associated with the culture of sensibility. Whereas Willoughby’s treatment of Eliza Williams and his mercenary marriage reveal that he is incapable of true sympathetic feeling for others, Colonel Brandon’s similarly intense feelings prompt him to acts of benevolence. Through Colonel Brandon, Austen endorses a different approach to masculinity associated with the culture of sensibility, through which feeling can prompt a sympathetic exchange between individuals and become a tool for social improvement. Marianne’s marriage to Colonel Brandon rather than Willoughby also furthers Austen’s reform of literary masculinities and particularly the characterisation of the romantic hero. Her marriage challenges the reader’s assumptions about the generic romantic hero and the narrative outcome of the courtship novel and forces the reader to appreciate both a partner for Marianne and a construction of the romantic hero who is the opposite of the “common Novel style”.

Both readers and scholars of *Sense and Sensibility* have found the marriage of Colonel Brandon and Marianne deeply problematic. Darryl Jones notes this critical unease: “So apparently problematic is the Marianne-Brandon marriage that it was, as it were, subject to correction from the very beginning” (65-66), referring to Lady Bessborough’s comment that the novel ended “stupidly” and to an early nineteenth-century French translation which enhanced Colonel Brandon’s romantic appeal and concluded with the marriage of Willoughby to Eliza Williams. He cites several instances of critical dissatisfaction with their marriage, commenting that Marianne is “the subject, or victim, of a conspiracy; she is offered as a reward or trophy to Brandon” (65). Jane Miller bluntly states her objections to their marriage: “the prospect of this lively young woman sharing the bed and bearing the children of Colonel Brandon is not an easy one to accept, and is likely to be felt as deserved punishment for earlier rashness or as penitentially making the best of a bad job” (147). Interestingly, several critics who find their marriage dissatisfying also tend to attribute it to a narrative failure on

Austen's part. Tony Tanner has described "the way Marianne is disposed of at the end" as "the weakest part of the book", and commented: "She is married off to Colonel Brandon to complete a pattern, to satisfy that instinct for harmonious arranging which is part of the structure both of that society and the book itself" (100). Darryl Jones has similarly commented:

Marianne Dashwood is, it seems, summarily married off to Colonel Brandon in order to satisfy the novel's formal requirement: the novel's device of twin heroines, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, presupposes a double marriage-plot, and therefore *must* end with the marriages of both sisters. Colonel Brandon, as the only eligible man left standing at the end of the novel, *must* therefore marry Marianne, however psychologically implausible such a resolution might seem (63).

The dissatisfaction which these and other critics of the novel find in the marriage of Colonel Brandon and Marianne can be interpreted as resulting from the assumptions about the courtship novel genre which, as readers, they bring to the text. The role that such generic assumptions can play is particularly striking in Laura Mooneyham White's analysis of *Sense and Sensibility*. Mooneyham White develops a formula for Austen's courtship narratives which contends that the reader's satisfaction in her novels is based on the heroine's education, maturation and marriage:

the satisfaction and sense of resolution a reader experiences when heroine and hero unite indissolubly is more than a thrill of vicarious romance; it is due to the recognition that marriage results from maturity. It stands to reason, therefore, that the more complete the heroine's education, the more complete will be the reader's satisfaction in the novel's resolution (27).

When Mooneyham White fails to find this satisfaction in *Sense and Sensibility*, she declares it a "failure, albeit a brilliant one" (31) because it does not fit the formula for the courtship novel which she has imposed upon the text. Rather than interpreting *Sense and Sensibility* as a text of itself, Mooneyham White and other critics allow their assumptions about the generic conventions of the courtship novel to influence their interpretations to the novel's detriment.

Few, if any, critics have considered the possibility that reader dissatisfaction with the marriage of Colonel Brandon and Marianne may in fact be intentional on Austen's part: that, as readers, we are *supposed* to find it dissatisfying. There are two

reasons why Austen may have intentionally generated reader disappointment with Marianne's narrative resolution. The first is that Colonel Brandon is neither cast nor characterised as the romantic hero of a courtship novel: in fact, through Marianne, Austen specifically constructs him in opposition to this image. In this respect, the reader's disappointment is the product of the expectations about the romantic hero which they have brought to the text and which, Austen indicates, must be revised. The second reason relates to Marianne's narrative resolution, and particularly to the perception that she is neither in love with, nor suited, to Colonel Brandon. In this case, the reader's dissatisfaction enhances Austen's critique of the social and its impact upon Willoughby's development as a man. He is Marianne's first choice and "right" partner, and the poor model of "what men ought to be" which society offers him results in their absolute separation. Marianne's marriage to Colonel Brandon is, in this sense, the best she can achieve within her social world. In this way, the reader's dissatisfaction with their marriage both enables Austen's reform of literary masculinities and highlights her broader thematic concern regarding the impact of the social on individual happiness.

Throughout *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen specifically constructs Colonel Brandon outside of the "common Novel style": he is neither handsome, nor amiable, nor unexceptionable. He is introduced as "neither very young nor very gay" (35) and "silent and grave" (36), and Austen writes:

His appearance however was not unpleasing, in spite of his being in the opinion of Marianne and Margaret an absolute old bachelor, for he was on the wrong side of five and thirty; but though his face was not handsome his countenance was sensible, and his address was particularly gentlemanlike (36).

Colonel Brandon may be a gentleman but he is clearly not a stereotypical romantic hero, a fact which is reinforced by his disqualification from this role by the literary romantics Marianne and Margaret. Indeed, Austen repeatedly uses Marianne – whose notions of desirable masculinity are specifically drawn from the courtship novel tradition – to construct Colonel Brandon in opposition to this model. She is offended by Mrs Jennings' supposition of his being in love with her, considering it "an unfeeling reflection on the colonel's advanced years, and on his forlorn condition as an old bachelor" (39). She also comments on his supposed ill-health, which she particularly identifies with his often-quoted use of a flannel waistcoat: "with me a flannel waistcoat is invariably connected with aches, cramps, rheumatisms, and every species of ailment

that can afflict the old and the feeble” (40). Clearly, Colonel Brandon’s age and his sombre character automatically discount the possibility of his being the novel’s romantic hero. Once Marianne meets Willoughby, her criticisms of Colonel Brandon intensify and his characterisation in opposition to her ideal becomes even more marked. She comments that “he has neither genius, taste, nor spirit” and that “his understanding has no brilliancy, his feelings no ardour, and his voice no expression” (53) – all qualities with which the man of taste, the romantic hero, and John Willoughby, are plentifully endowed.

Yet at the novel’s conclusion, Marianne is happily married to Colonel Brandon. Her happiness in her marriage is clear: “Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby” (352). Despite her happiness, their marriage creates a sense of dissatisfaction in the reader because it fails to provide the expected resolution of Marianne’s marriage to a man who is both worthy and a typical romantic hero. This dissatisfaction serves Austen’s literary project. By investing Marianne with such strong opinions regarding desirable masculinity and directly contrasting them with Colonel Brandon throughout the novel, Austen specifically sets the reader up to be dissatisfied with their marriage. The result is that by happily marrying Marianne to a man who fails as a romantic hero in virtually every respect Austen forces the reader to acknowledge the assumptions about literary masculinity which they have brought to the text. Indeed, Austen specifically points to this project in her final chapter:

Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favourite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give her hand to another! – and *that* other, a man who had suffered no less than herself under the event of a former attachment, whom two years before, she had considered too old to be married, - and who still sought the constitutional safe-guard of a flannel waistcoat! (352).

It is not only her views on “second attachments” which have been modified, but also her views on desirable masculinity. By reforming Marianne’s earlier ideas about masculine perfection, Austen simultaneously challenges the reader’s expectations regarding desirable literary masculinities within her own courtship novels. The reader is

compelled to imagine a different kind of man performing this role: a man of thirty-five, who occasionally wears a flannel waistcoat, and is much more likely to “abound in real Life”, can be a literary romantic hero.

The second cause of reader dissatisfaction with Marianne’s marriage to Colonel Brandon is the strong perception that she is neither in love with nor suited to him, thwarting the satisfying “meeting of hearts and minds” marital resolution expected of the courtship novel. As several critics have elucidated, there is not a single instance of dialogue between them in the entire novel and its conclusion relates rather than demonstrates or dramatises both Marianne’s change of opinion about Colonel Brandon and the happiness of her marriage to him (C Berger 533). In these respects their relationship is unique within Austen’s novels; yet this divergence from her usual pattern itself suggests that she may have had a different purpose in bringing them together. The reader’s dissatisfaction with Marianne’s narrative outcome is also produced by Marianne’s earlier dismissal of the possibility of her marrying Colonel Brandon: “‘you cannot deny the absurdity of the accusation ... Colonel Brandon is certainly younger than Mrs Jennings, but he is old enough to be *my* father; and if he were ever animated enough to be in love, must have long outlived every sensation of the kind’” (39). Even Elinor, usually considered the voice of wisdom and prudence in the novel, concedes that “‘thirty-five and seventeen had better not have any thing to do with matrimony together” (39), and later asks “what could a man of five and thirty hope, when opposed by a very lively one of five and twenty? and as she could not even wish him successful, she heartily wished him indifferent” (51). By specifically presenting their marriage as improbable and even unwise, Austen leads the reader to consider it an impossibility, setting them up for their dissatisfaction at the novel’s conclusion.

Austen’s purpose in generating the reader’s dissatisfaction with Marianne’s marriage is not only to force the reader to acknowledge and reject the expectations about the courtship novel genre and the romantic hero which they bring to the text, but also to highlight her thematic critique of the interference of the social world with individual happiness. It is true that, in many respects, Colonel Brandon is *not* Marianne’s right partner in life: Willoughby is, or could have been, Austen suggests, had society not intervened and corrupted him. Marianne’s courtship with Willoughby in Devonshire establishes their essential compatibility: they are the masculine and

feminine versions of an essentially Romantic personality. Their love is intense and real and Marianne's happiness is euphoric: "This was the season of happiness to Marianne. Her heart was devoted to Willoughby, and the fond attachment to Norland, which she brought with her from Sussex, was more likely to be softened than she had thought possible before, by the charms which his society bestowed on her present home" (55). Furthermore, as Peter Knox-Shaw has commented, "far from being undermined, Marianne and Willoughby's special compatibility is kept resonating almost to the end" (141). Willoughby's confession, its revelation of the essential humanness of his nature and Elinor's reflection on him strongly suggest that the faults that prevent his marriage to Marianne result from his socialisation rather than an inherently flawed character. By presenting his faults as socially-produced and forcing the reader to form an independent judgment of him, Austen specifically leaves open the possibility of Willoughby's complete vindication. The conclusion of *Sense and Sensibility*, therefore, is clearly capable of supporting an interpretation in which Willoughby, not Colonel Brandon, can be considered Marianne's right partner in life. The novel offers its readers a vision of the mutual love and happiness of two wholly compatible soul mates and simultaneously denies them satisfaction in their union, directly attributing its impossibility to the interference of the social world on their happiness. Colonel Brandon is both narratively and figuratively Marianne's second choice, a result of her realisation of the impossibility of achieving her first. Austen deliberately thwarts her readers' satisfaction in Marianne's narrative outcome both to compel them to confront their own expectations about the courtship novel genre, and also to highlight her critique of the interference of the social with individual happiness.

While Colonel Brandon is not Marianne's soul mate, he is the best that she can achieve within her social world. Moreover, he can offer her something that Willoughby could not: the possibility of simultaneously living in her society while retaining her personal and moral integrity, including as it depends on the authentic expression of feeling and other qualities associated with the culture of sensibility. Jean Hagstrum has commented: "Austen is of course not opposed to feeling, only to the excess of it, only to lack of control, only to the abandonment of the whole being to its dominance" (272). Colonel Brandon embodies an approach to experiencing and using feeling that is different from the approach initially practiced by Marianne and Willoughby, but which Austen clearly endorses both in *Sense and Sensibility* and throughout her novels.

Whereas Willoughby's feeling is revealed as deficient and socially corruptible, through Colonel Brandon's character Austen endorses feeling as a trigger for acts of benevolence, as a tool for social improvement and as a social corrective.

Colonel Brandon consistently displays compassion and benevolence throughout the novel, exemplified in his conduct towards his lost love, Eliza Brandon, and her daughter, Eliza Williams. His most important and prominent act of benevolence, however, lies in his gift of the Delaford parish living to Edward Ferrars. In this transaction, Colonel Brandon assumes the role of the social spectator within Adam Smith's theory of sympathetic exchange. He observes Edward's distressed situation with regard to his engagement to Lucy and his disinheritance by his mother, and performs an act of benevolent generosity to seek to alleviate his suffering. After Elinor confirms Edward's difficult situation, Austen clearly demonstrates that Colonel Brandon is prompted to this act of generosity by the sincerity and depth of his feelings: "The cruelty, the impolitic cruelty," – he replied, with great feeling – "of dividing, or attempting to divide, two young people long attached to each other, is terrible" (264). Colonel Brandon and Edward are, at the time, virtually unknown to each other, as the Colonel says to Elinor:

'I have seen Mr Ferrars two or three times in Harley-street, and am much pleased with him. He is not a young man with whom one can be intimately acquainted in a short time, but I have seen enough of him to wish him well for his own sake, and as a friend of yours, I wish it still more' (264).

The distance between Colonel Brandon and Edward indicates that his feelings regarding Edward's situation and their expression through his generosity arise from his desire to perform a social good, rather than from motives of familial or nepotistic patronage. Colonel Brandon assumes, of course, that Edward sincerely loves and wishes to marry Lucy, and views their attempted separation by his family as unjust and cruel. Having suffered through his own separation from Eliza as a result of the patrilineal inheritance of property and his family's desire for wealth and status, Colonel Brandon seeks to prevent the occurrence of what he views as a social failure by assisting Edward to marry Lucy. In this sense, his benevolence is represented as a social corrective. Elinor's response to Colonel Brandon's conduct clearly links it with the social sympathy associated with the culture of sensibility: "her esteem for the general benevolence, and her gratitude for the particular friendship, which together prompted Colonel Brandon to

this act, were strongly felt, and warmly expressed” (264). She later says to Mrs Jennings: ““I feel the goodness of Colonel Brandon most sensibly. There are not many men who would act as he has done. Few people who have so compassionate an heart!”” (267).

A further example of Colonel Brandon’s capacity to turn his strong feelings to a practical social good occurs during Marianne’s illness, in which he is personally more emotionally involved than in Edward’s disinheritance. Throughout this episode Austen strongly represents Colonel Brandon as a man of intense feeling, using language which specifically associates him with the culture of sensibility: “the many hours of each day in which he was left entirely alone, were but too favourable for the admission of every melancholy idea, and he could not expel from his mind the persuasion that he should see Marianne no more” (289). Colonel Brandon, like Marianne, suffers emotional extremes in solitude. Yet despite the intensity and despair of his feelings, he manages to turn them to practical assistance of the kind advocated by Adam Smith. Elinor asks him to bring her mother to Marianne with every confidence in his abilities: “The comfort of such a friend at that moment as Colonel Brandon – of such a companion for her mother, - how gratefully was it felt! – a companion whose judgment would guide, whose attendance must relieve, and whose friendship might soothe her!” (291). Austen’s description of Colonel Brandon’s response clearly dramatises his channelling of intense feeling into practical assistance: “*He*, meanwhile, whatever he might feel, acted with all the firmness of a collected mind, made every necessary arrangement with the utmost dispatch, and calculated with exactness the time in which she might look for his return. Not a moment was lost in a delay of any kind” (291). Indeed, Colonel Brandon’s collected and useful response to Marianne’s illness, which Elinor finds comforting and reassuring, is sharply contrasted with Willoughby’s intoxicated and almost violent demands that she reassure him of Marianne’s condition and hear his confession.

Two recent critics – Peter Knox-Shaw and Clara Tuite – have also noted Austen’s use of Colonel Brandon to reform the culture of sensibility by reinstating the use of feeling and sympathy to promote social wellbeing. The problem with the relationship between Willoughby and Marianne, argues Knox-Shaw, is that it excludes the role of sympathy as a mechanism for social bonding. For them, sympathy “signifies

correspondence of feeling – their own feeling, and it begins and ends – such is their boast – with themselves” (149). This means, however, that, “Marianne, after Willoughby’s desertion, finds herself in a social context which she has emptied of all meaning” (149). Beth Lau has similarly noted that Marianne “feels no connection or common interests with the society in which she finds herself” (255). Knox-Shaw argues that *Sense and Sensibility* reflects the idea of sympathy derived from Smith and Hume, that “sympathy stands primarily for an involuntary transfer of feeling, an almost magnetic influence that draws one person into the mental orbit of another ... it is the great cohesive force responsible for social bonding” (140), and that Austen illustrates this through Colonel Brandon. He argues that “on one plane Brandon’s own qualifications as a hero of sensibility – which include a temperament both warm and sympathetic – easily outweigh those of his rival” (142). Knox-Shaw states that in Colonel Brandon, “Austen distinguishes between the social virtue and the reigning cult” of sentiment and sympathy (148). Clara Tuite has likewise identified the “rhetoric of sympathy” in Colonel Brandon’s character, arguing that Austen “attempts to transform a discredited sensibility into a respectable sympathy” (*Romantic Austen* 67). She argues that *Sense and Sensibility* reforms sympathy into a corrective mechanism rather than a mode of excess, and that the novel “can be seen to manoeuvre towards sympathy as a synthesizing, stabilizing third term that lies between ‘sense’ and ‘sensibility’” (*Romantic Austen* 67). Tuite contends that Colonel Brandon represents “the classic male sentimental aristocratic gesture of sympathy as benevolence” (96). Austen’s endorsement of feeling in the form of a sympathetic social corrective in Colonel Brandon clearly prefaces the social sympathy of her later male protagonists, including Mr Darcy, Mr Knightley and Captain Wentworth.

Austen’s conclusion to the novel indicates that Marianne comes to appreciate the model of sensibility that Colonel Brandon embodies. Austen dwells on the extent to which her marriage integrates her into a community: “she found herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village” (352). Marianne’s marriage does not require her to renounce the feelings and passions associated with the culture of sensibility which are integral to her sense of self. Rather, she learns to channel them into social improvement, which Austen suggests will glean both social and personal benefits. In this way, Colonel Brandon can offer Marianne a means of pursuing feeling

that ensures both her social integration and her individual integrity, rather than the social exclusion and near self-destruction that resulted from her relationship with Willoughby.

Edward Ferrars completes Austen's project of reforming masculinities in *Sense and Sensibility*. Like Colonel Brandon, he is presented in opposition to Marianne's idealistic vision of desirable masculinity associated with the man of taste and the fictional romantic hero. However, although Austen's representation of Edward contributes to her realist reform of masculinities, her overriding concern in his characterisation is the exploration of the imposition of socially-produced conceptions of appropriate or desirable masculinity on individual men. With Edward, Austen's interest in "what men ought to be" turns away from the erroneous reduction of masculinity to social or literary "types" and toward an examination of the means by which masculine models are socially produced, how they are enforced on individual men and the ramifications of such conditioning for men who are unable or unwilling to meet their standards.

Of all the male characters in *Sense and Sensibility*, Edward has perhaps attracted the most critical ire. In addition to the scholarship cited at the beginning of the chapter, Warren Roberts has described Edward as lacking "spirit and resolution" (191), and Mary Poovey has noted his "chronic depression", commenting: "in the climactic final encounter between Elinor and Willoughby, Elinor is aroused to a pitch of complex emotion we never see Edward inspire in anyone" (185). Edward receives perhaps the most damning critique in Claudia Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, which insightfully explores the novel's exposition of the negative impact of patriarchal structures on unprotected women. Johnson persuasively argues that the patrilineal inheritance of property encourages young men who do not need to work for financial support to be lazy and idle and to prey upon vulnerable young women such as the two Elizas and Marianne Dashwood. Her critique extends to both Willoughby and Edward:

The bearing of the Eliza stories on Edward's treatment of Elinor and Lucy Steele ... is, though submerged, more disturbing, because Edward is often regarded as the positive foil to Willoughby: modest, retiring, indifferent to dead leaves. But Edward too forms an early attachment out of the idleness endemic to landed

gentlemen as presented in *Sense and Sensibility*. Although Edward, unlike Willoughby, is still under a parent's thumb, he too is holding out for an inheritance that will give him the money and the independence he needs to sustain, not an extravagant, but still a rather aimless life as a private gentleman. In the meantime, he expresses no interest in the energetic management of a country estate and discloses no enthusiasm or talent for a profession, not even the Church (57-8).

Johnson claims that "gentlemen in *Sense and Sensibility* are uncommitted sorts. They move on, more or less encumbered by human wreckage from the past. No sooner does Edward, like Willoughby, bind himself to one woman than he proceeds to engage the heart of another" (58). She further argues for Edward's lack of understanding of the impact of his behaviour on Elinor: "Edward never hints at any consciousness that he may carelessly have created an attachment in Elinor that he had no intention of reciprocating" (58). She describes him, as quoted earlier, as "weak, duplicitous, and selfish, and entirely lacking in that fortitude and forthrightness with which Austen is capable of endowing exemplary gentleman when she wishes" (58).

As Moreland Perkins has noted, "Edward is made out by Johnson to be such an abomination that I fail to recognize him" (110). While I accept Johnson's argument about Edward's ignorance of the pain and suffering Elinor experiences as a result of his behaviour, other aspects of her critique must be addressed. It is based on textual inaccuracies and unacknowledged assumptions about desirable masculinity. Perkins has already pointed out that Edward is in fact engaged to Lucy for at least three years before he meets Elinor, and that he remained committed to Lucy until she broke from him and married his brother (111). Moreover, whereas Johnson argues that he "expresses no enthusiasm or talent for a profession", Edward in fact indicates on several occasions that he was hopeful of entering the church before his family prevented him, and that it remains his preference. Her statement that Edward lacks "talent for a profession, *not even the Church*" (my emphasis) emerges from an ideological position that posits profession or occupation as an essential element of acceptable or desirable masculinity (a position which Austen clearly shared), but which contains unstated and implicitly negative assumptions about the church as a career. Her argument that Edward is "weak, duplicitous, and selfish" and that he lacks "fortitude and forthrightness" is easily refuted by examining Edward's response to excommunication

and disinheritance by his family on account of his engagement to Lucy: “‘Edward said very little; but what he did say, was in the most determined manner. Nothing should prevail on him to give up his engagement. He would stand to it, cost him what it might’” (250). Edward’s decision to maintain his engagement to Lucy demonstrates remarkable decision, fortitude and forthrightness.

As with Willoughby, and especially with Colonel Brandon, the negative critiques of Edward provided by Johnson and others are based on a set of assumptions about “what men ought to be” in terms of social and literary constructions of masculinity. Like Willoughby and Brandon, Austen’s exploration of these assumptions through Edward is designed to reject the “common Novel style” and to construct a romantic hero more likely to “abound in real Life”. Indeed, Edward’s incompatibility with the image of masculine perfection idolised by Marianne is established early in the novel when she articulates her vision of the desirable male directly in opposition to Edward’s body, mind, manners and taste: his “virtues” are all she retains. Like Colonel Brandon, Edward’s characterisation forces the reader to imagine a different kind of man taking on the role of romantic hero in the courtship novel.

While Austen’s characterisation of Edward is similar to Willoughby and Brandon in its rejection of stereotyped literary masculinities, it differs greatly from the other two male characters in terms of social constructions of masculinity. Both Willoughby and Colonel Brandon are characterised in relation to dominant ideologies of masculinity that had currency in the Romantic period. Willoughby’s character, as discussed earlier, incorporates masculinities associated with male refinement, taste and sensibility; and while the figure of sympathetic benevolence reflected in Colonel Brandon may not have dominated the Romantic period, it was recognisable in the writings of sentimental moral philosophers. Edward strongly differs from Willoughby and Brandon in that his characterisation does not reflect either these or any other models of masculinity in the public domain during the Romantic period. If Willoughby’s reflection of so many socially-produced masculinities renders him a social creature, and Colonel Brandon’s beneficent reform of sympathy casts him as a social improver, Edward by contrast exists on a social margin. Austen uses his character to explore the social and cultural processes by which masculine identities are generated, to critique socially produced

assumptions about desirable and undesirable masculinities, and to address their debilitating effects on individual men.

Although he is described as “a gentleman-like and pleasing young man” (17), Edward is not “polite” by eighteenth-century standards: “Edward Ferrars was not recommended to their good opinion by any peculiar graces of person or address. He was not handsome, and his manners required intimacy to make them pleasing” (17). Later in the novel Edward comments on his own ineptness with social interaction, presenting himself as the opposite of the genteel, “polite” man: “‘I never wish to offend, but I am so foolishly shy, that I often seem negligent, when I am only kept back by my natural awkwardness. I have frequently thought I must have been intended by nature to be fond of low company, I am so little at my ease among strangers of gentility!’” (93). Nor is Edward’s personality constructed through the culture of sensibility, either as it promoted the expression of feeling or its use as a social good. Although he has strong feelings, his shyness and lack of self-confidence prevent him from expressing himself or performing an active social role. His conversations with Marianne indicate that neither can he be regarded as a man of “taste”. His reading of Cowper disappoints and astonishes her and their later conversation about landscape and the picturesque reveals his lack of romance in this regard: “‘It is a beautiful country ... but these bottoms must be dirty in winter.’ ‘How can you think of dirt, with such objects before you?’ ‘Because,’ replied he, smiling, ‘among the rest of the objects before me, I see a very dirty lane’” (87-88).

Emily Auerbach has asked the salient question:

So what does Edward add to the novel, and why might Elinor prefer him? We have our dastardly villain (Willoughby) and our manly hero (Colonel Brandon) paired literally in a duel ... Willoughby marries for money while Colonel Brandon marries for love. Willoughby looks the part of the perfect gentleman; Colonel Brandon acts like one. Why might Austen have added Edward Ferrars to her gallery of gentlemen? (113).

Auerbach suggests that Edward’s contribution to the novel lies in his wit and the self-deprecating humour that he uses to banter with the other characters, particularly Marianne (113). She comments: “if we ... look carefully at his conversation, we see that he displays a flair for discerning character” (114). While this is true, Edward also

performs a vital function in Austen's interrogation of social constructions of masculinity. I have discussed Edward as a series of negatives; what he is not, rather than what he is. The question of who or what Edward is – and by extension the question as to whether men need to *be* something or someone at all – recurs throughout the novel and remains uncertain for both the characters and the reader until its resolution in Edward's marriage to Elinor. The uncertainty of Edward's character arises from his questionable status as a fully masculine adult person. If we consider Edward in relation to John Tosh's assertion that "as a social identity masculinity is constructed in three arenas – home, work and all male-association" (*A Man's Place* 2), it appears that for much of the novel Edward does not possess the necessary qualifications in relation to his home, his work, or his status among a male peer group, to be considered as fully masculine by the social standards of the Romantic period. The considerable social and familial pressure exerted on Edward throughout the novel by his mother, sister, brother and brother-in-law can itself be interpreted as symptomatic of his uncertain masculine status, as these characters seek to force him into a mould of socially produced desirable masculinity which they understand and approve.

Clearly, Edward does not possess the status of a householder throughout *Sense and Sensibility*: he is unmarried, and he possesses neither an estate (or other permanent home), nor a temporary home of his own, disqualifying him from being considered a fully masculine adult. His status in this regard is further complicated by Austen's presentation of both his marital status and the possibility of his ever controlling his own home as ambivalent. Edward is secretly engaged but for much of the novel has little prospect of marrying Lucy, suggesting that his marital status is itself indeterminate: he is publicly single but privately compromised, with no prospect of resolution. Additionally, his ability to form and control his own household is entirely dependent on the will of his mother. Edward's ambiguous marital status and his financial dependence mean that, for much of the novel, he is denied the status of a fully masculine person.

Secondly, Edward's work – or lack of work – also problematises his status as an adult male. Edward does not work at all, either in the management or maintenance of an estate, or in the pursuit of a profession. Furthermore, his income is not derived from independent sources but is instead provided by his mother, so that although he receives a sufficient income to support himself he cannot be regarded as either financially or

personally independent. Austen's endorsement of work as an essential attribute of desirable masculinity – signalled in *Northanger Abbey*, and also illustrated in her characterisation of Willoughby – is fully exemplified in her recurring treatment of the issue in Edward's conversations with the Dashwoods. Edward explains his lack of a profession:

'my own nicety, and the nicety of my friends, have made me what I am, an idle, helpless being. We never could agree in our choice of a profession. I always preferred the church, as I still do. But that was not smart enough for my family. ... and, at length, as there was no necessity for my having any profession at all, as I might be as dashing and expensive without a red coat on my back as with one, idleness was pronounced on the whole to be the most advantageous and honourable, and a young man of eighteen is not in general so earnestly bent on being busy as to resist the solicitations of his friends to do nothing. I was therefore entered at Oxford and have been properly idle ever since' (100-01).

This passage strongly illustrates the pressure exerted on Edward by his family to conform to a particular model of gentry masculinity that they endorse. His family see his profession as a vehicle for public adulation and celebrity, rather than as fulfilling a calling or as a means for financial independence. That their views are representative of a socially-produced image of gentry masculinity which both Edward and Austen consider undesirable is clear from his mildly sarcastic remark that "I might be as dashing and expensive without a red coat on my back as with one", and his ironic description of "idleness" as "proper", "advantageous" and "honourable". In fact, the model of gentry masculinity which Edward's family seeks to impose upon him is exactly the image of masculinity represented by Willoughby, with which Edward is clearly incompatible:

he was neither fitted by abilities nor disposition to answer the wishes of his mother and sister, who longed to see him distinguished – as – they hardly knew what. They wanted him to make a fine figure in the world in some manner or other. His mother wished to interest him in political concerns, to get him into parliament, or to see him connected with some of the great men of the day. Mrs John Dashwood wished it likewise; but in the mean while, till one of these superior blessings could be attained, it would have quieted her ambition to see him driving a barouche (17-18).

During his visit to Barton, Edward's conversations with Mrs Dashwood further reveal the pressure exerted on him by his family and also demonstrate his own unhappiness with his situation. Mrs Dashwood observes to Edward: "'you would be a happier man if you had any profession to engage your time and give an interest to your plans and actions'" (100). He agrees, and replies: "'It has been, and is, and probably will always be a heavy misfortune to me, that I have had no necessary business to engage me, no profession to give me employment, or afford me any thing like independence'" (100). He also comments that he is not ambitious, that his wishes are "'moderate'": "'I wish as well as every body else to be perfectly happy; but like every body else it must be in my own way. Greatness will not make me so'" (89-90). Edward's "own way" to happiness is through a profession – the church – through which he will be socially productive, financially independent and permitted the life of rural domesticity to which he is clearly suited, rather than to the fashionable circles of London. Edward's lack of a profession, or work of any kind, does more than limit his choice and freedom: it also prevents him from being considered, by early nineteenth century standards, a fully masculine person and severely damages his sense of self-worth.

Finally, gender historians have identified male peer-group status as the third arena in which masculine status is both constituted and conferred, and Edward's status in this regard is questionable throughout the novel. There is no suggestion that he engages in homosocial activities of any kind, either riding, hunting and shooting with other men in the country, or visiting the tavern or coffee-house for all-male company in the city. Tosh's analysis of masculine status as being in the "gift of one's peers" is particularly pertinent because Austen's characterisation of Edward is partly informed by other male characters' perceptions of him throughout the novel. Elinor's conversation with Edward's brother, Robert, reveals that Edward's masculine status is subordinated by his peers because he fails to fulfil the ideology of male refinement which Robert exemplifies. Robert emphasises Edward's difficulties with social interaction, "lamenting the extreme *gaucherie* which he really believed kept him from mixing in proper society" (235). He attributes Edward's disinclination for public life not to any "natural deficiency", but rather "to the misfortune of a private education", presenting education in addition to family expectation as a further instrument for the imposition of socially-produced models of desirable masculinity on individual men. Robert positions

Edward below himself in terms of their masculine status solely on the basis of their different capacities for culturally sanctioned social performance, saying “he himself, though probably without any particular, any material superiority by nature, merely from the advantage of a public school, was as well fitted to mix in the world as any other man” (235). Robert is the voice of the dominant ideology of male social refinement, and Edward’s failure to fulfil this model renders his masculine status uncertain and socially subordinated. Edward’s brother-in-law John Dashwood takes a similar view. John’s obsession with land and wealth inflects his own opinion of masculine status as being constituted (at least in part) by patrilineal inheritance. When John tells Elinor of Mrs Ferrars’ intention of settling the Norfolk estate on Robert, he asks: ““Can anything be more galling to the spirit of a man ... than to see his younger brother in possession of an estate which might have been his own? Poor Edward! I feel for him sincerely”” (251). To John, Edward’s removal from his position as eldest son within the patrilineal system for the inheritance of property renders him a less masculine object of pity.

Austen’s characterisation of Edward demonstrates considerable insight into the means through which models of masculinity were socially produced and imposed on individuals, being family expectations, the value of wealth and status, education and the system of property disposition within a patriarchal social and economic order. Each of these factors is presented as impacting upon Edward’s ability to marry, to form his own household, to pursue his career or other occupation of choice and to achieve parity with his male peers. His resistance to socially-produced standards of appropriate masculinity that are incompatible with his personality and desires and to the social pressure placed upon him to conform means that by the standards of the time he is not a fully masculine adult male. At best, Edward is subordinated below other men who are either more willing or more able to fulfil dominant masculine ideologies. Austen challenges the social expectation that men have to *be* someone or something by illustrating the debilitating effects on Edward of his inability to achieve a socially endorsed masculine identity. Edward is, as Mary Poovey has noted, “chronically depressed” (185). He lacks confidence in his dealings with others. He suffers from extremely low self-esteem. The Dashwoods generally attribute “his want of spirits, of openness, and of consistency” (99-100) to his lack of independence and to pressure exerted on him by his family, but they are also the result of his inability to fulfil the socially expected role of the gentry male. As Michael Giffin has noted, “Edward’s dilemma is that he does not

want to fulfil these expectations, and that he is temperamentally unsuited to fulfil them” (74). His low opinion of himself is confirmed by his determination to bring his sons up ““to be as unlike myself as is possible. In feeling, in action, in condition, in every thing”” (101).

Does Edward’s failure to meet the socially generated requirements of the gentry male mean that he is therefore feminised? Moreland Perkins has argued that this is indeed the case, and that Edward’s feminisation serves what he views as Austen’s democratic project throughout the novel:

a democratic hero, Austen believes, will not only be closer to everyday reality, he will share more features with women than the official version of his gender ever authorizes ... what marks Edward as a kind of Everyman who is unrecognised in the ruling class’s patriarchal ideology is his modesty, his quiet reticence, his “open, affectionate heart,” the fact that “all his wishes centred in domestic comfort and the quiet of a private life.” All these qualities figure centrally in patriarchy’s paradigm for the *feminine* gender (40).

While acknowledging the merit of this argument, Edward’s incompatibility with Romantic ideologies of masculine gender does not of itself render him feminised. Rather, Edward represents a new approach to masculinity that Austen clearly endorses. By the novel’s conclusion, he has achieved the status of a fully masculine adult person, but on terms that are different to those endorsed by his family and society. He has the status of a householder through his marriage to Elinor and his occupation of the Delaford parish living, though he never succeeds to a family estate. His profession as a clergyman provides him with both financial independence and a socially useful role, though he remains removed from the fashionable world of London public life. Finally, his relationships with Colonel Brandon and his community provide him with the respect of a male peer group, though he will always rank poorly in the estimation of Robert Ferrars and John Dashwood. John Tosh argues that “the precise character of masculine formation at any time is largely determined by the balance struck *between* these three components” (*Manliness and Masculinities* 39): work, domesticity and all-male association. By the conclusion of *Sense and Sensibility*, Edward has achieved an adult masculine status but both the quality and the balance of its components are different from those of the socially endorsed model represented by the Ferrars family. Edward’s family reflects an outdated approach that associates masculine status with social

performance and display; Edward, like Henry Tilney before him and the male protagonists which follow him, embodies a modern approach to masculinity which values domesticity and private life above all else. As Austen states, unfortunately for Mrs Ferrars and Fanny, “Edward had no turn for great men or barouches. All his wishes centred in domestic comfort and the quiet of a private life” (18).

Sense and Sensibility is unconcerned with the construction of paragons of masculine perfection and virtue, as previous scholarship on the novel abundantly exemplifies. Instead, Austen’s treatment of the issue of “what men ought to be” is much more complex, highlighting the fallacy of reducing masculinity to social and literary stereotypes, and exploring the means by which masculine genders are socially constructed and the effects of their imposition on individual men. Austen’s social and literary reconstructions of masculinity in *Sense and Sensibility* in fact create male characters who are more intricate and interesting than the stereotypical romantic heroes and villains that readers and critics seem to expect when they approach her novels. The men of *Sense and Sensibility* explode popular myths about social and literary masculinities – that masculine gender identity can be reduced to a stereotype or label; that men are either fundamentally good or fundamentally bad; and that men must be young, handsome and gallant to be romantic heroes. In their place, Austen constructs three men each of whom is a fundamentally human mixture of virtues and flaws. *Sense and Sensibility* established a new approach to literary masculinities that laid a foundation for the complex male characters that would feature in Austen’s later novels.

CHAPTER FIVE

Pride and Prejudice: Writing the Desirable Male

In December 2004, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a letter from a correspondent asking, “just what has this Mr Darcy ponce got that the Aussie man hasn’t? Nothing, I reckon” (“Opinions and Letters” 16 Dec. 2004). Answers to this question – which were printed under the headline “Mr Darcy: just Bazza with charm, money and good looks”¹ – included “Pemberley and lots of money”; “you weren’t paying attention during chapter three. Mr Darcy has 10,000 a year”; and the slightly doubtful “try good manners”. Three female correspondents provided particularly interesting responses: “where do we begin? Mr Darcy has passion, charm, loyalty and intensity. And, when played by Colin Firth, he is the sexiest man alive”; “he fell in love with a feisty young woman; and he looks like Colin Firth”; and finally, “Mr Darcy, in contrast to the ponces and fops around him, was a genuine, red-blooded man – much like many Aussie men” (“Opinions and Letters” 17 Dec. 2004). This conversation, which also touched on the contemporary value of Jane Austen’s novels, is one of countless indications of the extent to which *Pride and Prejudice* and particularly its male protagonist have become cultural phenomena capable of transcending time, space and cultural form. The British colony of New South Wales was twenty-five years old when the novel was published in 1813. Two hundred years, countless reprints, and numerous theatre and screen adaptations later, the cultural status of its male protagonist is sufficient to sustain an ongoing conversation in Sydney’s leading newspaper, prompting a discussion of conceptions of ideal masculinity in the early nineteenth and the early twenty-first centuries, and raising issues concerning perceived British and Australian masculinities.

Several scholars have explored the continuing popularity of the Darcy character in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially in relation to screen adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* and with particular female audiences.² Given the perceived desirability of the Darcy character among historical and contemporary audiences and the influence that the character has exerted over the romantic hero stereotype in popular culture, it seems almost a truism to state that in *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen’s construction of desirable masculinity is grounded in the politics of sexual desire. The novel’s reception over the last two centuries provides ample evidence of this fact. Yet

scholarship on the novel, and particularly on its 1995 television adaptation by BBC/A&E (“BBC adaptation”), indicate a critical neglect of Austen’s representation of the politics of desire between Darcy and Elizabeth and the extent of her interest not only in female desire but also in male sexuality. As in *Sense and Sensibility*, in *Pride and Prejudice* Austen’s central treatment of the question of “what men ought to be” focuses on the impact of socially-produced masculine ideals on individual men and specifically on Darcy’s difficulty reconciling his sexual desire for Elizabeth with the marital choices dictated by his education, upbringing and the socially approved models of gentry masculinity available to him. Paralleling Austen’s concern with the complexities of male sexuality in a highly regulated social world is her representation of a female erotic subject and the male object of her desire, which is given a prominence in *Pride and Prejudice* unequalled in Austen’s novels. *Pride and Prejudice* develops Austen’s reversal of the conventional courtship gender hierarchy in *Northanger Abbey* by presenting Elizabeth as a much more sophisticated erotic subject and by positioning Darcy as a physically desirable male object. *Pride and Prejudice* also strongly articulates a relationship between men’s physical desirability to women and their values, personality and character.

Pride and Prejudice validates female desire and asserts its importance in the formulation of socially-approved masculinities not only by privileging Elizabeth’s consciousness and focusing on her assessments of men as potential suitors, but also by dramatising this very dynamic in the relationship between the two protagonists. Darcy changes to model himself on Elizabeth’s vision of “what men ought to be”. Concurrent with the novel’s representation of the sexual desire of the two protagonists and its revelation of Darcy’s essential moral worth is his education in understanding that he needs to be desirable to Elizabeth, for whom sex appeal, wealth, status and a sense of patriarchal responsibility are insufficient. Darcy’s change is central both to the novel’s construction of desirable masculinity and to its contestation of the accepted gender politics of desire of courtship, as Austen asserts that men should change themselves for the single motivating reason that in so doing they will become more attractive to the women they desire. The alteration in Darcy’s understanding of appropriate masculine identity is inextricably linked to his fundamental need to be desirable to Elizabeth, who requires a man to have an expressive emotional life in which she can share. The fact

that Elizabeth is the catalyst for Darcy's change is made explicit after their engagement. Having described his deficient education and upbringing, Darcy exclaims:

'such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased' (349).

He reflects on their surprise meeting at Pemberley and directly attributes his changed social behaviour to his need to be desirable to Elizabeth: "'my object *then* ... was to shew you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past; and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended to'" (349-50).

Although Darcy's change has been examined by scholarship, the radicalism of this statement in the context of the Romantic period seems to have been overlooked. This fundamental aspect of *Pride and Prejudice* strongly resists the rhetorical difference between male and female conduct literature discussed in Chapter Two: whereas women were advised to adopt a particular model of femininity because they would thereby become attractive to men, men were advised to adopt a particular approach to masculinity because of motivating factors such as their public and professional reputation, their status among their peers and community and national interests. Men were rarely, if ever, advised to adopt a particular model of masculinity because in doing so they would become more attractive to women. Austen's endorsement of a male character whose reputation, masculine status and responsible attitude to his patriarchal and community roles cannot be doubted, but who nevertheless changes himself for the sole purpose of becoming desirable to his beloved, therefore seems courageous at this historical moment. Darcy's change throughout *Pride and Prejudice* is to reflect Elizabeth's vision of "what men ought to be", encapsulating Austen's project of reforming social masculinities to accommodate the needs and desires of women.

Darcy's change throughout *Pride and Prejudice* has been the subject of considerable critical attention. It has been suggested that he "is the only case in which Jane Austen tries to bring about a psychological change in her hero's character" (Kooiman-Van Middendorp 51), although Henry Tilney and Captain Wentworth also

develop psychologically. Most criticism of Darcy's change interprets it as a shift from rudeness to politeness, or from social exclusivity to social inclusiveness, as he realises on Elizabeth's instructions the importance of sociability and civility in social interactions. Juliet McMaster, for example, has commented:

Darcy has no small-talk; but when he needs to express himself he acts under strong compulsion, and the truth bursts from him into words as though by an almost physical necessity ... But once he has burst through the barrier of his habitual reticence, he does not know when to stop ... She [Elizabeth] has taught him to extend his communication, and to mend his language ("Talking About Talk" 93).

Tony Tanner has similarly argued: "it is part of Darcy's improvement that he comes to acknowledge the justness of much of what she [Elizabeth] has said about his behaviour and manner" (113). Claudia Johnson has also discussed Darcy's attitudes to politeness, arguing, "Darcy's central fault, after all, is to have been careless about pleasing other people ... considered with respect to the liberal ideas about personal happiness, Darcy's failure of politeness are quite momentous" (*Jane Austen* 81-82), and asserting that Elizabeth only begins to desire him once he "improves his manners" (*Jane Austen* 84).

However, Darcy's change is in fact the result of an emotional development rather than an acknowledgment of the importance of civilised sociability. By eighteenth-century standards, Darcy is the least "polite" man from the novel's beginning to its end: any differences in his outward behaviour result from his recognition of his faulty pride and elitist prejudices, and from his new understanding of the importance of experiencing and expressing his feelings in his relationship with Elizabeth. Whereas men's expression of feeling is presented as a two-edged sword in *Sense and Sensibility*, in *Pride and Prejudice* Austen emphatically endorses the pursuit of feeling and its expression within the context of romantic relationships. It is clear throughout the first section of the novel that Darcy finds it extremely difficult to experience and express emotion, which Austen ties to his repression of his sexuality: he seeks to contain both his sexual desire and his emotional love for Elizabeth. His development throughout the novel relates not only to his rejection of the pride and snobbery which his education cultivated, but also to his reconciliation of sexual desire and the expression of emotion with a masculine identity.

The issue of masculine emotional display and sexual desire has received some critical attention in the context of the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. As the correspondence in the *Sydney Morning Herald* quoted at the beginning of this chapter indicates, contemporary enthusiasm for Darcy among particular female audiences crystallised with Colin Firth's portrayal of the character in this production. Firth's interpretation of Darcy strongly foregrounded the character's sexuality, feelings and emotional development throughout the narrative, to which scholars including Lisa Hopkins (112) and Virginia Blum (164-65) have attributed the production's immense popularity, particularly with female audiences. While Firth's portrayal of Darcy won the BBC adaptation popular success, critical assessments have been much less favourable. Cheryl Nixon, for example, has argued that 1990s screen adaptations of Austen's novels and the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in particular alter the image of appropriate masculinity that Austen endorses in her novels. She asserts that all of Austen's male protagonists struggle with balancing emotional display and social restraint, that they demonstrate their worth by concealing their emotions and that "the hero proves his masculinity by learning to regulate his emotions in accordance with the constraints dictated by public courtship" (25). Sarah Frantz has similarly argued:

we can glean more important clues about a male character's moral suitability by examining his capacity to express his feelings. The depressing realization we come to is that emotionally expressive men should be regarded with suspicion ... the men who seem to be in touch with their emotions are actually untrustworthy, deceitful, and, most importantly, selfish, because rather than controlling their emotions, rather than exercising self-control, their emotions control them, to the detriment of all around them ("Jane Austen's Heroes" 171).

However, Austen does not condemn men's expression of emotion *per se* – it is not, for example, Willoughby's expression of his feelings but rather their unreliability which renders him undesirable – and in cases where individual characters, such as Colonel Brandon and Darcy, do struggle to express themselves emotionally, Austen represents this struggle as a debilitating and unacceptable result of social repression.

Nixon argues that by endowing Austen's male protagonists with a physicality which is absent from the novels, and using that physicality to reveal emotions which do not exist in the novels, screen adaptations of the novels upset what she identifies as the balance Austen strikes between masculine emotional display and social restraint. She

further argues that the BBC adaptation endows Darcy with an emotional expressiveness which is absent from the novel and reflects late twentieth-century notions of romance rather than the realities of late eighteenth-century courtship rituals (24). She writes:

In Davies's screenplay of *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy is cast as an awkward hero tortured by an excess of emotions he cannot express ... A brooding loner who can neither physically contain nor verbally express his inner emotional battles, Darcy engages in a roster of physical activities that do not appear in the novel but which convey these battles to the viewer ... While Darcy displays emotional restraint, he physically displays that which he is restraining (31).

Kathryn Sutherland has similarly argued that screen adaptations of Austen's novels disrupt her characterisation of men: "in place of emotional and physical restraint, the consequences of the polite domestic boundaries within which their novelistic characters are drawn, the films endow their male protagonists with both physical and emotional expressiveness" (348). The arguments of Nixon and Sutherland are tenable to the extent that they analyse the visual medium's capacity to emphasise male physicality and screen adaptations' use of this facility to reveal emotion. The visual medium constantly places the male body before the viewer in a way which the novel cannot, permitting, if not demanding, the communication of emotion which is different from the novel. Clearly, the use of the body to reveal emotion in the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is enhanced by the directorial decision to present Darcy bathing, fencing and swimming. However, the BBC adaptation's use of the capabilities of film to present physicality and emotion does not alter what Nixon describes as the balance between emotional display and social restraint, or endow the Darcy character with emotions which do not exist in the novel. As in the BBC adaptation, the Darcy of Austen's novel struggles to verbally express and physically contain his emotions; the only difference is that his struggle is revealed to the reader through focalisation and the erotic gaze, rather than through visualisation of his body. Rather than investing Darcy with emotions that do not exist in the novel, the BBC adaptation uses the visual medium to dramatise Darcy's emotional struggle, which in the novel is communicated to the reader through literary rather than cinematic techniques.

Criticism of the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* for going beyond the novel's exposition of male emotions indicates a scholarly misreading of Austen's investment of female desire and male sexuality in her characterisation of Darcy.

Surprisingly, little critical attention has been paid to the treatment of male sexuality in either the novel or the BBC adaptation. Blum has convincingly argued that the eroticism of the BBC adaptation lies in its visual representation of *repressed* sexual desire – “a sense of the sexuality that we seem to feel ebbed with the passing of the Victorians” (159) – but does not explore Austen’s treatment of this issue in the novel itself. Nixon, by contrast, treats Darcy’s sexual frustration with sarcasm: “Darcy turns to physical exercise as if to chastise the flesh for its desires” (32). Hopkins also ridicules the BBC adaptation’s interest in rendering Darcy’s sexuality on screen, commenting on his swim: “the fever-heat of his passion, it seems, is still in need of cooling” (118). To critics such as Nixon and Hopkins, male sexuality seems to be something for the female viewer and their own readers to be amused by, rather than a feature of the BBC adaptation and the novel that is deserving of serious scholarly attention.

Likewise, only passing critical attention has been paid to Austen’s treatment of male sexuality in the novel. This oversight was no doubt initially part of the general absence of discussion of sex and sexuality in Austen’s novels, a result of the long-standing but now fortunately debunked myth of Austen as a scribbling maiden aunt. In her 1975 article Alice Chandler noted the absence of critical examination of the role of marriage in Austen’s novels “as a consummation of sexual attraction between a man and a woman” (88) and attributed this absence to “our perceptions of her personality ... as a defensively ironic ‘genteel spinster’” (88). Yet since Chandler’s article, only a handful of studies have addressed sexuality in Austen’s novels and most of these are concerned solely with female sexuality.³ As recently as 2005, Olivia Murphy commented on *Pride and Prejudice*: “Austen rarely figures the men and women of her fiction as physical, sexualised beings” (26). Furthermore, analyses of sexuality in *Pride and Prejudice* have tended to focus on Elizabeth: Elvira Casal (no pag.) and Alison Sulloway (177), for example, have considered Elizabeth’s characterisation in relation to the perceived link between women’s laughter, wit and sexuality in eighteenth-century thought. Where male sexuality in Austen’s novels has been addressed, it is usually characterised as a destructive force. Susan Morgan argues that Austen omits sex from her novels because she is concerned with separating female identity from sexual identity; her analysis figures male sexuality only in terms of its potentially harmful effects on female virginity and selfhood (“Why there’s no sex” 346-56). Sulloway

similarly views male sexuality as dangerous, arguing that in *Darcy* it creates what she sees as his misogynistic approach to his first proposal to Elizabeth as he “lets her know that only sexual passion, which has left him feeling humiliated, has driven him to do so” and treats her “as an object of his sexual lust who is little better than a whore” (154, 177). Chandler has gone so far as to describe Darcy’s first proposal as “a verbal rape” (98).

In addition to a critical tendency to overlook sexuality in Austen’s novels, and to either focus on female sexuality or damn male sexuality, is the received interpretation of Austen’s novels as characterising sexual attraction as an unreliable and potentially dangerous method of selecting a spouse. Tony Tanner, for example, has argued: “it is fairly clear here that Jane Austen is showing her particular suspicion of the pre-verbal immediacy of sexual attraction. In this area in particular, she obviously thought that to act on first impressions could only be disastrous” (124). It is true that had Elizabeth pursued Wickham the consequences would have been disastrous, and as Anne Mellor has commented, Austen’s novels dramatise the danger that women’s pursuit of sexual desire can lead to unhappiness in marriage, seduction and social ostracism (*Romanticism and Gender* 59). This is not, however, the narrative outcome of Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*; and in *Pride and Prejudice* Darcy’s sexual attraction leads him to his perfect partner, as it does for Henry Tilney, John Willoughby and Colonel Brandon. This is not always the case in Austen’s novels – Edward Ferrars and Edmund Bertram, for example, demonstrate that the pursuit of sexual desire can have disastrous consequences for men as well as for women – but to say that “passion, as such, is hardly differentiated from folly in the terms of this book” and that “in her books, and thus in the society they reflect, emotion is either rational – capable of being both conceptualised and verbalised – or it is folly” (Tanner 133-34) is clearly a misrepresentation of Austen’s treatment of sexual desire: it is simply not so clear-cut. Fortunately, the view of Austen’s novels and *Pride and Prejudice* in particular as being distrustful of sexual attraction has been modified by more recent critics who have identified the sexual tension between Elizabeth and Darcy throughout the novel. Claudia Johnson, for example, has argued that Austen “puts a premium” on the importance of love and passion as a precondition of marriage:

unlike Jane’s marriage to Bingley, Elizabeth’s relationship with Darcy resonates with a physical passion the milder couple lacks. The rapport between these two

from start to finish is intimate, even racy ... The fact that Darcy and Elizabeth form and pursue most of their relationship in secret and alone not only electrifies this intimacy, but also pushes it to the verge of an impropriety unique in Austen's fiction ... Austen's approval of erotic love, here and elsewhere in her fiction, suggests how she endorses the 'affective individualism' that anti-Jacobin novelists were trying to quell (*Jane Austen* 90-91).

Although critics have begun to recognise the importance of sexual attraction to Austen's courtship narratives and the sexual tension between Darcy and Elizabeth evident in *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy's sexuality remains largely unaddressed by scholarship. Yet Darcy's sexuality, his emotional journey and the sexual tension that characterises his relationship with Elizabeth are not the products of recent screen productions and their commercial interest in meeting a contemporary audience demand for romantic fantasy. They are in fact grounded in the novel itself and strongly inform both Austen's interrogation of the question of "what men ought to be" and her endorsement of Darcy as an image of desirable masculinity.

Austen uses Darcy to explore the complexities of male sexuality within the highly regulated patriarchal social and economic order of the Romantic period. The emotional and social problems that Darcy's sexuality causes him provide an insight into male psychology that is at the very least an unusual subject for a female novelist of the period. Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen uses two central narrative techniques to reveal Darcy's sexuality and the specifically sexual nature of his love for Elizabeth: the erotic gaze and focalisation, through which the reader accesses Darcy's interiority and specifically his thoughts and feelings about Elizabeth. Austen's focalisation through Darcy is extremely rare among her male protagonists (the only other male character through whom she focalises is Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion*) and has been virtually unnoticed by scholarship. Jennifer Preston Wilson, for example, has recently located Austen's characterisation of Darcy in the emotionally distant Grandisonian figure of the eighteenth-century courtship novel:

Darcy, albeit a humanized and fallible version of Richardson's paragon of masculinity, remains rather inaccessible to the reader who is tempted to rely on Elizabeth's own reading of him for information. If this happens, the experience of reading *Pride and Prejudice* can become one of verisimilitude, a movement toward recognition of Darcy as a good man and abandonment of prejudice

against him on the part of the reader that mirrors Elizabeth's own awakening (no pag.).

Preston Wilson has suggested that Austen's "premise that Darcy is a reserved man who is reluctant to enter into conversation about himself" means that "interiority must be probed in a different way" and that Austen achieves this "by allusion to well-known outside standards" and through comparison with Mr Wickham. She writes:

because of Darcy's characteristic taciturnity, Austen could not develop him primarily through use of dialogue. To supplement her portrayal, the conflicting models of manhood help to define his nature and give the reader a sense of the shifting standards for gentlemanly behavior at the time (no pag.).

Such comparisons with other male characters – not only Mr Wickham, but also Mr Bingley, Mr Bennet and in fact all the male characters of the novel – are important to Darcy's characterisation, particularly in terms of discourses on male refinement and patriarchal responsibility. However, Preston Wilson overlooks the fact that Austen does in fact probe Darcy's interiority using focalisation. While the reader's greater access to Elizabeth's interiority naturally provides her with a greater influence over the reader's views of the characters and the plot, it is vital to recognise that Austen also permits her reader access to Darcy's interiority. Furthermore, the reader's access to the thoughts and feelings of both Elizabeth and Darcy creates an important dissonance between Elizabeth's knowledge and the reader's knowledge. This dissonance specifically reveals Darcy's desire for Elizabeth as Austen combines focalisation with the erotic gaze to inform the reader, but not Elizabeth herself, of his sexual desire.

Austen's representation of Darcy's sexuality is central to two of her key concerns in *Pride and Prejudice*: her exploration of the tensions between the pursuit of individual desire and the preservation of social order and harmony; and her examination of the politics of desire within courtship practices. The first of these themes, both in *Pride and Prejudice* and throughout her novels, has attracted considerable critical attention, much of which has concluded that Austen ultimately endorses the maintenance of the social order at the expense of individuality. While recognising Austen's exposition of the importance of individual choice and society's capacity to impose roles and restrictions of the individual self, Tony Tanner ultimately concludes: "Jane Austen was brought up on eighteenth-century thought and was fundamentally loyal to the respect for limits, definition and clear ideas which it inculcated" (125-40).

Claudia Johnson has also argued for *Pride and Prejudice*'s privileging of the harmony and maintenance of the social order over individual happiness. While she acknowledges that through Elizabeth's character Austen accepts "happiness as a morally acceptable goal" (*Jane Austen* 78), she also contends that "of all Austen's novels it most affirms established social arrangements without damaging their prestige or fundamentally challenging their wisdom or equity" (*Jane Austen* 73-4). Such scholarly readings of *Pride and Prejudice* frequently focus on Elizabeth, an intellectually independent heroine who needs to find a path for herself within the restrictive social and economic order that confronts her, and tend to conclude that her marriage to Darcy signals Austen's endorsement of the social establishment over the potentially disruptive individualism associated with Romanticism, Jacobinism and the culture of sensibility. Alistair Duckworth, for example, specifically characterises Elizabeth as representing "individuality" and Darcy "society" (*Improvement of the Estate* 75). Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth faces the real possibility of social isolation and while Austen frames such an outcome as disastrous for a woman in Elizabeth's socio-economic position, she clearly privileges Elizabeth's individualist stance over the contrary approach adopted, for example, by Charlotte Lucas. With regard to Elizabeth, Austen leaves the tension between the pursuit of individual happiness and the social order unresolved: while Elizabeth's assertions about marriage for love and not for financial security are authentic, her pursuit of happiness eventually leads her to the most eligible man in the novel. Elizabeth is ultimately not forced to pursue individual desire despite social and economic obstacles, so her assertions regarding the rights of the individual at the expense of social cohesion go untested: with regard to her heroine, Austen can effectively have her cake and eat it too.

By contrast, Claudia Johnson argues that Austen's treatment of the tension between social harmony and individual desire turns on Darcy rather than Elizabeth. Johnson argues that Darcy reflects the essential conservatism of the novel and its privileging of the social order over the individual:

Pride and Prejudice corroborates conservative myths which had argued that established forms cherished rather than prohibited true liberty, sustained rather than disrupted real happiness, and safe-guarded rather than repressed individual merit. Its hero accordingly is a sober-minded exemplar of the great gentry, a dutiful son and affectionate brother (*Jane Austen* 74).

The fantastical nature of *Pride and Prejudice* and the reader's pleasure in its story, Johnson suggests, lie in the fact that it is this "sober-minded exemplar of the great gentry" who "himself ... secures the happiness the novel celebrates" (*Jane Austen* 73). Johnson's link between what she sees as the conservatism of the novel and the characterisation of Darcy is also illustrated by her discussion of the ways in which it also critiques society: "the novel as a whole certainly does not evade or neutralize social criticism out of a fond or unquestioning allegiance to established forms and the attractive men who embody them ... Darcy may conform to conservative requirements for one of his rank and sex, but Elizabeth emphatically does not" (*Jane Austen* 75). According to Johnson, then, the world of *Pride and Prejudice* allows men to simultaneously support the establishment and pursue their individual happiness: she states that readers "find in the exuberant heroine and her manly hero the comedic promise of personal fulfilment as well as social harmony" (*Jane Austen* 73).

Johnson's analysis of the role Darcy plays in Austen's exploration of the tension between individualism and the social order rests on two assumptions: first, that because Darcy is a man within a patriarchal social order, external pressures such as social and family expectations do not affect him; and second, that his choice to pursue individual happiness instead of bowing to such pressures cannot by definition be disruptive of the social order because, as a gentry man, he embodies it. These assumptions are unsustainable within either Austen's novel or the broader context of gentry masculinities throughout the Romantic period. Unlike Elizabeth, Darcy *does* have to choose between the pursuit of individual happiness and the harmony of his familial and social sphere. Of all Austen's protagonists, Darcy is the only one whose marital choice is allegedly bespoken and whose marriage causes a social and familial rift. Accounts of the novel that suggest it favours the maintenance of the social order ignore the extent to which Austen uses Darcy to explore the effects of socialisation on the individual self. Whereas in *Sense and Sensibility* Austen used Edward Ferrars to explore the damaging effects of the conferral of adult male status through socially-approved codes of gentry masculinity, in *Pride and Prejudice* Austen is specifically concerned with the tension between socially-approved gentry masculinity and individual male heterosexuality. *Pride and Prejudice* dramatises the tension between Darcy's sexual desire for Elizabeth, the rational approach to sexuality and marriage that his education and upbringing has cultivated and the real pressure upon him to marry according to social and familial

expectations. Rather than advocating the maintenance of the social order, Austen uses Darcy to assert the individual's right to pursue happiness according to their own free will. Clearly, the fact that Darcy is male (and is therefore endowed with the power of choice) and wealthy (and therefore can afford his choice) makes possible his marriage to Elizabeth: a poor woman of lower social rank (Elizabeth Bennet, in fact) would certainly face considerably more obstacles to pursuing this kind of individualism. But the patriarchal economic and social structures of Austen's world not only affected women; they also had a profound impact on the lives of men, and to suggest otherwise is to ignore a fundamental aspect of gender relations that historians of masculinities are gradually bringing to light, as well as one of Austen's central concerns in *Pride and Prejudice*. Darcy's decision to marry the woman he loves and desires in defiance of the socially approved behaviour of the gentry male emphatically privileges the pursuit of Romantic individualism over the maintenance of the social order.

Austen's treatment of Darcy's sexuality is also part of her broader exploration of courtship practices in *Pride and Prejudice*. As discussed in Chapters One and Two and in relation to *Northanger Abbey*, the dominant ideological approach to courtship relations positioned men as the active subjects of sexual desire and women as the passive objects and recipients of their desire. Austen's treatment of the dominant model of courtship relations in *Pride and Prejudice* is unusual and potentially pioneering in two key respects. Firstly, rather than allowing the reader to assume that Darcy, as the male, automatically takes the dominant, desiring role in his relationship with Elizabeth, Austen actually dramatises his sexual desire using focalisation and the erotic gaze. Moreover, contrary to popular critical opinion, Darcy's sexuality is presented as neither dangerous nor destructive but instead as a key element of desirable masculinity. Secondly, Elizabeth's rejection of Darcy's first proposal triggers a reversal in the usual power relationship within courtship, and which dominates the first section of the novel. The second section of the novel instead presents Elizabeth as an erotic subject and Darcy as the object of her desire. This reversal poses considerable problems for Austen, who has few literary tools available to her to effectively present a female erotic subject or, perhaps even more problematically, a male object of female desire. Austen resolves this problem by developing innovative narrative techniques which enable her to simultaneously present Elizabeth as a female desiring subject and Darcy as a desired

object while also preserving her acceptability as a heroine within contemporary codes of female sexual behaviour.

As in *Northanger Abbey*, the erotic gaze is the central narrative technique Austen deploys to represent the sexual desire of Darcy and Elizabeth. Theorisation of the gaze has exposed the power relationships involved in the act of looking between men and women. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger argues: “men survey women before treating them. Consequently how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated ... men *act* and women *appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” (46-7). Rosalind Coward extends Berger’s analysis, exposing the power that the male gaze holds over women: “men can and do stare at women; men assess, judge and make advances on the basis of these visual impressions. The ability to scrutinize is premised on power. Indeed the look confers power” (75). Laura Mulvey and Judith Mitchell have explored the power that the erotic gaze confers on men over women in film and literature respectively, investigating its implications for the construction of female sexual desire and the relationship of the viewer or reader to the text. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen repeatedly uses Catherine’s gaze to reveal her desire for Henry, but its eroticism is neutralised by her simultaneous presentation as a naïve and comic heroine. In *Pride and Prejudice*, however, Austen utilises the gaze to much greater effect and particularly emphasises its erotic quality. Her combination of the gaze with focalisation reveals Darcy’s sexuality and assists both her representation of Elizabeth’s sexual desire, and Darcy as its object.

The first meeting between Darcy and Elizabeth introduces the sexual politics of the gaze and signals the important role it will play both in their relationship and in revealing their sexual desire to the reader. When Bingley advises Darcy to dance with Elizabeth, he turns to look at her: “turning round, he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said, “She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*” ’ (13). This brief episode encapsulates the politics of the gaze within the usual power relationship of the courtship hierarchy. The conversation of Darcy and Bingley turns on their visual assessments of the women in the room and Darcy looks at and judges Elizabeth at the encouragement of his male friend. The adversity of his judgment leads him to exercise his power of choice and he withholds his invitation to dance. Darcy’s decision to wait until he has caught

Elizabeth's eye – until she is conscious of being looked at – before looking away is a dramatisation of the power of the gaze to reaffirm male power over women and also signals his eroticism. Darcy wants Elizabeth to know that she has been assessed and rejected by him: he fully understands the power of his gaze over women and is willing to use it.

Elizabeth falls under Darcy's gaze at a number of neighbourhood gatherings: "Mr. Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise" (24). However, as Darcy sees more of Elizabeth his judgment of her begins to change: "Occupied in observing Mr. Bingley's attentions to her sister, Elizabeth was far from suspecting that she was herself becoming an object of some interest in the eyes of his friend" (20). Austen's use of the word "object" to describe Elizabeth's position within Darcy's gaze refers to the visual language of landscape design and representation (a usage to which she returns during Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley), suggesting a relationship of control between Darcy's empowered gaze and Elizabeth's subordinated position. At this point, Austen begins to use focalisation to reveal Darcy's gradual change of opinion about Elizabeth and his growing attraction to her:

no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded others equally mortifying. Though he detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness (24).

Austen's use of focalisation in this passage dramatises the mental assessment that accompanies Darcy's visual enjoyment of Elizabeth's body. It establishes that Austen's use of the gaze throughout the novel not only reveals Darcy's interest in Elizabeth but is also definitively scopophilic: Darcy clearly takes pleasure in looking at Elizabeth's body. This passage is in fact the only description physical of Elizabeth in the entire novel and the fact that it is focalised entirely through Darcy (rather than, for example, being voiced through an omniscient narrator) highlights the scopophilic quality of his gaze and reveals the sexual nature of his attraction to Elizabeth.

Darcy's attraction to Elizabeth greatly increases during her stay at Netherfield and Austen again uses a combination of the gaze and focalisation to depict his desire for her. When she arrives she is the object of his gaze as he is "divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion's justifying her coming so far alone" (33). Later in the evening, "Elizabeth could not help observing how frequently Mr Darcy's eyes were fixed on her. She hardly knew how to suppose that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and yet that he should look at her because he disliked her, was still more strange" (50). Interestingly, Alice Chandler has identified a sexual connotation to Darcy's invitation to Elizabeth to dance a "reel" to the Scottish music played by Miss Bingley: "the word *reel* did have a sexual connotation in Jane Austen's time. The phrases 'the reels o' Bogie', 'the reels of Stumpie' and 'dance the miller's reel' are all slang terms for sexual intercourse" (18). On this basis, Darryl Jones has interpreted "Elizabeth's put-down in the modern vernacular as something like 'I wouldn't have sex with you if you were the last man on earth'" (109).

At this point in the novel, Darcy becomes increasingly aware of and uncomfortable with his desire for Elizabeth and Austen begins to explore the complexities of male sexuality in the context of socially-approved models of gentry masculinity and the highly regulated courtship practices of the Romantic period. After Elizabeth verbally disarms him one evening, Austen writes: "Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger" (51). To Darcy, Elizabeth's lower socio-economic status automatically prevents the possibility of their marriage despite his obvious sexual interest in her. After his eventual engagement to Elizabeth, Darcy's confession specifically attributes his mentality throughout the first section of the novel to his education and upbringing which, while reflecting socially approved forms of gentry masculinity, have sought to prevent him from pursuing sexual and emotional feelings:

I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was *right*, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately an only son, (for many years an only *child*) I was spoilt by my parents, who though good themselves, (my father particularly, all that was

benevolent and amiable,) allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to *wish* at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own (348-49).

Austen takes this a step further by suggesting that Darcy's deficient education, and the social expectation that he will marry a woman of wealth and status (if not his cousin), renders not only his marriage to Elizabeth but also the possibility of being sexually attracted to her impossible. His education both in what is expected of him in marriage and what he should find desirable in women – wealth, status and to a lesser extent, beauty – has effectively conditioned him to *mentally* reject a woman like Elizabeth as a potential wife but also as an object of desire. Meeting Elizabeth triggers a conflict between his rational, educated understanding of desire and marriage and his emotional and sexual impulses, and Austen again uses focalisation to dramatise his discomfort with his desire for Elizabeth. As Elizabeth's stay in Netherfield continues, he "began to feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention" (57), until he finally concludes:

Elizabeth had been at Netherfield long enough. She attracted him more than he liked – and Miss Bingley was uncivil to *her*, and more teasing than usual to himself. He wisely resolved to be particularly careful that no sign of admiration should *now* escape him, nothing that could elevate her with the hope of influencing his felicity; sensible that if such an idea had been suggested, his behaviour during the last day must have material weight in confirming or crushing it. Steady to his purpose, he scarcely spoke ten words to her throughout the whole of Saturday, and though they were at one time left by themselves for half an hour, he adhered most conscientiously to his book, and would not even look at her (59).

Throughout this passage Austen carefully uses the language of reason – "wisely resolved", "steady to his purpose", and "adhered most conscientiously to his book" – to reveal the conflict between Darcy's mentality and his sexual and emotional feelings and to emphasise his attempt to use rationality to repress his desire. As Knox-Shaw has commented, "it seems that the presence of a desire that resists conscious control is itself a cause of irritation to him" (88). Rather than looking to judge or looking for pleasure, Darcy's refusal to look here denotes a wish to deny and if possible extinguish his desire for Elizabeth. Darcy attempts to repress his sexuality and his emotions from leading

him in a direction which is unacceptable to his family and social circle and which he himself cannot mentally sanction.

Darcy's intention to extinguish his desire for Elizabeth continues when they meet by chance in Meryton: "Mr Darcy ... was beginning to determine not to fix his eyes on Elizabeth" (71), when his attention is distracted by the appearance of Mr Wickham. Yet the measures he takes to hinder his desire prove ineffectual. Austen makes his growing love for Elizabeth particularly explicit when he asks her to dance at the Netherfield ball. After Elizabeth quizzes him about his relationship with Wickham, "in Darcy's breast there was a tolerable powerful feeling towards her, which soon procured her pardon, and directed all his anger against another" (92-93). He continues to hover near her at the ball, though Elizabeth adopts quite a different interpretation of his behaviour: "She was at last free from the offence of Mr Darcy's farther notice; though often standing within a very short distance of her, quite disengaged, he never came near enough to speak" (100). The result of Darcy's endeavours to defeat sexual and emotional desire through reason is that he gravitates towards Elizabeth at the Netherfield Ball and other social functions and either does not speak or manages only awkward, uncommunicative conversation. In combination with his pride, Darcy's distrust of emotion and its expression result in his poor conversation, his rudeness, and his lack of consideration for others.

Yet Darcy's feelings for Elizabeth further increase during his visit to Rosings. When he first calls at the Hunsford parsonage, Austen specifically raises the issue of his desire for Elizabeth and its disruptive potential: "Mr. Darcy looked just as he had used to look in Hertfordshire, paid his compliments, with his usual reserve, to Mrs. Collins; and whatever might be his feelings towards her friend, met her with every appearance of composure" (166). Darcy may *appear* composed, but the reader's greater knowledge of his feelings for Elizabeth together with his earlier intention to suppress them suggest that the reality is otherwise. He closely observes her during her visits to Rosings, particularly during her conversations with Colonel Fitzwilliam: "*His* eyes had been soon and repeatedly turned towards them with a look of curiosity" (168-69). Later when Elizabeth is playing the piano, Darcy "stationed himself so as to command a full view of the fair performer's countenance" (169). Other characters begin to notice his interest in her, suggesting that he becomes more demonstrative of his attraction, though

the motivation of his attention remains a mystery to the other characters. Charlotte notes: “He certainly looked at her friend a great deal, but the expression of that look was disputable. It was an earnest, steadfast gaze, but she often doubted whether there were much admiration in it, and sometimes it seemed nothing but absence of mind” (176). He repeatedly seeks Elizabeth out to walk with her in Rosings Park, but his social performance remains as awkward as it had been in Hertfordshire: “on these occasions it was not merely a few formal enquiries and an awkward pause and then away, but he actually thought it necessary to turn back and walk with her. He never said a great deal, nor did she give herself the trouble of talking and listening much” (178). Darcy also seeks her out at Hunsford Parsonage, but again does not manage to hold a conversation: “why Mr Darcy came so often to the Parsonage, it was more difficult to understand. It could not be for society, as he frequently sat there ten minutes together without opening his lips; and when he did speak, it seemed the effect of necessity rather than of choice – a sacrifice to propriety, not a pleasure to himself” (176). While these meetings are inexplicable to Elizabeth and the other characters in the novel, the reader knows that they result from Darcy’s love for Elizabeth.

Up to this point in the novel, Darcy has acted upon his desire for Elizabeth by looking at her whenever the opportunity arises and he cannot mentally refuse himself, (eventually) asking her to dance, making tense and difficult conversation and seeking her out both at home and in the woods around Rosings. Yet while Darcy’s proposal comes as a surprise to her, his attempts to demonstrate his attraction to Elizabeth combined with the reader’s access to his interiority through focalisation mean that it does not come as a surprise to the reader. Clearly, Austen uses Darcy’s first proposal to foreground and interrogate the power relationship between men and women in courtship and later marriage: he assumes that she will accept him regardless of her own feelings or the manner of his proposal. Austen presents the manner of Darcy’s proposal, particularly his monologue regarding the difficulties he has faced in confronting his love for Elizabeth and the struggle he has endured to reach the point of proposing, as unjustifiable on any grounds. Yet it is important to consider the “struggles” and “scruples” he speaks of in relation to the complex issues of male sexuality that Austen has already raised in the text. Darcy begins: “‘In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you’” (185), verbalising for the first time the contest between sexual desire and

rational thought which the reader knows he has endured since meeting Elizabeth in Meryton. In his explanation of his conduct toward Bingley and Jane in his subsequent letter, Darcy repeats his revelation of the strength of his passion and its role in overcoming his scruples about marrying Elizabeth: “My objections to the marriage were not merely those, which I last night acknowledged to have required the utmost force of passion to put aside, in my own case” (192). Darcy’s discussion of his “sense of her inferiority – of its being a degradation – of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination” (185) indicates that the issues of socio-economic status and social and family expectation that troubled him when he was initially attracted to Elizabeth have protracted and all but prevented his proposal. He says that he has ultimately found the “strength” of his “attachment ... impossible to conquer” (185), suggesting that he has overcome the considerable power that his social conditioning and social and familial expectations attempt to wield over his sexuality. However inappropriate his discussion of these struggles was in the context of his proposal, they are nonetheless genuine. The strength of the pressure that has been exerted upon Darcy is later confirmed by Lady Catherine’s visit to Elizabeth and her subsequent attempt to divide them. After Elizabeth’s rejection, however, it becomes clear that Darcy has not really succeeded in overcoming his “scruples”: his education and upbringing continue to value family pride, wealth and social status. He describes both his views and his communication of them as “natural and just” and asks: ““Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly below my own?”” (188). Darcy’s proposal to Elizabeth is the result of a temporary aberration in which sexual and emotional love has triumphed over reason, not a resolution of the obstacles which he sees as dividing them.

Darcy’s first proposal also reveals the considerable extent of his distrust of feeling and his chronic insensitivity to others and establishes these as the central grounds for Elizabeth’s rejection. Elizabeth tells Darcy: ““your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain for the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike”” (188). While this statement appears to focus on Darcy’s manner, it is his overarching lack of consideration for others – which is reflected not only in his social performance, but also in his greater crimes regarding

his interference with Bingley and Jane (to which he listens “with an air which proved him wholly unmoved by any feeling of remorse” (187)), and what Elizabeth sees as his inhumane treatment of Mr Wickham – that forms the foundation of Elizabeth’s disapproval of Darcy and her refusal of his proposal. Her feelings of pity for him are overcome by “his shameless avowal of what he had done with respect to Jane, his unpardonable assurance in acknowledging, though he could not justify it, and the unfeeling manner in which he had mentioned Mr Wickham, his cruelty towards whom he had not attempted to deny” (189). Elizabeth’s revelation of her opinion of Darcy as unfeeling and emotionally bankrupt becomes a trigger for his emotional development in the second half of the novel.

Elizabeth’s rejection of Darcy’s proposal marks a turning point in the novel’s narrative focus in terms of its representation of the sexual desire of the two protagonists. To this point, Austen has dramatised the configuration of desire which dominated the Romantic period, with Darcy positioned as the novel’s desiring subject and Elizabeth as the object of his desire. After the first proposal, Austen shifts her focus to Elizabeth as the desiring subject and instead positions Darcy as the desired object, reversing the usual configuration of heterosexual desire. In the second half of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen’s characterisation of Darcy is dedicated to the depiction of a male object of desire and his education both in understanding the importance of female desire and becoming desirable himself. Austen’s shift from the male to the female as the erotic subject resists the conventional narrative trajectory outlined by Teresa de Lauretis in “Desire in Narrative”:

The end of the girl’s journey, if successful, will bring her to the place where the boy will find her, like Sleeping Beauty, awaiting him, Prince Charming. For the boy has been promised ... that he will find the woman waiting at the end of his journey ... And so her story, like any other story, is a question of his desire (133).

George Haggerty has commented on de Lauretis’ analysis of the role of desire in the context of women’s eighteenth-century courtship narratives:

‘her story’ cannot be told because of the degree to which it is formulated as an expression of ‘his desire’ ... it comes true in the narrative resolutions of almost every work I will consider. It is almost as if narrative takes control at a certain point in these works. The novelists seem powerless to resist the dictates of narrative resolution (12).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, however, the girl's rejection brings the boy's journey to an abrupt halt, and does not provide the resolution that he had anticipated. Darcy's belief that he would find the woman of his choice waiting at the end of his journey is clear from their conversation at the end of the novel when he tells Elizabeth "'I believed you to be wishing, expecting my addresses'" (349). Austen's shift in focus to Elizabeth as the desiring subject means that the story of *Pride and Prejudice* in fact becomes a question of her desire, not his, thereby resisting the conventional narrative pattern of the courtship novel. Additionally, although the novel's conclusion with the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy seems to reflect conventional narrative resolution, Austen's insistence on the recognition and validation of female desire and on Darcy's education in being a desirable male in fact challenges its generic configuration. While this argument (particularly with regard to the validation of female desire) could be applied to each of Austen's novels, it is much more pronounced in *Pride and Prejudice* because of the novel's overt concern with Darcy's sexuality and Austen's dramatic shift in focus from Darcy to Elizabeth as the subject of desire. Whereas female desire – and particularly female desire for individual men – is a central theme throughout Austen's work, in *Pride and Prejudice* it also informs the narrative structure of the novel.

Austen's representation of Elizabeth as a desiring subject is much more problematic than her presentation of Darcy as a desiring subject in the first part of the novel. Darcy's gaze is presented as direct, confident and uninhibited: being male, he has a socially sanctioned right to look, judge, and take pleasure in looking. Elizabeth's own assessment of him is an "acute and unembarrassed" observer (249). The representation of Elizabeth's desire through the gaze is rather more difficult. At some points throughout the novel, Elizabeth's gaze is presented as equally direct, confident and uninhibited. Douglas Murray has noted Elizabeth's association with the eye throughout the novel, and Austen's use of the gaze to present her as a strong heroine:

Austen mentions Elizabeth's eyes with almost predictable frequency, every ten pages or so. Elizabeth's abilities to attract more than a cursory gaze and to return others' gazes indicate her resistance and independence of mind amid powerful forces of conformity ... Elizabeth is a heroine of proud and independent gaze (45).

However, Elizabeth's gaze is not always this proud and independent. At times it is reluctant, compromised and repressed, a result of Austen's difficulty reconciling her use

of the erotic gaze with social codes of feminine modesty. Judith Mitchell has discussed the literary construction of female erotic subjects and the male objects of their desire, and argues that if “‘to see is to desire’ ... heroines (as well as female viewers and readers) do little of either except in a highly convoluted and problematic fashion” (14). The emphasis which dominant ideologies of femininity placed on chastity and particularly modesty in the Romantic period seems to be mutually exclusive with a positive, active female sexuality, even if it is expressed through the eyes and nothing else. Mitchell writes:

the heroines of classical realism, in order to maintain credibility as heroines, do not look at male characters with desire, nor do they return the latter’s look (they look away or drop their eyes). Exceptions to this rule are consistently punished or regarded with suspicion, by the spectator/reader, by the events of the film/novel or by the other characters in the narrative ... the woman’s look of desire in both realist film and the realist novel is frequently portrayed as shameful, in fact, so that a desiring woman appears to be not looking but spying (14).

Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth exhibits each of these characteristics: she refuses to look, she refuses to meet Darcy’s eyes by looking away or dropping her eyes, and she looks covertly.

The compromised nature of Elizabeth’s gaze is symptomatic of the broader problems facing Austen as a novelist attempting to write both a female erotic subject and a male object of her heroine’s desire. George Haggerty has noted that female desire for male characters “is rarely articulated as uncomplicated (and more often appears as transgressive) female-male desire” (2). Alice Chandler has suggested that as a woman writer in the early nineteenth century, Austen’s ability to represent sexuality and female sexual desire “was bound by pre-Victorian limitations of subject matter which had already turned physical sex into a topic for covert implication rather than overt description” (89). However, Austen’s dilemma can also be seen as part of a wider problem confronting artists who seek to reverse the usual hierarchy of heterosexual desire. Mitchell argues that the depiction of female desire, particularly through the gaze, is problematic because “a positive formulation of female desire itself does not yet exist in our cultural psyche” (8). Sarah Kent raises a similar problem in *Women’s Images of Men*, noting:

the absence of a body of knowledge or an art form which recognises and describes female sexuality as a potent initiating force, rather than merely as a response to masculine desire ... The question for the woman artist is not, therefore, simply a matter of reversing roles so that she can ape the man, borrowing masculine attitudes and the images which give them expression. She must grope towards a language that will bring her own feelings into consciousness ("Looking Back" 62-64).

Furthermore, this central obstacle to Austen's representation of Elizabeth's sexual desire also impacts upon her ability to present Darcy as an object of female desire: the arguments of Mitchell and Kent can be applied both ways. Indeed, Kent specifically identifies the absence of an artistic language through which women can represent the male body in art as one of the central barriers to their representation of masculinities ("Looking Back" 64). Austen's position as a female writer has additional complications for the representation of a male object of female desire, for the reasons set out in Chapter One in relation to women's constructions of masculinities, and because the codes of feminine propriety which impede Austen's presentation of Elizabeth's sexual desire similarly impede her ability to write a male object of female desire. Kent and Morreau argue that "objectification is a predatory act which requires a reversal of power that, as yet, seldom exists between the sexes" (29). This has implications not only for Elizabeth's desire for Darcy, but also for Austen as a female novelist presenting Darcy as an object of female desire. As Karen Harvey has noted: "Looking at male bodies was problematic in the eighteenth century ... men voiced concerns over the freedom of women to gaze upon male bodies" (*Reading Sex* 127-28).

Yet despite the difficulties inherent in her position as a female novelist writing female sexual desire for a male object, Austen does manage to achieve this in *Pride and Prejudice*. She compensates for the compromised nature of Elizabeth's gaze and the virtual impossibility of allowing Elizabeth to positively act on her desire within contemporary codes of feminine propriety and the demands of the realist courtship novel, by developing alternative narrative techniques that nevertheless represent her physical attraction to Darcy. Whereas her gaze upon Darcy himself tends to be problematic, lessening its impact in communicating Elizabeth's desire to the reader, she may look uninhibited upon his house, his grounds and his portrait. Austen's alternative narrative techniques regarding Pemberley and Darcy's portrait allow her not only to

present Elizabeth's desire for Darcy, but also enable her to present Darcy as an object of female desire. They also construct female desire as constituted by a combination of physical attraction and men's values, personality and character.

Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley is the first meeting of the two characters after the focus of Austen's narrative of desire has shifted from Darcy to Elizabeth. Numerous critics have discussed Pemberley as an expression of Darcy's personality, its cultural meanings in terms of eighteenth-century landscape and architecture styles, its symbolic worth and value, its importance in altering Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy and the parallel Austen draws between Elizabeth's enlightenment and country-house tourism.⁴ However, Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley is also highly important in terms of the narrative of desire Austen constructs in the second section of the novel and the narrative techniques she uses to present both Elizabeth's desire for Darcy and Darcy as a desirable object. Pemberley does not only represent Darcy's character and moral worth, it also represents his body. Armed with her new knowledge of Darcy's character, and her own, it is Elizabeth who is doing the looking, the gazing, the observing. Elizabeth is allowed an unrestrained view of the Pemberley house and grounds which parallels Darcy's gaze upon her throughout the first half of the novel and which codes of social propriety would not permit her on Darcy himself. Throughout Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley, Austen uses the language of landscape appreciation, as discussed by Peter de Bolla ("The Charmed Eye" 89-111), to highlight the shift in visual power from Darcy to Elizabeth and to couch Elizabeth's visual assessment of what is in fact an expression of Darcy's physicality within the socially acceptable tourist activity of country house visiting. In contrast to Roger Sales' argument that "without being in any worked-out way symbolic, wood, stream, hill and house here are all Darcy" (*Closer to Home* 41), Austen's use of the visual language of landscape appreciation indicates that both Pemberley itself and Elizabeth's experience of it are highly "worked-out" to enable Austen to convey to the reader Elizabeth's growing desire for Darcy and to construct Darcy as an image of physically desirable masculinity.

Austen's use of terminology associated with the observation, appreciation and enjoyment of landscape begins with Elizabeth's drive into the grounds, during which she "saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view". As they reach a rise, her "eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House" (235). Austen's specific inclusion

of multiple points of view from which Elizabeth surveys the house and grounds and her description of the way in which Elizabeth's eye is "caught" reflects the language of eighteenth-century methodologies for the visual appreciation of landscape. Elizabeth's pleasure in looking at the Pemberley estate indicates that her gaze, like Darcy's, is scopophilic: Austen states that "Elizabeth was delighted" (235). Austen's use of vocabulary related to the visual assessment of landscape continues once Elizabeth is inside the house. Austen dwells on her views of the landscape as she moves through the rooms, pausing at different windows to observe the changing scene:

Elizabeth ... went to a window to enjoy its prospect. The hill, crowned with wood, from which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks, and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight. As they passed into other rooms, these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen (236).

Elizabeth very clearly now possesses the power of the gaze, and Darcy's landscape is her object. Her pleasure in looking is clear as she moves to a window to "enjoy its prospect" and looks "on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks, and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight" (236). There is, moreover, a strong sense that in gazing on Pemberley, Elizabeth is gazing on a representation of Darcy's body. Pemberley house is "a large, handsome, stone building" (235), the dining parlour is "a large, well-proportioned room, handsomely fitted up" (236), and the rooms are "lofty and handsome, and their furniture suitable to the fortune of their proprietor ... neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings" (236). The use of the word "handsome" to describe the house and interior is shortly after used no less than five times to describe Mr Darcy in Elizabeth's conversation with the housekeeper, in which Mrs Gardiner also mentions his "fine person" (237). The word "lofty", applied to the Pemberley interior, could equally be applied to Darcy's physical presence: its meaning in the sense of "consciously haughty, proud, aloof, dignified" (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1624) reflects his personality and social behaviour in the first section of the novel. The connection between Pemberley as a representation of Darcy's body and Elizabeth's obvious pleasure in looking at it suggests a sexual dimension to the change

of her mind which is effected throughout the visit. It also allows Austen to present Darcy as an object of female sexual desire.

Austen specifically connects Darcy's body with the Pemberley estate during Elizabeth's visit to the gallery, where she seeks out a portrait of Darcy:

Elizabeth walked on in quest of the only face whose features would be known to her. At last it arrested her – and she beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her. She stood several minutes before the picture in earnest contemplation, and returned to it again before they quitted the gallery (240).

Elizabeth can gaze upon the representation of Darcy's body in his portrait in a way that, as a woman, she would be unable to look upon Darcy himself. Her observation of the portrait also permits her to return his gaze in a manner which, given social codes of feminine modesty, would be impossible with the man himself. Elizabeth's pleasure in gazing upon Darcy's portrait is clear: she recalls his manner of looking at herself, and returns for another look before she leaves the room. Indeed, Elizabeth's mobility in the gallery – her ability to seek him out amongst the portraits and to return to him before she leaves – stands in striking contrast to her restricted ability to act on her desire for the remainder of the novel. Just as Darcy clearly understands the power of his gaze in the first part of the novel, so Elizabeth demonstrates the erotic power of hers, as their eyes metaphorically meet: “as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression” (240). The pleasure Elizabeth takes in gazing upon the portrait here develops into pleasure at being admired and loved by Darcy.

In all of Austen's novels, desirable masculinity requires both a domestically orientated mentality and a responsible and generous approach to family and social roles. The relationship between men's attitudes to their domestic and social roles and responsibilities and their physical desirability is perhaps nowhere more strongly revealed than during Elizabeth's observation of Darcy's portrait in the Pemberley gallery. Elizabeth has already learned from the housekeeper that Darcy is “the best landlord, and the best master ... that ever lived. Not like the wild young men now-a-days, who think of nothing but themselves. There is not one of his tenants or servants

but will give him a good name” (239). As Elizabeth gazes on his portrait she reflects on his masculine roles and her new understanding of his character and values: “As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people’s happiness were in his guardianship! – How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow! – How much of good or evil must be done by him!” (240). Indeed, unlike Elizabeth’s father, Darcy’s performance of the roles and responsibilities that accompany patriarchal power is virtually flawless: he is a kind and loving brother, a generous master and a benevolent and socially responsible landlord. His guardianship of his sister means that he is effectively already tried and tested as a father. As Claudia Johnson has pointed out, “as an authority figure ... Darcy is singularly free from the faults that underline comparable figures elsewhere” (*Jane Austen* 73). Elizabeth’s physical desire for Darcy and her new understanding of and appreciation for his character develop simultaneously. This juxtaposition, together with Austen’s use of Darcy’s home to present him as an object of female desire, encapsulates the relationship which her novels posit between female desire and men’s attitudes towards their domestic and family roles and responsibilities.

Austen’s representation of Elizabeth’s growing desire for Darcy and her parallel depiction of him as an object of female desire is heightened by Elizabeth’s walk through the grounds, which takes place after Austen has already established a relationship between Pemberley and Darcy’s physicality. Austen writes:

They had now entered a beautiful walk by the side of the water, and every step was bringing forward a nobler fall of ground, or a finer reach of the woods ... They entered the woods, and bidding adieu to the river for a while, ascended some of the higher grounds; whence, in spots where the opening of the trees gave the eye power to wander, were many charming views of the valley, opposite hills, with the long range of woods overspreading many, and occasionally part of the stream (242).

Throughout this walk Elizabeth’s “thoughts were all fixed on that one spot of Pemberley House, whichever it might be, where Mr. Darcy then was” (242). Austen continues to use language associated with landscape description and appreciation to articulate Elizabeth’s gaze and draw a parallel between the beauty and elegance of the Pemberley estate and Darcy’s physicality. This link is reinforced not only by his sudden appearance but also as the Gardiners “expressed their admiration of his figure”

(241), a rare description of Darcy's physicality and one which seems to serve no other function than to highlight his physical desirability.

While Elizabeth takes pleasure in gazing upon his house, his grounds and his portrait, she does not take pleasure in looking at Darcy himself during this chance meeting: "so abrupt was his appearance, that it was impossible to avoid his sight. Their eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of each were overspread with the deepest blush" (240-41). Whereas Elizabeth was permitted an unrestrained view of the estate and the portrait and Austen had no reservations in linking her pleasure in viewing them with her growing desire for Darcy, she is not allowed a similarly uninhibited gaze upon Darcy himself: Elizabeth "scarcely dared lift her eyes to his face" (241). As Ogden has noted: "That looking up at one's acknowledged lover requires 'daring' signals the extent to which polite female visuality was not permitted to be oversexualized in the domestic novel tradition" (60). Nevertheless, Elizabeth's unexpected presence at Pemberley provides Darcy with an opportunity to demonstrate his attempts to change in response to her disapproval, particularly with regard to his emotional sensitivity and expression. On this occasion, Darcy's emotional development is reflected in his social performance and generosity to herself and the Gardiners. The extremity of his change astonishes Elizabeth: "his behaviour, so strikingly altered, – what could it mean? That he should even speak to her was amazing! – but to speak with such civility, to enquire after her family! Never in her life had she seen his manners so little dignified, never had he spoken with such gentleness as on this unexpected meeting" (242). Austen specifically raises the issue of Darcy's changing to please Elizabeth as she reflects: "'Why is he so altered? From what can it proceed? It cannot be for *me*, it cannot be for *my* sake that his manners are thus softened. My reproofs at Hunsford could not work such a change as this'" (244). Elizabeth's opportunities for observing Darcy's change, however, continue to be thwarted by codes of feminine propriety. Throughout the remainder of this visit to Pemberley, Elizabeth's observations of him are presented as either swift – "with a glance she saw that he had lost none of his recent civility" (243) – or covert and transgressive – "she stole a sly look at him" (244).

When he later visits her in Lambton, Elizabeth's gaze – though more qualified than previously – reveals that Darcy's changed behaviour continues:

It was not often that she could turn her eyes on Mr. Darcy himself; but, whenever she did catch a glimpse, she saw an expression of general complaisance, and in all that he said, she heard an accent so far removed from hauteur or disdain of his companions, as convinced her that the improvement of manners which she had yesterday witnessed, however temporary its existence might prove, had at least outlived one day (250-51).

Austen emphasises the extremity of Darcy's change of attitude regarding the issues of class, wealth and family connection that he had previously viewed as dividing him from Elizabeth:

When she saw him thus seeking the acquaintance, and courting the good opinion of people, with whom any intercourse a few months ago would have been a disgrace; when she saw him thus civil, not only to herself, but to the very relations whom he had openly disdained, and recollected their last lively scene in Hunsford Parsonage, the difference, the change was so great, and struck so forcibly on her mind, that she could hardly restrain her astonishment from being visible (251).

Elizabeth reflects that "never ... had she seen him so desirous to please, so free from self-consequence, or unbending reserve as now" (251). Elizabeth's mental comparison between the old and the new Darcy indicates that his change is not limited to manner, but is in fact the result of an emotional development which has tempered his pride and improved his social performance. Darcy's new approach to expressing rather than concealing emotion is clear from the Gardiners' instant perception of his love for Elizabeth:

The suspicions which had just arisen of Mr. Darcy and their niece, directed their observation towards each with an earnest, though guarded enquiry; and they soon drew from those enquiries the full conviction that one of them at least knew what it was to love. Of the lady's sensations they remained a little in doubt; but that the gentleman was overflowing with admiration was evident enough (249).

They later reflect: "it was evident that he was very much in love with her" (252).

Darcy's love was unnoticed by the other characters in Hertfordshire and only suspected by Charlotte at Hunsford. After meeting him at Lambton, Elizabeth realises that she herself has brought about Darcy's change: "Such a change in a man of so much pride,

excited not only astonishment but gratitude – for to love, ardent love, it must be attributed” (253).

Austen further demonstrates Darcy’s emotional development during Elizabeth’s return visit to Pemberley. Miss Bingley’s reference to Mr Wickham’s corps provokes an intensely emotional response which is observed by Elizabeth: “an involuntary glance shewed her Darcy with an heightened complexion, earnestly looking at her” (257). On this occasion, their eyes do meet, but Elizabeth’s glance is presented as beyond her control, absolving her of transgressive behaviour and indicating the strength of her attraction. Austen reinforces the emotionally expressive nature of Darcy’s response: “Elizabeth’s collected behaviour, however, soon quieted his emotion” (258). Darcy’s new approach to emotional expression is also clear in his defence of Elizabeth from Miss Bingley’s abuse and his revelation of his feelings for her. Austen writes that Darcy “could contain himself no longer” and eventually replies ““it is many months since I have considered her as one of the handsomest women of my acquaintance”” (259). This conversation indicates that Darcy may attempt to contain his feelings for the sake of politeness, but that he is clearly happy to lose this battle and to sacrifice propriety for the sake of self-expression.

Darcy’s conduct in relation to Lydia and Wickham’s elopement reveals that he has overcome his pride to the extent that he can acknowledge and seek to repair his former mistakes, motivated by his love for Elizabeth. The emotional – rather than polite – nature of this development is illustrated in his initial response to Elizabeth’s distress at the news she has received: ““Good God! what is the matter?” cried he, with more feeling than politeness” (263). Austen’s language is deliberately chosen – his instinctive response is feeling; politeness is unimportant. Darcy’s subsequent actions in travelling to London, seeking the pair out and paying Wickham off to marry Lydia, reveal his emotional reform. He acknowledges that his decision to conceal Wickham’s true character to protect his family’s pride was a mistake that has occasioned severe ramifications for others, including Elizabeth, and his generosity enables him to repair this mistake in an act of benevolence similarly to Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility*. Mrs Gardiner writes in her letter to Elizabeth:

The motive professed, was his conviction of its being owing to himself that Wickham’s worthlessness had not been so well known ... He generously

imputed the whole to his mistaken pride, and confessed that he had before thought it beneath him, to lay his private actions open to the world. His character was to speak for itself. He called it, therefore, his duty to step forward, and endeavour to remedy an evil, which had been brought on by himself (304-05).

Elizabeth finds herself proud of Darcy's actions as they represent a real emotional development: "Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself" (309).

When Mrs Gardiner's letter arrives, Elizabeth has already acknowledged to herself her love for Darcy: "She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes ... But no such happy marriage could now teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was" (295-96). Having plainly established Elizabeth's desire for Darcy, throughout the remainder of the novel Austen becomes less concerned with representing her as an erotic subject and more interested in exploring Elizabeth's repeated frustrations with social codes of propriety that prevent her from acting on her desire. Elizabeth realises the true nature of her feelings for Darcy at the moment when their fulfilment through marriage seems, to her, virtually impossible. Austen simultaneously reveals Elizabeth's desire for Darcy, the improbability of its fulfilment and her powerlessness to act upon it: "She became jealous of his esteem, when she could no longer hope to be benefited by it. She wanted to hear of him, when there seemed the least chance of gaining intelligence. She was convinced that she could have been happy with him; when it was no longer likely that they should meet" (295). As a woman, it is of course impossible for Elizabeth to correspond with Darcy or to seek him out: she lacks in social life the mobility that she used to pursue him in the Pemberley gallery.

Elizabeth's frustrations with her inability to initiate a reconciliation between them only increases with Darcy's return to Hertfordshire. When he first calls, Elizabeth "went to the window – she looked – she saw Mr. Darcy" (315), but this is the extent of her activity throughout the subsequent visit. Once he is in the room rather than safely out the window, Elizabeth is essentially governed by her inhibitions, which tell her that she ought not to look at him, though her desire occasionally gets the better of her: "She

had ventured only one glance at Darcy. He looked serious, as usual; and, she thought, more as he had been used to look in Hertfordshire, than as she had seen him at Pemberley” (316), and “when occasionally, unable to resist the impulse of curiosity, she raised her eyes to his face, she as often found him looking at Jane as at herself, and frequently on no object but the ground” (317). He is seated at a distance from her, and Elizabeth “was in no humour for conversation with any one but himself; and to him she had hardly courage to speak” (317).

Elizabeth’s frustration reaches its peak during the dinner party that follows this visit, specifically in her inability to approach Darcy despite their proximity due to gendered forms of English sociability. Although they are at opposite ends of the dinner table, Elizabeth “was in hopes that the evening would afford some opportunity of bringing them together; that the whole of the visit would not pass away without enabling them to enter into something more of conversation, than the mere ceremonious salutation attending his entrance” (321-22). Austen writes of Elizabeth’s annoyance at their separation following dinner, in accordance with the English practice of the ladies adjourning to the drawing room:

Anxious and uneasy, the period which passed in the drawing-room, before the gentlemen came, was wearisome and dull to a degree, that almost made her uncivil. She looked forward to their entrance, as the point on which all her chance of pleasure for the evening must depend (322).

However, when Darcy does come in:

she thought he looked as if he would have answered her hopes; but alas! the ladies had crowded round the table, where Miss Bennet was making tea, and Elizabeth pouring out the coffee, in so close a confederacy, that there was not a single vacancy near her, which would admit of a chair. And on the gentlemen’s approaching, one of the girls moved closer to her than ever, and said, in a whisper, ‘The men shan’t come and part us, I am determined. We want none of them, do we?’ (322).

Elizabeth’s exasperation is evident: “She followed him with her eyes, envied every one to whom he spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee” (322).

When the card tables are brought out:

Elizabeth was then hoping to be soon joined by him, when all her views were overthrown, by seeing him fall a victim to her mother’s rapacity for whist

players ... They were confined for the evening at different tables, and she had nothing to hope, but that his eyes were so often turned towards her side of the room, as to make him play as unsuccessfully as herself (323).

Throughout the evening Elizabeth is separated from Darcy by gendered forms of propriety and sociability and prevented from initiating a reunion between them by the gender politics of courtship. Austen highlights the absurdity of Elizabeth's powerlessness to act on her desire even by initiating a conversation with him in the course of the evening. Mitchell and Osland have argued: "there are few narratives that work as hard as *Pride and Prejudice* to exclude the possibility that the heroine has knowingly done *anything* to engage the hero's interest or to encourage his suit" (164). They state that despite her frequent disdain for social codes and decorum, "one boundary that Elizabeth does not overstep is the prohibition against acting on or even expressing desire ... there is not the slightest suggestion that passion, even unconsciously, endangers Elizabeth's virtue" (166). Yet Austen still presents Elizabeth in terms of her desire for Darcy, through her manipulation of the erotic gaze (particularly in relation to Pemberley and Darcy's portrait), by revealing her desire through her consciousness, and by exposing the frustration she experiences with the gendered codes of sociability and propriety that restrain her.

Darcy's second proposal to Elizabeth and the conversations that follow establish that he has developed the emotionally expressive life that Elizabeth required of him. When they acknowledge their love for each other, Austen writes: "There was too much to be thought, and felt, and said, for attention to any other objects" (346-47). With Elizabeth, and possibly for the first time in the entire novel, Darcy is able to think, feel and speak simultaneously. Austen describes "how well the expression of heartfelt delight, diffused over his face, became him" (346) and comments that "he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do ... he told her of feelings, which, in proving of what importance she was to him, made his affection every moment more valuable" (346). His conviction of his previous errors – both in terms of his attitudes to the Bennet family's socio-economic position and his behaviour to Elizabeth during his first proposal – are clear. He states: "The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me" (347); and later tells Elizabeth: "You thought me devoid of every proper feeling, I am

sure you did” (348). The depth of his change is clearly demonstrated in his attitude to Lady Catherine. When Elizabeth asks if he will “‘ever have courage to announce to Lady Catherine, what is to befall her?’” he replies “‘I am more likely to want time than courage, Elizabeth’” (361). Lady Catherine’s response – a letter containing “language so very abusive, especially of Elizabeth” (367) – occasions a familial and social rift which is only repaired at Elizabeth’s instigation, demonstrating the pressure Darcy as a wealthy gentry man has endured regarding the regulation of his sexuality and his marital choice, and which he has now learned to disregard in preference for a life which values emotion and feeling in human relationships. It is true that Darcy possessed many desirable qualities before he met Elizabeth; as she comments: “‘in spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself, your feelings were always noble and just’” (217). His earlier belief in emotional repression is here figured as a “disguise” of his true personality, which he is now comfortable in displaying to the world. His sister now views him as “the object of open pleasantry” (366). Furthermore, the continued absence of social kindness in Darcy’s treatment of characters such as Mr Collins, Sir William Lucas, Mrs Bennet and Mrs Philips demonstrates that adherence to eighteenth-century notions of politeness does not form part of his new social identity:

He bore it all with admirable calmness. He could even listen to Sir William Lucas, when he complimented him on carrying away the brightest jewel of the country, and expressed his hopes of their all meeting frequently at St. James’s, with very decent composure. If he did shrug his shoulders, it was not till Sir William was out of sight (362-63).

Austen writes that Elizabeth “was ever anxious to keep him to herself, and to those of her family with whom he might converse without mortification” (363). By the novel’s conclusion, Darcy has achieved an emotionally expressive identity which answers Elizabeth’s needs but does not compromise his own intelligence: he is *not* a polite man by eighteenth-century standards, and neither Elizabeth nor Austen require him to be.

It is ironic that in *Pride and Prejudice*, the novel which immediately follows *Sense and Sensibility* and Austen’s explosion of the myth that masculinities can be reduced to stereotypes or labels, Austen should create a male character who in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been so enthusiastically appropriated by Western cultures as a symbol for a particular approach to masculinity which many female audiences continue to find desirable. Yet this is perhaps not surprising given

that *Pride and Prejudice* is deeply concerned with dramatising the importance of men – even ideal models of gentry masculinity – changing to please the women they love. The novel explores the possibilities of men and women realising their individual desires within a highly regulated patriarchal and social system. Austen’s characterisation of Darcy dramatises her endorsement of the pursuit of individual desire, even when it is grounded in sexuality and will create a social rupture. His development throughout *Pride and Prejudice* signals her rejection of eighteenth-century conceptions of male refinement in preference for the simple and unadorned expression of heartfelt and genuine emotions. Darcy’s impeccable performance of his patriarchal responsibilities as a landlord, a brother and a guardian; his strong sense of domesticity and community responsibility; his financial and moral independence; and his emotional development throughout the novel establish him as possessed of the essential attributes of desirable masculinity. The characterisation of the male protagonists of Austen’s later three novels – *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* – is similarly informed by these qualities. However, in her final three novels they are articulated within a paradigm of nationalist politics, as Austen shifts her focus to men’s responsibilities to the nation in addition to their responsibilities to women and to their own individual happiness.

¹ “Bazza” is a slang Australian nickname for men named “Barry”.

² See for example Frantz “Jane Austen’s Heroes” 175, Hopkins 120, Lau 259, Lutz 43, Mitchell and Osland 165, Sulloway 206 and Wootton 35-36. The early appeal of Darcy’s character to female readers is exemplified in Mary Russell Mitford’s critique of the novel (Southam *Critical Heritage* 54).

³ See for example Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl”. *Critical Inquiry* 17(4) (Summer 1991): 818-37.

⁴ For alternative readings of Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley, see Britton Wenner 57, Clarke *passim*, Heydt-Stevenson 273, Knox-Shaw Chapter 2 *passim*, Ogden 59, Roberts 48-49, Sales *Closer to Home* 41, Tanner 120.

CHAPTER SIX

Men and National Security in *Mansfield Park*

The irony that in *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen created a male character who became a stereotype of the romantic hero in the twenty-first century is compounded by the fact that her next novel, *Mansfield Park*, features a cast of male characters who are incapable of performing their socially-prescribed masculine roles and who collectively fail to produce a model of desirable masculinity. The male characters of *Mansfield Park* fail *as men* through their inability to meet the demands of the English nation or to respond to female desire. Edmund Bertram, Henry Crawford and Sir Thomas Bertram realise their own failures as men, but rather than effecting significant changes in themselves to become “what men ought to be” – to women and to the nation – they instead rely on the grace of the heroine, Fanny Price, to forgive their failures and assist them to forge socially-approved standards of masculinity. Fanny possesses the sound principles and the moral independence to follow them which each of these men lacks. They need Fanny in order to become the men that the English nation demanded to ensure its political survival and its moral and spiritual wellbeing.

The starkness with which Austen judges the men of *Mansfield Park* is symptomatic of a realignment of her narrative and thematic concerns between the earlier and later phases of her writing career. *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* were all drafted in the 1790s, though not published until the 1810s, and are concerned with issues, particularly the pursuit of individual desire and its social implications, which characterised the post-Revolutionary period. While Austen uses these novels to highlight the importance of female desire and to establish certain qualities as desirable in men, she is also deeply concerned with the perception that men “ought” to adopt socially approved or sanctioned models of masculinity. These novels – particularly *Sense and Sensibility* - sympathetically expose the ramifications of the imposition of such standards on individual men, and ultimately celebrate the pursuit of individual desire over social demands. Austen’s later three novels – *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* – take a rather different approach to the question of “what men ought to be”. Whereas the earlier novels endorsed particular qualities as desirable in men but refrained from endorsing a universal standard of masculine identity and behaviour, Austen’s later novels instead suggest that such a masculine standard *does*

exist and adversely judge men who fail to meet it. Gone is Austen's interrogation of the assumptions about masculine gender which underpin the question of "what men ought to be" and in its place is a strong belief that men ought, indeed, to adopt particular models of appropriate masculine identity and behaviour. Within the later three novels, issues concerning men's attitudes to their family, domestic and community responsibilities, which Austen raised in her earlier novels, are elevated into a critique of men's political and social power at local, national and international levels. Austen's later constructions of masculinity indicate that such power comes with responsibilities and that only certain men are equipped to adequately fulfil them, didactically endorsing a standard of masculinity from which her earlier novels refrained. Austen's later three novels seek to articulate a model of masculinity which can be trusted with the exercise of power and to highlight the importance – for the nation, and for women – of individual men striving to achieve it. However, rather than stifling individuality, Austen's later works present happiness as achievable through national service.

Roger Sales has also noted a thematic shift between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* and attributed it to their composition throughout the Regency period rather than the post-Revolutionary 1790s. He argues: "the debates of the 1790s may not be quite so crucial as far as the later writings are concerned ... it is dangerous to read the novels that were produced during and after the second Regency Crisis exclusively in terms of events that took place ten or more years earlier" (*Jane Austen* xv). Sales argues that while there are continuities between Austen's first three and later three novels other specifically Regency contexts are available for *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* (*Jane Austen* xvi). In terms of her construction of masculinities, these contexts include a heightened public concern regarding England's national security, particularly in relation to the conflict with France, a new interest in defining and celebrating English national character and culture and the increasing dominance of the middle-class values of domesticity, work and independence. Whereas the earlier novels are courtship narratives that are primarily concerned with male characters (particularly fathers and potential suitors) in terms of their impact on the courtship plot, in the later three novels Austen's characterisation of men is much more overtly invested with contemporary political and social concerns.

Yet despite her greater concern with issues of international and national significance, Austen does not leave the vital importance of men's desirability to women behind with Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. Rather, Austen's commentary on masculinities changes from "men should be what women desire" to "men should be what women desire and the nation needs", crossing the private domestic and public national spheres. Throughout her final three novels Austen draws her authority to critique masculinities less from ideologies of courtship and domesticity and focuses instead on her authority to speak at the national level on political, social and domestic concerns. In *Mansfield Park* this change is accompanied by a qualification to Austen's validation of female desire. Throughout *Mansfield Park* two female characters – Fanny Price and Mary Crawford – express contrary and conflicting notions of "what men ought to be" which are articulated chiefly through their relationships with Edmund Bertram. Rather than validating female desire *per se*, in *Mansfield Park* Austen endorses Fanny's notions of "what men ought to be" because they parallel the political and spiritual needs of the English nation. She denies the validity of Mary's desire on the basis of its potential danger to the nation. In *Emma* and *Persuasion*, Austen continues her endorsement of female desires which parallel the national interest and constructs male characters who are capable of fulfilling the demands of both. Austen's final two novels also endorse men who forge socially-validated masculinities, but who are not dependent on the submission or isolation of women within patriarchal family and household structures, enabling a reform of the conventional English family.

Mansfield Park demonstrates the absolute necessity that English men be possessed of the personal qualities and the responsible attitudes to the exercise of power that will ensure the political survival and the moral wellbeing of the English nation. Austen achieves this by presenting a novel which is composed of male characters who are fundamentally deficient in this regard and dramatising the ramifications of their deficiencies for the Bertram family and the Mansfield Park estate. In *Mansfield Park* Austen critiques the irresponsible exercise of men's power at both local and national levels through her use of the country estate as a metaphor for the broader political state: the English nation. Threats to the Bertram family and estate are figured chiefly in Henry and Mary Crawford, whose association with French language and culture throughout the novel projects the narrative into contemporary national and international politics. The men of *Mansfield Park* – particularly Sir Thomas, Tom and Edmund

Bertram – fundamentally fail in the roles to protect the family and estate, and by extension the nation, which they are socially allocated within nationalist discourse. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen establishes particular qualities endorsed in her earlier novels – including estate management, domesticity, work, and a responsible approach to family and community roles – as absolutely essential to desirable masculinity by presenting them not only as desirable to women but also as vital to the national interest. In this novel, a failure to dutifully manage an estate, to value domesticity, to engage in productive work or to exercise power responsibly is equated to failure as an English man and a threat to the nation's security. Anne Mellor's analysis of Romantic women's novels indicates that Austen was not alone in this concern. She argues that female novelists of the Romantic era "all draw attention to the myriad ways in which men fail to perform their moral and financial duties as leaders of their families and the nation" (*Romanticism and Gender* 60). *Mansfield Park* further consolidates the relationship between desirable masculinity and the national interest by engaging with the early nineteenth-century project of identifying and endorsing English national character – a new feature in Austen's novels – which is differentiated from the refined sociability of the eighteenth century and dramatised through men's relationships with women. None of the male characters of *Mansfield Park* are equipped to take political or moral responsibility for the estate or the nation with the only possible exception being William Price, who is excluded from political power by the class, property and patronage systems. *Mansfield Park* dramatises the political, social and moral ramifications of a vacuum of appropriate masculine power at local and national levels.

Austen's overtly politicised critique of masculinities in *Mansfield Park* is enabled by three key differences between this and her other novels. Firstly, *Mansfield Park* is less concerned with the courtship narrative of the heroine, Fanny Price, than it is with the survival of the estate, though the two are closely related. At a rudimentary level, the primary importance of the estate is reflected in the novel's title. Auerbach has argued that Austen's narrative prioritisation of the Bertram family and estate are illustrated in the novel's concluding chapter, which is more concerned with Sir Thomas Bertram's self-discovery than with the relationship between Fanny and Edmund: "not all drama happens on the way to the altar" (186). This is not to say, however, that courtship narratives are unimportant. On the contrary, the courtships between Fanny and Henry, Edmund and Mary and finally Fanny and Edmund bear strongly on Austen's

critique of masculinities, as Fanny's conception of "what men ought to be" parallels the model of masculinity required for England's political survival and moral wellbeing. By prioritising the survival of the estate within the narrative Austen is able to broaden the range of her critique of masculinities into the political and national spheres.

Austen's use of the country estate as a literary symbol of the English state was neither original nor unique in the Romantic period. Virginia Kenny has tracked the use of this metaphor throughout the eighteenth century and John Su has also considered *Mansfield Park's* impact on later literature, arguing that since its publication "the English estate has been positioned both as a defining aspect of British *ethos* and as a crucial site of cultural debates about national identity" (556). Several critics have identified the relationship between the estate and the state in *Mansfield Park* and speculated on its implications for Austen's political concerns. Alistair Duckworth, for example, has interpreted the estate as "symbolic of an entire inherited culture" (*Improvement of the Estate* 55) and Tony Tanner has similarly identified it as representative of the value system of the landed gentry under threat from modernity (149). These approaches rely on the assumption that Austen endorsed the inherited culture and the values of the landed gentry; an assumption which is unsustainable within the novel and clearly challenged by Austen's class commentary, through which William and Fanny Price emerge as the rightful though disempowered custodians of the nation's political and spiritual wellbeing. As Claudia Johnson has argued, "Austen's enterprise in *Mansfield Park* is to turn conservative myth sour, as she surely need not have done were her allegiances to the world of the country house as assured as is generally argued" (*Jane Austen* 97). Other critics have interpreted Austen's use of the country estate as a metaphor for the greater political state, rather than as being symbolic of a particular culture or value system.¹ The advantage of this second approach is that it does not tie Austen to a conservative value system, instead accommodating her concern with England's political survival and spiritual health and her endorsement of middle-class values. Austen's use of the estate/state metaphor enables her to critique the male characters of *Mansfield Park* not only in terms of their relationships to courtship narratives, but also as social and political actors.

Austen's broader critique of masculinities in *Mansfield Park* is further enabled by her characterisation of the heroine. Fanny is markedly different from Austen's other

heroines, particularly her predecessor Elizabeth Bennet and her successor Emma Woodhouse. As Auerbach has noted, Austen “seems deliberately to have chosen something new and challenging to her powers” (166). While there are numerous differences of personality and situation between Fanny, Elizabeth and Emma, two are particularly relevant to my argument. Firstly, Fanny’s courtship narrative is different from those of Austen’s other heroines because she has loved Edmund since childhood, remains defiantly faithful to him throughout the novel and does not seriously consider another suitor; not even Henry. As readers, we know how Fanny feels about Edmund and wait for him to realise his own need for her and their mutual love. Therefore, unlike her predecessors (particularly Catherine Moreland), Fanny’s internal monologue is less concerned with analysing the merits of men as potential suitors, enabling Austen to explore topical concerns regarding the condition of England and English masculinities. These dual purposes – the use of the courtship heroine to critique masculinities and the exploration of national concerns – are realised in Henry’s courtship of Fanny, in which Fanny assesses his worth primarily as an English man rather than a prospective husband.

Secondly, Austen’s construction of Fanny’s personality and her position within the Bertram family at Mansfield Park also enables her to comment on broader political issues. Unlike her predecessors, Fanny is removed from her family and occupies a liminal, marginal space within the household. She is a companion for Lady Bertram, but not a servant; she is a relative, but not an equal; and for much of the novel, she is a grown woman, but not officially “out” in society. Austen casts Fanny’s status at Mansfield Park as ambiguous to present her as being within but not part of the estate. This creates a distance between Fanny, the Bertram family and the estate that allows her to observe it from the position of an outsider within its boundaries. Furthermore, also unlike Austen’s other heroines, Fanny is extremely modest, shy and reticent, particularly in social situations, enabling her to observe the people and events around her without actually participating with or in them. As Auerbach has noted, “Fanny relishes her wallflower role and shrinks from notice” (168). The combination of these factors – her position as outsider within the estate, and her role as social observer rather than participant – effectively allows Fanny to sit in judgment on the men of her world. Her judgment is revealed by the reader’s access to her consciousness, and she sees men

as social and political actors rather than solely in terms of her own or others' courtship narratives.

Fanny's liminal position and the power it gives her as a social observer are clearly illustrated by the visit to Sotherton and the theatrical episode. Throughout the day at Sotherton Fanny, Edmund and Mary walk through a small wood on the edge of the estate. Fanny stops to rest on a bench while Edmund and Mary continue their walk. In the course of her rest Fanny becomes an immobile observer of the movements, conversations and behaviour of the other characters, perceiving the growing relationship between Edmund and Mary, the danger posed by Henry to the relationship between Maria and Mr Rushworth and the jealous anger of Julia. Barbara Britton Wenner has identified "Fanny's position as simultaneous insider and outsider, as curative and inflexible" throughout the visit to Sotherton: "the whole scene here is about in's and out's, socially (and morally) correct behaviour as illustrated by everyone's movement in the landscape" (70). Similarly, Fanny's defiant refusal to act in the theatricals at Mansfield Park allows her to form the audience for the rehearsals, a detached position that enables her to observe Maria and Henry openly indulge their flirtation and the increasingly intimate relationship between Edmund and Mary. Fanny's critique of the behaviour of Tom, Henry and Edmund throughout this episode is powerfully revealed to the reader through Austen's intense evocation of her inner world. Auerbach has commented that "for an angel in the house, Fanny has surprisingly independent thoughts, solid integrity, and hidden power", and noted that Fanny's thoughts and reflections cover a range of subjects, including nature, humanity, religion, politics, literature, architecture and friendship (173-74). To this list could be added Fanny's analysis of the merits, or lack thereof, of the men whose conversation, conduct and morality she critiques from her detached position as spectator. Fanny herself later comments on her position during this period, to Edmund: "'As a by-stander ... perhaps I saw more than you did'" (324); and to Mary: "'I was quiet, but I was not blind'" (336).

Finally, Austen's engagement with broader political issues – particularly in relation to the moral and spiritual wellbeing of the nation – are enabled by the novel's concern with Evangelical thought and practice. Several early critics of *Mansfield Park* noted its interest in religious matters, though this approach has declined because, argues

Michael Giffin, the novel “presents the twenty-first century-reader with both a cultural pretext and a historical pretext that are now politically incorrect” (126).² Yet Austen’s treatment of moral and religious concerns in *Mansfield Park* does not necessarily limit her to a conservative agenda. Evangelicalism promulgated a belief in the fundamental importance of the individual within their social environment, a view that was far from conservative within the social and political context of the Romantic period. As Elisabeth Jay has noted: “Evangelicalism’s emphasis on a personal relationship with God, its rejection of the corporate authority of the Church, and the premium it placed upon the individual’s judgement assured a man of a significance frequently denied him in secular society” (7). Linda Hunt has argued for the particular significance of this for women, who were seen as moral beings responsible for themselves and to society, and as designed for God’s purpose, rather than for the purpose of pleasing men (11). Evangelicalism’s association with middle-class reform, particularly through women such as Hannah More, also questions its association with conservative values.³ Furthermore, Anthony Mandal has argued that *Mansfield Park* is not only concerned with Evangelicalism, but that it can also be interpreted as emerging from the Evangelical or “moral-domestic” novel genre which flourished in Britain between 1808 and 1814 (34). He contends that the development of the Evangelical novel made novel writing and reading by women more socially acceptable and that this was particularly useful to Austen, who “decided to publish a work concerned with so many issues topical at the time” (169). Knox-Shaw has likewise commented: “The choice of an evangelically inclined central couple for *Mansfield Park* offered the chance not only to move beyond the sphere of the relatively light, bright, and sparkling, but to engage in a direct way with what was crucial to the new age” (161).

Austen’s concern with Evangelicalism in *Mansfield Park* both promotes her broader social and political critique and strongly influences her constructions of masculinity. *Mansfield Park* is concerned not only with men’s power to secure the political state, but also their capacity to ensure the nation’s moral and spiritual wellbeing. Uniquely within her novels, Austen presents an active spiritual life as an essential component of desirable masculinity. This spiritual life is characterised by the development of sound moral principles and the strength of will and independence of mind to pursue them, and is strongly influenced by the ideal of Christian manliness endorsed by Evangelicalism. Evangelical thought, particularly as it emphasised the

importance of conscience, self-examination and a desire for self-improvement, is vital to the characterisation of Edmund, Henry and Sir Thomas throughout the novel. John Tosh has commented that rather than “being guided by the opinion of others, the serious Christian was urged to listen only to the inward monitor of conscience, and to appear to the world as he really was” (“Old Adam” 233). He further notes that although the Evangelicals “cultivated a greater awareness of the self than anyone else”, they also endorsed “a repression of the self far more severe than anything laid down by the gentlemanly code of restraint” and particularly locates this repression in attitudes to male sexuality (“Old Adam” 234). The ideal of Christian manliness associated with Evangelicalism “could only be achieved by means of unremitting self-scrutiny through private prayer and contemplation” (Tosh “Old Adam” 233-34). Austen dramatises this form of self-examination and a desire for self-improvement in the personal development of the central male characters throughout the novel. In *Mansfield Park*, an active spiritual life is presented as essential to maintaining the nation’s moral and spiritual health, and thus a vital component of desirable masculinity.

Throughout *Mansfield Park* the three principal male characters – Edmund Bertram, Henry Crawford, and Sir Thomas Bertram – are judged according to the standards of masculinity located in nationalist and Evangelical discourse and are each found wanting. All three of these men realise, at different points throughout the novel, that they can only achieve a socially acceptable and nationally useful model of masculinity through the heroine, who possesses the sound principles and the moral independence which they lack, and the grace to forgive or overlook their shortcomings. Thus, although *Mansfield Park* is concerned with endorsing female desire as it reflects the needs and interests of the nation, it is equally concerned with ascertaining which of these men is deserving of Fanny’s grace and on what grounds. Edmund’s credentials in terms of nationalist and Evangelical discourses of acceptable masculinity prove him worthy of Fanny’s forgiveness of his moral weaknesses and inconsistencies, dramatised through his relationship with Mary. Henry, despite his genuine attempt to become the English man Fanny desires and to improve himself through self-examination, is incapable of effecting the personal growth by which he could prove himself deserving of the heroine. Sir Thomas demonstrates a greater capacity for personal growth than either of the younger men, resulting in Fanny’s gracious acceptance of him as a father regardless of his considerable personal failings.

Throughout *Mansfield Park*, the central trope through which Austen critiques men's capacity to secure the nation is the estate. Issues concerning estate management, landlord absenteeism and estate "improvement" pervade the novel, reflecting the cultural investment of the image of the estate with politicised national meanings. At a time in which the image and the issue of the estate were imbued with nationalist politics, the attitudes displayed by male characters to their estates reflect their capacity to responsibly wield political power and to guarantee the security of the English nation, in addition to their attitudes to domesticity and community responsibility. Austen's use of the estate to indicate the worth of individual men is strongly articulated through the discourse of estate "improvement", and particularly the differing attitudes held by Mr Rushworth, Edmund and Henry. The subject is first introduced by Mr Rushworth, who, returning from a visit to an "improved" estate, becomes consumed with improving his own estate at Sotherton. Maria advises Rushworth to seek Humphry Repton's assistance, which specifically positions the conversation within the contemporary debate concerning estate management and improvement outlined in Chapter Two. The aesthetic successor of Capability Brown, Repton was associated with extreme alterations to estates that were focused on fashionable display rather than integration with the community or preservation of the natural landscape. Daniels and Watkins have argued that the style of Brown and Repton "was in every way one of disconnection and, in the political climate of the war years, was a dangerously destabilising fashion" (21) and Heydt-Stevenson has noted that Repton's designs were "dependent upon the eradication of commons, of signs of commerce, and of laborers' homes" (263). The substantial changes which have occurred at Rushworth's friend's estate are clear: "I never saw a place so altered in my life. I told Smith I did not know where I was" (51). Mr Rushworth's interest in improving his estate as a result of this experience, and his association with Repton, suggest a desire for change for its own sake and Austen targets the destruction of nature as particularly reprehensible: Rushworth's comment that the avenue of oaks will probably be removed prompts Fanny's outrage. Rushworth's association with Repton and the projected destruction of the oak avenue indicates his unfitness as a national leader: as Darryl Jones has commented, "the oaks are obviously significant here, having as they do a major place in English symbology" (136). Duckworth has interpreted this aspect of the novel as signifying Austen's opposition to the extreme and radical alterations of estate and landscapes that could result from a Reptonian approach (*Improvement of the Estate* 45).

This conversation also reveals Henry Crawford's enthusiasm for estate improvement as he comments on his own estate, Everingham:

there was very little for me to do; too little – I should like to have been busy much longer ... what with the natural advantages of the ground, which pointed out even to a very young eye that little remained to be done, and my own consequent resolutions, I had not been of age three months before Everingham was all that it is now. My plan was laid at Westminster – a little altered perhaps at Cambridge, and at one and twenty executed. I am inclined to envy Mr Rushworth for having so much happiness yet before him. I have been a devourer of my own (58).

Henry, like Rushworth, reflects a desire for change for its own sake and as quickly as possible. His wish that he had more to do indicates a love of the activity of improvement itself rather than care of the estate. Furthermore, Henry is effectively an absentee landlord who spurns settled domesticity and the management of his own estate in preference for London and fashionable resort towns: "To any thing like a permanence of abode, or limitation of society, Henry Crawford had, unluckily, a great dislike" (39). This, together with his enthusiasm for estate improvement, suggests that Henry views his home as a vehicle for public display rather than either a domestic retreat or an expression of personal identity.

Throughout the conversation, Edmund offers an alternative approach to estate improvement that reveals his concern with preserving national and natural heritage, his strong sense of domesticity and his personal identification with the home. While Edmund acknowledges that it is appropriate for Rushworth to improve Sotherton, he also outlines what his own approach to estate improvement would be, given the opportunity: "had I a place to new fashion, I should not put myself into the hands of an improver. I would rather have an inferior degree of beauty, of my own choice, and acquired progressively. I would rather abide by my own blunders than by his'" (54). Edmund's approach indicates respect for national heritage and incremental progress rather than radical change, reflecting the model of improvement endorsed by Repton's aesthetic rivals, Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight. It also reveals the expression of masculine identity and personality through the home, a motif that recurs throughout Austen's novels. In contrast to Rushworth and Henry, Edmund clearly views his home

not as a vehicle for public display but rather as an individual expression of his personality and character.

The issue of estate improvement recurs later in the novel and establishes important differences between Edmund and Henry. Henry has travelled through Edmund's parish, Thornton Lacey, and formed the view that his parsonage house requires "work for five summers at least before the place is live-able" (223). He explains a detailed plan for the transformation of the house and grounds:

The farm-yard must be cleared away entirely, and planted up to shut out the blacksmith's shop. The house must be turned to front the east instead of the north – the entrance and principal rooms, I mean, must be on that side, where the view is really very pretty; I am sure it may be done. And *there* must be your approach – through what is at present the garden. You must make you a new garden at what is now the back of the house; which will be giving it the best aspect in the world – sloping to the south-east (223-24).

Henry's plans involve a transformation of the parsonage house away from agrarian functionality ("The farm-yard must be cleared away entirely") and community involvement ("shut out the blacksmith's shop"). He attempts to convince Edmund to implement his plan by arguing that the improvements to the house and garden will give it the appearance of a landholding squire's residence rather than a parsonage:

By some such improvements as I have suggested ... you may give it a higher character. You may raise it into a *place*. From being the mere gentleman's residence, it becomes, by judicious improvement, the residence of a man of education, taste, modern manners, good connections. All this may be stamped on it; and that house receive such an air as to make its owner be set down as the great land-holder of the parish, by every creature travelling the road; especially as there is no real squire's house to dispute the point; a circumstance between ourselves to enhance the value of such a situation in point of privilege and independence beyond all calculation (225).

Henry's plans for Thornton Lacey are designed not only to remove it from agrarian, community life, but also to make it appear to be something that it is not: a house owned by a landholding squire rather than the parish clergyman. In this passage Austen reflects the objections to Reptonian improvement deplored by Uvedale Price: "Price saw this style as precisely eroding localism, reducing landscapes to a general plan,

erasing humble detail such as hamlets, hedges and copses, isolating ambitious owners in vast empty parks and leaving ‘the vacancy of solitary grandeur and power’” (Daniels and Watkins 21). Edmund’s plans for Thornton Lacey, by contrast, are more modest, express little desire to increase his social status by aggrandising his house and seek to foster its traditional aspects while adding a personal touch: “‘I must be satisfied with rather less ornament and beauty. I think the house and premises may be made comfortable, and given the air of a gentleman’s residence without any very heavy expense, and that must suffice me; and I hope may suffice all who care about me’” (224).

The differences between Edmund and Henry articulated through their conflicting attitudes to estate management and domesticity are also reflected in their different attitudes to productive work. Work – whether it takes the form of an occupation or profession, business, or estate management – is presented as desirable for men in Austen’s earlier novels, but in *Mansfield Park* and later in *Emma* and *Persuasion*, it is constructed as absolutely indispensable to the formation of acceptable English masculinity. Henry is an absentee landlord who leaves the management of his estate to agents and stewards rather than attending to it himself. Rather than responsibly managing his own estate, he pursues a lifestyle driven by pleasure and self-gratification. Henry’s idleness and self-indulgence are strongly contrasted with the productive employment and serious work ethic of Edmund and the sailor William Price. When William first arrives at Mansfield Park he has spent years hard at work in the navy and regales the Bertram family with stories of his adventures:

William was often called on by his uncle to be the talker. His recitals were amusing in themselves to Sir Thomas, but the chief object in seeking them, was to understand the recitor, to know the young man by his histories; and he listened to his clear, simple, spirited details with full satisfaction – seeing in them, the proof of good principles, professional knowledge, energy, courage, and cheerfulness – every thing that could deserve or promise well (218).

Austen writes: “William had already seen a great deal. He had been in the Mediterranean – in the West Indies – in the Mediterranean again – had been often taken on shore by the favour of his Captain, and in the course of seven years had known every variety of danger, which sea and war together could offer” (218). William’s working

life in the navy starkly contrasts with Henry's lifestyle of luxury and self-gratification, which he himself cannot help noticing:

He longed to have been at sea, and seen and done and suffered as much. His heart was warmed, his fancy fired, and he felt the highest respect for a lad who, before he was twenty, had gone through such bodily hardships, and given such proofs of mind. The glory of heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance, made his own habits of selfish indulgence appear in shameful contrast; and he wished he had been a William Price, distinguishing himself and working his way to fortune and consequence with so much self-respect and happy ardour, instead of what he was! (218-19).

Yet Henry's sudden desire for productive and useful work lapses almost immediately:

The wish was rather eager than lasting. He was roused from the reverie of retrospection and regret produced by it, by some inquiry from Edmund as to his plans for the next day's hunting; and he found it as well to be a man of fortune at once with horses and grooms at his command (219).

That William's work lies in an unquestionably patriotic cause also indicates that for Austen, the desirability of work lies both in the purpose and income it gives young men and in its service to the community and the nation. The importance of work as a contribution to the national community is emphatically demonstrated through Edmund's understanding of his role as a clergyman, which is revealed through his conversation with Mary and Fanny at Sotherton. Mary asserts: "'A clergyman is nothing'" (86) on the basis that the profession is unfashionable, particularly in comparison with the law and the military. Edmund's response illustrates the role of moral and spiritual social reform he attributes to clergymen:

'I cannot call that situation nothing, which has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally, – which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence. No one here can call the *office* nothing. If the man who holds it is so, it is by neglect of his duty, by foregoing its just importance, and stepping out of his place to appear what he ought not to appear' (86).

Edmund also projects the important role he sees clergymen performing within local parishes onto the national level: "'*You* are speaking of London. *I* am speaking of the

nation at large” (87). He specifically links the conduct and behaviour of the nation’s clergymen to its character and morality:

‘The *manners* I speak of, might rather be called *conduct*, perhaps, the result of good principles; the effect, in short, of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend; and it will, I believe, be every where found that as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation” (87).

Edmund’s intention to serve this national purpose within his own parish is revealed in a later conversation, in which he states that he has “no idea but of residence” at Thornton Lacey (228). Sir Thomas approves Edmund’s decision in a statement that both elucidates the problems with absentee clergymen and endorses a close relationship between clergymen and community life:

‘a parish has wants and claims which can be known only by a clergyman constantly resident, and which no proxy can be capable of satisfying to the same extent. Edmund might, in the common phrase, do the duty of Thornton, that is, he might read prayers and preach, without giving up Mansfield Park; he might ride over, every Sunday, to a house nominally inhabited, and go through divine service; he might be the clergyman of Thornton Lacey every seventh day, for three or four hours, if that would content him. But it will not. He knows that human nature needs more lessons than a weekly sermon can convey, and that if he does not live among his parishioners and prove himself by constant attention their well-wisher and friend, he does very little either for their good or his own’ (229).

Edmund’s approach to fulfilling his professional duties reflects not only a commitment to national service but also the model clergyman advocated by Evangelicalism, reinforcing the novel’s concern not only with the nation’s security but also with its moral and spiritual wellbeing. Mandal has commented that Edmund’s opinion of his role as a clergyman “sounds decidedly Evangelical” (175), and also notes that Evangelical clergymen were prevented from holding more than one living at a time (149), which Edmund refrains from doing in *Mansfield Park*.

Furthermore, Edmund and William – the men who labour in the nation’s service – are also endowed with qualities of personality and manner that closely reflect the concept of the English national character that emerged during the Romantic period. As highlighted in Chapter Two, English national character was viewed as constituted by a

sincerity of thought and feeling which was expressed through an open, plain and honest manner. William is described as “a young man of open, pleasant countenance, and frank, unstudied, but feeling and respectful manners” (216). His affection for Fanny is described as “a love which his stronger spirits, and bolder temper, made it as natural for him to express as to feel” (216), signifying the close relationship between William’s thoughts and feelings and his open expression of them. Edmund similarly embodies the plain speaking, forthright and honest approach to conversation endorsed as the quintessentially English national character, commenting to Mary: ““there is not the least wit in my nature. I am a very matter of fact, plain-spoken being, and may blunder on the borders of a repartee for half an hour together without striking it out”” (88).

Edmund’s embodiment of English national character, and Henry’s construction in opposition to it, are clearly articulated in their different approaches to conversation and conduct with women. Mary notes Edmund’s lack of gallantry and his refutation of the courtly approaches to conversation associated with male refinement: “he was not pleasant by any common rule, he talked no nonsense, he paid no compliments, his opinions were unbending, his attentions tranquil and simple ... there was a charm, perhaps in his sincerity, his steadiness, his integrity” (96). Austen also writes of Mary’s growing interest in him: “to the credit of the lady it may be added, that without his being a man of the world or an elder brother, without any of the arts of flattery or the gaieties of small talk, he began to be agreeable to her” (96). Edmund, in this respect, reflects the form of plain-speaking and rational conversation with women that was endorsed by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and which becomes vital to Austen’s characterisation of Mr Knightley in *Emma*. Henry, by contrast, continues to practice the courtly gallantry associated with eighteenth-century refined masculinity. He begins flirting with Maria and Julia shortly after his arrival: “He did not want them to die of love; but with sense and temper which ought to have made him judge and feel better, he allowed himself great latitude on such points” (43). His conversation with both sisters is in the style of gallant compliment, despite Maria’s engagement to Mr Rushworth. Henry’s gallantry and its sexual connotations are particularly exemplified during the visit to Sotherton. Arriving at a locked gate, Mr Rushworth returns to the house to retrieve the key and in his absence Henry comments to Maria: ““I do not think that *I* shall ever see Sotherton again with so much pleasure as I do now. Another summer will hardly improve it to me”” (92). He continues his

flattering banter, which particularly turns on his preference for Maria over her sister, and eventually persuades her: “‘I think you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance’”. Maria agrees, though Fanny tries to convince her otherwise: “‘You will hurt yourself, Miss Bertram ... you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes – you will tear your gown – you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha’” (93). Maria’s decision to climb around the gate prefigures her later, more damaging sexual relationship with Henry and reveals the slippage between gallantry, seduction and adultery that characterised eighteenth-century refined conversation.

Henry’s courtly or gallant conversation with women constitutes a failure to reflect the English national character embodied in the sincere, honest and plainly-spoken William and Edmund. Furthermore, the model of conversation practised by Henry was increasingly associated with French language and culture in the Romantic period. Indeed, Austen specifically associates Henry and Mary with French culture through their repeated use of French words and phrases: Mary describes Dr Grant as a “‘Bon Vivant’” and compares herself to “‘the famous Doge at the court of Lewis XIV’” in being surprised to find herself at Mansfield Parsonage (194); and Henry describes Edmund’s income as being for his “‘*menus plaisirs*’” – his luxuries or indulgences – rather than his living expenses (209), and refers to Fanny’s “tout ensemble” (213) to describe her physical attractiveness. Not only is Henry’s conversation with women not “English”, it is also positively associated with the French and the threat they posed to England’s national security. Additionally, Henry’s employment of the language of flattery and compliment and its implicit sexual licence, in combination with his own later sexual relationship with the married Maria, links him with a sexual liberation which was both associated with French culture and also incompatible with the ideal of Evangelical Christian manliness.

It would seem that Edmund – working in the nation’s service, engaged in community life, domestically orientated, with a responsible attitude to estate management and improvement and representative of English national character – possesses all the qualities of desirable masculinity. In contrast, Henry – lazy, self-indulgent, attracted by the trappings of polite society, wealth and status and linked to French language and culture – not only lacks the qualities essential to desirable English

masculinity, but also possesses attitudes which are potentially disruptive and even dangerous to English society and culture. However, over and above Austen's construction of these men in terms of their respective capacities to ensure England's national security and cultural values, is her construction of them in relation to the Evangelical model of ideal Christian manliness. At different points in the novel, both Edmund and Henry realise that they lack moral independence and engage in a process of self-examination, scrutiny and attempted self-improvement endorsed by Evangelicalism. However, both Edmund and Henry fail to independently achieve the active spiritual life promoted by Evangelicalism and are instead dependent on Fanny's grace to achieve the moral independence they crave, and which the novel requires of the desirable male.

Henry is the first of the two to recognise his lack of moral independence and sound principles, and he seizes on the possibility of compensating for these deficiencies in his own character by marrying Fanny. In the absence of Maria and Julia, Henry turns his attention to Fanny and sets out to use his powers of gallantry and flirtation to make her love him, a project that clearly contradicts the approach to conversation with women endorsed by Evangelical manliness. Henry comments to Mary on the failure of his usual methods of attracting women to exert their customary influence on Fanny:

'I do not quite know what to make of Miss Fanny. I do not understand her ... What is her character? – Is she solemn? – Is she queer? – Is she prudish? ... I never was so long in company with a girl in my life – trying to entertain her – and succeed so ill! Never met with a girl who looked so grave on me! I must try to get the better of this' (213).

Henry's attempts to ingratiate himself with Fanny have precisely the reverse of the effect he desires; in fact they result in his falling in love with her. He discusses at length his reasons for loving her: her "beauty of face and figure", her "graces of manner and goodness of heart", her "gentleness, modesty, and sweetness of character", her "temper", her "understanding ... quick and clear" and her "modest and elegant mind" (270-71). However, Henry's speech emphasises that her sound moral principles and religious rectitude are among the most important qualities to attract him:

Henry Crawford had too much sense not to feel the worth of good principles in a wife, though he was too little accustomed to serious reflection to know them by their proper name; but when he talked of her having such a steadiness and

regularity of conduct, such a high notion of honour, and such an observance of decorum as might warrant any man in the fullest dependence on her faith and integrity, he expressed what was inspired by the knowledge of her being well principled and religious (271).

Henry specifically sees Fanny as a moral and spiritual guide and a means to his own self-improvement. He tells Mary, ““I could so wholly and absolutely confide in her ... and *that* is what I want”” (271). Henry views Fanny as the means of developing the active spiritual life he lacks, but which he needs to become a desirable English man.

Fanny’s negative opinion of Henry reveals the extent of his flaws of principle and character and – ironically – how thoroughly he needs the guidance that she could offer him. Although her rejection of Henry’s marriage proposal is chiefly the result of her love for Edmund, Austen clearly reveals that even were this not the case she would be unable to accept him. Fanny correctly believes Henry to lack moral principles and to be careless of the feelings of others. She wonders how she could have created genuine affection in a man “so little open to serious impressions, even where pains had been taken to please him – who thought so slightly, so carelessly, so unfeelingly on all such points – who was every thing to every body, and seemed to find no one essential to him?” (282). She tells Edmund: ““I cannot approve his character. I have not thought well of him from the time of the play. I then saw him behaving, as it appeared to me, so very improperly and unfeelingly”” (324). Indeed, Fanny’s distrust of Henry arises chiefly from what she considers his unprincipled behaviour toward Maria and Julia, commenting to Mary: ““I cannot think well of a man who sports with any woman’s feelings; and there may often be a great deal more suffered than a stander-by can judge of”” (336). To Fanny, Henry “can feel nothing as he ought” (210). She characterises his pursuit of her despite her refusal in the following terms:

Here was again a want of delicacy and regard for others which had formerly so struck and disgusted her. Here was again a something of the same Mr. Crawford whom she had so reprobated before. How evidently was there a gross want of feeling and humanity where his own pleasure was concerned – And, alas! how always known no principle to supply as a duty what the heart was deficient in (303).

Henry pursues Fanny despite her refusal because he sees in her the sense of principle and duty that he lacks. Indeed, Henry’s love for Fanny prompts him, like

Darcy before him, to strive to become the man that his beloved needs and desires. Furthermore, in seeking to become desirable to Fanny, Henry's actual and attempted changes – in his conversation and behaviour toward women, in his value for domesticity and in his management of his estate – bring him closer to the model of masculinity endorsed by nationalist and Evangelical discourses. His conversation and behaviour change from the courtly gallantry he practiced with the Bertram sisters to a milder, less refined and more plainly-spoken manner which is more acceptable to Fanny:

his continued attentions – continued, but not obtrusive, and adapting themselves more and more to the gentleness and delicacy of her character, obliged her very soon to dislike him less than formerly. She had by no means forgotten the past, and she thought as ill of him as ever; but she felt his powers, he was entertaining, and his manners were so improved, so polite, so seriously and blamelessly polite, that it was impossible not to be civil to him in return (214).

Specifically referring to his flirtatious behaviour with Maria at Sotherton, Henry tells Fanny: “I see things very differently now. Do not think of me as I appeared then” (226), suggesting that he has undergone a process of self-examination and is seeking to improve himself. He also demonstrates an increased value for domesticity when explaining his plan to settle in the Mansfield district:

his attachment to the neighbourhood did not depend on one amusement or one season of the year: he had set his heart upon having a something there that he could come to at any time, a little homestall at his command where all the holidays of his year might be spent, and he might find himself continuing, improving, and *perfecting* that friendship and intimacy with the Mansfield Park family which was increasing in value to him every day (227-28).

Sir Thomas praises Henry's growing inclination for a settled, domestic life, telling Fanny “his wish to marry at all so early is commendatory to me” (292). Edmund similarly notes that Henry's love for Fanny “has raised him inconceivably in my opinion. It does him the highest honour; it shews his proper estimation of the blessing of domestic happiness, and pure attachment” (325). During his visit to Portsmouth, Henry reveals that his new value for domesticity and his desire to please Fanny have also changed his approach to estate management. He discusses his recent visit to Everingham, his introduction to tenants previously unknown to him and his settlement of a dispute between his steward and tenants for the mutual benefit of the estate and the community. Fanny's more favourable opinion reflects Henry's change in relation to

both national and Evangelical discourses of desirable masculinity: “It was pleasing to hear him speak so properly; here, he had been acting as he ought to do. To be the friend of the poor and oppressed! Nothing could be more grateful to her” (376). The changes in Henry’s personality and values force Fanny to see him in a new light: “He was now the Mr. Crawford who was addressing herself with ardent, disinterested, love; whose feelings were apparently become all that was honourable and upright, whose views of happiness were all fixed on a marriage of attachment” (303).

Fanny’s role as a catalyst for Henry’s change is clearly revealed when he finally elicits her reasons for disapproving him: ““You think me unsteady – easily swayed by the whim of the moment – easily tempted – easily put aside”” (318). Henry resolves to prove her wrong: ““It is not by protestations that I shall endeavour to convince you I am wronged, it is not by telling you that my affections are steady. My conduct shall speak for me”” (318). Edmund similarly attributes Fanny with the power to give Henry the principled, dutiful, spiritual life that he needs: ““a most fortunate man he is to attach himself to such a creature – to a woman, who firm as a rock on her own principles, has a gentleness of character so well adapted to recommend them. He has chosen his partner, indeed, with rare felicity ... you will make him every thing”” (325). While Fanny protests ““I would not engage in such a charge ... in such an office of high responsibility!”” (325), it becomes clear during Henry’s visit to Portsmouth that this is precisely the role that she plays in their developing relationship. Henry speaks of his hopes “soon to have an assistant, a friend, a guide in every plan of utility or charity for Everingham, a somebody that would make Everingham and all about it, a dearer object than it had ever been yet” (376). He discusses his concerns about the management of estate and asks Fanny for her advice: ““When you give me your opinion, I always know what is right. Your judgment is my rule of right”” (383). Fanny again disclaims this role with sage advice: ““We have all a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it, than any other person can be”” (383). Henry’s visit to Portsmouth leaves Fanny with the opinion that “he might have more good qualities than she had been wont to suppose. She began to feel the possibility of his turning out well at last” (376). Fanny acknowledges the change in her feelings towards him: “she thought him altogether improved since she had seen him; he was much more gentle, obliging, and attentive to other people’s feelings than he had ever been at Mansfield; she had never seen him so agreeable – so near being agreeable ... He was decidedly improved” (377).

Henry's resolution to travel to Everingham to manage his estate in person is, of course, disrupted by his delay in London and the affair with Maria Rushworth that ensues. The narrator's later reflection specifically links Henry's affair to his inability to follow Fanny's advice – to listen to the “better guide” within himself – which would have properly directed him to fulfil his responsibilities as a landlord: “Had he done as he intended, and as he knew he ought, by going down to Everingham after his return from Portsmouth, he might have been deciding his own happy destiny” (434). However, Henry “resolved to defer his Norfolk journey, resolved that writing should answer the purpose of it, or that its purpose was unimportant” (434). The narrator suggests that Henry knows what “he ought” to do but lacks the strength of will and independence of mind to follow his better judgment. The result of this weakness is his affair with Maria, which symbolises his failure as a man in terms of both English nationalist discourse and the Evangelical ideal of Christian manliness. However, Henry's affair with Maria denies neither the authenticity of his love for Fanny nor his attempts to become the man she desires. On the contrary, Austen dwells on his continuing love and his regrets, ultimately casting Henry as an object of pathos whose moral weakness separates him irrevocably from the woman he loves, and who could have saved him from his own deficiencies:

we may fairly consider a man of sense, like Henry Crawford, to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret – vexation that must rise sometimes to self-reproach, and regret to wretchedness – in having so requited hospitality, so injured family peace, so forfeited his best, most estimable and endearing acquaintance, and so lost the woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved (435).

We are allowed to believe that Mary is correct when she tells Edmund: ““She would have fixed him”” (423).

It is Edmund, rather than Henry, who Fanny is ultimately able to fix. Edmund's deficiencies are less severe than Henry's: he is already possessed of the central credentials of desirable English masculinity and his conversations with Fanny indicate that he possesses sound moral principles and an active spiritual life. However, Edmund needs Fanny for the same reasons that Henry fell in love with her: she can compensate for his own lack of moral independence and strength of will. As Auerbach has similarly argued: “Edmund possesses all the necessary ingredients for a gentleman ... but lacks

backbone and discernment” (187). Like Henry, Edmund lacks the moral strength to adhere to his better judgment, a weakness that is dramatised by his relationship with Mary Crawford. Blinded by his love, he repeatedly attributes what he sees as her improper conversation and behaviour and her lack of moral principles to her education and upbringing: ““we must suppose the faults of the niece to have been those of the aunt; and it makes one more sensible of the disadvantages she must have been under”” (61). Despite his acknowledgment of Mary’s deficiencies, Edmund’s attraction to her repeatedly leads him to compromise his own moral principles. The clearest example of this is his decision to act during the amateur theatricals, contrary to his beliefs regarding the propriety of acting and the choice of play. He rationalises his involvement on the basis that he is averting a greater evil that would result from the escalation of the project beyond the household and into the local neighbourhood. Yet the play provides Edmund with an opportunity to perform the role of Mary’s lover and Mary with a specifically sexualised opportunity of attracting him. As Penny Gay notes, “it places Edmund and Mary in an electrically charged place apart – a ‘stage’ – where more may be said and done than Edmund, at least, could imagine in the normal world” (110). Despite his awareness of Mary’s faults of propriety and character and his acknowledgment of his own mistake in compromising his principles, Edmund continues to treat their relationship seriously. He begins to plan for his future and following his ordination seriously contemplates proposing, despite his uncertainty as to whether Mary returns his love or whether she would accept the quiet country life he could offer her. It is only Mary’s response to Henry’s affair with Maria that convinces Edmund of the fundamental differences between them: ““She saw it only as folly, and that folly stamped only by exposure ... it was the detection, not the offence which she reprobated”” (422).

Throughout the novel, Edmund’s conversations with Fanny, particularly concerning Mary, reveal his habit of self-examination. Like Henry, Edmund views Fanny as a guide and seeks her advice and approval; however, unlike Henry, Edmund is frequently unwilling to hear or receive the guidance she provides, particularly where it interferes with his relationship with Mary. Austen writes: “Having formed her mind and gained her affections, he had a good chance of her thinking like him; though at this period, and on this subject there began now to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration of Miss Crawford, which might lead him where Fanny could

not follow” (61). Fanny’s disagreement with Edmund and his unwillingness to accept her advice is clearly demonstrated during their conversation concerning the play. He tells Fanny: ““No man can like being driven into the *appearance* of such inconsistency”” (142). Fanny, however, cannot condone his decision to act to prevent the expansion of the theatricals: ““I am more sorry to see you drawn in to do what you had resolved against, and what you are known to think will be disagreeable to my uncle”” (143). While Edmund states that Fanny’s approval is important to him – ““Give me your approbation ... I am not comfortable without it ... If you are against me, I ought to distrust myself”” (144) – he proceeds with his decision to participate.

Edmund acknowledges Fanny’s superiority to Mary throughout the novel, but it is only at the conclusion that he acknowledges her superiority to himself: “She was of course only too good for him” (437). This is a sentiment that Austen does not contest in the novel’s concluding chapters. While Edmund acknowledges his blindness regarding his relationship with Mary, his statements ““My eyes are opened”” (423) and ““How have I been deceived!”” (426) are not accompanied by either a recognition of his own willing participation in the deception or a resolution regarding future self-improvement. Unlike Henry and Sir Thomas, Edmund does not reach a moment of climactic self-realisation or desire for personal growth. His regrets regarding his relationship with Mary consist of what may have been rather than an acknowledgment of his own moral weakness. Indeed, Edmund does not appear to substantially develop at all throughout the novel; even his change of feelings towards Fanny is articulated as a change of preference for “soft light eyes” over “sparkling dark ones” (436-37). Austen is unequivocal in her allocation of the advantage of their marriage entirely to Edmund’s side and her presentation of him as undeserving: “nobody minds having what is too good for them” (436). Ultimately, Edmund’s credentials as a Christian English man render him desirable to Fanny despite his failings, and Fanny’s grace – expressed through her faithful love for him – renders him acceptable to the reader.

Although Edmund does not develop substantially throughout *Mansfield Park*, his father Sir Thomas Bertram does undergo a significant emotional transformation in the course of the novel, which is particularly tied to his role as a landlord and his relationships with his children and Fanny. Roger Sales and Susan Allen Ford have offered two different though compatible allegorical interpretations of Sir Thomas’s

relationships to his family and to his estate which enhance interpretations of *Mansfield Park* as fundamentally concerned with the state of the English nation and highlight its particular interest in critiquing masculinities. Sales has persuasively argued that Austen's construction of Sir Thomas, his elder son Tom and their custodianship of the Mansfield Park estate is an allegory of the Regency crisis. He interprets the absence of Sir Thomas in Antigua and his temporary replacement by his irresponsible and selfish son as the head of the family and the estate as paralleling the madness of King George III and his temporary replacement with his dissolute and self-indulgent son the Prince of Wales as Prince Regent. Sales's argument that *Mansfield Park* is an allegory of the Regency is particularly strengthened by the fact that the novel was composed during the second Regency crisis and several similarities between the public persona of the Prince Regent and the characterisation of Tom Bertram (*Jane Austen* 88). Secondly, Ford has argued that *Mansfield Park* is a reworking of Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

In both works, the father/king abrogates his responsibility for family/kingdom/estate and suffers as a consequence the ungrateful rejection of his two elder daughters even as he banishes the third daughter, whose honesty he fails to value. Further, the novel incorporates in its main plot the play's subplot: one son betrays his father and the virtues he stands for but fails fully to embody, while the other is revealed as the true inheritor of those paternal values ...

Finally, both examine issues of national identity, exploring the condition of England in the face of changing relationships, responsibilities, definitions (96-7).

These two interpretations of *Mansfield Park* – reading the novel as an allegory of the Regency crisis and also as a rewriting of *King Lear* – complement each other, linking Austen's treatment of the estate to a commentary on masculinity and the body politic. Considering the fact that *King Lear* was not performed during the period “because of its untimely reflection of a king's madness and a disastrous Regency” (Ford 109), Austen's rewriting of its plot, characters and themes within a novel which is also clearly an allegory of the Regency makes *Mansfield Park* a radical statement that attests to the strength and immediacy of Austen's political concerns.

Both these allegorical interpretations of *Mansfield Park* suggest that the novel is particularly concerned with critiquing Sir Thomas Bertram's performance as an estate manager and as a father: indeed, these are the roles in which he is judged and found

wanting. Unlike Mr Darcy before him and Mr Knightley after him, Austen refrains from specifically commenting on whether Sir Thomas is a responsible manager of his estates. Instead, the reader is left to interpret his performance of this role from his actions which, while demonstrating an active involvement in the management of his estate, reveal him to be driven almost entirely by financial motives. Sir Thomas views his estate as an economic commodity rather than a social entity: a tool for financial exploitation rather than a foundation of community life. His mercenary approach to estate management and its inadequacies are clearly demonstrated by two decisions he makes which have potentially disastrous consequences for the estate and actually disastrous consequences for his daughter Maria. The first is his decision to leave Mansfield Park to attend to business in Antigua, and the second is to permit Maria to marry Mr Rushworth. Economic interests almost exclusively drive both these decisions and by dramatising the threats to which they expose the estate and the Bertram family, Austen demonstrates that care of the nation requires much more than economic management. It also requires the ability to develop affective and loving relationships and to identify and counter threats to the nation's political integrity and moral wellbeing.

Austen specifically presents Sir Thomas's absence in Antigua as financially driven, both as it concerns his income and in his decision to manage the business himself. She writes that he "found it expedient to go to Antigua himself, for the better arrangement of his affairs" (31). Her use of the word "expedient" suggests that Sir Thomas decided to attend to the business in person because of the speed, efficiency and convenience of doing so, rather than adopting an alternative method of employing an agent or managing it from England which may have been less "expedient" but would have allowed him to fulfil what Austen presents as his greater responsibilities to his family and his English estate. Although Sir Thomas also views his journey to Antigua as a means of separating his son Tom from "bad connections", Austen emphasises "the necessity of the measure in a pecuniary light", and writes that this financial necessity "reconciled Sir Thomas to the effort of quitting the rest of his family" (31). Tanner has similarly noted Sir Thomas's economic motivations, describing his departure for Antigua as "a dangerous split in his loyalties: he believes in the values associated with landed property in England; but also in the financial profits to be made from a trade involved in slavery" (149). It is clear that to Sir Thomas, economic imperatives

outweigh his responsibilities as the custodian of his English estate and as a husband and father.

Several critics have sought to use Sir Thomas's Antiguan estate as a means of identifying Austen's ideological position on English imperialism and, as it is generally assumed that the Antiguan estate is a sugar plantation worked by slave labour, her position on slavery in particular. Edward Said, for example, has identified a symbiotic relationship between the Bertram English and Antiguan estates, arguing that "to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and rule an imperial estate in close association. The production and regulation of one allows for the tranquillity and harmony of the other" (87). Referring to Britain's imperial activities in the Caribbean and South America throughout the period, Said argues: "Austen seems only vaguely aware of the details of these activities, although the sense that extensive West Indian plantations were important was fairly widespread in metropolitan England" (89). Somewhat controversially, Said argues that "by that very odd combination of casualness and stress, Austen reveals herself to be *assuming* ... the importance of an empire to the situation at home" (89), suggesting that Austen's treatment of the Antiguan estate exemplifies English culture's unconscious complicity in and enjoyment of the imperial project. Said offers a singular interpretation of *Mansfield Park* which obscures conflicting aspects of the novel – the "tranquillity and harmony" of the English estate, for example, is at least questionable – in addition to Austen's own personal interest in the issues surrounding slavery and abolition. Said's arguments have been contested by several scholars who, as Katie Trumpener comments, "have uncovered considerable evidence of Austen's personal interest in the subject of slavery" (*Bardic Nationalism* 175) and who demonstrate that the many intertextual, temporal and historical references Austen embeds within *Mansfield Park* indicate that her treatment of the issue is far from vague or superficial. Peter Knox-Shaw has investigated these connections and argues that emancipation "is the theme closest to the heart of *Mansfield Park*" (179), and Gabrielle White's *Jane Austen in the Context of Abolition* also extensively examines Austen's references to Antigua, empire and slavery and concludes that "slavery is her most solemn concern in the novel" (20). Rather than interpreting *Mansfield Park* as signifying complicity with England's imperial project and slavery in particular, Trumpener has persuasively argued that the novel is a subtle yet powerful rewriting of the abolitionist plot which was popular with female novelists throughout the Romantic

period, in which Austen seeks “to link the causes of gradual abolition and moderate feminism and to disengage both causes from a Jacobinism that has, among its other misdeeds, betrayed abolitionist and feminist interests” (*Bardic Nationalism* 181).

Clearly there are several ways in which Austen’s representation of the Bertram family’s Antiguan connection can be interpreted. Despite White’s extensive and detailed reading of *Mansfield Park* and the strength of her view that Austen favoured abolitionist politics, Austen’s references to Antigua, slavery and empire in this novel are so few and so brief that it is dangerous to use them as a basis for a definitive view of her attitude – whether conscious or unconscious – to England’s imperial project. Said notes that the narrative does not follow Sir Thomas to Antigua (it remains in Northamptonshire with the Mansfield Park estate and is barely mentioned after his return), indicating a narrative subordination of the colonial below the metropolis (90). Austen does, indeed, subordinate the Antiguan estate to the English estate within the narrative. This results from her fundamental concern with the condition of England in *Mansfield Park*, which is embodied in the English estate, rather than a lack of interest in or an unconscious debasing of the imperial to the metropolitan. Susan Fraiman has similarly placed Austen’s treatment of empire within her greater nationalist concerns, countering Said’s argument by interpreting the novel “as an inquiry into Mansfield’s corruption that challenges the ethical basis for its authority both at home and, by implication, overseas” (211). Sir Thomas’s extended absence from Mansfield Park and his abdication of responsibility for his estate and his family is more important to Austen than the fact that part of his income is derived from empire. Indeed, Austen’s selection of Antigua as the site of Sir Thomas’s imperial estate serves to emphasise the themes of landlord responsibility and the damaging effects of absenteeism which, White argues, she explores extensively throughout the novel. Rather than signifying complicity with the imperial project, Austen’s treatment of Sir Thomas’s absence and the threats to his estate and his family which it permits positions empire as a dangerous distraction for rulers more interested in the accumulation of wealth than in fulfilling their responsibilities to protect the English nation.

Sir Thomas reconciles his absence from Mansfield Park and particularly from his daughters by his faith in Mrs Norris and Edmund: “in Mrs Norris’s watchful attention, and in Edmund’s judgment, he had sufficient confidence to make him go

without fears for their conduct” (31). Mrs Grant, for one, sees Mrs Norris and Edmund as poor substitutes: “I do not think we do so well without him. He has a fine dignified manner, which suits the head of such a house, and keeps every body in their place. Lady Bertram seems more of a cipher now than when he is at home; and nobody else can keep Mrs Norris in order” (182). Furthermore, subsequent events reveal that Sir Thomas’s trust in Mrs Norris and Edmund is misplaced. Mrs Norris’s fallibility is clear: during his absence, she encourages Maria and Julia in their vanity and orchestrates Maria’s ultimately disastrous engagement to Mr Rushworth. Edmund’s deficiencies, however, are much more complex. Despite his ostensible capacity to ensure the nation’s political survival and spiritual wellbeing, he fails to neutralise the threat posed by Tom and the Crawfords. Even when his judgment is correct he lacks both the power and determination to enforce it on others and the moral independence to follow it himself. In leaving the Mansfield Park estate and his family to Mrs Norris and Edmund, Sir Thomas leaves them unprotected and vulnerable.

The amateur home theatricals dramatise the external threat to the estate and the family posed by the Crawfords and the internal threat posed by Tom Bertram. Tom is early in the novel described as “careless and extravagant” (21) to such an extent that his debts can only be repaid by giving the living at Mansfield Parsonage to Dr Grant, rather than holding it for Edmund as Sir Thomas had intended. The deeper threats Tom poses to the estate are dramatised after his early return to England from Antigua. He visits Ramsgate and returns to the estate only briefly before departing again for the races and Weymouth, demonstrating, as White has highlighted, his own tendencies toward absenteeism (23). When the “season and duties” of September bring Tom back to Mansfield Park for an extended stay his arrival is announced “first in a letter to the gamekeeper, and then in a letter to Edmund”, indicating that his focus is more on hunting than on estate management (107). The reader sees more of Tom during this brief return home than at any other time in the novel when, Sales argues, in his father’s absence he effectively becomes regent of Mansfield Park and Austen demonstrates the danger that he poses as heir to the estate. Tom’s enthusiasm for the amateur theatricals suggests that his presence – particularly in his attitudes to estate and family responsibilities – is potentially more dangerous than his absence.

Both the theatrical plan and the choice of play – *Lovers' Vows* – originate with Tom and his friend Mr Yates, who he met briefly at Weymouth. Austen casts the fact that Yates is visiting the estate as problematic in itself, writing that he “had not much to recommend him beyond habits of fashion and expense, and being the younger son of a lord with a tolerable independence”, and that “Sir Thomas would probably have thought his introduction at Mansfield by no means desirable” (113). Mr Yates brings with him an enthusiasm for acting that Tom later describes as an “infection” (171), signifying the potential for these young men to corrupt the moral health of the family and estate.

Austen emphatically attributes the escalation of the theatrical project to Tom:

the inclination to act was awakened, and in no one more strongly than in him who was now master of the house; and who having so much leisure as to make almost any novelty a certain good, had likewise such a degree of lively talents and comic taste, as were exactly adapted to the novelty of acting (115).

Edmund, who identifies these young men as posing a potential risk, repeatedly but unsuccessfully attempts to convince Tom of the unsuitability of amateur home theatricals. Edmund's objections are grounded in his father's absence and in the impropriety of his sisters acting, particularly in *Lovers' Vows* (117). He is also concerned that the construction of a theatre “would be taking liberties with my Father's house in his absence which could not be justified” (118), indicating that his concerns lie not just with the propriety of acting for the family but also with physical alterations to the estate itself. Edmund is consistently overruled by Tom, who as elder brother is now “master of the house” and thus holds power over the estate and the family in Sir Thomas's absence. Tom tells Edmund “‘I'll take care that his daughters do nothing to distress him. Manage your own concerns, Edmund, and I'll take care of the rest of the family’” (118), and later “‘don't act yourself, if you do not like it, but don't expect to govern every body else’” (119). Austen specifically ties Edmund's inability to enforce his judgment on this subject to his position as a relatively powerless younger son. Tom, by contrast, possesses patriarchal power but with no understanding of the responsibilities which accompany it.

Austen's treatment of amateur theatricals in *Mansfield Park* does not suggest that she opposes them as a matter of course. Rather, they are used as a device to illustrate the vulnerability of the family and the estate to the internal threat posed by Tom Bertram and the external danger of the Crawfords. Penny Gay has similarly

identified Austen's protest to the theatricals as resulting from increased exposure to political and moral ruin, which she specifically associates with France. She comments that the theatricals "would allow the sort of carnival disruption of hierarchised society that had been going on in France for the previous quarter of a century" (104) to infiltrate English society. Gay also comments on Austen's choice of Elizabeth Inchbald's translation of *Lovers' Vows*:

any play selected by the bored young people would have served for Austen's introduction of the theme of carnival disruption, the great house turned topsy-turvy ... Inchbald's play is ultimately most useful to Austen, not for its questionably subversive politics, but because it provides two strong female parts in scenes which suit perfectly the development of plot, character, and theme in this novel (107).

Austen's greatest objection to the theatrical episode is that it provides Henry and Maria with an opportunity of publicly indulging and displaying their flirtation, and Mary with an opportunity of ensnaring Edmund. A similar point has been made by White (71-2).

The amateur theatricals are brought to an end by Sir Thomas's premature return from Antigua. His response on discovering the theatre in his house and particularly the choice of play is as Edmund and Fanny had predicted. Sir Thomas quickly re-imposes his own order on Mansfield Park the morning after his arrival:

He had to reinstate himself in all the wonted concerns of his Mansfield life, to see his steward and his bailiff – to examine and compute – and, in the intervals of business, to walk into his stables and his gardens, and nearest plantations; but active and methodical, he had not only done all this before he resumed his seat as master of the house at dinner, he had also set the carpenter to work in pulling down what had been so lately put up in the billiard room, and given the scene painter his dismissal (177).

However, despite the fact that Sir Thomas is a model of efficient estate management, both his extended absence in Antigua and the events that his return precipitates indicate that the authority he brings to the estate and the family is itself fundamentally flawed. His return immediately prompts the marriage of Maria and Mr Rushworth, the second of Sir Thomas's decisions which demonstrates his mercenary motives and which has disastrous consequences for his family. Sir Thomas is informed of the engagement

while in Antigua, and Austen's description of his response again emphasises his overarching concern with wealth and status:

Sir Thomas, however, was truly happy in the prospect of an alliance so unquestionably advantageous, and of which he heard nothing – but the perfectly good and agreeable. It was a connection exactly of the right sort; in the same county, and the same interest; and his most hearty concurrence was conveyed as soon as possible (38).

Sir Thomas's joy in the engagement lies in the fact that it is "advantageous" for his own local and financial interests. The economic nature of the engagement is also suggested by Austen again using the word "expediency", this time as a descriptor of the local community's perception of the relationship (38): clearly, it is a marriage based on mutual financial and political interests. Indeed, Edmund immediately identifies Maria's mercenary motives, noting Mr Rushworth's otherwise undesirable personality and Maria's obvious indifference to him and reflecting: "he was not pleased that her happiness should centre in a large income" (38). Shortly after his return, Sir Thomas likewise perceives Maria's cold indifference to Mr Rushworth and provides her with an opportunity of relinquishing the engagement "if she felt herself unhappy in the prospect of it" (186). Sir Thomas, however, is satisfied with Maria's unconvincing confirmation of her desire to marry Mr Rushworth because of its financial consequences for himself: "It was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain ... happy to escape the embarrassing evils of a rupture, the wonder, the reflections, the reproach that must attend it, happy to secure a marriage which would bring him such an addition of respectability and influence" (186-87). He later regrets that "he had sacrificed the right to the expedient" (428-29).

While Sir Thomas clearly acts on the motives of wealth, status and "interest" in permitting Maria's marriage to Rushworth, Maria's motives are not, in the end, purely economic. She also marries Rushworth as a means of escaping Mansfield Park and specifically her father after his return. Focalising through Maria, Austen writes:

Independence was more needful than ever; the want of it at Mansfield more sensibly felt. She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed. The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely necessary. She must escape from him and Mansfield as soon as possible, and

find consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world, for a wounded spirit. Her mind was quite determined and varied not (187-88).

Maria's desire for escape from the estate and specifically from Sir Thomas indicate that his deficiencies as a father go beyond his mercenary attitude to his daughter's marriage. Sir Thomas's strict and severe approach to domestic life prevents his children, particularly Tom, Maria and Julia, from really loving him and him from really knowing them. Indeed, Austen suggests early in the novel that his system of education and upbringing and his faith in Mrs Norris are fundamentally flawed: "it is not very wonderful that with all their promising talents and early information, they should be entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In every thing but disposition, they were admirably taught" (19-20). Austen also specifically attributes his deficiencies as a father to his failure to develop loving relationships with his children: "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" (20). While Austen deplores the vacuum of authority during Sir Thomas's absence in Antigua, she also clearly resists the model of patriarchal authority he stamps on the estate and family when at home.

Sir Thomas's deficiencies as a father are further illustrated by his encouragement of Henry's courtship of Fanny. Fanny is emphatic in her rejection of Henry, not only because she loves Edmund but also because she is convinced that he is a dangerous influence. The Bertram family finds her decision incomprehensible, particularly Sir Thomas, who points out to her:

'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. And he is not an acquaintance of to-day, you have now known him some time. His sister, moreover, is your intimate friend, and he has been doing *that* for your brother, which I should suppose would have been almost sufficient recommendation to you, had there been no other' (291).

To this point in the novel, Henry's only real misconduct lies in his flirtation with Maria Bertram, which of course takes place in Sir Thomas's absence. Qualities in Henry that Sir Thomas identifies as positive – his "agreeableness", "address" and "conversation" – to Fanny conceal a lack of principles that she cannot overlook but Sir Thomas clearly

does not perceive. Fanny attributes Sir Thomas's pressure on her to marry Henry to his ignorance of his character – "she considered how much of the truth was unknown to him" – and to his disregard for the value of loving relationships, either in marriage or within his own family: "He who had married a daughter to Mr. Rushworth. Romantic delicacy was certainly not to be expected from him" (306). Indeed, Sir Thomas's plan to send Fanny to Portsmouth is devised on the basis that "a little abstinence from the elegancies and luxuries of Mansfield Park, would bring her mind into a sober state, and incline her to a juster estimate of the value of that home of greater permanence, and equal comfort, of which she had the offer" (342). Sir Thomas clearly views material wealth and comfort as a sufficient basis for Fanny's acceptance of Henry.

The consequences of Sir Thomas's deficiencies in his patriarchal responsibilities as an estate manager and a father are Maria's affair with Henry, the destruction of her marriage and her social exclusion at the novel's conclusion, and also less importantly Julia's elopement with Mr Yates. Edmund's letter to Fanny recalling her to Mansfield Park ends with the almost biblical statement: "There is no end to the evil let loose upon us" (411). The lapse in men's performance of their social and national responsibilities is a security breach that has left the family and the estate vulnerable to threats from without and subversion from within. Austen places the blame for the destruction of Maria, and the near-destruction of Julia and the estate, squarely on the shoulders of Sir Thomas. His deficient education and upbringing of his daughters, his extended and perhaps unnecessary absence in Antigua, his financially-motivated decision to permit Maria's marriage and his lack of judgment regarding the Crawfords all indicate his failure to adequately protect his family and estate, and by extension his unfitness to rule the English nation. Sir Thomas's deficiencies as a landlord and as a father amount to a failure as a man.

However, Sir Thomas proves himself capable of self-examination and personal growth at the novel's conclusion, and comes to reflect values associated with Evangelical manliness. Austen dwells on his personal suffering regarding Maria's affair:

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 (428-29).

He reflects on the upbringing of his daughters: “Something must have been wanting *within*, or time would have worn away much of its ill effect. He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which alone can suffice” (430). He specifically links this deficiency to religion: “They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice” (430). Emily Auerbach has also noted the change in Sir Thomas, praising his “capacity to admit his errors, feel the sting of self-reproach, and change his ways” (184) and noting that “had Mr. Bennet or Mr. Price felt their own errors so deeply, they would be on the road to becoming not only far better fathers but also far better men” (185). Sir Thomas’s personal development is revealed in his attitude to the marriage of Edmund and Fanny: “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” (437). These sentiments represent a change from viewing domesticity and family relationships in terms of patriarchal authority in favour of the modern, more affective concept of “domesticity” which was aligned with Evangelicalism and Christian manliness. This change is also represented in his new value for Fanny: “Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted. His charitable kindness had been rearing a prime comfort for himself. His liberality had a rich repayment, and the general goodness of his intentions by her, deserved it ... After settling her at Thornton Lacey with every kind attention and comfort, the object of almost every day was to see her there, or to get here away from it” (438). Fanny in turn sympathises with Sir Thomas’s sufferings and graciously forgives him his mistreatment of herself.

Neither Edmund nor Sir Thomas is able to repair the damage that their deficiencies as men cause the Bertram family. Fanny’s strong sense of moral principle and her courage to act as she thinks right compensate for these deficiencies. Fanny’s view of “what men ought to be” – in terms of the political and spiritual wellbeing of the nation – is comprehensively endorsed by the novel as a whole. It is her grace that enables Edmund and Sir Thomas to forge masculinities which are capable of serving the

national interest, and which renders them acceptable to the reader despite their considerable failings. While Fanny's marriage to Edmund symbolises the merging of middle-class moral and social values with the landed gentry, *Mansfield Park* does little to reinforce the reader's faith in the men who wield power. So does Austen conclude that power should be removed from male control? No; *Emma* and *Persuasion* prove that there are some men who can be trusted with social and political power. Rather, *Mansfield Park* dramatises the social, moral and national problems caused by a widespread deficiency in "what men ought to be".

¹ See for example Darryl Jones 113, Sales *Jane Austen* 88-93 and Ford 105.

² See for example Edge, Garside and McDonald and Monaghan "*Mansfield Park*",

³ For discussions of Hannah More's work and her relationship to Evangelicalism and femininity, see Mellor *Mothers of the Nation* 13-38 and Wood 118-25.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was”:

Emma’s Mr Knightley

As she surveys the house and grounds at Mr Knightley’s estate, Donwell Abbey, Emma Woodhouse reflects: “It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was” (336). Donwell Abbey is the centre of a hard-working, progressive and prosperous agricultural community that Austen endorses in *Emma* as a social model. Importantly, however, not only is Donwell Abbey “just what it ought to be”, but it also looks what it is: the estate is devoid of the trappings of display and social performance which characterise such estates as Northanger Abbey and Rosings, and which Henry Crawford encouraged Edmund Bertram to adopt for Thornton Lacey in *Mansfield Park*. These twin aspects of Donwell Abbey – its status as a social model, and its contentment in appearing what it is without either display or concealment – form a foundation for Austen’s construction of desirable masculinity in *Emma*. Like Woodston and Pemberley before it, Donwell Abbey symbolises its owner’s personality and values. Emma’s assessment of Donwell Abbey as “just what it ought to be” indicates that Mr Knightley, too, represents “what men ought to be”. Having refused to provide her readers with a vision of “what men ought to be” in *Mansfield Park*, in *Emma* Austen constructs Mr Knightley as a paragon of masculine virtue who can simultaneously serve the English nation and reform the conventional patriarchal family and household structure.

Masculinity is a volatile issue throughout *Emma*. Its critical importance is dramatised in the fractious relationship between Mr Knightley and Frank Churchill and the extent to which Frank is personally criticised by other characters in the novel, particularly Mr Knightley and ultimately by Emma. In comparison with the other “villains” of Austen’s novels, Frank’s crimes – forming a secret engagement with Jane Fairfax and concealing it by flirting with another woman – are relatively minor. He is not nearly as offensive or abusive as John Thorpe and General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*. He has not abandoned his lover and child, as Willoughby did in *Sense and Sensibility*. He does not seduce unprotected young girls in the habit of Mr Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*. He does not embark on an affair with a married woman in the manner of Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. Finally, he does not seek to play one

woman off against another for his own emolument in the practice of Mr Elliot in *Persuasion*. Yet Frank perhaps receives more vitriolic personal criticism, which is specifically articulated in gendered terms, than any of these men. Upon discovering his engagement to Jane, Emma declares: “‘It has sunk him, I cannot say how it has sunk him in my opinion. So unlike what a man should be! – None of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life’” (372). Emma’s recipe for desirable masculinity is, of course, reflected in the male protagonists of Austen’s earlier novels and perfected in Mr Knightley. Frank’s failure to behave according to this model leads Mr Knightley to declare him an “‘Abominable scoundrel!’” and a “‘disgrace to the name of man’” (399). Such extreme reactions to Frank’s transgressions, which in the scale of Austen’s novels are comparatively minor, are symptomatic of the novel’s deep anxiety regarding appropriate and inappropriate masculinities.

The anxiety over masculinities in *Emma* arises from the novel’s deep concern with English nationalist politics. This concern with English nationalism strongly influences the characterisation of the novel’s two central male characters, Mr Knightley and Frank Churchill, an aspect of *Emma* that has long been recognised by scholarship. Warren Roberts, for example, has commented: “Knightley was the ideal Englishman. His integrity, sense of responsibility and tradition, his respect for the social code, his true propriety and ‘amiability’ made him a leading citizen of Highbury” (42). Joseph Kestner has similarly noted that Mr Knightley “constructs for British culture the English male” (150). Mr Knightley’s essential “Englishness” is particularly established through his fraught relationship with Frank Churchill, who is invested with ideas reflecting French language and culture, which, like *Mansfield Park*, projects *Emma* into the realm of national and international politics. Roberts has argued that Frank reflects a sense of Francophobia which arose from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (37) and Kestner has similarly argued: “Frank Churchill embodies French masculinity, as his Christian name suggests, just as Knightley embodies the masculinity of England and its St. George” (149). Several earlier scholars, including Kestner, Claudia Johnson, Emily Auerbach and Michael Kramp, have explored the critical importance of masculinity as an issue in *Emma*, particularly within the paradigm of gender and nationalist politics. As Johnson has stated, “what ‘true’ masculinity is like – what a ‘man’ is, how a man speaks and behaves, what a man really wants – is the subject of continual debate”

throughout *Emma* (*Equivocal Beings* 196). Auerbach has likewise noted: “After reading so many conduct books for young women written by men, Austen must have enjoyed the irony of writing (with a dedication to the profligate Prince Regent) a conduct novel for young men!” (221). As the relationship between Mr Knightley and contemporary English nationalism has been ably explored by these and other critics, my analysis of *Emma* will briefly consider how this aspect of his characterisation develops Austen’s earlier constructions of desirable masculinity before proceeding to the more pressing issue of Mr Knightley’s capacity and willingness to reform the patriarchal family. It is not only Mr Knightley’s credentials as an Englishman, but also his relationship with Emma, which informs his representation as “what men ought to be” in *Emma*.

Austen constructs Mr Knightley as a model Englishman through three key elements which continue the pattern of desirable masculinity established in her earlier novels: his house, his middle-class value for work and domesticity and his embodiment of English national character. As with Henry Tilney, Mr Darcy and Edmund Bertram, Mr Knightley’s house reflects his personality and values. The importance of Donwell Abbey to Mr Knightley’s characterisation is signalled by the fact that, rather than requiring her readers to themselves associate the estate with its owner, Austen instead focalises through Emma to directly articulate this relationship. Gazing on the house, Emma feels “all the honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future owner could fairly warrant” (335). She later feels “an increasing respect for it, as the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding. – Some faults of temper John Knightley had, but Isabella had connected herself unexceptionably. She had given them neither men, nor names, nor places, that could raise a blush” (336). Further, Donwell Abbey represents not only Mr Knightley but also a specifically English idyll. Emma reflects on the estate: “It was a sweet view – sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive” (338). As Joseph Kestner has commented: “In the famous excursion to Donwell Abbey, Knightley IS England” (150). The episode overtly constructs Mr Knightley as the custodian of a quintessentially English geographic and cultural landscape.

Austen's endorsement of Donwell Abbey as an English social model is informed by its dissociation from the contemporary vogue for estate improvement. Austen relates Emma's visual appreciation of the house:

she viewed the respectable size and style of the building, its suitable, becoming characteristic situation, low and sheltered – its ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream, of which the Abbey, with all the old neglect of prospect, had scarcely a sight – and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up. – The house was larger than Hartfield, and totally unlike it, covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular, with many comfortable and one or two handsome rooms (335-36).

Donwell Abbey has clearly been built for utility rather than aestheticism. Its “rambling and irregular” nature suggests that rooms have been added as required rather than for grandeur, luxury or aesthetics. The fact that they are “comfortable”, with only “one or two handsome rooms” similarly speaks to the prioritisation of utility over display. Austen pointedly distances Donwell Abbey from being “improved” in any way: it was built at a time when little attention was given to “prospect” and has not altered since. As a result, the house itself does not have views of the gardens, meadows and stream that would be found in a more modern house (like Hartfield). Unlike Sotherton in *Mansfield Park*, the lack of improvement also means that the trees have been preserved from destruction by a new entrance or a wider view.

Donwell Abbey's preservation from improving landscape architects is also clear in Emma's later view of the gardens:

a broad short avenue of limes, which stretching beyond the garden at an equal distance from the river, seemed the finish of the pleasure grounds. – It led to nothing; nothing but a view at the end of a low stone wall with high pillars, which seemed intended, in their erection, to give the appearance of an approach to the house, which never had been there. Disputable, however, as might be the taste of such a termination, it was in itself a charming walk, and the view which closed it extremely pretty (337).

The grounds around the house have likewise been little affected by modern conceptions of landscape improvement. Austen particularly highlights this absence by having Emma assess the house and grounds using the language of improvement and

specifically exemplifying the ways in which the estate falls short of modern conceptions of landscape design. Indeed, the merging of the house, the hills, the river and the farmland suggests a more rugged and naturally “picturesque” aesthetic than would be achievable using modern methods of improvement:

The considerable slope, at nearly the foot of which the Abbey stood, gradually acquired a steeper form beyond its grounds; and at half a mile distant was a bank of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well clothed with wood; - and at the bottom of this bank, favourably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey-Mill Farm, with meadows in front, and the river making a close and handsome curve around it (337-38).

The relationship between the estate, the natural environment and Abbey-Mill Farm suggests not only a preference for a picturesque aesthetic, but also an emphasis on utility above all else. From Donwell Abbey, Emma can view the farm’s “appendages of prosperity and beauty, its rich pastures, spreading flocks, orchard in blossom, and light column of smoke ascending” (338).

Unlike the encounters between the heroines and the estates in *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice*, in *Emma* the heroine’s reflections on Donwell Abbey form only part of the novel’s construction of desirable masculinity through the image of the estate. *Emma* repeatedly figures Mr Knightley as a hard-working estate manager. Much earlier in the novel, during his conversation with John, the reader is alerted to Mr Knightley’s careful and industrious approach to managing his estate:

as a farmer, as keeping in hand the home-farm at Donwell, he had to tell what every field was to bear next year, and to give all such local information as could not fail of being interesting to a brother whose home it had equally been the longest part of his life, and whose attachments were strong. The plan of a drain, the change of a fence, the felling of a tree, and the destination of every acre for wheat, turnips, or spring corn, was entered into with as much equality of interest by John (96).

Mr Knightley is also consistently presented as conducting business with several different men including Mr Cole, Mr Woodhouse, Mr Cox and Mr Weston, in addition to his tenant Robert Martin and his manager William Larkins, who the reader never meets but who is mentioned repeatedly throughout the novel. As Darryl Jones has stated:

Mr Knightley may be a landed gentleman, but that land is worked, and the high regard he has for his estate manager William Larkins is indicative of his recognition, not only of Larkins's high personal and professional qualities, but also of the extent to which his continued economic existence depends on Larkins (176).

The substance of these transactions is not pursued – they are usually mentioned in passing, when Emma meets him or when he arrives at Hartfield – but their consistent presence in the novel's background generates an image of Mr Knightley as a man who works, albeit with the assistance of servants and tenants, and for his own living.

Mr Knightley also demonstrates a strong belief that estate ownership comes with important social and community responsibilities. His relationships with his servants and tenants are demonstrated more clearly than with any of Austen's other landlords, particularly his relationship with Robert Martin. Mr Knightley acts as the local magistrate: he consults his brother on points of law, and he is the person to whom Emma turns regarding the gypsies in the neighbourhood. However, his sense of social responsibility extends beyond formal or legal roles to a moral understanding of his power to influence the lives of others, both on his own estate and in the surrounding community. This is particularly clearly demonstrated during his conversation with John:

'John, as to what I was telling you of my idea of moving the path to Langham, or turning it more to the right that it may not cut through the home meadows, I cannot conceive any difficulty. I should not attempt it, if it were to be the means of inconvenience to the Highbury people, but if you call to mind exactly the present line of the path ... The only way of proving it, however, will be to turn to our maps. I shall see you at the Abbey to-morrow morning I hope, and then we will look them over, and you shall give me your opinion' (102).

In deciding whether to shift a path, which could be regarded as a legitimately unilateral decision for a landowner to take, Mr Knightley is more concerned about the inconvenience it may cause to the wider community than with his own need or desire to shift it, and is prepared both to consult his brother and to survey the maps of the land to be sure. Mr Knightley's sense of moral responsibility as a landowner and as a privileged member of the community is also reflected in numerous acts of generosity throughout the novel, such as his gift of the apples to Jane Fairfax and the use of his

carriage to collect Jane and Miss Bates for the Coles' party. This last action prompts Emma to comment to Mrs Weston: "'I know no man more likely than Mr. Knightley to do the sort of thing – to do any thing really good-natured, useful, considerate, or benevolent ... this, considering Jane Fairfax's ill health, would appear a case of humanity to him'" (208). Emma later reflects on Mr Weston, but with an imputed comparison to Mr Knightley, that "general benevolence, but not general friendship, made a man what he ought to be. – She could fancy such a man" (300).

Although he is a gentry landowner, Mr Knightley's value for hard work and his relationships with people at all classes of society indicate his support for individual self-improvement and class mobility despite its potential to rupture the established social and economic order from which he benefits. It is clear throughout *Emma* that the socio-economic hierarchy of Highbury is in a state of flux. Mr Weston, for example, "was a native of Highbury, and born of a respectable family, which for the last two or three generations had been rising into gentility and property" (16). Having made his fortune in trade with his brothers, he has purchased a small estate near Highbury and retired to the leisure of the landed gentry. The Cole family, similarly, has recently risen in social standing:

the last year or two had brought them a considerable increase of means – the house in town had yielded greater profits, and fortune in general had smiled on them. With their wealth, their views increased; their want of a larger house, their inclination for more company. They added to their house, to their number of servants, to their expenses of every sort; and by this time were, in fortune and style of living, second only to the family at Hartfield (194).

While Emma views the rise of the Cole family as a negative social development, Mr Knightley represents much more democratic principles and looks forward to the prosperity and social rise of his tenants, particularly the Martins. Not all families, however, are upwardly mobile in Highbury. The Bates, for example, are sinking in both wealth and social position, a reality to which Mr Knightley remains sensitive, attentive and benevolent.

Austen's investment in Mr Knightley of the middle-class value for social mobility through work is assisted in her characterisation of his brother, John. Being a younger brother, John has adopted a profession – the law – as he will not inherit the

Donwell Abbey estate. Austen attributes John Knightley with the middle-class values of hard work and especially domesticity. Her description of him as “rising in his profession, domestic, and respectable in his private character” (89) reflects a particularly Evangelical view of socially-approved masculinity. John Knightley’s extreme domestic orientation is highlighted by his displeasure at dining at Randalls on Christmas Eve – he tells Mr Elton that he never dines out in London – and also by his mildly derogatory assessment of Mr Weston’s character:

‘he takes things as he finds them, and makes enjoyment of them somehow or other, depending, I suspect, much more upon what is called *society* for his comforts, that is, upon the power of eating and drinking, and playing whist with his neighbours five times a-week, than upon family affection, or any thing that home affords’ (93).

Although slightly resentful of his view of Mr Weston, Emma is prepared to forgive John on the basis of his strong beliefs regarding domestic life: “there was something honourable and valuable in the strong domestic habits, the all-sufficiency of home to himself, whence resulted her brother’s disposition to look down on the common rate of social intercourse, and those to whom it was important. – It had a high claim to forbearance” (93). John Knightley in fact reflects what would become the Victorian model of desirable masculinity: he is independent, he works hard to support himself and his family through his profession, and outside work his greatest pleasure lies in being at home with his wife and children. In Mr John Knightley, Austen forecasts the model of masculinity that would dominate British masculine discourse throughout the Victorian era.

Finally, Mr Knightley’s language, conversation and manners, which develop Austen’s characterisation of Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, also consolidate his construction as an embodiment of English masculine virtue. Throughout *Emma*, Mr Knightley is presented in the image of English national character that was politically, socially and culturally endorsed during the Romantic period. For example, Austen relates the meeting of Mr Knightley and his brother in the following terms:

John Knightley made his appearance, and ‘How d’ye do, George?’ and ‘John, how are you?’ succeeded in the true English style, burying under a calmness that seemed all but indifference, the real attachment which would have led either of them, if requisite, to do every thing for the good of the other (101-02).

Janet Sorensen has argued that through this episode, “a rare moment of oral representation (signified in the contraction ‘d’ye’) conveys a humble and unselfconscious Englishness” (200), and Auerbach has further emphasised the essential Englishness of Mr Knightley’s speech by tracing the Anglo-Saxon origins of his language throughout the novel (224). Todd has also noted: “The ‘English’ manner of greeting between the Knightley brothers, which Emma appreciates, draws on the French caricature of English taciturnity and bluntness, as well as on English pride in sincerity” (*Cambridge Introduction* 108). Emma also observes Mr Knightley’s “downright, decided, commanding sort of manner”, which reflects contemporary conceptions of English national character, and states: “it suits *him* very well; his figure and look, and station in life seem to allow it” (33).

Austen particularly emphasises the Englishness of Mr Knightley’s language and conversation by comparing him with Frank Churchill. Though Emma praises Mr Knightley’s manner, her initial preference for a conversational style associated with eighteenth-century male refinement is reflected in her preconceived ideas about Frank’s manners and conversation: “My idea of him, is that he can adapt his conversation to the taste of every body, and has the power as well as the wish of being universally agreeable” (141). Mr Knightley’s response harshly derides Emma’s idealised vision of Frank as embodying a model of sociable masculinity so different from his own:

‘if he turn out any thing like it, he will be the most insufferable fellow breathing! What! at three-and-twenty to be the king of his company – the great man – the practised politician, who is to read every body’s character, and make every body’s talents conduce to the display of his own superiority; to be dispensing his flatteries around, that he may make all appear like fools compared with himself!’ (141-42).

The differences between Mr Knightley and Frank, and their cultural affiliations throughout the novel, are synthesised when he tells Emma: “your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very ‘aimable’, have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him” (141). As Claudia Johnson has commented, the plain style of speech and conversation employed by Mr Knightley “is a matter of national import, constituting the *amiable*, ‘the true English style,’ as

opposed of course to the *aimable*, the artificial, the courtly, the dissembling, the servile, and (as the tradition goes) the feminized French” (*Equivocal Beings* 201).

However, although Mr Knightley’s manner is presented as plain, direct and unceremonious, Austen carefully separates him from the popular image of the unpolished and boorish country squire. She achieves this by attributing to him a *natural* – rather than a cultivated or fashionable – grace and manner which are repeatedly praised by Emma. In conversation with Harriet, she comments: ““Mr Knightley’s air is so remarkably good, that it is not fair to compare Mr Martin with *him*. You might not see one in a hundred, with *gentleman* so plainly written as in Mr Knightley”” (32). Emma’s most favourable observation of Mr Knightley, which includes both his manner and his physical appearance, occurs at the ball:

There he was, among the standers-by, where he ought not to be; he ought to be dancing, - not classing himself with the husbands, and fathers, and whist-players, who were pretending to feel an interest in the dance till their rubbers were made up, - so young as he looked! – He could not have appeared to greater advantage perhaps any where, than where he had placed himself. His tall, firm, upright figure, among the bulky forms and stooping shoulders of the elderly men, was such as Emma felt must draw every body’s eyes; and, excepting her own partner, there was not one among the whole row of young men who could be compared with him. – He moved a few steps nearer, and those few steps were enough to prove how gentlemanlike a manner, with what natural grace, he must have danced, would he but take the trouble (307).

The true Englishman is naturally gentlemanlike, allowing Austen to present English national character as simultaneously plainly spoken, sincere and unadorned, yet graceful and dignified.

Traditionally, Austen’s characterisation of Mr Knightley through his idyllic English estate, his solid work ethic and his concern with community life has led scholars to interpret him as a bastion of the conservative establishment. Janet Todd, for example, has recently argued: “*Emma* invests Mr Knightley with Burkean conservative values”, though she also notes his modernity in terms of agricultural practices (*Cambridge Introduction* 107). His perceived association with Burke is compounded by his name – George Knightley – as it combines England’s patron saint with the

discourse of chivalry that, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke feared was in decline. As discussed in Chapter Two, chivalric masculinities were popularised throughout the Romantic period because they were viewed as combining elements of refined masculinity with a distinctly masculine national character, and Michèle Cohen has argued that Mr Knightley embodies this early nineteenth-century “fusion of notions of ancient liberty with modern manliness and civilization” (“‘Manners’” 328). Michael Kramp has similarly interpreted Mr Knightley’s association with chivalry in terms of conservatism:

Emma dramatizes Knightley’s attempt to maintain qualities of Burke’s ideal of aristocratic English masculinity while directing the maturation of a modern community and its young men and women ... Knightley embraces the nation’s new developments even as he remains invested in the lore and structures of England’s history (109-10).

However, Claudia Johnson has argued that the association between Mr Knightley and chivalry in fact belies his modernity: “It is the work of *Emma* to make Mr. Knightley seem traditional. Combining as it does the patron saint of England with the knight of chivalry, his name itself conduces to his traditional-seeming status” (*Equivocal Beings* 201). Johnson persuasively argues that Mr Knightley in fact represents the reimasculination of English masculinity in the early nineteenth century, purging it of the sentimentality of eighteenth-century ideals of refined masculinity that are represented at their logical conclusion in the character of Mr Woodhouse (*Equivocal Beings* 198-200). I further argue that rather than signalling his conservatism, Mr Knightley’s association with chivalry effectively highlights Austen’s concern with debunking the gender politics of the chivalric code.

The public masculinities that dominated the Romantic period were all to some extent founded on a belief in an inherent sexual difference between men and women. Within masculinities associated with chivalry, nationalism and the military, men are presented as responsible for the protection of women and women as in need of male protection and the reward of male exertion. These discourses also obliged men to serve the needs of women and place women in an elevated, almost revered position that would ensure their protection but simultaneously deny their status as rational individuals and prevent them from assuming socially and politically participatory roles. As discussed in Chapter Two, Mary Wollstonecraft noted this problematic gender

relationship in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In *Emma*, Austen's characterisation of Mr Knightley and his relationship with Emma comprehensively discredits the images of desirable masculinity and femininity that inhere in these discourses. As Margaret Kirkham has noted, Mr Knightley is "designed by his author to mock latter-day romantic notions of the chivalric tradition and latter-day aristocrats with their aversion to work of any kind, and their incurable habits of flattery and deception in sexual relationships" (128).

Unlike the models of masculinity endorsed within chivalric, national and military masculinities, Mr Knightley is almost totally unconcerned with either conventional ideas concerning desirable femininity or sexual difference generally. In fact, his frequent diatribes against Frank Churchill indicate that he is much more concerned with differences between individual men – and particularly with men's performance of their duties – than with ideas or beliefs regarding femininity. As Roger Sales has noted, Mr Knightley keeps Frank under "intense scrutiny and surveillance" (*Jane Austen* 142). His attempts to influence Emma's maturation seek to make her a better person in a gender-neutral, moral and ethical sense, not a better woman by a conventional or any other standard of femininity. Mr Knightley's lack of interest in sexual difference is particularly reflected in his uniform approach to conversation regardless of whether he is speaking with men or women. His blunt and plainly spoken approach does not alter in his conversations with Emma, Mrs Weston or any other woman. As Emma states: "He is not a gallant man, but he is a very humane one" (208). For example, immediately before his marriage proposal Mr Knightley and Emma greet each other with "How d'ye do's" reminiscent of the earlier conversation between the Knightley brothers (397). Mr Knightley's plainly spoken manner leads him to describe himself as "a very indifferent lover" (403) and to criticise what he sees as his own ineptness: "I cannot make speeches, Emma ... If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more. But you know what I am – You hear nothing but truth from me" (403).

However, Austen clearly does not view Mr Knightley as an indifferent or inept lover. On the contrary, his conversational style signifies a belief in women as moral and intellectual equals that is strongly contrasted with the gallant courtship practised by Mr Elton. Mr Elton's love of flattery and compliment is clear during his early

conversations with Emma and Harriet and Austen specifically highlights the difference in his conversation in female rather than male company. Mr Knightley articulates this difference when he says of Mr Elton's marriage prospects: "'from his general way of talking in unreserved moments, when there are only men present, I am convinced that he does not mean to throw himself away'" (64). This opinion of Mr Elton as changing his manners to suit the gender of his audience is later corroborated by John Knightley: "'I never in my life saw a man more intent on being agreeable than Mr Elton. It is downright labour to him where ladies are concerned. With men he can be rational and unaffected, but when he has ladies to please every feature works'" (106). In contrast, Mr Knightley speaks to Emma about the complex issue of their marital home in the "plain, unaffected, gentleman-like English, such as Mr Knightley used even to the woman he was in love with" (419). His consistent refusal to compliment and flatter Emma constitutes a refusal to insult her considerable intelligence. He says, for example, of Frank Churchill: "'My dear Emma, your own good sense could not endure such a puppy when it came to the point'" (142). In this respect, Austen uses Mr Knightley to critique the model of gallant conversation targeted by Wollstonecraft: "why do women ... condescend to receive a degree of attention and respect from strangers different from that reciprocation of civility which the dictates of humanity and the politeness of civilization authorise between man and man?" (*Vindication* 145). Mr Knightley's conversations with women indicate that he specifically rejects the model of gallantry reviled by Wollstonecraft: "I lament that women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attentions which men think it manly to pay to the sex, when in fact, they are insultingly supporting their own superiority" (*Vindication* 147). As Margaret Kirkham has noted, Mr Knightley is "a man capable of open, unaffected and unpatronising relationships with women" (131).

Mr Knightley's lack of concern with sexual difference or with desirable and undesirable femininities effectively enables his relationship with Emma, whose gender identity is fundamentally incompatible with the models of femininity she is offered by contemporary discourses of chivalry, nationalism and domesticity. Emma is strongly averse to marriage, intelligent and unafraid to demonstrate it, determinedly individualistic, financially independent and powerful within her family and her community. The gender hierarchy within a conventional marriage would seriously threaten both her independence and her power (Menon 39). Patricia Menon has argued:

From the courtships she observes with such detachment, she deduces that love, for males and females alike, entails real or ritual surrender. The socially acceptable language of love is the language of submission, which, before marriage at least, is the posture required of man (40).

As Menon notes: “‘power and freedom,’ exactly what Emma desires for herself, are in her view likely to be the prerogative of the man in the long run” (41). Claudia Johnson has also described Emma as “a woman who possesses and enjoys power, without bothering to demur about it” (*Jane Austen* 125) and argued: “Emma does not think of herself as an incomplete or contingent being whose destiny is to be determined by the generous or blackguardly actions a man will make towards her” (*Jane Austen* 124).

Emma’s unconventional femininity is particularly striking when she is compared with her sister Isabella, who embodies the passive femininity celebrated by domestic, national and chivalric ideologies. Isabella is described as “a pretty, elegant little woman, of gentle, quiet manners, and a disposition remarkably amiable and affectionate” and “not a woman of strong understanding or any quickness” (89). She performs the socially sanctioned female role, being “wrapt up in her family; a devoted wife, a doating mother” (89). As Johnson has noted: “Rather than pathologize Emma’s deviations from ‘right feminine happiness,’ the novel introduces Isabella for the sole purpose of making Emma look better by comparison” (*Equivocal Beings* 196). For despite Isabella’s conformity to ideals of domestic femininity, Mr Knightley consistently favours Emma’s strength, independence and intelligence. He tells Mrs Weston “Isabella does not seem more my sister; has never excited a greater interest; perhaps hardly so great” (39) and in comparing their writing favourably finds that “Emma’s hand is the strongest” (275). When, believing Emma to be courted by Frank, he retreats to his brother’s house in London, Mr Knightley finds that “Isabella was too much like Emma – differing only in those striking inferiorities, which always brought the other in brilliancy before him” (405). Kramp has erroneously argued that Mr Knightley’s “‘love’ for Emma is reignited by a desire for a woman like Isabella – and the hegemonic stability she promoted for the modern English man” (123): it is clearly Emma’s differences from the ideal of domestic womanhood that draw him to her.

Emma’s marriage to Mr Knightley is not enabled either because she grows to reflect the domestic feminine ideal upon which conventional marriage depended or because she chooses to sacrifice either her independence or her power. On the contrary,

Emma realises that marriage to Mr Knightley is in fact compatible with her own self-preservation. This view of the marriage between Emma and Mr Knightley – as being founded on equality and allowing Emma to retain her individualism – contradicts much scholarly opinion on the novel, which tends to view Emma’s individualism as socially disruptive and in need of Mr Knightley’s restraining hand. Marilyn Butler, for example, argues that Emma’s marriage secures her integration within the Highbury community (*Jane Austen* 272-73) and Alistair Duckworth likewise notes: “the social gaps which individual actions threaten to widen, will be closed around the marriage of the central figures” (*Improvement of the Estate* 176). Tony Tanner has also argued: “it is in fact Emma herself, the central ec-centric, who is the potentially most disruptive figure in the society of this novel” (*Jane Austen* 189). Linda Hunt has specifically articulated Emma’s development throughout the novel in terms of her gendered social roles and their fulfilment through marriage: “With his [Mr Knightley’s] aid Emma must learn to fill her life with the duties of her sex and social position and this means accepting her limitations, subordinating her will, in order to achieve the best possible happiness a woman can hope for, as a good wife to a good man” (34). Wayne Booth has similarly commented: “Marriage to an intelligent, amiable, good, and attractive man is the best thing that can happen to this heroine, and the readers who do not experience it as such are, I am convinced, far from knowing what Jane Austen is about” (260). More recently, Anthony Mandal has argued: “She must learn to integrate herself in the same way Knightley does, however, and to abandon her romantic idealisations and correlative snobbery in favour of her more positive social skills” (277).

Yet the extent to which Emma’s social integration and the performance of her social roles and responsibilities improves through her marriage to Mr Knightley is doubtful. Emma demonstrates a strong awareness of her social obligation to the poor within the Highbury community throughout the novel and, as Johnson has noted, in this respect she is “intelligent, generous, compassionate, and – whatever she is in her studies – steady” (*Jane Austen* 128). As Johnson has commented: “Emma considers the performance of untold acts of kindness a duty attached to her social position requiring no announcement or praise” (*Jane Austen* 129), an approach which contrasts sharply with Mrs Elton’s ostentation. Knox-Shaw has also noted Emma’s “natural considerateness”, which he argues “is early brought home by the dinner at which she humours her father’s anxieties about eating while silently ensuring that the guests are

well fed, as also by her unconditional (though by no means unpatronizing) care for the poor” (203). After she insults Miss Bates at Box Hill, Emma reflects: “She had been often remiss, her conscience told her so; remiss, perhaps, more in thought than fact” (353), and it is her attitudes to social relationships, not her performance of her social roles, which change throughout the novel. Emma’s appreciation of the damaging potential of her relationship with Harriet prompts her greatest moment of self-realisation, particularly regarding her faults of character and her past behaviour, which occurs without intervention from Mr Knightley or anyone else. Emma recognises that she needs to improve her relationships with others, but she does not need Mr Knightley to achieve this: her subsequent behaviour to Harriet, Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax demonstrates her ability to improve of her own accord. Emma’s self-improvement results from her own maturation, not from her marriage.

Emma is perhaps as far from the dominant ideal of domestic femininity as Austen could have characterised her while simultaneously ensuring the empathy of her reading public. Her character is totally incompatible with a conventional marriage and her development throughout the novel has no bearing whatsoever on either her femininity or her ability to enter into such a marriage. Auerbach has noted that Emma and Mr Knightley’s “notion of an open, equal, and fair marriage radically redefines this institution” (230), and it is vital to also investigate *how* Austen achieves this. The marriage of Emma to Mr Knightley is not made possible by any changes that occur in *her* personality or character throughout the novel, but rather because of *his*. For Emma, a successful marriage demands a reform of the traditional family and household structure and the success or failure of her marriage will depend entirely on Mr Knightley’s ability to meet those demands. Mr Knightley’s capacity to reform conventional gender hierarchies of marriage and household management is dramatised in his decision to leave Donwell Abbey and to live instead at Hartfield, a house which is symbolically governed by Mr Woodhouse but in reality is entirely controlled by Emma. Johnson has noted that the novel’s conclusion “which seemed tamely and placidly conservative thus takes an unexpected turn, as the guarantor of order himself cedes a considerable portion of the power which custom has allowed him to expect” (*Jane Austen* 143). She argues that Mr Knightley “is thus a fantastically wishful creation of benign authority, in whom the benefits and attractions of power are preserved and the abuses and encroachments expelled” (*Jane Austen* 141). “Wishful” though it may be,

there is much more at work here than a celebration of “benign authority”. While Mr Knightley’s shift from Donwell Abbey to Hartfield is essentially symbolic – in practical terms his management of his estate and his involvement with the Highbury community will remain unchanged – its symbolism is powerful indeed. His marriage to Emma indicates that adult male identity does not need to be dependent on the patriarchal social order or specifically on the subordination of women, particularly as this conventional gender hierarchy was reflected in contemporary chivalric, national and domestic ideologies. Mr Knightley’s lack of interest in the discourse of sexual difference that underpinned these ideologies signifies his rejection of the models of masculinity, grounded in masculine seniority and authority over women, which they endorse.

Mr Knightley’s capacity to maintain a masculine identity that is not dependent on the control of women through conventional family and household hierarchies results from his view of masculine gender as being a matter to be determined by each individual man rather than a status that needs to be established through external social factors. In Mr Knightley, Austen demonstrates the modern conception of “masculinity” as discussed by John Tosh: that masculinity “should not be subject to prescription, and it should ideally express individual choice” (*Manliness and Masculinities* 2). Mr Knightley’s decision to give up patriarchal power in the form of marital authority (reflected in the equality of his relationship with Emma) and household management (reflected in his move to Hartfield) suggests that for him, masculinity is a matter of individual choice that is unaffected by the prescriptive approaches to masculine status which are offered by contemporary English society. Indeed, the extent to which Mr Knightley’s approach to masculinity differs from available social models, and the capacity for contemporary English society to misunderstand him, is clear in Mrs Elton’s response to his engagement: ““Poor Knightley! poor fellow! – sad business for him. – She was extremely concerned; for, though very eccentric, he had a thousand good qualities. – How could he be so taken in? ... Shocking plan, living together. It would never do”” (438-39). Mr Knightley, however, takes an approach to masculine identity which may be socially misunderstood but which works for him. He reflects the modern approach to masculinity as “an expression of personal authenticity, in which being true to oneself counts for much more than conforming to the expectations of others” (Tosh *Manliness and Masculinities* 2-3).

Furthermore, Mr Knightley's approach to masculinity in the modern sense is reflected not only in his individual life choices, but also in his comments regarding Frank Churchill throughout the novel. His remarks indicate a view that masculine status is determined by men behaving according to the dictates of their own conscience, without reference to external social factors such as public reputation, the patriarchal order or the national interest. Regarding Frank's prolonged visit to Highbury, he tells Emma: "It is Frank Churchill's duty to pay this attention to his father. He knows it to be so, by his promises and messages; but if he wished to do it, it might be done" (138). He dismisses the difficulties Frank may face leaving the Churchills, stating: "a sensible man would find no difficulty in it. He would feel himself in the right ... they know, as well as he does, as well as all the world must know, that he ought to pay this visit to his father" (139). He tells Emma: "There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chuses, and that is, his duty; not by manoeuvring and finessing, but by vigour and resolution ... A man who felt rightly would" (138). To Mr Knightley, the test of masculinity is the relationship between a man's knowledge of his duties and his exertion to perform them. Frank's ultimate failure lies in his awareness of his duties and his consistent choice not to perform them. Such behaviour would be impossible to Mr Knightley not because it would result in a failure of social and national responsibility, or because he would risk social disapproval, but rather because it would conflict with the dictates of his own conscience.

In an early sparring match with Mr Knightley, Emma encapsulates the limitations imposed on women caused by conventional approaches to courtship and the models of masculinity they promote. She uses men's views of desirable femininity to defend her fanciful plans for Harriet Smith's marriage prospects: "till it appears that men are much more philosophic on the subject of beauty than they are generally supposed; till they fall in love with well-informed minds instead of handsome faces, a girl with such loveliness as Harriet, has a certainty of being admired and sought after" (62). Emma concludes: "I am very much mistaken if your sex in general would not think such beauty, and such temper, the highest claims a woman could possess" (62). Mr Knightley replies: "Men of sense, whatever you may chuse to say, do not want silly wives" (63), but men such as Mr John Knightley, Robert Martin and to a lesser extent Mr Elton, dramatise the essential truth of Emma's argument. Austen endorsement of the accuracy of Emma's view in her characterisation of these men effectively highlights

the different model of masculinity she offers in Mr Knightley. His understanding of masculinity as a matter of personal choice, rather than established through the performance of socially-imposed roles regarding courtship and family life, enables him to form relationships with women which are not based on conventional gender hierarchies. He makes the choice that Wollstonecraft implored men to make in *Vindication*: he chooses a masculinity that is not dependent on the oppression or ignorance of women.

Mr Knightley, like Donwell Abbey, is just what he ought to be, and he looks what he is. He achieves this authenticity because his gender identity is governed by personal choice and the necessity of being true to himself, rather than performing socially expected roles in his relationships with women. Austen offers him as an alternative to the social practice of locating masculine status within relationships of power and subservience: an alternative, in effect, to the traditionally gendered structure of the family. Through Mr Knightley, the ideal Englishman is revealed not only as serving the national interest but also as capable of reforming the English family. Through his name – George Knightley – Austen reclaims chivalry for English culture and purges it of the restrictive ideology of sexual difference. The success of Mr Knightley's marriage to Emma – dependent on a reform of masculinity and encapsulating the reform of the British family – is clear in the novel's final sentence: "the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union" (453). A union on these grounds is presented in *Emma* as essential for women such as Emma Woodhouse, who resist conventional prescriptions of femininity and for whom marriage would otherwise be impossible. However, in her final novel, Austen demonstrates that it is not only wealthy, powerful and independent women such as Emma who demand a reform of the traditional family which this new model of masculinity enables. *Persuasion* illustrates the necessity of this change for women who seek to perform a more publicly and nationally participatory role, casting the reform of the British family in the interests of both women and the nation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“The accommodations of a man of war”:

Reforming the Family in *Persuasion*

In a conversation regarding the navy and her own life at sea with her husband, Mrs Croft observes “I know nothing superior to the accommodations of a man of war” (64), and later comments, “nothing can exceed the accommodations of a man of war” (66). She ostensibly refers to the “man of war” as one of the many ships she has lived aboard with Admiral Croft, but in the broader context of *Persuasion* and its construction of “what men ought to be”, Mrs Croft’s use of the phrase “man of war” can also be interpreted as a play on words that points to the novel’s celebration of masculinities associated with the navy. The naval officers of *Persuasion* – including Admiral Croft, Captain Harville and, by the novel’s conclusion, Captain Wentworth – are men of war who embody a new model of masculinity. *Persuasion* consolidates Austen’s endorsement of national service and the middle-class work ethic as essential qualities of desirable masculinity. It also furthers Austen’s project of reforming the patriarchal family: like Mr Knightley, the naval officers of *Persuasion* are able to form masculine identities that are not reliant on authority over women, permitting their wives more active and participatory roles in public life. In Captain Wentworth, Austen’s construction of this new model of masculinity simultaneously effects a reform of the patriarchal family and responds to the literary figure of the Byronic hero, removing courtship from domesticity and effectively writing women into the adventure narrative.

There is a tendency among scholars to treat *Persuasion* as a thematic culmination of Austen’s writing career; as her last public “statement” on a range of political, social and cultural issues. This approach seems peculiar as Austen herself would have had no way of knowing that it would be her final novel and it is therefore difficult to imagine how this fact could have influenced the text itself. Yet Captain Wentworth can be interpreted as a synthesis of the male protagonists who precede him. He combines the awareness and performance of his social and national responsibilities of Edmund Bertram and Mr Knightley, with the depth of passion and romance of Mr Darcy, uniting in one man the essential attributes of desirable masculinity Austen endorses throughout her career. Other aspects of Captain Wentworth, such as his career as a naval captain, his homelessness and his antipathy towards domesticity, strongly

depart from the pattern of desirable male characterisation established in Austen's earlier novels. He displays several character traits – such as pride, impetuosity, stubbornness and even occasionally cruelty – which contradict aspects of Austen's previous constructions of desirable masculinity, and which endure to the novel's conclusion. Further, Captain Wentworth's characterisation is complicated by Austen's concern with responding to two public images of masculinity that developed around celebrated male figures throughout the 1810s: Admiral Lord Nelson, particularly following his victory and death at the Battle of Trafalgar; and Lord Byron, whose poetic celebrity arose throughout Austen's career, particularly through the development of the "Byronic hero". The result is perhaps the most complex construction of desirable masculinity of all Austen's male protagonists. Captain Wentworth seems to exemplify Austen's comment to her niece that "pictures of perfection make me sick and wicked" (23-25 March 1817, 335).

Captain Wentworth, like Edward Ferrars throughout most of *Sense and Sensibility*, lacks either a permanent or temporary home of his own, a narrative device and thematic concern that, I have demonstrated, was central to Austen's construction of her male protagonists. However, whereas Edward's lack of his own home serves to illustrate his marginalised position in terms of the establishment of a socially recognisable adult masculine identity, in *Persuasion* Captain Wentworth's homelessness reflects Austen's desire to establish a new set of criteria against which men's worth and value should be judged. Indeed, his homelessness itself suggests that in *Persuasion* Austen set out to accomplish something new and different in her construction of desirable masculinity and enables her to promote several different agendas throughout the novel. Firstly, endowing Captain Wentworth with an estate and its associated sense of permanence would be incompatible with her clear purpose of celebrating the navy in the context of the Napoleonic Wars and with her new interest in engaging with public cults of masculinity surrounding both Nelson and Byron. Secondly, by dissociating her male protagonist from the image of the estate, Austen offers a model of desirable masculinity which, because it is not dependent on the ownership and control of land, is more accessible and available to middle-class professional men, serving her endorsement of class mobility through individual self-improvement. Thirdly, by removing the estate from Captain Wentworth and associating it instead with Sir Walter Elliot, Austen raises contemporary concerns regarding the

degeneracy of the aristocracy and its entitlement to rule: all landholders, unfortunately, are not like Mr Knightley. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Austen's removal of Captain Wentworth from the estate allows her to focus instead on aspects of family relationships – specifically romantic relationships between men and women – beyond the domestic space itself. In this respect, *Persuasion* advances the reform of the English family that Austen began with Mr Knightley in *Emma* by reconstructing masculinity away from relationships of control and subservience that inhered within the conventional household structure. While several scholars have noted Austen's exploration of the theme of homelessness in *Persuasion*,¹ its vital role in allowing Austen to construct a new model of masculinity and to reform the patriarchal family has gone unnoticed.

Not only does Captain Wentworth not possess either a permanent or temporary home of his own, but he also expresses no desire or intention of acquiring one. In fact, Austen implies the opposite, suggesting instead that like all the naval couples of the novel, Anne and Wentworth will lead an itinerant lifestyle between ships, houses, towns and countries as their profession and their nation require. This is strongly implied by the timing of the novel's composition and its temporal setting. Austen commenced writing *Persuasion* on 8 August 1815, the day Napoleon sailed to St Helena following his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815 and his subsequent surrender.² The novel is set, however, in the summer of 1814, shortly after Napoleon's exile to Elba. When, at the novel's conclusion, Austen comments of Anne that "the dread of a future war [was] all that could dim her sunshine" (236), her readers know that there will be a future battle – the Battle of Waterloo – and can imagine that Anne and Wentworth's itinerant lifestyle will continue at least in the short term.

Captain Wentworth's homelessness requires Austen to develop a new index of masculine worth and value, which she locates chiefly in his role as a naval captain. *Persuasion*'s celebration of the navy has, as Mary Favret notes, "become a commonplace" in critical accounts of the novel ("Everyday War" 623) and therefore does not need to be restated at length here. However, it is important to emphasise that through Captain Wentworth, Admiral Croft, Captain Harville and Captain Benwick, Austen not only celebrates the navy but also creates a new model of masculinity that is underpinned by national service and a strong work ethic. This aspect of the novel has

likewise been noted by Jocelyn Harris, who has recently commented on Austen's alertness "to the cult of naval heroism, which represented a new kind of masculinity and a new kind of Englishness" ("Domestic Virtues" 181). Furthermore, the naval characters of *Persuasion* not only reflect a new model of masculinity based on work and national service, they also represent an approach to male identity that is demonstrated as capable of reforming the patriarchal family. As with Mr Knightley, for these men masculine status is not determined by their ownership and control of land, a household or a family. Whereas Mr Knightley's masculine status is assured by his understanding of masculinity as being a matter of authenticity for individual men, for the naval officers of *Persuasion* masculinity is established through their national service and their position as self-made men. Austen's final two novels represent different but equally effective means through which men can form socially approved masculine identities without recourse to the hierarchy of the patriarchal family and household. Austen presents both these masculine models as simultaneously working in the interests of women and the nation.

Through Captain Wentworth's profession Austen articulates a parallel between desirable masculinity and national service that is perhaps more overt even than in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. When her father is considering leasing Kellynch-hall, Anne comments: "'The navy, I think, who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give. Sailors work hard enough for their comforts, we must all allow'" (20). Captain Wentworth's conversations with the Musgrove family at Uppercross quickly establish his naval prowess and his dedication to national service. Susan Morgan has argued that Austen's choice "to introduce Captain Wentworth by having him earn the rank of Commander through his valor against the French in the 1806 action off St. Domingo ... carries significant political meanings" and constructs him "as having fought not only a particularly important and dangerous sea battle but one particularly linked for British audiences with arguments for the cause of liberty" ("Captain Wentworth" 91-92). Austen's favourable representation of naval officers is encapsulated in Louisa Musgrove's rapturous praise during the visit to Lyme:

Louisa ... burst forth into raptures of admiration and delight in the character of the navy – their friendliness, their brotherliness, their openness, their uprightness; protesting that she was convinced of sailors having more worth and

warmth than any other set of men in England; that they only knew how to live, and they only deserved to be respected and loved (92-93).

These sentiments are emphatically endorsed by the novel as a whole. Within the world of *Persuasion*, national service through the navy is plainly an indicator of masculine worth and value.

In addition to Captain Wentworth's associations with national service through his naval career, there are also strong indications throughout *Persuasion* that Austen also endorses naval officers because they are self-made men. Austen's treatment of the relationship between work, occupation or profession and desirable masculinity takes on a new meaning, as work becomes not only essential to desirable masculinity but a sufficient basis of itself for assessing masculine worth. The naval officers of *Persuasion* all work for a living and have earned rather than inherited their fortune. Austen repeatedly emphasises this aspect of their characters – perhaps more so than their national service – throughout the novel. Anne's own endorsement of naval officers at the beginning of the novel is more concerned with their hard work than their patriotic sentiment.

Austen states that at the time of his courtship of Anne "Captain Wentworth had no fortune. He had been lucky in his profession, but spending freely, what had come freely, had realized nothing" (27). Eight years later, he returns from the Napoleonic Wars with "five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him" (232). As Fulford has commented, Captain Wentworth's "profession has allowed him to unite his own and the nation's interests" ("Romanticizing the Empire" 189). Austen writes:

All his sanguine expectations, all his confidence had been justified. His genius and ardour had seemed to foresee and to command his prosperous path. He had, very soon after their engagement ceased, got employ; and all that he had told her would follow, had taken place. He had distinguished himself, and early gained the other step in rank – and must now, by successive captures, have made a handsome fortune. She had only navy lists and newspapers for her authority, but she could not doubt his being rich (29).

Austen's language throughout this passage strongly reflects the extent to which Captain Wentworth has proactively increased both his social position and his wealth. He has

“got employ”, “distinguished himself”, “gained” his promotion and “made” his fortune: none of these has been left to chance or granted without being earned. Later in the novel, during her conversation with Captain Harville, Anne elaborates on the hard-working nature of a sailor’s life: ““You have difficulties, privations, and dangers enough to struggle with. You are always labouring and toiling, exposed to every risk and hardship. Your home, country, friends, all quitted. Neither time, nor health, nor life, to be called your own”” (219). That Captain Wentworth’s fortune and success are entirely the result of this kind of labour is clear from Lady Russell’s motivations for disliking him during his initial courtship of Anne. She rejects him on the basis that he is “a stranger without alliance or fortune” (27) and “a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession” (26-27). These details – particularly his self-reliance – confirm that when Captain Wentworth returns from the Napoleonic Wars wealthy and promoted, his success is solely the result of his own talent and hard work rather than an inheritance or patronage that could serve his interests.

Austen’s representation of work as essential to desirable masculinity is clear from her representations of men who do not work for a living, particularly in the characters of Sir Walter and William Elliot. Austen writes: “Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot’s character; vanity of person and of situation” (6). He is a caricature of the contemporary perception of the aristocracy – and particularly the Prince Regent and other members of the royal family – as vain, useless and morally bankrupt (Fulford *Romanticism and Masculinity* 1-9 and “Romanticizing the Empire” 187, Sales *Jane Austen* 65-71). Austen’s comment: “Few women could think more of their personal appearance than he did” (6), and Admiral Croft’s later removal of the mirrors from the house, reflects the contemporary view of the aristocracy as effeminate and requiring the professional middle classes to maintain a strongly masculine national character. Furthermore, not only is Sir Walter presented as a social parasite, he is also a spendthrift “who had not had principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him” (232). Austen writes that the “Kellynch property was good, but not equal to Sir Walter’s apprehension of the state required in its possessor” (10), and his financial irresponsibility leaves him unable to pay his debts including to local tradespeople. As Frantz has argued, Sir Walter “is not only unable to

retain but is also undeserving of the honor of his patrimony” (“Jane Austen’s Heroes” 171). Rather than seeking to increase his income through work, Sir Walter instead decides to pursue a similar life of leisure at a cheaper price in Bath. Mr Elliot takes a similar attitude to Sir Walter regarding his impecunious position. Rather than increasing his income and paying his debts by working he seeks to ingratiate himself with the Elliot family to secure his inheritance, either by blocking Mrs Clay’s aspirations to become Lady Elliot or through marriage to Anne.

The uselessness of the aristocracy and the landed gentry embodied in Sir Walter and Mr Elliot is encapsulated in Mrs Clay’s discussion of the perils facing the professions, and her conviction that ““it is only the lot of those who are not obliged to follow any, who can live in a regular way, in the country, choosing their own pursuits, and living on their own property, without the torment of trying for more; it is only *their* lot, I say, to hold the blessings of health and good appearance to the utmost”” (21). If “every profession is necessary and honourable in its turn” (21), the gentry and aristocracy are by analogy neither necessary nor honourable. Mr Elliot’s similarity to Sir Walter and his moral bankruptcy, particularly in terms of his treatment of Mrs Smith, indicates that the degeneracy of the aristocracy cannot be solved by generational change. Duckworth has contended that “in *Persuasion*, for all the socially positive attitudes of the heroine, society never really recovers from the disintegration evident at the beginning” (*Improvement of the Estate* 180). This analysis, however, overlooks the novel’s strong endorsement of a realignment of social and political power away from a landed but useless aristocracy and its relocation in the hardworking middle class. In this way, Austen’s political focus shifts away from her primary concern in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* with the survival of England within the contemporary international political and military climate, and towards domestic politics concerning the exercise of social and political power within the nation itself. Maaja Stewart has similarly argued: “*Persuasion* involves a conscious transfer of power and moral legitimacy from the estate ideology to that of mercantile experience” (87). Sir Walter accurately describes the navy as ““being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers never dreamt of”” (20). However, while Sir Walter finds the navy and its class mobility strongly objectionable, its capacity for effecting social change is comprehensively endorsed throughout the novel. The successful transfer of social and political power away from the aristocracy

and its relocation in the middle class is signified by Sir Walter's lease of Kellynch-hall to the Crofts. Anne herself is in no doubt as to where this form of power should reside:

she had in fact so high an opinion of the Crofts, and considered her father so very fortunate in his tenants, felt the parish to be so sure of a good example, and the poor of the best attention and relief, that however sorry and ashamed for the necessity of the removal, she could not but in conscience feel that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners (117).

The marriage of Anne – “the daughter of a foolish, spendthrift baronet” (233) – and Wentworth – “a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him” (26-27) – encapsulates a redistribution of social and political power away from the aristocracy and towards the middle class.

Austen's celebration of the navy, its reliability as an index of masculine worth and its symbolism in terms of the redistribution of political power reflect the cult of celebrity surrounding Lord Nelson throughout and beyond the Napoleonic Wars. Joseph Kestner has succinctly described the significance of Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar in October 1805 for English society and history: “The British fleet under Nelson engaged the combined French and Spanish fleets. At the climax of the battle, Nelson died on board the *Victory*. Two immediate consequences resulted: the engagement put an end to Napoleon's scheme for an invasion of England and as a result, British naval supremacy was established for a century” (“Jane Austen” 148). Nelson was publicly celebrated as embodying the qualities the nation needed in men to survive the conflict with France, as John Peck has noted: “Nelson, a hero who dies achieving victory, becomes a glorious martyr for his country. It is at this point that the popular hero becomes a symbolic centre of English national identity” (34). Tim Fulford has also argued that the British public regarded Nelson “as the hero who had come to define national character in terms of self-command, devotion to duty, and courage” (“Romanticizing the Empire” 165). As discussed in Chapter Two, Fulford has further attributed Nelson with positively relocating chivalric masculine values in the middle classes. Jane Austen's letters themselves reveal both Austen's awareness of Nelson's celebrity and her own family's relationships with the navy: “Southey's *Life of Nelson*; - I am tired of *Lives of Nelson*, being that I never read any. I will read this however, if Frank is mentioned in it” (11-12 October 1813, 235). Several scholars have identified a

relationship between Austen's characterisation of naval officers and the cult of Nelson. Jocelyn Harris has argued that Austen based Captain Wentworth not only on her naval officer brothers "but also on England's foremost naval hero, especially as Robert Southey represented him in his hagiographic *Life of Nelson*" ("Domestic Virtues" 181). As the son of a Norfolk parson, Nelson, like the naval officers of *Persuasion*, was a self-made man. As Harris has commented: "Part of the Nelson legend was that he rose by merit, not patronage, and Wentworth too earns his way" ("Domestic Virtues" 182). Kestner has argued that *Persuasion* not only reflects the cult of celebrity surrounding Nelson but that Austen also used it as a specific tool to critique masculinities. He attributes her characterisation of naval officers to both Nelson and the Duke of Wellington, who had defeated France in the Battle of Waterloo shortly before Austen commented writing *Persuasion*. Kestner argues that the "two elements of the posthumous fame of Nelson and the actual triumphs of Wellington inform the reconfiguration of masculinity in *Persuasion*" ("Jane Austen" 155), and that Austen's project "was to appropriate this paradigm and democratize it, that is, to instantiate this paradigm into domestic and quotidian contexts" ("Jane Austen" 148).

Through her treatment of the navy in *Persuasion* – in terms of its national service and its middle-class work ethic – Austen endorses a new model of masculinity that is capable of effecting the social change needed to take England forward into the nineteenth century, as several scholars have noted. Fulford has commented that in her final novel Austen "redefined gentlemanly masculinity as a matter of manners and morals tested in (military) action, rather than inherited by birth" ("Romanticizing the Empire" 186) and Susan Morgan has further argued: "Captains Harville, Benwick and Wentworth are the new generation, part of the final decade of the long struggle against Napoleon, but also the generation which will shape the future" ("Captain Wentworth" 95). Harris has interpreted this endorsement of a new, modern masculinity as being particularly politically engaged: "Austen's admiration for Charles Pasley the advocate of armed imperialism, Thomas Clarkson the abolitionist, and Claudius Buchanan the missionary in India suggests further elements of her ideal progressive man" ("Domestic Virtues" 182 n1). The creation of this new model of masculinity through the navy – underpinned by national service and a strong work ethic – is enabled by Captain Wentworth's homelessness, and in this respect can be interpreted as a natural progression from *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*.

It is important, however, to recognise that while Captain Wentworth's homelessness allows Austen to construct a new model of masculinity, it conflicts with other qualities she had established as essential to desirable masculinity throughout her career and which, paradoxically, she appears to endorse within *Persuasion* itself. Specifically, Austen's characterisation of Captain Wentworth directly contradicts the high value her earlier novels place on a strong sense of domesticity in men. In addition to Captain Wentworth's lack of either a temporary or a permanent home of his own, and the novel's implicit suggestion that he and Anne will be itinerant into the future, his personality is itself fundamentally incompatible with domesticity. His dislike of fixity and domestic pursuits is indicated by his choice of profession, his obvious love of adventure and by his behaviour on his return to England. When he first arrives at Kellynch he has already made plans to move on quickly to visit his brother in Shropshire. His plans alter, however, when he meets the families at Uppercross: "it was soon Uppercross with him almost every day. The Musgroves could hardly be more ready to invite than he to come" (97). No sooner does Wentworth arrive at Kellynch than he is out shooting with the local squire and flirting with his sisters. When Anne contemplates returning to Kellynch to stay with Lady Russell she reflects: "he spent so much time at Uppercross, that in removing thence she might be considered as leaving him behind, rather than going towards him" (115). Later, Wentworth spontaneously rides over to Lyme to visit the Harvilles, and his return visit with the Musgroves results in his staying several weeks. He then visits his brother in Shropshire before finally moving again to Bath in pursuit of Anne. Throughout the novel, Captain Wentworth has no less than four temporary "homes" – Kellynch, Lyme, Shropshire, and Bath – and it is significant that on no occasion does Austen actually present him – either to Anne or to the reader – in any of them. On the contrary, whenever we see Wentworth he is away from "home" – whether visiting Uppercross, walking in Lyme or on the streets or public gatherings in Bath. Captain Wentworth clearly loves socialising: it is inconceivable that, like Mr Knightley, he could prefer reading the week's account to attending a ball or, like Mr John Knightley, he could live in London but never dine out. If the Knightleys embody ideal, domestically-orientated masculinity, Captain Wentworth is its absolute opposite.

Critics have generally overlooked Captain Wentworth's fundamental incompatibility with domesticity, perhaps because the novel's final sentence describes

the navy as “that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance” (236). In combination with the portraits of naval domestic happiness which feature throughout *Persuasion* – particularly Admiral and Mrs Croft, and Captain and Mrs Harville – the novel’s final sentence has been interpreted as attributing the navy with creating ideal, domestically-orientated men. Kestner, for example, has argued that the concluding sentence signifies “that this new masculinity has both domestic and national implications” (“Jane Austen” 157). Harris has argued: “At a time when the cult of military heroism was at its most powerful, she merges Wentworth’s chivalry, courage, and fraternal solidarity with the sensibility and attachment to home and family that would characterize Englishmen in a post-war, post-Romantic age” (“Domestic Virtues” 192, 205). Fulford has likewise commented that *Persuasion* “makes naval men into model gentlemen: chivalric, authoritative, paternalist” and describes Austen as “the provider of models of British manliness on which a stable domestic society could be founded” (“Romanticizing the Empire” 171, 187). Yet throughout the novel there is a clear dissonance between what Austen *tells* the reader about the navy and domesticity, and what she *shows* the reader through Captain Wentworth. His characterisation reflects neither the model of settled domesticity nor the image of chivalrous masculinity with which critics seek to attribute the novel. There is a tension in *Persuasion* between Austen’s endorsement of domesticity in men – both in comparison with her earlier novels, and within *Persuasion* itself – and her characterisation of Captain Wentworth. This tension is not adequately resolved by such extra-diegetic inclusions as the novel’s final sentence.

John Peck has noted this complexity within *Persuasion* and described its final sentence as “a contention that the evidence of the text itself does little to support” (48). He attributes the tension within *Persuasion* to “the fact that the sailor proves to be a difficult character to assimilate into social fiction”, and to the perceived reality that “not only is a sailor’s life one of risk and danger, it is fundamentally a man’s way of life with no place for women” (46). However, Peck’s discussion of the tension surrounding domesticity in *Persuasion* overlooks the novel’s concern with realigning gender boundaries. Rather than eliding the complexities of naval life for relationships between men and women, *Persuasion* in fact confronts them by constructing new models of masculinity and femininity that are capable of simultaneously complementing each other and serving the nation. Austen’s characterisation of women who are already

married to officers demonstrates not their incompatibility with naval life but instead their close involvement with their husbands' careers. Mrs Harville and Mrs Croft have both travelled extensively with their husbands, which several historians have described as a realistic depiction of naval life. Rodger has argued that it was not unusual for the wives of officers to live on board ship: "the practice was officially tolerated in peace time, and certainly survived in time of war" (76). Southam has also noted that the wives of naval officers often travelled with their husbands and performed particular tasks on board, such as nursing the sick or wounded (*Jane Austen and the Navy* 277). Mrs Harville's development of these skills through her involvement with the navy proves indispensable when she later nurses Louisa Musgrove after her fall (105). In this respect, Mary Favret has argued, "*Persuasion* shows the coordination of the domestic and the wartime everyday through acts of practical nursing" ("Everyday War" 625).

Indeed, *Persuasion*'s characterisation of naval wives, particularly in Mrs Croft, suggests that the navy provides suitable role models not only for men but also for women (Fulford "Romanticizing the Empire" 188). Mrs Croft has clearly relished the opportunities that her marriage to the Admiral has provided, arguing: "Women may be as comfortable on board, as in the best house in England'" (64). While in Bath Anne observes the Crofts in conversation with other officers and notices "Mrs Croft looking as intelligent and keen as any of the officers around her" (158). Sir Walter's agent Mr Shepherd describes her as "'a very well-spoken, genteel, shrewd lady ... asked more questions about the house, and terms, and taxes, than the admiral himself, and seemed more conversant with business'" (23). Rather than suggesting an incompatibility of women with a seafaring life, as Peck suggests, *Persuasion* uses Mrs Croft and Mrs Harville to espouse the mutual benefits to men and women that arise from female involvement in the navy.

Rather than being symptomatic of a difficulty reconciling naval life with contemporary conceptions of femininity and domesticity, the tension in *Persuasion* between Austen's claim that naval officers are "distinguished" for their "domestic virtues" and her actual characterisation of Captain Wentworth arises from her desire to pursue distinct and in some respects competing agendas. On the one hand, from *Northanger Abbey* to *Emma* Austen decisively endorses a strong sense of domesticity as being in the interests of women and the English nation, and her comments about the

navy and domesticity indicate that she does not wish to abandon this agenda in *Persuasion*. However, Captain Wentworth's characterisation – as a naval officer, a professional middle class man, and in terms of his association with Nelson and also the Byronic hero – clearly indicates her desire to endorse a new masculinity that departs from the models of ideal English masculinity based around the landholder in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. Furthermore, Austen's project of reforming the patriarchal family also requires her to address in some way relationships between masculinity, women and domesticity.

Austen reconciles these competing agendas – her desire to construct a new model of masculinity which is dissociated from the concept of “home”, and her desire to renovate the conventional English family – by shifting the meaning of “domestic virtue” away from the domestic space itself and instead towards the nature and quality of human relationships, particularly in marriage. *Persuasion*'s concern with relationships between people themselves, rather than between people and places, is clear from its widespread separation of people from place, particularly domestic spaces. In addition to the itinerant lifestyle of the naval officers and their families, the Elliot family also moves from Kellynch-hall to Bath. Both Captain Wentworth and Anne are effectively homeless throughout the novel: she moves between Kellynch-hall, Uppercross, Lady Russell's house and Bath throughout the novel. Although Anne misses Kellynch-hall and dislikes the change to Bath, it is clear that for her it does not have the emotional connotations of “home” because of her poor family relationships. When she visits the Crofts after they take possession, Austen writes:

Anne had no power of saying to herself, ‘These rooms ought to belong only to us. Oh, how fallen in their destination! How unworthily occupied! An ancient family to be driven so away! Strangers filling their place!’ No, except when she thought of her mother, and remembered where she had been used to sit and preside, she had no sigh of that description to heave (117).

Anne's only attachment to Kellynch-hall lies in her remembrance of her mother, the one positive relationship of her domestic family life. She mourns for the family life she could have had, not for the place itself. Anne, like Captain Wentworth, does not possess either a permanent or temporary physical space that is invested with the emotional connotations of “home”. Her appreciation of the conceptual difference between “house” and “home” is clear when, having returned to Lady Russell from

Uppercross, she reflects on “how much more interesting to her was the home and friendship of the Harvilles and Captain Benwick, than her own father’s house in Camden-place” (116). Sales has similarly noted the separation of person from place in *Persuasion*: “At no point in the novel is there any feeling that people belong anywhere, are defined by where they are, or move comfortably in known domestic or domesticated space” (*Closer to Home* 61).

Rather than locating “domestic virtues” within the physical space of the house or home, *Persuasion* locates it instead in the marriage relationship itself. This is evident from the portraits of itinerant but harmonious marriages that are represented by the navy throughout the novel. Captain and Mrs Harville are happy despite their transient lifestyle, their financial want and his physical disability. Austen writes: “Captain Harville had taken his present house for half a year, his taste, and his health, and his fortune all directing him to a residence unexpensive, and by the sea” (91), and that “Anne thought she left great happiness behind her when they quitted the house” (92). Their warmth is clear from their kindness to Anne and the Musgroves, even though their house contains “rooms so small as none but those who invite from the heart could think capable of accommodating so many” (92). The importance of friendship within the navy is clear from Anne’s observations:

There was so much attachment to Captain Wentworth in all this, and such a bewitching charm in a degree of hospitality so uncommon, so unlike the usual style of give-and-take invitations, and dinners of formality and display, that Anne felt her spirits not likely to be benefited by an increasing acquaintance among his brother-officers. ‘These would have been all my friends,’ was her thought; and she had to struggle against a great tendency to lowness (91-92).

Within the navy, friendship between people is clearly deemed more important than the trappings of domesticity itself. Anne realises that marriage to Captain Wentworth and her involvement with the navy would have provided her with the family life she lacked. In this sense, Anne’s visit to Lyme serves a similar purpose to Elizabeth’s tour of Pemberley and Emma’s assessment of Donwell Abbey: it provides a new insight into the male protagonist, and offers the reader a glimpse of the heroine’s life after her marriage.

The navy's emphasis on human relationships themselves, rather than on an attachment to place, is also clearly drawn in the marriage between Admiral and Mrs Croft. Mrs Croft's eagerness to travel with her husband has already been noted. As Eric Walker has commented: "'Home' in Sophia Croft's definition is any European port" (221). Mrs Croft tells Mrs Musgrove:

'While we were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared ... The only time I ever really suffered in body or mind, the only time that I ever fancied myself unwell, or had any ideas of danger, was the winter I passed by myself at Deal ... as long as we could be together, nothing ever ailed me' (66).

Although the Crofts clearly enjoy the comfort at Kellynch-hall, their place of residence does not seem to concern them at all. Mrs Croft repeatedly describes the comfort she finds on board ship, and Admiral Croft's conversation with Anne in Bath indicates that to him all houses serve the same purpose:

'We are always meeting with some old friend or other ... and then we get away from them all, and shut ourselves into our lodgings, and draw in our chairs, and are as snug as if we were at Kellynch, ay, or as we used to be even at North Yarmouth and Deal. We do not like our lodgings the worse, I can tell you, for putting us in mind of those we first had at North Yarmouth. The wind blows through one of the cupboards just in the same way' (160).

When they visit Bath Anne notes "They brought with them their country habit of being always together. He was ordered to walk, to keep off the gout, and Mrs. Croft seemed to go shares with him in every thing, and to walk for her life, to do him good" (158).

Anne takes great pleasure in observing the Crofts in Bath: "Knowing their feelings as she did, it was a most attractive picture of happiness to her. She always watched them as long as she could; delighted to fancy she understood what they might be talking of, as they walked along in happy independence" (158). As Walker has noted: "The dominant image is motion, the walking human pair" (222). Emily Auerbach persuasively argues that "Austen clearly links the Crofts' happy fifteen-year marriage to their freedom from restrictive roles for men and women" (242), a freedom which can be directly related to their homelessness.

Persuasion's concern with redefining "domestic virtues" in terms of marital relationships rather than the spatial concept of "home" is clear from its sensitive treatment of romance and its almost exclusive narrative focus on the complex

relationship between Anne and Captain Wentworth. In this respect, *Persuasion* recalls Austen's earlier fictions rather than *Emma*, which is focused on Emma's maturation and the didactic endorsement of a model of ideal English masculinity within a period of national crisis, or *Mansfield Park*, which is more concerned with the estate than with the relationship between Fanny and Edmund. Furthermore, despite its concerns with English social life and class mobility, *Persuasion* is much less concerned than either of its predecessors with examining masculinity under the auspices of a nationalist agenda. Instead it returns to Austen's earlier project of constructing desirable masculinity primarily in the context of romantic relationships. This change results from *Persuasion* being a post-war novel: it is as though having saved the nation, men such as Captain Wentworth can concern themselves once more with their own interests and desires and the pursuit of their own happiness. Indeed, Austen specifically articulates this sentiment on Captain Wentworth's return to England: "He was rich, and being turned on shore, fully intended to settle as soon as he could be properly tempted; actually looking round, ready to fall in love with all the speed which a clear head and quick taste could allow" (57-58).

Austen's return to her earlier focus on romantic love between men and women yields different results in 1816 when *Persuasion* was completed, than in 1811 when *Sense and Sensibility* was published. *Persuasion* is concerned with many of the issues Austen raised in *Sense and Sensibility*, such as youthful romance, the appropriate expression of feeling and questions of constancy and fidelity between men and women. Austen's investigation of these subjects in *Sense and Sensibility* has attracted a vast range of critical responses concerning her treatment of the relationship between sensibility, feeling and rational judgment. Putting aside the question of whether she rejects or endorses sensibility in either *Sense and Sensibility* or her other novels, Austen's treatment of the issue is primarily satirical. Marianne's disdain of second relationships, her elevation of feeling over reason and her raptures over landscape are exaggerations of sentimental discourse and presented as humorous to the reader. In *Persuasion*, by contrast, Austen treats these issues with a sincerity that is markedly different from the earlier novel. This difference between *Persuasion* and the earlier novels should not be overstated because, as I have argued, *Pride and Prejudice* celebrates the fulfilment of romantic love even at the risk of social rupture. Yet

Persuasion suggests that, like Anne Elliot, Austen herself “learned romance as she grew older” (29).

Austen writes of the initial meeting of Anne and Captain Wentworth that “half the sum of attraction, on either side, might have been enough, for he had nothing to do, and she had hardly any body to love” (26) and that once acquainted they were “rapidly and deeply in love” (26). Austen describes their brief engagement as a period of “exquisite felicity” (26), a hyperbolic yet sincere use of language unusual in her novels but which Marianne Dashwood would have approved. Anne later reflects on the change in their relationship, comparing their earlier happiness with their estrangement on Captain Wentworth’s return:

Once so much to each other! Now nothing! There *had* been a time, when of all the large party now filling the drawing-room at Uppercross, they would have found it most difficult to cease speaking to one another ... there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved (59-60).

Anne’s reflection on her earlier relationship with Captain Wentworth strongly resembles the relationship between Marianne and Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* – particularly in their public devotion to each other, the expressive and demonstrative nature of their feelings for each other, and the similarity of their tastes – but it is represented sincerely in a positive light rather than with the satire of the earlier novel.

While there is no suggestion that Anne’s response to the severance of her relationship resembled Marianne’s, in the long term Anne remains devoted to Wentworth to the exclusion of all others: Marianne recovers from her relationship, Anne does not. Whereas in *Sense and Sensibility* Austen satirises Marianne’s disdain for second attachments, in *Persuasion* she presents the fidelity of Anne’s love for Wentworth as entirely natural:

No one had ever come within the Kellynch circle, who could bear a comparison with Frederick Wentworth, as he stood in her memory. No second attachment, the only thoroughly natural, happy, and sufficient cure, at her time of life, had been possible to the nice tone of her mind, the fastidiousness of her taste, in the small limits of the society around them (28).

Although Anne does not regret the fact that she took the advice of Lady Russell and broke the engagement, she soon realises that the advice itself was flawed and that “under every disadvantage of disapprobation at home, and every anxiety attending his profession, all their probable fears, delays and disappointments, she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, than she had been in the sacrifice of it” (29). Anne’s view reflects the approach to romantic love represented by the Harvilles and the Crofts; that happiness lies in being together, regardless of financial insecurity or the uncertainty of the future. Eight years on, Anne still favours the pursuit of youthful romance despite an uncertain future, rather than the unhappiness and ultimately the insecurity which she has endured: “how eloquent could Anne Elliot have been, - how eloquent, at least, were her wishes on the side of early warm attachment, and a cheerful confidence in futurity, against that over-anxious caution which seems to insult exertion and distrust Providence!” (29).

In Bath, after she has begun to suspect Captain Wentworth’s continuing love for her, but before she has learnt of Mr Elliot’s plans for her family, Anne renounces the possibility of a relationship with Mr Elliot or any other man on the basis of her enduring love for Captain Wentworth:

How she might have felt, had there been no Captain Wentworth in the case, was not worth inquiry; for there was a Captain Wentworth: and be the conclusion of the present suspense good or bad, her affection would be his for ever. Their union, she believed, could not divide her more from other men, than their final separation (181).

Here Anne, still uncertain of Captain Wentworth’s feelings and what the result of their present meetings might be, explicitly rejects the possibility of a relationship with any other man. Her decision to devote herself to Captain Wentworth “for ever”, regardless of whether they marry or not, is effectively a preference for spinsterhood rather than renouncing her love. Having made this decision, Austen writes: “Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy, could never have passed along the streets of Bath, than Anne was sporting with from Camden-place to Westgate-buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way” (200). Austen’s sarcastic treatment of romantic love, particularly in relation to its capacity to consume the self, has clearly mellowed since *Sense and Sensibility*.

Austen's renewed and sincere interest in romantic love in *Persuasion* also produces different results in terms of the construction of desirable masculinity. Admiral Croft and Captain Harville are presented as constant in their love and dependent on their wives in a fundamental emotional sense. Admiral Croft's prediction that Captain Wentworth will change his mind regarding carrying women on ships when he is married reflects his own attitude toward Mrs Croft: "When he is married, if we have the good luck to love to another war, we shall see him do as you and I, and a great many others, have done. We shall see him very thankful to any body that will bring him his wife" (65). Captain Harville's emotional description of his separation from his family, which occurs during a conversation with Anne about the fidelity of men and women, is even more expressive:

'if I could but make you comprehend what a man suffers when he takes a last look at his wife and children, and watches the boat that he has sent them off in, as long as it is in sight, and then turns away and says, 'God knows when we meet again!' And then, if I could convey to you the glow of his soul when he does see them again ... I speak, you know, only of such men as have hearts!' pressing his own with emotion (220).

What is significant about Captain Harville and Admiral Croft is not only the depth of their feelings about their wives and their emotional dependence upon them, but also their willingness to publicly express these feelings in a manner which would be inconceivable for men such as Sir Walter, Mr Elliot or Charles Musgrove. The new masculinity reflected in the naval officers of *Persuasion* is clearly not compromised by an emotional dependence on women or by the public expression of romantic love.

For much of the novel, however, Captain Wentworth does not reflect the attitudes to women or to romantic love expressed by Admiral Croft and Captain Harville. On the contrary, Captain Wentworth's conversation indicates a confusion regarding romantic love, women and his responsibilities to them that is articulated through the language of Romantic nationalist, military and chivalric discourses. Many critics have interpreted his development throughout the novel in terms of his new understanding of the importance of persuadability and flexibility, his new appreciation of Anne, and to a lesser extent his realisation of his own weaknesses (Duckworth *Improvement of the Estate* 199, Morgan "Captain Wentworth" 92-95). However, it is the change that takes place in Captain Wentworth's understanding of desirable

femininity and his roles and responsibilities towards women that enables his marriage to Anne at the novel's conclusion. It is a lesson that men such as Captain Harville and Admiral Croft have already learned. Emily Auerbach partly attributes the success of the Croft marriage to the Admiral's "solid, secure sense of identity": "A true man can share the power and form a genuine partnership with a woman without feeling his manhood threatened" (244). This approach to masculine identity allows Mrs Croft, who does not fit the passive roles that, as a woman, she is allocated within Romantic discourses of nationalism and chivalry, a greater participatory role. Indeed, through her characterisation of these Mrs Croft, Mrs Harville and Anne, Austen challenges the definition of the female subject within Romantic nationalist discourse as discussed by Angela Keane. Keane argues that within "the Romantic national imaginary, the woman who wanders, who defines herself beyond the home and as a subject whose desires exceed or preclude maternity, divests herself of femininity and erases herself from the familia, heterosexual structure of the nation" (3). Through her characterisation of naval women in *Persuasion* – who wander far beyond the home and the nation, and whose desires include participation in a world beyond the domestic space – Austen clearly challenges this conception of the Romantic female subject. These women also represent the model of femininity endorsed by Mary Wollstonecraft:

the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband ... In fact, if we revert to history, we shall find that the women who have distinguished themselves have neither been the most beautiful nor the most gentle of the sex (*Vindication* 113).

Persuasion asks whether Anne, like Mrs Croft and Mrs Harville, will find a man who can accommodate such a publicly participatory role for women.

By the conclusion of *Persuasion*, Captain Wentworth forms a masculine identity that allows Anne the active social role she desires and enables a reform of the patriarchal family, though on different grounds to Mr Knightley in *Emma*. Austen does not repeat her representation of masculine identity in the modern sense of being determined by individual men according to the dictates of their own conscience and the necessity of being true to themselves. Rather, as I have argued, Captain Wentworth represents a model of ideal masculinity which is new to the nineteenth century and grounded in the navy, national service and the middle-class work ethic, all social rather

than individual factors. Austen suggests, however, that while the masculine ideal that Wentworth represents – associated with nationalism, the military and chivalry – clearly serves the interests of the English nation, it does not necessarily serve the interests of women because it is based on discourses of masculinity which are fundamentally dependent on ideologies of sexual difference and female passivity. Whereas Mr Knightley is capable of forming relationships with women which are uninfluenced by sexual difference, Captain Wentworth is by contrast representative of masculinities that were profoundly influenced by discourses of sexual difference and remains acutely aware of distinctions between men and women throughout the novel. His deep concern with defining ideal or appropriate femininity is signalled soon after his arrival in Somerset when he describes the kind of woman he is searching for as a wife. He tells his sister that his ideal wife will have ““a strong mind, with sweetness of manner”” (58), and he comments on his marital choice: ““If I am a fool, I shall be a fool indeed, for I have thought on the subject more than most men”” (58). While this remark would be interpreted as light-hearted by his sister, the reader’s knowledge of his earlier engagement to Anne signals that he is in fact speaking the truth: he has thought in some detail on the subject, and certainly much more than men such as Mr Knightley. However, unlike characters such as General Tilney and Sir Thomas Bertram, Captain Wentworth’s awareness of sexual difference does not result in familial or domestic ascendancy over women, but instead in a paternalistic attitude that strongly reflects discourses of chivalry and politeness. It is this approach to desirable femininity, and its implications for his own masculine identity, that Captain Wentworth must reform before he can marry Anne at the novel’s conclusion.

Austen explores this aspect of Captain Wentworth’s development through his association with a second cult of masculinity that dominated the 1810s concerning the Byronic hero. Lord Byron was an exact contemporary of Austen and developed the literary personality of the Byronic hero in such works as *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812), *The Giaour* (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), *Lara* (1814) and *Manfred* (1817). The Byronic hero stressed the autonomous and socially alienated conception of the self common to much Romantic poetry but was also, as Atara Stein has argued, characterised by “ambition”, “aspiration” and “aggressive individualism” (1). Frantz has noted that Byron’s “grim, unfathomable male characters – emotionally inaccessible and morally suspect – touched a nerve in the Romantic era” (“Jane Austen’s Heroes”

169-70). Indeed, Austen herself seems to have found this particular masculine image appealing, commenting to Cassandra of a pantomime she attended in London: “I must say that I have seen nobody on the stage who has been a more interesting Character than that compound of Cruelty & Lust” (15-16 September 1813, 221). Several critics have explored the relationship between Austen and Byron in *Persuasion*, particularly Anne’s references to Byron’s poems in her conversations with Captain Benwick³ and the Byronic nature of Captain Wentworth’s characterisation. Jocelyn Harris has noted that Austen used Byron, “the idol of the moment”, as the basis “for Wentworth’s handsome exterior and much more” (“Domestic Virtues” 196) and Sarah Wootton has argued that several of Captain Wentworth’s characteristics “mark him out as a contemporary of such Byronic heroes as Conrad and the Giaour” (33). On his initial meeting with Anne, Captain Wentworth is described as “a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy” (55), qualities which are also attributed to the Byronic hero. Anne observes that Captain Wentworth has developed a more rugged, swarthy appearance on his return: “the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages” (86). Captain Wentworth’s depth of emotion and erratic expression of his feelings are also Byronic qualities. His capacity for extreme jealousy, for example, is revealed when he suspects a relationship between Anne and Mr Elliot and he abruptly leaves the concert, rudely retorting to Anne ““there is nothing worth my staying for”” (180). His pride, anger and resentment is demonstrated by his refusal to contact Anne and seek to renew their engagement when he returns to England only two years after she severed it: ““It is not that I did not think of it, or desire it, as what could alone crown all my other success. But I was proud, too proud to ask again”” (231). These feelings similarly prevent him from pursuing Anne on his return at the beginning of the novel, and he deplores “the pride, the folly, the madness of resentment, which had kept him from trying to regain her when thrown in his way” (227). Austen uses focalisation to reveal Captain Wentworth’s dark, interior brooding over his loss of Anne:

He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity (57).

After their first meeting, Anne asks herself “how were his sentiments to be read?” (56), a question which continues for both Anne and the reader throughout much of *Persuasion* as Captain Wentworth, like the Byronic hero, is constructed as mysterious, dark and inscrutable.

Captain Wentworth’s itinerant lifestyle at sea clearly reflects the eternal wandering and homelessness of the Byronic hero. Both Captain Wentworth and the Byronic hero have “no place in the domesticity of society” (Lutz “Love as Homesickness” 25). Many of Byron’s heroes used travel as a means of escape. Wootton has noted that “with nearly all Byron’s protagonists, journeys overseas represent a bid for freedom ... and a form of self-exile” (33), and Captain Wentworth’s departure from Somerset after the severance of his engagement to Anne and his subsequent travels for eight years can similarly be interpreted as a form of self-exile. Austen writes that when Anne broke off the engagement she left Captain Wentworth “feeling himself ill-used by so forced a relinquishment. – He had left the country in consequence” (28). He later reflects on this period, stating: “‘It was a great object with me, at that time, to be at sea, - a very great object. I wanted to be doing something’” (90). This reflection indicates that Captain Wentworth viewed the navy and the war with France as an opportunity to escape from England and the emotional pain associated with his thwarted love for Anne.

Austen’s use of the Byronic hero in the characterisation of Captain Wentworth indicates that by the time she wrote *Persuasion* her confidence in writing men was sufficient to directly and immediately respond to specific trends in the public construction of masculinities, a significant development for a female novelist who had disclaimed her ability to write men in public and professional settings. Austen’s characterisation of Captain Wentworth in response to the Byronic hero is highly significant in the contribution it makes to her project of reforming the patriarchal family, particularly if *Persuasion* is read in conjunction with *The Corsair*. *The Corsair* was published on 1 February 1814 and immediately achieved immense popular success, Austen herself commenting to Cassandra on 5 March 1814: “I have read the Corsair, mended my petticoat, & have nothing else to do” (257). While critics have tended to view this remark as dismissive of Byron’s poem, William Deresiewicz has instead interpreted it as telling us “precisely nothing – except that Austen was interested enough

in Byron's work to have read this latest effort within five weeks of its publication" (6). Captain Wentworth specifically resembles Conrad, the hero of *The Corsair*, in two key respects: his physical appearance and facial features, and the constancy of his love for Anne. Byron writes of Conrad: "oft perforce his rising lip reveals / The haughtier thought it curbs, but scarce conceals" (I, 205-206), and later:

Love shows all changes – Hate, Ambition, Guile,

Betray no further than the bitter smile;

The lip's least curl, the lightest paleness thrown

Along the govern'd aspect, speak alone / Of deeper passions (I, 229-233).

Austen similarly focuses on Captain Wentworth's mouth throughout *Persuasion*, particularly, like Byron, to express contempt for social forms and practices and to hint at internal thoughts and feelings. For example, When Mrs Musgrove speaks of her deceased son, Anne notices:

a momentary expression in Captain Wentworth's face at this speech, a certain glance of his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth, which convinced Anne, that instead of sharing in Mrs Musgrove's kind wishes, as to her son, he had probably been at some pains to get rid of him (63).

This curl of Captain Wentworth's mouth, like Conrad's, reveals rather than conceals his true thoughts on Dick Musgrove. As Mary Waldron has commented: "the reader who knew *The Corsair* might have seen something which, for the time being, Anne does not ... Conrad, the Corsair, can also evince contempt in a similar way" (*Jane Austen* 147). Captain Wentworth's smile also reveals his contempt for Mary Musgrove's class snobbery during the walk to the Hayters: "She received no other answer, than an artificial, assenting smile, followed by a contemptuous glance, as he turned away, which Anne perfectly knew the meaning of" (80). Finally, after he receives the invitation from the Elliots Austen again uses Captain Wentworth's mouth to reveal his contempt, this time for her family: "Anne caught his eye, saw his cheeks glow, and his mouth form itself into a momentary expression of contempt" (212).⁴

The constancy of Captain Wentworth's love for Anne also particularly resembles Conrad, who Caroline Franklin has argued was the first of Byron's heroes to maintain a monogamous romantic relationship (64). Conrad's love for Medora is presented as his single remaining virtue and Byron particularly emphasises his constancy:

love – unchangeable – unchanged,
Felt but for one from whom he never ranged;
Though fairest captives daily met his eye,
He shunn'd, nor sought, but boldly passed them by (I, 287-289).

As Waldron has noted, Conrad is “an icon of male constancy to a single love” (*Jane Austen* 147). Like Conrad, Captain Wentworth remains faithful in his love for Anne despite their separation: “He had been most warmly attached to her, and had never seen a woman since whom he thought her equal” (57). His later remark regarding Captain Benwick’s changeable loyalties reflects his own constancy: “‘A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman! – He ought not – he does not’” (192).

It is in Conrad’s attitudes towards women that *The Corsair* is particularly important to Austen’s reformation of masculinity in *Persuasion*. Both texts specifically address romantic love in the context of warfare, homelessness and men’s roles and responsibilities towards women. The two male protagonists experience the same confusion regarding different models of assertive and passive femininity and their implications for their own masculine identities. *The Corsair* presents two prominent female characters: Medora, Conrad’s faithful lover, who Franklin has described as “an Oriental version of the ‘angel in the house’ ideal” (65) and who typifies the perceived relationship between feminine beauty, emotional passivity and physical weakness; and Gulnare, the queen of the Pacha’s harem who is rescued by Conrad, and who then murders the Pacha to save Conrad’s life and secure their escape. In *Persuasion*, by contrast, these models of passive and active femininity exist primarily in Captain Wentworth’s imagination and are not reflected in the female characters themselves: real women, Austen suggests, are a combination of the two. The significance of *The Corsair* for Austen’s reformation of masculine identity and the patriarchal family in *Persuasion* lies in the different approaches taken to these images of femininity by the male protagonists and how they accommodate them within their own gender identities. In *The Corsair* Conrad is incapable of forming a masculine identity that can accommodate an empowered femininity. In *Persuasion*, by contrast, Captain Wentworth undertakes an emotional development through which he forges a masculine status that is not reliant on passive femininity, enabling him to enter an equal marriage with Anne. *Persuasion* can therefore be interpreted as revising the conclusion of *The*

Corsair, demonstrating that the appeal of the Byronic hero and the image of desirable masculinity he symbolises can be compatible with companionate marriage and an assertive, empowered femininity.

In *The Corsair*, Byron's characterisation of Medora and initially of Gulnare presents women as passive, weak and in need of male protection, reflecting the position women occupied in contemporary discourses of nationalism and chivalry. Unlike Mrs Croft, Medora remains behind while Conrad is at war, and Conrad later uses men's perceived responsibility to protect women to justify the rescue of Gulnare and the other women of the Pacha's harem:

'Oh! burst the Haram – wrong not on your lives
One female form – remember – *we* have wives.
On them such outrage Vengeance will repay;
Man is our foe, and such 'tis ours to slay' (II, 202-05).

As Franklin has argued, in *The Corsair* the "helplessness of women ... is perceived as necessitating male aggression on their behalf" (67). Byron's description presents Conrad and his men as the chivalrous rescuers of helpless women in need of male protection:

They search – they find – they save: with lusty arms
Each bears a prize of unregarded charms;
Calm their loud fears; sustain their sinking frames
With all the care defenceless beauty claims (II, 215-18).

Using chivalric discourse that positions women not only as in need of male protection but also as objects of male devotion, Gulnare contrasts the manner in which she has been treated by the Pacha and Conrad:

The Pacha woo'd as if he deem'd the slave
Must seem delighted with the heart he gave;
The Corsair vow'd protection, soothed affright,
As if his homage were a woman's right (II, 265-68).

Throughout *Persuasion* Captain Wentworth expresses a similar view of women as being in need of male protection. This view is articulated through the language of chivalry, nationalism and to a lesser extent politeness, discourses of masculinity that relied strongly on the ideology of sexual difference. In spite of his own sister's

extensive travels with Admiral Croft, Captain Wentworth protests against carrying women on his ships, signifying his preference for their exclusion from combat. When Admiral Croft abuses him “for his want of gallantry”, Wentworth defends himself on the grounds that it is impossible “‘with all one’s efforts, and all one’s sacrifices, to make the accommodations on board, such as women ought to have. There can be no want of gallantry, Admiral, in rating the claims of women to every personal comfort *high* – and this is what I do” (64). While Captain Wentworth is happy to gallantly make sacrifices for women, he views women as unequal to the demands of life at sea and in need of domestic comfort and protection that a ship cannot offer, the position they occupied within Romantic nationalist ideology. Mrs Croft’s criticism also suggests that his view of women, which demonstrates respect for them by confining them to settled domesticity, has also been influenced by the gender configuration of male refinement. She attacks his “‘idle refinement” (64) and his “‘superfine, extraordinary sort of gallantry” (65), phrases which reflect the discourse of eighteenth-century politeness that, like chivalry, placed women in a revered but disempowered position. When Mrs Croft reassures Captain Wentworth that Mrs Harville and her children “‘were all perfectly comfortable” (65) when he transported them his response – “‘I might not like them the better for that, perhaps. Such a number of women and children have no *right* to be comfortable on board” (65) – reflects a view that appropriate femininity is fussy, fragile and domestic. Mrs Croft protests: “‘I hate to hear you talking so, like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth waters all our days” (65). Austen’s use of the phrase “rational creatures” to describe real women is interesting: Wollstonecraft used the same phrase on no less than eight occasions throughout *Vindication* to argue her rationale for women’s liberation. Mrs Croft, Mrs Harville and ultimately Anne all fit this model of femininity: they are “rational creatures” rather than “fine ladies” and Captain Wentworth must transform his views on women to appreciate this. Paradoxically, Captain Wentworth’s view of women as in need of male protection and demanding a high level of personal comfort contradicts other opinions he expresses regarding desirable femininity. He states that he values “‘a strong mind” in women, he “honours” Louisa Musgrove for her willingness to stay with a man she loved despite physical danger and he lectures her on the importance of firmness and decisiveness of character, all qualities which are fundamentally incompatible with the model of femininity which his earlier statements endorsed. As Johnson has noted, “he is in fact

caught within highly charged tensions about women's manners, and his description of the ideal woman is oxymoronic, because however much he may desire 'strength' in women, he considers it essentially inconsistent with the sweetness he also exacts" (*Jane Austen* 150). Whereas in *The Corsair* these extreme models of passive and empowered femininity are represented in the characters of Medora and Gulnare, in *Persuasion* they exist in Captain Wentworth's own mind, focusing the resolution of this tension on his personal development throughout the novel.

In both *The Corsair* and *Persuasion*, the male protagonists are confronted by women who do not conform to the models of domestic femininity they idealise. In *The Corsair*, Gulnare takes on the role of the warrior, kills the Pacha and marshals the troops to orchestrate Conrad's rescue. Bound in chains, helpless and unwilling to kill the Pacha himself, Conrad is forced into a passive role as he is liberated and rescued by Gulnare. Like Mrs Croft and Mrs Harville in *Persuasion*, Gulnare is Conrad's "equal and helpmeet" and "indispensable to his mission" (Franklin 84). Captain Wentworth is also confronted by assertive and determined femininity in the face of his own comparative weakness. When Louisa falls from the Cobb at Lyme, Captain Wentworth "knelt with her in his arms, looking on her with a face as pallid as her own, in an agony of silence" and cries: "'Is there no one to help me?' ... in a tone of despair, and as if all his own strength were gone" (102). Anne, by contrast, takes charge of the situation: she takes the fainted Henrietta from Captain Benwick, issues instructions to him and Captain Wentworth, and sends for the surgeon. In contrast to the men present, Anne responds "with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied" and Captain Wentworth and Charles Musgrove both "look to her for directions" (103). This is not the first occasion in which Anne has demonstrated a collected and useful response in a crisis. When Mary's son has a fall:

Anne had every thing to do at once – the apothecary to send for – the father to have pursued and informed – the mother to support and keep from hysterics – the servants to control – the youngest child to banish, and the poor suffering one to attend and soothe; – besides sending, as soon as she recollected it, proper notice to the other house, which brought her an accession rather of frightened, enquiring companions, than of very useful assistants (50-51).

Anne takes the chief role in caring for the boy throughout his recovery and later reflects: "Her usefulness to little Charles would always give some sweetness to the memory of

her two months visit there, but he was gaining strength apace, and she had nothing else to stay for” (87-88). Using naval terminology, Austen writes that Anne anticipates “her removal of Uppercross, where she felt she had been stationed quite long enough” (87). As Favret has noted: “One could also say, in noting her sense of service and care, that there is a touch of the officer in Anne Elliott” (“Everyday War” 625). Anne also demonstrates assertiveness in her determination to act on her own principles, defying Lady Russell’s opinion of Mr Elliot and his marriage proposal, and renewing her friendship with Mrs Smith despite her father’s fervent opposition.

Where *The Corsair* and *Persuasion* diverge is in the responses of the male protagonists to the assertive and determined women who confront them. Despite her rescue of Conrad and their escape, Conrad finds Gulnare’s murder of the Pacha and her assertive role totally incompatible with his views regarding appropriate or desirable femininity:

That spot of blood, that light but guilty streak,
Had banish’d all the beauty from her cheek!
Blood he had view’d – could view unmoved – but then
It flow’d in combat, or was shed by men! (III, 426-29).

As Franklin has noted: “this removes at a stroke her sexual attraction for the hero” (84). Conrad’s confusion regarding Gulnare’s femininity is evident in Byron’s description of her as “at once above – beneath her sex, / Whom blood appall’d not” (III, 514-15). It is only when Gulnare assumes a model of passive and docile femininity reminiscent of Medora that Conrad can once again regard her as a woman:

To Conrad turns her faint imploring eye,
She drops her veil, and stands in silence by;
Her arms are meekly folded on that breast,
Which – Conrad safe – to fate resign’d the rest.
Though worse than frenzy could that bosom fill,
Extreme in love or hate, in good or ill,
The worst of crimes had left her woman still! (III, 516-22).

Once Gulnare has become “changed and humbled: – faint and meek” (III, 533) Conrad again recognises her as a woman and can kiss her in thanks for his rescue. At this point she vanishes from the narrative, and Conrad returns to the pirates’ island to discover that Medora has died of grief at his capture. Indeed, it could be argued that Conrad’s

preference for docile, passive and submissive femininity ultimately denies him redemption through romantic love, either with Medora or with Gulnare. His masculinity is ultimately reliant on the passive submission of women, resulting in the destruction of his single remaining virtue – love – and ultimately his exile.

Although Conrad is unable to appreciate or accommodate the model of femininity represented in Gulnare, in *Persuasion* Captain Wentworth is able to develop a masculine identity that *can* accommodate the model of strong and assertive femininity embodied in Anne. After witnessing Louisa's fall and Anne's collected response, Captain Wentworth is forced to confront his own weakness, his confused attitudes and behaviour towards women and his love for Anne. Unlike Conrad, Captain Wentworth's constancy provides him with a path of redemption rather than destruction. Louisa's accident prompts him to rethink his attitudes towards Anne: he "learnt to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind ... he had seen everything to exalt in his estimation the woman he had lost" (227) and resolves to pursue Anne. His acknowledgment of his continuing love for Anne itself symbolises the resolution of his internal conflicts regarding desirable femininity and its implications for his own masculine identity. In the same way that Mr Knightley must enable his marriage to Emma, Captain Wentworth must enable his marriage to Anne; but for Captain Wentworth, this demands a psychological break from the ideologies of sexual difference embedded in discourses of nationalism and chivalry. His letter of proposal to Anne signifies that he has formed an emotionally expressive masculine identity that is not reliant on the passivity of women, of the kind embodied in Admiral Croft and Captain Harville:

'You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope ... Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, than his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant ... You do as justice indeed. You do believe that there is true attachment and constancy among men. Believe it to be most fervent, most undeviating in 'F.W.'" (222-23).

Austen's dramatisation and endorsement of Captain Wentworth's development of a new masculine identity throughout *Persuasion* has implications beyond the scope

of her novel. By presenting love and companionate marriage as achievable, *Persuasion* revises romantic relationships as they are represented through the Byronic hero.

Deborah Lutz has argued that the only possibility for the Byronic hero's redemption lies in "finding a home in the beloved": "Love might give the terrible internalised infinite of his/her desire a home" ("Love as Homesickness" 26). She emphasises the mobility of love as a source of the home in Byron's work, a motif which parallels Austen's configuration of love and the home in *Persuasion*: "Love creates a dwelling place in space and time, filling it up so that it becomes reachable, moveable" ("Love as Homesickness" 26). Lutz writes: "in some sense, the Byronic philosophy sees love as the ultimate, and only, redemption and home for one in this life" ("Love as Homesickness" 27). Whereas Lutz notes that this form of redemption is denied the Byronic hero, Austen allows Captain Wentworth to achieve it in *Persuasion*. Like the other naval couples of the novel, Anne and Captain Wentworth have a home in each other. At the novel's conclusion, Anne does not gain a permanent space to which she can attach the concept of "home", but she instead gains the "domestic virtues" which the novel celebrates in the form of a loving relationship with Captain Wentworth. Anne's marriage to Captain Wentworth provides the emotional life that she needs: with him, she does not also require the stability and security that a permanent home would provide. The sufficiency of her relationship with Captain Wentworth to meet her emotional needs, even at the exclusion of all else, is emphasised during the Elliots' evening party after her engagement. Anne enjoys "some moments of communication continually occurring, and always the hope of more, and always the knowledge of his being there!" (230). The "knowledge" that Captain Wentworth will "be there" is all that Anne ultimately requires. By presenting companionate marriage as achievable for Captain Wentworth – a sailor who also incorporates elements of Byronic masculinity – and as capable of moving beyond the domestic space itself, Austen effectively writes women into the adventure narrative. The novel's final sentence confirms Anne's integration into Captain Wentworth's itinerant lifestyle: "She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance" (236).

As in *Emma*, in *Persuasion* the realisation of female selfhood is enabled by men choosing a masculine identity that is not dependent on the passive submission of

women. Although some critics including Jocelyn Harris have argued that *Persuasion* effects a reversal of gender identities by feminising Captains Harville, Benwick and Wentworth (“Domestic Virtues” 202), it is important to recognise that these men are indisputably masculine; in fact, their national service through their work for the navy forms a new index of masculine worth and value. Allowing women a greater participatory role does not, therefore, result in the compromise of masculine identity or the erosion of gender. These men embody a model of masculine gender that is indisputably socially recognised as male, but which does not rely on the passive submission of women. Like Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Austen suggests that men can choose how they behave towards women, demonstrates that such a choice does not of itself need to compromise masculine status and endorses the choices made by these men to liberate women from their position of passive protection and allow them greater social roles. By characterising Captain Wentworth through the cults of Nelson and Byronic masculinity, *Persuasion* strongly argues that this choice does not result in a negation of masculine status. This is particularly significant as the model of masculinity Captain Wentworth reflects, and which has endured throughout literary history, is demonstrated in *Persuasion* as being capable of accommodating female involvement: the virility and sexual appeal of the Byronic hero is not mutually exclusive with functional relationships with women.

In *Persuasion* Austen presents “men of war” as “what men ought to be”: a new model of masculinity that can take England forward into the nineteenth century. They create a new index of masculine worth and value through their national service and their work ethic, which is available to a wider range of men because it is not dependent on the ownership and control of land. Furthermore, they are also demonstrated as being capable of “accommodating” a more socially and politically participatory role for women, in part because they locate domestic virtue in human relationships rather than settled domesticity, and in part because they make choices about their attitudes to masculinity which are not dependent on the passive subordination of women. Both *Persuasion* and *Emma* endorse men who are indisputably masculine, who fulfil the needs of the English nation, but whose choices about their masculine status enable a greater public role for women.

¹ See for example Deresiewicz (139-43) and Sodeman (798-93).

² The timing of the novel's composition and setting is discussed by Deresiewicz 146, Knox-Shaw 220, Le Faye 10 and Southam *Jane Austen and the Navy* 264.

³ See for example Deresiewicz (126-34), Harris ("Domestic Virtues" 196) and Wootton (30).

⁴ Peter Knox-Shaw (233) has also noted this resemblance between Captain Wentworth and Conrad. He draws a parallel between Gulnare and Louisa Musgrove, but does not comment on the constructions of masculinity in *The Corsair* and *Persuasion*.

CONCLUSION

“Ladies are the best judges”

During their walk through the streets of Bath in the second volume of *Persuasion*, Admiral Croft remarks to Anne Elliot that “‘ladies are the best judges’” of the manners and conversation of men (161). His remark concerns Anne’s view of gentleness as being compatible with other qualities, such as courage and spirit, required of naval officers. However, Admiral Croft’s affirmation of female judgment with regard to the personal qualities of men also speaks to Austen’s broader project of constructing masculinities as a female novelist, both in the context of *Persuasion* and throughout her writing career. In her conversation with Captain Harville towards the conclusion of *Persuasion*, Anne rejects representations of women in literature: “‘Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything’” (220). This comment demonstrates Austen’s awareness of the gender politics of authorship, specifically with regard to the construction of characters of the opposite sex. Her novels demonstrate that now that the pen is in her hands, she is determined to use it to create male characters who can simultaneously meet the desires of women and serve the demands of the English nation. Admiral Croft’s statement that “‘ladies are the best judges’” is an affirmation and endorsement of Austen’s literary project of reforming masculinity.

Throughout her novels, Jane Austen’s treatment of the question of “what men ought to be” develops with her changing political, social, cultural and feminist concerns. She begins her writing career with a humorous disruption of the conventionally gendered courtship hierarchy in *Northanger Abbey*, which works to establish female desire as an important public voice in the development of socially-acceptable models of masculinity and to legitimise desirable masculinity as an appropriate subject for the courtship novel. Her first novel also introduces a range of attributes – including attitudes towards women, domesticity, independence and work – which remain core elements of desirable masculinity throughout her novels. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen’s focus shifts to exploding the myths about masculinity – in its literary and social forms – which her reading public has inherited from the eighteenth-century courtship novel. Real men, Austen suggests, are more complex and far more

interesting that literary stereotypes permit. *Sense and Sensibility* also highlights the destructive and debilitating effects that the forced imposition of socially-approved male identities on individual men can cause both the men themselves and the women around them. In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen combines the central concerns of her previous novels – the disruption of the politics of desire within courtship, and the pursuit of individual happiness – to forge a male protagonist who, in the twenty-first century, continues to be considered an icon of desirable masculinity. Austen’s development of Mr Darcy throughout *Pride and Prejudice* testifies to the importance of men – even exemplars of gentry masculinity – changing to meet the needs and desires of women.

Following *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen’s focus shifts to a greater concern with the English nation in the political and military climate of the 1810s. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen illustrates the damaging consequences of the absence of the responsible exercise of male power at local, national and international levels. Through Fanny Price, she also demonstrates the parallel between the desires of women and the demands of the nation. This parallel continues in *Emma* and *Persuasion*, in which Austen not only dramatises men’s capacity to fulfil both the desires of women and the demands of the nation, but also endorses the reform of the patriarchal family through a new model of masculinity. *Emma* endorses a model of masculinity that is premised on the modern conception of individual choice and personal authenticity, enabling men to form relationships with women that are not dependent on socially-approved ideologies of sexual difference. *Persuasion* actually dramatises the process through which a man can reject the essentialism of sexual difference, particularly as it is articulated in discourses of politeness, nationalism and chivalry, and choose an adult male identity which is not dependent on the passivity or submission of women.

For Austen, “what men ought to be” is ultimately determined by their capacity to allow women a greater publicly participatory male, regardless of how they achieve this. Her novels dramatise a means by which women can achieve a level of social and political participation without compromising the gender identities of men. Such a reform of patriarchy relies on a willingness by men to alter their understanding of masculinity so that it is not reliant on women occupying a position of passive subordination. Austen demonstrates that men can still be men even when they enter equal relationships with women and allow or even encourage their greater political and

social participation. In this way, Austen's novels develop a prescription for the reform of patriarchy, and specifically the family and household structure, which was capable of social implementation throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and which, remains relevant in contemporary society.

My consideration of Jane Austen's constructions of masculinity has the capacity to contribute to new directions in scholarship on women's writing. By considering the male characters of women's novels as representative of their political, social and feminist projects, my thesis lays the groundwork for a similar approach to be used in the interpretation of both historical and contemporary women's writing. This may in time develop into a broader theoretical approach to women's writing. Additionally, Austen's engagement with public constructions of masculinity throughout the Romantic period may well be indicative of a broader concern among her female contemporaries with using the novel to critique masculinities in a public and politicised fashion. Exploring relationships in the construction of masculinities between Austen's novels and other female literary genres of the early nineteenth century – such as the national tale, the Evangelical novel and the historical romance – may yield valuable results in terms of a broader feminist engagement with public discourse on masculinity and on politics more generally. The masculinities publicly endorsed by female novelists and other writers throughout the Romantic period are worthy of further consideration. They can inform our understanding of the history of masculinities throughout the period and provide readers and scholars with valuable insights into these women's political and feminist concerns.

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