

The Enduring Austen Heroine:
Self-Awareness and Moral Maturity in Jane Austen's *Emma* and in Modern Austen Fan-Fiction

A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the School of Communication
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

By
Brittany A. Meng
15 November 2010

Liberty University
School of Communication
Master of Arts in English

Dr. Brenda Ayres, Thesis Chair

Date

Dr. Homer Blass, First Reader

Date

Dr. Mark Schmidt, Second Reader

Date

ABSTRACT

Jane Austen's novels continue to be popular in the twenty-first century because her heroines are both delightful and instructive; they can be viewed as role models of personal growth due to their honest self-examination and commitment to high moral standards. Chapter one establishes the patterns of personal growth that uniquely characterizes Austen's heroines in each of her six novels. Chapter two tests these conclusions by carefully examining the character of Emma Woodhouse. Though Emma is a unique heroine due to her wealth and social privileges, she follows the principles of personal growth possessed by Austen's other heroines. Chapter three further analyzes these conclusions by examining how Jane Fairfax can also be viewed as an Austen heroine because she too cultivates self-awareness and corrects her inner failings. In fact, several contemporary writers have recognized the heroic qualities in Jane Fairfax and have rewritten *Emma* by placing Jane as the heroine; three such adaptations are analyzed in chapter three. To further evaluate the characterization of the Austen heroine as realized by modern authors, chapter four examines three versions of *Emma* set in modern times to see if contemporary renditions of Austen's novels are consistent with the model of growth that Austen promotes. Though these contemporary adaptations are not always faithful to the underlying moral themes found in the original Austen novels, the mere existence of these adaptations affirms the influence that Austen has on the minds, hearts, imaginations, and moral education of twenty-first century writers and readers.

COPYRIGHT
BRITTANY A. MENG
15 NOVEMBER 2010

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Aaron, who challenged me to pursue my master's degree in the first place. I also dedicate this thesis to my sons, Micah and Benjamin. I hope and pray that as you grow up, you will find literary heroes (and heroines!) that will delight you and also challenge you to grow and mature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Brenda Ayres

Dr. Homer Blass

Dr. Mark Schmidt

Thank you all for sharing your knowledge, insight, support, and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	7
Chapter One	
Jane Austen's Heroines and Anti-heroines: Character and Construct in <i>Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, Northanger Abbey,</i> <i>Persuasion, Mansfield Park and Emma</i>	13
Chapter Two	
Emma: Heroine or Anti-heroine?.....	45
Chapter Three	
Jane Fairfax: An Austen Heroine	66
Chapter Four	
The Modern Austen Heroine	82
Conclusion	98
Works Cited	100

Introduction

Few writers have enjoyed the honor, prestige, and fame that Jane Austen has earned in the past two hundred years; and amazingly, since the turn of the century, her popularity has grown even more. Readers claim Austen's heroines as their personal friends and return to her novels again and again to immerse themselves in the lives of their favorite heroines. These heroines continue to captivate because Austen's literary themes still resonate with what makes life meaningful today: family, friendship, romance, and personal growth. Although countless authors have explored these themes, Austen's works have a timeless freshness about them because her heroines are so recognizably human. Each heroine experiences triumphs and failures yet, most importantly, learns to see herself for who she really is. Austen weaves a moral core through each heroine that guides her on her journey of personal growth. While each novel characteristically ends with the marriage of the heroine, it is only when the Austen protagonist has gained self-knowledge and maturity that she is ready to become a wife. Chapter One, "Jane Austen's Heroines and Anti-heroines: Character and Construct in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*" defines in detail what it means to be an Austen heroine and recounts the journeys of Elizabeth, Elinor, Marianne, Catherine, Anne, and Fanny as they mature beyond their personal faults in order to become truly mature women.

Chapter Two, "Emma: Heroine or Anti-heroine?" explores the character and growth of Austen's most unique and most flawed heroine: Emma Woodhouse. In *Emma*, Austen fashions a heroine who is strikingly different from her other leading ladies. Emma is set apart from the other heroine by Austen's very first description: she is "handsome, clever, and *rich*," (7; emphasis added). Her wealth puts her into a distinctive social position—unlike any other Austen

heroine, Emma does not need to concentrate her thoughts and energy on catching a husband; instead she fancies herself the village matchmaker and mentor to the “socially impaired.” Because the novel is written from Emma’s perspective, the reader knows that she (usually) has good intentions for her actions, but, if one compares Emma’s social position and outward actions to characters in Austen’s other books, Emma’s character is often more comparable to the social “enemies” in Austen’s novels, such as the rich, opinionated, and conniving Mary Crawford of *Mansfield Park*. In fact, many critics and readers, struggling to fit Emma into the mold of the “Austen heroine,” have turned to analyzing Jane Fairfax as model of Austen heroine in *Emma*.

In Chapter Three, “Jane Fairfax: An Austen Heroine,” I examine how Jane Fairfax’s character and process of personal growth match seamlessly with Austen’s other protagonists. In so many ways she exhibits the qualities of Austen’s heroines: upright yet flawed character, self-awareness, and personal growth. Yet Austen only teases readers with a brief glimpse into her story. In recent years, Janeites, as devoted fans of Austen’s fiction are called, have created a new genre of literature: the Austen sequel or the rewritten novel. The mysteries surrounding Jane Fairfax have challenged these authors to, as literary theorist Wolfgang Iser posits, fill in “the gaps” in a work of fiction (58). Janeite authors Naomi Royde Smith (*Jane Fairfax: A New Novel* [1940]), Joan Aiken (*Jane Fairfax: Jane Austen’s Emma, Through Another’s Eyes* [1990]), and Joan Ellen Delman (*Lovers’ Perjuries* [2007]) have fleshed out Jane Fairfax’s tale, ultimately writing the “submerged novel” in *Emma* (Perry 195). These contemporary authors have written Jane Fairfax in their own unique way: Some authors form her with the moral sensitivity and self-awareness that characterizes Austen’s original heroines while other authors create Jane with the independent demeanor of a modern woman. Although *Emma* is presumably about its namesake,

a detailed look at Jane's character and actions in Austen's original *Emma* and in several *Emma* adaptations reveals that Jane Fairfax can stand up amongst the heroines of Austen's world.

The last chapter, "The Modern Austen Heroine," delves into another genre of Jane Austen fan-fiction: the Austen novel set in modern times. Authors Juliet Archer (*The Importance of Being Emma* [2008]) and Debra White Smith (*Amanda* [2006]) have so identified with *Emma* that they have transformed her into a contemporary woman, complete with sassy independence and an MBA, yet still with all the meddling, matchmaking ways of the original Emma Woodhouse. While these two novelists capture Emma's flawed character by including updated versions of her social faux pas and foibles in friendship and love, these modern protagonists are only a pale version of the original Emma. Archer's and Smith's adaptations are centered on the developing love story between Emma and Mr. Knightley, unlike in *Emma* where romance is an afterthought. However, one contemporary version of *Emma*, the film *Clueless* (1995), makes the self-awareness and personal development of the heroine the central theme of the plot. Whether these modern version of *Emma* follow Austen's form of heroine or not, every adaptation speaks highly of the enduring ability of Austen's works to relate to modern audiences.

Not only do Jane Austen's novels inspire the imaginations of fiction writers, but her works continue to instigate new discussion in the academic community as well. In the past ten years alone, almost two thousand articles about Austen and her works have been published and stored in academic databases such as JSTOR and the MLA International Bibliography. In addition, since 2000, nearly two hundred scholars have devoted their theses and dissertations in partial or complete study of Austen and her works. Scholars have also formed online literary societies such as jansa.org (Jane Austen Society of North America) to give academic Austen lovers an opportunity for literary discussion and publication.

However, in all of these forums, very little work has been done to analyze modern adaptations of Austen's novels. And these adaptations are extensive and popular, especially among lay readers. One website, www.austen.com, houses over 2500 fictional short stories inspired by Austen novels; the message boards of this website are updated daily with new stories or discussions. Even more popular than www.austen.com is the online fan club "The Republic of Pemberly" (www.pemberly.org), named, of course, for Mr. Darcy's beloved estate, Pemberly. Janeites flock to this site to discuss Austen novels, characters, film adaptations, or the newest sequel that has just been published. The editors of "The Republic of Pemberly" include a compilation of published Austen sequels or adapted works: the current count is one hundred and forty-two novels. A quick search on www.amazon.com reveals a similar number of publications when the phrase "Jane Austen Sequels" is typed into the search engine. Interestingly, about ninety percent of these adaptations listed on www.amazon.com have been published in the last ten years alone.

Despite this plethora of adaptations that have been published, only one substantive academic work has been written in recent years analyzing this new genre: graduate student, Ursula Marie Gross, wrote her thesis on Janeites and Austen sequels, titling her work, "What Happens Next: Jane Austen Fans and Their Sequels to *Pride and Prejudice*" (2008). Gross' thesis is the first one of its kind to address Austen fan fiction as part of an academic discussion. My thesis continues this conversation, though in a different vein. I chose *Emma* (after *Pride and Prejudice*, this novel has the second highest number of published adaptations) for my thesis in order to explore the influence that Austen's model of heroine—a moral, growing person—has had on modern retellings of Austen's novels.

Through all of these chapters, I propose that Austen intended *Emma*—and all her novels—for much more than a delightful read. Even as her works delight, they also instruct. As readers identify with the heroine, they too travel the path of emotional and moral growth. While Austen’s novels are not explicably Christian, her characters live by and seek to change into people guided by Christian standards of truth, charity, and self-control. Yet in identifying these themes in Austen’s fiction, and namely in *Emma*, it is difficult to know how to accept both postmodern ideals of moral ambiguity and standards of Christian ethics. Clearly, social, relational, and moral principles have changed drastically since Austen’s time. Yet readers, even more so in the past decade, are drawn to her novels, and Janeites are eager to claim Austen as their personal muse in writing their adaptations. In her book, *Dear Jane Austen: A Heroine’s Guide to Life and Love*, Patrice Hannon argues that Austen’s novels, heroines, and standards are still as relevant to today as when Austen first wrote them:

Despite the enormous changes in our external conditions since *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* were written, human nature is as it was then, and no writer has captured it better. Austen’s portrayal of character is as accurate, amusing, and enlightening now as when the world was first bewitched and delighted by Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse. (xiv)

It is the intrinsic humanity of these heroines, and especially Emma herself, that is so familiar, comforting, endearing, and inspiring. Readers are able to see themselves in these heroines, and because even Austen’s heroines are not perfect, readers also see their personal imperfections mirrored in the lives of these literary characters. Hannon writes, “If they were not so true to life they would not serve as examples for the young women reading [Austen’s novels today]” (13-

14). It is interesting that in a society that celebrates the mantra that all people should love themselves just the way they are, readers still admire novels that clearly promote the ideology that personal growth is needed in order to achieve love or happiness. Perhaps, despite a postmodern amoral value system, contemporary readers are still inherently drawn to plots and characters that affirm the truth that personal growth toward maturity will reap rewards. In Austen's books, the growth of the heroine is directly related to her happy ending: marriage to a good and loving man. Austen's novels appeal to readers today—despite differing moral systems—because at the core of each heroine, and at the core of all humans, is the desire to recognize truth within ourselves and in the world. While modern ideologies promote the idea that happiness comes through personal acceptance, Austen subtly weaves the timeless axiom throughout *Emma* (and all her novels) that true happiness is only achieved through self-awareness and improvement. It is only then, when personal reformation has taken place, that mature and lasting romantic relationships can be formed. Perhaps it is this timeless truth, and the satisfying conclusions of all of Austen's works, that not only draws readers to her novels time and time again, but also challenges readers toward personal maturity and authentic relationships. And in embracing the moral Austen heroine as a friend and mentor, perhaps the modern reader has the hope not only to change her romantic future, but her heart and soul as well.

Chapter One: Jane Austen's Heroines and Anti-heroines

Character and Construct in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*,
Persuasion, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*

Even though Jane Austen lived and wrote in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, her novels enjoy immense popularity today. The plots of Austen's works are timeless, and her heroines continue to delight and inspire readers in the twenty-first century. Byron's famous line in *Don Juan*—"I want a hero!" (1.1)—can be modified to express the same desire and attachment modern readers feel toward Austen's heroines: "I want a *heroine*!" Readers form literary "friendships" with Austen's heroines, admiring these literary character both for their attractive personalities and page-turning stories, yet also for their strong moral cores. Even in a post-modern age of moral relativity, scholars, students, and lay readers still to seek out Austen's heroines for both entertainment and moral guidance.

While Austen's novels are all romances, every leading lady plays a unique role in her story. Each heroine has a distinctive personality, domestic setting, personal relationships, and imagination. Reginald Brimley Johnson, author of the introduction for the 1922 edition of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), finds commonalities between Austen's leading ladies by describing them as women with "strong affections, constancy, a love of nature and books, good looks, good temper, and good breeding" (xviii). However, this description could apply to many characters in Austen's novels such as Louisa Musgrove of *Persuasion* (1818) or Mary Crawford of *Mansfield Park* (1814). These two women vie for the attention and affection of the hero in their respective novels, and readers briefly wonder if these women will succeed in snatching the hero away from the "real" heroine of the novel. Characters like Louisa Musgrove and Mary Crawford cannot win the hero however because, even though they possess seemingly "good" outward qualities, they

(and other “anti-heroine” models in each novel) lack the inward moral character essential to the true Austen heroine. Johnson’s description of the Austen heroine leaves out two essential characteristics that distinguish each heroine from all other characters. First, Austen’s heroines are delightfully flawed: they are neither angelically perfect nor morally debased (Hannon 13). Gene Koppel points out this unique feature of every Austen heroine in *The Religious Dimension of Jane Austen’s Novels*: “Austen clearly creates her characters (including her heroines) highly imperfect—their strengths and weaknesses hopelessly mingled” (25). The second characteristic that is essential to the true heroine is a moral core of virtue and conscience that leads the heroine throughout her story, guiding her toward personal correction and relational growth. Each heroine possesses the “capacity for self-examination and self-correction,” writes Joan Ellen Delman, author of an Austen sequel, in a recent email interview. It is this ability to view one’s faults, correct one’s behavior and improve one’s character that not only sets each heroine apart from the other characters in Austen’s novels, but also makes the Austen heroine worth admiring and even emulating by scholars and lay readers alike.

In order to fully recognize and appreciate the genius of the Austen heroine, one must take a close look at both the heroines and anti-heroines in each novel. While none of the heroines are perfect examples of moral or social behavior, each of these characters is a literary example of how a person of strong moral character and convictions should behave and mature. In contrast, the anti-heroines ultimately give readers an example of how one should *not* think or behave. I use the term “anti-heroine” to describe characters that act as a foil for the central protagonist, meaning the anti-heroine illuminates either the negative or positive qualities of the heroine to encourage the reader to identify with the heroine. In the majority of Austen’s novels, the anti-heroine is in direct competition with the heroine for the heart of the hero, but this does not

necessarily make the anti-heroine a morally reprehensible or a “bad” person. The anti-heroine often has very admirable characteristics. However, in all of Austen’s novels, save one (Jane Fairfax in *Emma*), the anti-heroine in the story lacks the essential moral core that characterizes the true heroine. By comparing and contrasting the character and actions of the heroines with anti-heroines in each novel, one is better able to understand and admire the imperfect yet morally strong character of Austen’s leading ladies and journey along with the heroine as she grows personally and relationally with others.

Pride and Prejudice

Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is perhaps Jane Austen’s most memorable and beloved heroine—in fact, Elizabeth was Austen’s favorite created character (Austen-Leigh 87). Readers not only love Elizabeth for her spirited personality and wit but also for how she grows past her first impressions of Mr. Darcy in order to fall deeply in love with him. In fact, without this growth of character in Elizabeth, *Pride and Prejudice* would be without a plot. It is the combination of Elizabeth’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as her ultimate growth toward self-awareness and maturity that makes her so delightful and endearing.

Though she has a “lively, playful disposition” (Austen, *P&P* 9) and is “tolerably” (*P&P* 8) handsome, Elizabeth is often looked down upon for her seeming lack of propriety, accomplishments, and social status. Miss Bingley, one of the anti-heroines of *Pride and Prejudice* who vies for the attention and affection of Mr. Darcy, considers herself to be superior to Elizabeth in character, connections, and fortune. Miss Bingley is “rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, . . . [was] therefore in every respect entitled to think well of [herself], and meanly of others” (11-12). She certainly thinks “meanly” of Elizabeth. In the mind of Miss Bingley, Elizabeth Bennet

is not an “accomplished” (32) lady, like herself. Miss Bingley thinks that her accomplishments will help her to win a husband, and in the presence of Mr. Darcy, she recites her personal “virtues,” in hopes that he will view her, rather than Elizabeth, as the superior woman:

. . . no one can be really esteemed accomplished who does not . . . have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, all the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved. (32)

Miss Bingley hopes that Mr. Darcy will be impressed with this grand list but he adds one more item to the catalog, a quality that tips the scales in Elizabeth’s favor: “to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading” (32). This shrewd comment compliments Elizabeth, who likes to read, and shames Miss Bingley who only pretends to read to impress Mr. Darcy.

The key phrase in Mr. Darcy’s tart speech is that a truly admirable lady will seek to improve her mind, therefore emphasizing inner growth over outer feminine accomplishments. Elizabeth honestly admits to Mr. Darcy that she is not as accomplished as she would like to be, especially on the pianoforte because she does not “take the trouble of practicing” (151). She is aware of her shortcomings and does not try to hide them from others, even from those considered to be her social superiors, as evidenced when she plays for Lady de Bourgh (149-50). Although Miss Bingley does her best to insult and disparage Elizabeth’s character, accomplishments, and social status in order to turn Mr. Darcy’s gaze from Elizabeth to herself, she does not succeed in winning her “hero” because she is only concerned with an outward façade of virtue. Inside she is vain, jealous, and mean-spirited. Thankfully, Mr. Darcy never pays her a second glance,

preferring to admire a woman of character rather than a pretty face with twenty thousand pounds.

Miss Bingley's "sins" are rather petty, yet there is another anti-heroine in *Pride and Prejudice* that illustrates a contrast to Elizabeth, and that is Lydia. While Elizabeth's youngest sister is pretty and good-humored, she is also "self-willed," loud, "careless," "ignorant, idle, and vain" (183). Her actions mirror her immature and foolish character: At the end of the novel Lydia recklessly runs away with Mr. Wickham, indulging in a premarital sexual relationship. Rather than improving her character throughout the book, Lydia gets worse. Even after she is given a second chance—an actual redemption of her sins—by Mr. Darcy, Lydia does not repent of her socially and morally wrong actions: "Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless" (269). Only Elizabeth attempts to check Lydia by stating bluntly, "I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands" (271). Elizabeth, and Austen, knows that a socially and morally conscious woman does not compromise her character with a sexual relationship before marriage (Hannon 91). In her unabashed parade of her immoral actions, Lydia epitomizes everything that the Austen heroine is not. Her character is void social graces such as politeness, elegance, intelligence, and common sense, yet most importantly she lacks a strong moral conscience that guides her toward personal growth. Lydia is beyond correction from her family or society because she lacks self-control, maturity, and the ability to evaluate herself—all essential qualities of the Austen heroine.

In contrast to Lydia and Miss Bingley, the outward and inward qualities of Elizabeth Bennet present a nearly perfect model of how a true heroine should be and behave. Elizabeth has many delightful personal qualities: She is witty, intelligent, socially aware, devoted to her family, and fearless; yet she also has significant character flaws, namely her propensity to form immediate and strong opinions about the character of others. After being snubbed by Mr. Darcy

at a party, Elizabeth is only too glad to absorb negative information from him, especially from the charming and handsome Mr. Wickham. Elizabeth judges these two gentlemen quickly, and she does not change her initial impressions without great difficulty. She must grow past her personal prejudices and pride in order properly to understand and love the worthy man. Elizabeth, who “prided [herself] on [her] discernment,” is “absolutely ashamed of herself” when she discovers the truth about the character of both Mr. Darcy and Wickham (178). Her shame propels her to self-examination and self-knowledge. After reading Mr. Darcy’s letter and discovering that Wickham is a skirt-chasing, money-hungry scoundrel, she realizes:

“Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other . . . I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment I never knew myself.” (179)

Though Elizabeth comes to the truth about the character of Wickham and Mr. Darcy, the most important knowledge that she gains is about herself. She realizes that the “discernment” on which she prided herself was shallow, relying on outer characteristics such as amiability and good looks, or intimidating wealth and a reserved personality, rather than examining the inward character that truly reflects a person’s moral core.

After this initial revelation, Elizabeth not only continues to grow in reason and self-consciousness, but in love as well. Her feelings toward Mr. Darcy shift from disdain to acceptance, from respect and esteem, and finally to gratitude and love. She realizes that he is the best man for her, not simply because she loves and respects him, but because they are mutually able to help each other grow:

She began 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. It was a union that must have been to the advantage of both—by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved; and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance.

(266)

While Elizabeth experiences this revelation before she knows if she and Darcy will be able to marry, her evaluation of their mutual benefit to one another marks her final step of personal growth. Elizabeth is in love with her eyes wide open; she is no longer blinded by her vanity, pride, and prejudice. Her discernment has grown past shallow first impressions to properly evaluate and understand the inner character of Mr. Darcy, Wickham, and most importantly, herself.

Sense and Sensibility

Unlike *Pride and Prejudice* where Elizabeth Bennet outshines every other female character in the novel, both in personality and morality, Austen's first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, has two heroines. *Sense and Sensibility* tells the tale of the two eldest Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne. It is fitting that the novel is written primarily from Elinor's perspective because she is a watcher of events and people, unlike her younger sister, Marianne, who is an instigator of actions and relationships. Elinor's action in the novel is more quiet and indirect; she is the person in whom others confide their personal thoughts and secrets. Elinor's greatest challenge in the novel is keeping the secret of anti-heroine Lucy Steele, yet it is this challenge that proves her inner character and strength to Marianne and to readers alike.

Lucy Steele is a perfect example of an Austen anti-heroine. After first meeting Lucy, Elinor's opinion of her is not favorable: Lucy is "ignorant and illiterate," a flatterer, and a woman without personal integrity (118). Soon after meeting Elinor, Lucy shares that she is secretly engaged to Mr. Edward Ferrars, not knowing that Elinor is in love with Edward as well, and he with her. While there is nothing inherently wrong with Lucy's having a prior claim on Edward or the fact that she is "ignorant and illiterate," the real reason as to why Lucy emerges as an anti-heroine is for the spiteful way she treats Elinor and because she ultimately chooses money over love when she marries.

After Lucy tells Elinor of her engagement, Lucy begins to hear rumors that Elinor may have a special interest in her fiancé, and this hearsay quickly brings out Lucy's jealous and spiteful nature against Elinor. When both girls are invited to dinner where Edward's mother is to be a guest, Lucy purposefully tries to hurt Elinor by pointing out that Edward would not be present: "Lucy . . . believed herself to be inflicting a severe disappointment when she told [Elinor] that Edward certainly would not be in Harley Street on Tuesday, and even hoped to be carrying the pain still further by persuading her that he was kept away by that extreme affection for herself which he could not conceal when they were together" (198-99). After this deliberate attack on Elinor's emotions, Lucy has the audacity to beg Elinor for emotional support as Lucy is terrified to meet her future mother-in-law for the first time. Elinor knows that the haughty Mrs. Ferrars will never agree to a match between the penniless Miss Steele and Edward, the eldest son who will inherit the estate; in fact, she also knows that Mrs. Ferrars intends for Edward to marry the wealthy heiress Miss Morton. Elinor mischievously ponders giving Lucy "immediate relief by suggesting the possibility of its being Miss Morton's mother, rather than her own, whom they were about to behold," but, being a true heroine, Elinor would not ever willingly give pain to

others, even when it would give her a small moment of satisfactory pleasure (199).

The final act that marks Lucy as an anti-heroine is that she ultimately favors a monetary marriage over love. Although Austen does not explicitly write this into the plot, it can easily be deduced that Lucy breaks her engagement with Edward his mother disinherits him (for continuing his engagement to her, no less!). Lucy's "affection" is quickly transferred to Edward's younger brother, Robert, who is now the heir of the Farrars' fortune. Her love for Edward was contingent upon his fortune; Elinor, on the other hand, truly loves Edward for who he is, not for the money he has. This attitude is seen in all of Austen heroines, and reflects Austen's own opinions regarding marrying for money. Austen often gave advice to her niece, Fanny, on these issues. As a wise aunt, she was practical enough to remark to Fanny that "[s]ingle Women have a dreadful propensity for being poor—which is one very strong argument in favour of Matrimony" (*Letters* 483), yet Austen never advised her niece to marry for money, and likewise, none of her heroines marry out of financial desperation, or even worse, greed. Marriage should be built on a foundation of love, Austen believed, and charged her niece to remember that "[a]nything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection" (Austen-Leigh 197). Many of Austen's leading ladies marry wealthy men, but they would never marry a man simply because he is rich (Delman, 5 June 2010), nor break an engagement because he becomes suddenly poor. A tell-tale sign of an anti-heroine is a girl who desires to make a mercenary marriage: With a heart fixed on money instead of love, the inner character of such a girl is usually morally astray, as clearly seen in Lucy Steele.

Elinor Dashwood's actions and attitudes toward Lucy Steele, Edward's family, her own family, and herself mark her as a true Austen heroine. She is a unique character because at first glance she seems angelically good, even perfect. Yet because *Sense and Sensibility* is told from

Elinor's perspective, the reader is granted a glimpse into her struggling heart. "She is a flawed heroine," Susan Morgan argues in her article "Polite Lies: The Veiled Heroine of Sense and Sensibility," "not in the simpler sense of Marianne, through making mistakes and learning to see them, but in the more interesting sense of using an awareness of her own failings as a factor in maintaining a continuing and flexible process of judgment" (200). Yet for all her superior self-control and strong moral character, Elinor is not perfect. Readers, privy to her private thoughts, are able to see that Elinor is a real person and not a spotless angel. When Lucy is crying about never being able to see her beloved Edward, Austen writes: "Elinor did not feel very compassionate" (122). Whether Elinor sees past Lucy's elaborate façade, or she is simply exasperated with an annoying girl, or jealous of Lucy's good fortune, Austen does not reveal. But this simple statement shows readers that while Elinor is polite, she does not feel or think or do the right thing all the time. She feigns good manners when politeness demands her to cover up her disagreeable opinions. Unlike Marianne who lets everyone know what she thinks or how she feels, or if she cannot, is silent, Elinor is not above "telling lies when politeness [requires]" her to act a certain part (*S&S* 114). When she cannot lie, Elinor simply holds her tongue, as seen when Elinor desperately wants to remind Lucy before the dinner party that Mrs. Ferrars is more likely to be Miss Morton's mother-in-law than either Lucy's or even her own, "but instead of doing that, she assured her, and with great sincerity, that she did pity her" (*S&S* 199). Elinor's act of self-control with Lucy shows readers the two essential character qualities of the authentic Austen heroine—Elinor is not perfect, yet instead of spitting out a cheeky comment, she refrains, knowing that keeping silent will do more to shame Lucy's motives than any witty remark would. Elinor also acts with others in mind; she is motivated by love and respect, not selfishness, so refraining from putting Lucy down is consistent with her moral inner character.

Elinor's most admirable virtue is her devotion to her family, particularly to Marianne. When Willoughby heartlessly leaves Marianne and engages himself to another woman, Elinor has no compassion for her sister's former beau, especially after she learns that Willoughby has seduced, fathered a child, and then abandoned a young woman before he even met Marianne. Elinor experiences a true test of character when Willoughby comes to visit unexpectedly, hoping to offer an explanation of his behavior: He tells her that he desires "to obtain something like forgiveness" from Marianne (*S&S* 267). Though Willoughby seems sincere, Elinor is unconvinced and does not want to forgive him. Austen's inflection in Elinor's dialogue reveals this skepticism: "his answer, with a warmth which brought all the former Willoughby to her remembrance, and in spite of herself made her think him sincere . . . 'you may be satisfied already, for Marianne *does*—she has *long* forgiven you'" (267; emphasis original). However, Elinor's choice of words and vocal inflection demonstrates that she has not forgiven him. She almost refuses to listen to his explanations, and is filled with "angry contempt" at his words and behavior (267). However, she curbs her emotions and listens to his side of the story. Despite his falsehoods in the past, Willoughby's words ring of truth and "Elinor's heart, which had undergone many changes in the course of this extraordinary conversation, [is] now softened again" (272). While she honestly tells him what she thinks of him, she extends compassion: "'You are very wrong, Mr. Willoughby, very blamable,' said Elinor, while her voice, in spite of herself, betrayed her compassionate emotion" (275). By the end of their conversation, Willoughby has convinced her of his sincerity and procures her forgiveness; "Elinor assured him that she did: she forgave, pitied, wished him well, was even interested in his happiness, and added some gentle counsel as to the behavior most likely to promote it" (277). It is her act of

forgiveness that marks her as a true heroine. Morgan compares Elinor's moral growth and strength in the scene to similar instances of self-awareness and altruism for Austen's other leading ladies:

Her compassion for her sister's betrayer, at the very moment when Marianne has escaped death, is an instance of the moral imagination at its best. It is the same lucid perception Elizabeth Bennet has when she accepts the truth of Darcy's letter or Emma has when she encourages Mr. Knightley to speak his heart. In those moments Jane Austen's heroines escape from the confinements of who they are and look at someone else with the clarity that disinterested sympathy can provide. Such controlled thoughtfulness suggests that largeness of mind and generosity of heart which alone gives value to decorum. ("Polite" 204)

Elinor, like Elizabeth, Emma and others, exercises her strong moral character in order to grow personally and relationally with others. While Elinor is anything but weak throughout *Sense and Sensibility* she still must overcome her inner shortcomings in order to strengthen her moral core.

Marianne, Elinor's younger sister, also exhibits strong characteristics of an Austen heroine. Austen describes Marianne as "sensible and clever . . . generous, amiable [and] interesting" (*S&S* 24); despite her positive qualities she does need to mature a great deal by releasing her over-romanticized view of life. Marianne's true flaw is not her sensibility—a fashionable virtue manifested as a "moral sympathy" toward people and events (ApRoberts 354)—but her lack of prudence (*S&S* 24). Marianne's personal transformation occurs when she marries her sensibility to prudence and uses this prudence to correct some of her character flaws.

Contrasted with Elinor, whose "feelings [are] strong" but kept in check, Marianne is "eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation" (*S&S* 24). Marianne's

greatest character failing in *Sense and Sensibility* is in her relationship with Willoughby. Like Elizabeth Bennet who is briefly captivated by the handsome and charming Mr. Wickham, Marianne is quickly smitten with her romantic rescuer, Willoughby. Yet Elizabeth has the wisdom to let the attachment fade when she senses deficiency in Wickham's character; Marianne, on the other hand, abandons all sense of social propriety in her infatuation. Her most serious blunder is going alone with Willoughby to see his aunt's estate. When Marianne returns from her unchaperoned outing, Elinor gently reprimands her, stating "that the pleasantness of an employment does not always evince its propriety" (72). Marianne defensively retorts: "On the contrary, nothing can be a stronger proof of it, Elinor; for if there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when we are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure" (73). Instead of practicing prudence and propriety, Marianne defends her actions by remembering how she felt at the time. It is only after her heartbreaking separation from Willoughby and the months that follow that Marianne gains the self-awareness to make corrections to her behavior and character.

At the end of the novel, the change in Marianne's heart, mind, and character is significant. When she recollects how immaturely she acted with Willoughby, she is embarrassed, ashamed, and worried about social reputation: "for not only is it horrible to suspect a person who has been what *he* has been to *me* of such designs, but what must it make me appear to myself?" (S&S 287). Marianne realizes her lack of prudence put her in danger of being seduced; her eyes are opened to her character deficiencies for the first time: "I saw in my own behavior since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last autumn nothing but a series of imprudence toward myself and a want of kindness to others" (288). Marianne's self-awareness in this moment is an essential quality as an Austen heroine, claims Patrice Hannon: "[W]ithout such a

capacity for learning and improving [Marianne] would not be a heroine” (146). And like every Austen heroine, Marianne has a happy ending at the end of the book. Her marriage to Colonel Brandon marks her maturity as a woman and heroine as well. She is no longer a girl, obsessed with the romance of first attachments. Now as a woman, she falls quietly in love with a man of good character, proving that second attachments can be stronger and more lasting than the passion of first love. Both Marianne and Elinor are blessed with love, marriage, and good husbands at the end of their journeys because their self-evaluation and inner growth helped them mature into women of wisdom and prudence.

Northanger Abbey

Like Marianne, Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey* (1818) has significant maturing to do when readers first meet her. Unlike Elizabeth and Elinor, who are known for their cleverness and good sense, Catherine’s “mind [is] about as ignorant and uniformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is” (NA 13). Yet despite her immaturity, Catherine has an affectionate heart, a “disposition cheerful and open, without conceit or affectation of any kind—her manners just removed from the awkwardness and shyness of a girl; her persona pleasing, and when in good looks, pretty” (13). In the development of both her protagonist and plotline, Austen parodies the popular Gothic novels of the day by calling Catherine a “heroine” in the very first sentence of the book: “No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine” (NA 8). Austen is, of course, poking fun at the current model of heroine portrayed in these popular novels: beautiful damsels in distress who faint at danger, and then wait languidly for a handsome man to rescue them. But Catherine is certainly not one of these heroines; rather, she is an ordinary girl longing for something to “happen to throw a hero in her way” (12). Yet before Catherine finds her hero, she must first learn to evaluate the character

of others, and also learn to understand herself before she can claim the title of “heroine.”

Throughout *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine discovers that real life is not as exciting, romantic, or black and white as one of her romance novels. This is especially apparent in her friendship with Isabella Thorpe. Though Isabella is beautiful, clever, and socially confident, she quickly emerges as the anti-heroine of the novel. Isabella seems genuine, affectionate and a true friend when Catherine first meets her. Catherine looks up to Isabella because she is assertive and seems to have a fashionable air of sensibility. Isabella is no Marianne, however. While Marianne’s “sensibility is genuine,” Isabella is a “hypocrite” (McMaster 727) who plays games with people’s hearts and minds. She tries to manipulate Catherine into spending time with her when Catherine has plans with a new friend, Eleanor Tilney. At first, Isabella speaks sweetly to Catherine, trying to persuade her “in the most affectionate manner . . . She was sure her dearest, sweetest Catherine would not seriously refuse such a trifling request of a friend who loved her so dearly” (79). When Catherine quietly refuses to go along with Isabella’s plans, Isabella changes her tactics and her true character is revealed: “Isabella appeared to [Catherine as] ungenerous and selfish, regardless of everything but her own gratification” (79). After this moment of revelation, Catherine begins to separate herself physically and emotionally from Isabella, though her character as an anti-heroine in the novel is still yet to be fully revealed.

Like Lucy Steele, Isabella is determined to make a mercenary marriage, though she tries to hide her motives from Catherine and her family. When Catherine finds out that her brother James and Isabella are engaged, she is surprised, shocked, and doubtful of the affection of their relationship. She hopes they are marrying for love and not money, and is briefly persuaded by Isabella’s speeches: “‘For my part,’ said Isabella, ‘my wishes are so moderate, that the smallest income in nature would be enough for me. Where people are really attached, poverty itself is

wealth: grandeur I detest” (97). This statement soon highlights Isabella’s hypocrisy because as soon as James leaves Bath, Isabella begins publically flirting with Captain Tilney. Catherine naively believes that Isabella is “unconsciously encouraging him; unconsciously it must be, for Isabella’s attachment to James was as certain and well acknowledged as her engagement” (116). It is also well acknowledged that Captain Tilney has a large fortune, and despite Isabella’s profession that she cares nothing about money, her behavior toward Captain Tilney suggests otherwise. It is not until after Isabella breaks her engagement with James and attaches herself to the captain, that Catherine’s eyes are finally opened to Isabella’s true character: She is a conniving girl who “uses a facade of sensibility to conceal and accomplish her mercenary ends” (McMaster 725). Isabella is a true anti-heroine: dishonest, selfish, calculating, manipulative, flirtatious, and mercenary.

Fortunately, Catherine escapes from Isabella’s influence when she goes on an extended visit to the Tilney estate. At this point in her journey, Catherine has realized—in part—that people are not always as they seem. Instead of people being all good or all bad, like in a romance novel, the character of those she comes in contact with is mixed. It is not until a humiliating episode with Henry Tilney, the man she secretly loves, that Catherine’s naivety about the world and herself is stripped away. She allows her imagination run away with her about General Tilney, Henry and Eleanor’s father, fantasizing that he tortured and murdered his wife, just like a villain out of the Gothic novels she loves to read. Henry confronts Catherine and gently chastises her about her assumptions. Catherine is horrified and ashamed at her thoughts—“The visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened” (157). She pictured herself as a heroine of some grand adventure but instead of triumphing and winning her hero, Catherine knows that she has failed: “It was not only with herself that she was sunk—but with Henry. Her

folly, which now seemed even criminal, was all exposed to him, and he must despise her for ever” (157). But Henry forgives her before she forgives herself. Catherine will not soon forget her lesson. Unlike in her favorite novels where good and evil are so easily distinguished, Catherine discovers a new truth:

in England it was not so; among the English, she believed, in their hearts and habits, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad. Upon this conviction, she would not be surprised if even in Henry and Eleanor Tilney, some slight imperfection might hereafter appear; and upon this conviction she need not fear to acknowledge some actual specks in the character of their father, who, though cleared from the grossly injurious suspicions which she must ever blush to have entertained, she did believe, upon serious consideration, to be not perfectly amiable. (158)

This revelation changes her outlook of the people she loves (Eleanor and Henry) and of those she should have been wary of (Isabella and General Tilney). It also changes Catherine herself; she makes purposeful changes in her life as a result of this imaginative debacle: “Her mind made up on these several points, and her resolution formed, of always judging and acting in future with the greatest good sense, she had nothing to do but to forgive herself and be happier than ever” (158). Her resolution serves her well because in her newly exercised “good sense,” she is right about the General being “not perfectly amiable.” In fact, he is as mercenary and two-faced as Isabella. After discovering that Catherine is not the rich heiress he thought her to be, General Tilney sends her away from Northanger Abbey alone and unchaperoned in the back of a post chaise.

Despite this abrupt, confusing and heartbreaking ending to her adventures, Catherine

returns to her parents no longer a girl, but a young woman. She has shed her romantic fantasies and has learned to see others and herself in an honest fashion. Hannon argues that this is the way that Austen meant for a true heroine to mature; she imitates Austen's point of view on this theme:

For my heroines, the recognition of where their best hope of true happiness lies can only come when their illusions about the world and about themselves are exposed for what they are. In such moments of truth the scales fall from their eyes and a sobering self-knowledge allows them to make decision in love that are reasonable and realistic enough to give them a fair chance of living happily beyond the weddings at the end of my novels. (143)

And Catherine receives her happy ending when Henry asks for her hand in marriage. It is a fitting end to Catherine's tale and an Austen novel, but her marriage to Henry is not the point of the book. "In revealing the growth of Catherine Morland," John K. Mathison writes, "[Austen] has made the reader, as well as Catherine, consider what is important, what trivial, what admirable, and what detestable in life and behavior. In making Catherine become aware of true values, she has helped the reader to do the same" (150). Catherine is a true Austen heroine, not only because she learns to examine her own heart and mature beyond her shortcomings, but also because she inspires readers to develop truly heroic behavior themselves.

Persuasion

Compared with Austen's preceding leading ladies, the character of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* is unique as her role as heroine for Anne has loved and lost even before the novel begins. Though she was deeply in love and engaged at nineteen, she was persuaded by her mentor Lady Russell to break off the engagement because Anne's fiancé, Fredrick Wentworth, a

poor soldier with no way of supporting Anne in the style she deserved as a gentlemen's daughter. While Anne is not mercenary about marriage, she is won over by Lady Russell's arguments. When the novel opens, Anne is twenty-seven (considered an old maid by social standards) and though she has "an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding" she is practically invisible in her own home: Her father and sisters either ignore or take advantage of her. To them, "she was only Anne" (*Persuasion* 7). At nineteen, Anne was full of life and beauty, but her broken engagement "clouded every enjoyment of youth; and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effect" (28). Anne is different from Austen's other heroines in that she "does not have to grow up: rather she has to grow younger . . . Anne, unlike Fanny and Catherine, has had her experience; her development must be in terms of her recovery from it" (McMaster 735). Anne's journey to "grow younger" and learn romance is a journey that matures her moral core as well. When Fredrick, now Captain Wentworth, comes back into her life, she must suffer to watch him lavish attention on other young ladies, and in particular the vivacious and headstrong Louisa Musgrove. By persevering through this trial and others, Anne develops her inner integrity and proves to herself and Captain Wentworth that by growing in self-knowledge and assurance, she is now ready to be a wife, a role that she was not mature enough to claim at age nineteen.

Louisa Musgrove emerges as the anti-heroine in *Persuasion* primarily because she vies for the attention of Captain Wentworth, yet also because she exhibits some inner weaknesses. Despite carrying the title of "anti-heroine," Louisa is a very likable girl. Austen describes her and her sister Henrietta as "young ladies of nineteen and twenty . . . [who were] living to be fashionable, happy, and merry . . . their spirits were extremely good, their manners unembarrassed and pleasant . . . Anne always contemplated them as some of the happiest

creatures of her acquaintance” (P 39). Wentworth, still hurt over Anne’s rejection so many years ago, shows willing attention to the spirited Louisa. He particularly thinks highly of her seemingly steadfast character: “*yours* is the character of decision and firmness . . . It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on . . . Everybody may sway it; let those who would be happy be firm” (81). Wentworth admires Louisa’s decisive nature when he first meets her but she soon reveals her immaturity.

Louisa soon demonstrates that she is also headstrong, impulsive, and foolish. When her family talks of going to Lyme for a vacation, “Louisa, who was the most eager of the eager, having formed her resolution to go, and besides the pleasure of doing as she liked, being now armed with the idea of merit in maintaining her own way, bore down all the wishes of her father and mother for putting it off till the summer” (88). Hoping to further impress Wentworth with her “firmness of character” Louisa exaggerates this virtue and behaves like a spoiled child who must have her way. She continues this attitude in Lyme, and the results are disastrous. A seaside walk along the Cobb at Lyme increases both Louisa’s childish behavior and also her flirtatiousness with Wentworth: “all were contented to pass quietly and carefully down the steep flight, excepting Louisa: she *must* be jumped down them by Captain Wentworth. In all their walks, he had *had* to jump her from the stiles” (101; emphasis added). When Louisa wants to jump from an even higher stair, “[Wentworth] advised against it, thought the jar was too great, but no, he reasoned and talked in vain; she smiled and said, ‘I am determined I will.’” But before he can catch her, Louisa falls to the ground and is “taken up lifeless!” (102). Louisa’s actions prove to Wentworth that though her character may be “steadfast,” she is also foolish and reckless. Anne’s character, in contrast, positively shines in this moment. She is emotionally stable in the aftermath of Louisa’s fall, taking charge with truly mature courage and

determination.

Though Anne outwardly composed when she watches her former fiancé woo Louisa, she frequently struggles to act in love and selflessness; she does not always succeed and often has mixed motives for her actions. When her nephew has an accident on the night her family is to dine with Wentworth and his sister, Anne “sacrificially” volunteers to stay home with the boy so her sister and brother-in-law go to the dinner. Though “this is very kind of Anne” (54), her true motives are not to provide a favor for her sister; rather she wants to avoid seeing Wentworth. Anne realizes that her feelings are the same for Wentworth as they were eight years ago, only now they are complicated by his seeming indifference toward her and the jealousy she feels when he gives attention to Louisa. She does not know that Wentworth’s actions are motivated by an injured heart and smarting pride.

Anne may appear outwardly flawless to readers, but it is Wentworth who sees and lists her faults, at least as they appear to him. When Anne rejected Wentworth, his heart and pride were deeply wounded: “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). Wentworth is, of course, speaking as a jilted lover, and his negative response to Anne’s rejection is not her fault. Yet his assessment of Anne is not entirely without merit. She *had* been persuaded to give him up, primarily to please her surrogate mother, Lady Russell. Though Anne was right to heed her mentor’s advice (her marriage to Wentworth could have ended up like unhappy marriage of Fanny Price’s mother), her decision at nineteen shows a lack of self-knowledge about the true desires of her heart. And eight years later, Anne still has complicated feelings about her actions:

She did not blame Lady Russell, she did not blame herself for having been guided by her; but she felt that were any young person, in similar circumstances, to apply to her for counsel, they would never receive any of such certain immediate wretchedness, under uncertain future good . . . she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, that she had been in the sacrifice of it.

(29)

Having gained the knowledge of her heart and desires at age twenty-seven, Anne realizes that she would never advise another girl to make the same decision that she would because her personal happiness was all but lost when she broke off her engagement at nineteen.

As the events of *Persuasion* unfold, Anne discovers for the first time that she has choices and opinions, especially in interacting and communicating with her family. No longer is this quiet heroine “only Anne” (*P* 7) in the eyes of others; rather she has developed her own self-importance in the world by serving, caring, and respecting others. After having spent extensive time away from her vain, proud, and opinionated father and sister, and having enjoyed the responsibilities and recognition in a time of crisis, Anne decides that she will no longer be invisible to her family. Instead of silently standing by, or quietly working behind the scenes, Anne speaks up about her thoughts and feelings. When her father and sister try to persuade her to visit a rich, obscure relative in order to distinguish themselves, Anne informs them that she has plans to visit a dear, but poor, friend. Despite her father and sisters’ rude insults about her friend, Anne resolutely pursues her own plans for the day. And, in the manner of a true Austen heroine, she exercises self-control in the presence of her insulters: “Anne could have said much and did long to say a little . . . but her sense of personal respect to her father prevented her. She made no reply” (148). Anne’s actions prove to her family that she is no longer invisible but a woman of

strong character who should be respected.

Anne's journey in *Persuasion* is not only one of self-awareness and new-found confidence, but it is also a return to her first love and initial convictions about her relationship with Wentworth: "There they returned again into the past, more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their re-union, than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth, and attachment" (225). This knowledge helped them to renew their affection for each other, and also aided them in forgiving each other for past mistakes. Anne, herself, is also at peace with her decision to respect Lady Russell's advice at nineteen: "I was right in submitting to [Lady Russell], and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience" (231). Anne could not have uttered this statement eight years ago, or even at the beginning of the novel when she was suffering from familial neglect, low self-esteem, a lack of positive friends, and deep personal regret. For Anne, this self-awareness comes only because she has a strong moral character that she continues to develop throughout her story. Though she is the oldest Austen heroine with the most regrets about her life and past decisions, Anne's journey as a heroine is sweetly satisfying because *Persuasion* ends with her renewed love and reaffirmed personal character.

Mansfield Park

Fanny Price, the heroine of *Mansfield Park*, is perhaps the most self-consciously moral of all Austen's heroines. She has been described as "the English Protestant good-girl ideal: sweet-tempered and duty driven, morally and socially obedient; also shy, stammering, self-effacing; also doubtful, tender, awkward, and embarrassed" (Potter 611). She is also poor—in fact, the poorest heroine in the Austen canon. Fanny is at the mercy of her rich relatives, the Bertrams, to

provide for her and is constantly overshadowed by her beautiful, charming female cousins. However, Fanny outshines her cousins in her consistency and morality in contrast to Julia and Maria Bertram prove by their attitudes and actions to be anti-heroines. The Bertram girls, however, are predictable and underdeveloped characters compared to Mary Crawford, the other anti-heroine of *Mansfield Park*. In fact, Mary, with her wit, beauty, charm, and caring heart (at times), vies not only for the heart of the hero, but also for the very role of heroine in the novel. Yet a critical look into Mary's motives and moral core reveals that she cannot be classified as an Austen heroine, and that Fanny, despite her timidity, emerges triumphantly as the only true heroine of *Mansfield Park*.

Bertram sisters are cut from the same cloth as Miss Bingley, Lydia Bennet, and Lucy Steele. Austen describes the sisters as "entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility" (*MP* 36). Unlike the Austen heroine who seeks self-knowledge as a means of improving her character and relationships with others, Julia and Maria do not seek to cultivate their moral cores at all. Far from being examples of loving sisters like Jane and Elizabeth Bennet and Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, the Bertram sisters are competitive and selfish with each other, especially in their relationships with men. Although Maria is engaged, she and Julia fight for the attention and affection of Henry Crawford, and their jealousy over Henry ultimately splinters their relationship (150). When Henry tires of his flirtatious games, Maria decides to go through with her marriage; however her reasons for marrying are far from admirable: "being prepared for matrimony by an hatred of home, restraint, and tranquility; by the misery of disappointed affection and contempt of the man she was to marry" (185). Yet after Maria marries, she runs away and has a sexual affair with Henry Crawford. These actions bring personal shame and emotional pain to the Bertrams and Fanny as

well. Unlike a true heroine who acts with purity, forthrightness, and honesty in her actions with men (or like Marianne who, after acting badly, comes to see the error of her ways), Maria acts thoughtlessly, never considering how her actions will affect others. According to Rachel M. Brownstein, “Maria’s losing her reputation, or character, is a function of her weakness of character; destroying her good name, Maria makes it evident that she has no character at all” (95). In the end, Maria’s husband divorces her; her affair with Henry ends bitterly; she loses her wealth and position as a wife, daughter, and respectable woman in polite society; and is forced by necessity to live with her insufferable Aunt Norris for the rest of her life. Maria’s fate ultimately shows readers what may result when one willfully makes wrong choices and refuses to learn from one’s mistakes in order to grow in character and morality.

While Maria clearly possesses qualities of an anti-heroine, Mary Crawford as a literary character is much more complex. *Mansfield Park* was written directly after *Pride and Prejudice*, and Mary Crawford has been favorably compared to Elizabeth Bennet for her wit, vivaciousness, good humor, and sparkling personality (Trilling 426). Yet these two characters differ in their relationships toward money: Unlike Elizabeth who only possesses a modest dowry, Mary has twenty thousand pounds to bring to a marriage. And “[m]atrimony was her object, provided she could marry well” (*MP* 54). When Mary first meets the Bertrams, she decides that she will pursue the eldest son, Tom, “having seen Mr. Bertram in town, she knew that objection could no more be made to her person than to his situation in life” (54). As seen in previous novels, marrying for money is a mark of an anti-heroine, and throughout the novel, for all her charm, Mary makes no secret of the fact that she is mercenary.

Mary’s initial plans to snare Tom fail, and she soon determines to attach herself to Edmund, the second son and the secret love of Fanny. With her eyes focused on money, Mary

tries to convince Edmund to go into any other profession than the church, his desired vocation. She treats religion flippantly and cannot understand why Edmund would choose an occupation that collects so little income and respect. Edmund, caught in her web of charm and beauty, desperately wants Mary's approval of his career path so that she will agree to marry him. Little does he know that the girl who truly loves him would never ask him to lower his standards. Fanny is not blinded to Mary's motives or deceived by her charm. And it is Fanny who suffers the most for Mary's actions.

Despite Mary's mercenary motives for marriage and the way she plays with Edmund's heart, she is not without merit as a person. In fact, as much as readers may want to hate her for breaking Fanny's heart, Mary is actually quite endearing. She is fun loving, active, beautiful, and interesting—she is actually more interesting to read about than Austen's quiet little heroine, Fanny. Compared to Fanny, “everyone adored the witty, ironic, open-tempered and—might I point out—grossly immoral Miss Crawford . . . I do not say that Mary is not on the surface the more delightful of the two . . . I merely caution that such powerful appeal can be deceiving” (Hannon 19). Mary is confusing and deceiving because she is so complex. While she does possess obvious character weaknesses, she can also be kind and thoughtful, as shown clearly when she rescues Fanny when her cousins try to pressure her into play-acting. Mary, noticing that Fanny is very uncomfortable and near tears, changes the subject, “moved away her chair to the opposite side of the table close to Fanny, saying to her in a kind low whisper as she placed herself, ‘Never mind, my dear Miss Price . . . do not let us mind them’; and with pointed attention continued to talk to her and endeavour to raise her spirits, in spite to being out-of-spirits herself” (*MP* 140). Mary's actions are kind and unselfish, but rather out of character for her. In an earlier interaction with Fanny, Mary begs forgiveness for keeping Fanny waiting to ride her

horse: “I have nothing in the world to say for myself—I knew it was very late, and that I was behaving extremely ill; and therefore, if you please, you must forgive me. Selfishness must always be forgiven you know, because there is no hope of a cure” (76). Mary’s apology dissolves into a witty, yet revealing joke about her character. She knows herself well enough to realize that she is self-centered.

Like an Austen heroine, Mary possesses self-knowledge, yet she lacks the ability to change and grow past her moral deficiencies. Mary Crawford’s “mind is irredeemably perverted. Although she recognizes her own love for Edmund, she deliberately stifles it because he will not conform to her ideas” (McMaster 731). Instead of honestly looking into her heart and motives and acknowledging her ultimate desires to Edmund (and letting him go), Mary persists in playing with his heart. Edmund may be blind to Mary’s true character, but Fanny is able to assess Mary’s shallow feelings:

She might love, but she did not deserve Edmund by any other sentiment. Fanny believed there was scarcely a second feeling in common between them; she may be forgiven by older sages, for looking on the chance of Miss Crawford’s future improvement as nearly desperate, for thinking that if Edmund’s influence in this season of love, had already done so little in clearing her judgment, and regulating her notions, his worth would be finally wasted on her even in years of matrimony. (321)

Though Fanny selfishly wants Edmund all to herself, she stifles her jealousy and is willing to let him marry someone else if that will make him happy. His happiness and the happiness of the Bertram family are her first priorities. It is only after Mary reveals her selfishness and mercenary motives to Edmund and his family after Tom’s illness and Maria’s adultery that Edmund realizes

that “Hers are faults of principle . . . of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind” (*MP* 394). And at the end of the novel, Mary shows no initiative to improve herself. Though she is one of the most attractive and complex characters in *Mansfield Park*, Mary does not display any desire to grow past her faults and cannot be called a true heroine.

Compared to the sparkling character of Mary Crawford, it is hard for many readers to view Fanny Price as the rightful heroine of *Mansfield Park*. Indeed, it is difficult for Fanny to realize her own self-importance. Yet unlike the selfish Miss Crawford, Fanny finds her own worth, not in flaunting her beauty, talents, wit, or superiority, but in serving others. Even more than Anne or Elinor, Fanny is a servant-heroine. She is eager to please and serve those around her as seen in her devotion to her Aunt Bertram and her immediate family, and in particular, to her cousin Tom during his illness. However, Fanny will not compromise her own morals and convictions to please others. Though her refusal to join in the play acting with her cousins and the Crawfords is often read as prudish and even puritanical by critics, Fanny’s firmness of conviction is one of her most admirable qualities. She exhibits this same steadfastness of character when she repeatedly refuses Henry Crawford’s proposals. Yet, as readers are aware of Fanny’s shy and timid girlhood, they also know that standing up for what she believes in is a difficult task. Her firm character and strongly expressed convictions are two of Fanny’s most significant areas of growth in the novel. Though Fanny cannot compare with Mary Crawford’s irresistible charm, her inner strength is what ultimately endears her to Edmund and to readers, and what marks her as a true Austen heroine.

Fanny’s personal convictions go hand in hand with her intuitive knowledge of herself and her admirable self-control. Potter writes that out of “all the major characters in *Mansfield Park*, she is the only one who studies her own personality. Everyone else, even the almost-good

Edmund, disregards himself and thus falls into traps and errors” (612). It is only in evaluating her personality and beliefs that Fanny is able to follow through with her convictions, though it is not easy for her. When she makes her decision not to be involved in the play-acting, far from feeling at peace with this decision, Fanny is distressed: “She could not feel that she had done wrong herself, but she was disquieted in every other way. Her heart and her judgment were equally against Edmund’s decision; she could not acquit his unsteadiness: and his happiness under it made her wretched. She was full of jealousy and agitation” (*MP* 149). Fanny’s jealousy about Edmund’s attention toward Mary blinds her so much that for a moment Mary’s “gaiety” and friendliness toward Fanny seems like a personal “insult” (149). It is only her deep love for Edmund and her desire to see him happy that keeps Fanny from acting upon her envy. And she is ultimately rewarded for her self-control. One critic concludes that such self-control speaks highly of the moral maturity of the Austen heroine: “Being able to control one’s own desires, to take pleasure in principled behavior, is a precondition for being capable of loving deeply, the novels show. Love is not the vehicle for moral education, but is more like the reward for it (when good fortune cooperates)” (Rudderman 277). Because Fanny knows herself and her faults and is able to exercise self-control in difficult situations, she is ultimately rewarded with Edmund’s love when he finally realizes that she is a woman of superior character.

Though Fanny’s character defects may seem minor compared to some of Austen’s other heroines, they are significant in defining who Fanny is, and her growth beyond her faults is significant as well. Compared to the vivaciousness of Elizabeth, Marianne, and even Mary Crawford, Fanny’s shyness and timidity are painfully obvious. As a child and even a young woman, Fanny trembled even to be in the presence of her uncle, but upon his return from Antigua, “she was thankful that she could now sit in the same room with her uncle, hear his

voice, receive his questions, and even answer them without such wretched feelings as she had formerly known” (*MP* 251). Fanny even finds courage to speak bluntly about the play-acting incident to Henry Crawford. Instead of hiding her feelings, she boldly speaks her mind: “She had never spoken so much at once to him in her life before, and never so angrily to anyone; and when her speech was over, she trembled and blushed at her own daring” (204). Though her personality is still reserved by the end of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny does grow tremendously, and by the end of the novel is able to “assert her own identity” (McMaster 733). Unlike Mary, who never grows beyond her character defects, Fanny’s personal improvement throughout the novel marks her as a true Austen heroine.

However, as much as Fanny does mature in the novel, she never overcomes her jealousy toward Edmund and Mary. She recognizes the truth about Mary’s character and knows that Edmund “[is] deceived in her” and blinded to her faults. Fanny weeps for her loss, and is only her “relieved by the influence of fervent prayers for his happiness” (*MP* 235). Praying for Edmund is one of Fanny’s better reactions. In one of Mary’s many flirtatiously fickle moments with Edmund, he is confused by her lack of attention; “Fanny, not able to refrain entirely from observing them, had seen enough to be tolerable satisfied. It was barbarous to be happy when Edmund was suffering. Yet some happiness must and would arise, from the very conviction that he did suffer” (247). This rare moment of selfishness and spite marks Fanny as a human being and not an angel, and this character defect actually makes her more relatable to readers. For all her humanness in this moment, Fanny still hopes that either she will overcome her jealousy or it will simply fade away, but this is not to be. Even in the last few chapters of the novel Fanny struggles: “being so frequently with Mary and Edmund, without feelings so near akin to envy, as made her hate herself for having them” (359). Like Elinor and Anne, Fanny must suffer to watch

the man she loves show attention and affection to another woman; the only cure for Fanny's jealousy is for Edmund to realize that it is she, and not Mary, whom he loves. Indeed, suffering proves to be one of the most important teachers in Fanny's journey of growth. Yet like her heroine-sisters, she is rewarded for her suffering in the end. Edmund finally sees Fanny for who she really is—not simply as the quiet, devoted cousin and friend but as the woman he loves and values for the “sweetness of her temper, the purity of her mind, and the excellence of her principles” (404). It is these inner qualities that Julia, Maria, and especially Mary lack. Fanny is an ideal Austen heroine not because she is witty like Elizabeth, passionate like Marianne, or imaginative like Catherine—she is an Austen heroine because, like all of Austen's leading ladies, Fanny acts upon the courage of her conviction, is forgivably human, and grows past her weaknesses to become a woman that a hero is privileged to have as his wife.

Emma

Emma Woodhouse of *Emma* (1815) is perhaps the most unique and complex of all Austen's heroines. Like Elizabeth, Elinor, Marianne, Anne, and Fanny, Emma grows in self-awareness and character by the end of her story. Nevertheless, the novel introduces a protagonist with many characteristics of an anti-heroine. Interestingly, because Emma partially takes on the role of anti-heroine in her story, a minor character, Jane Fairfax, emerges as a model of Austen heroine who inspires Emma to change, but this is the subject of my next chapter.

Conclusion

While both the plots and personal characteristics of each heroine in Austen's novels are distinctly different, the moral core at the heart of each heroine is what makes each leading lady worth admiring and even emulating. Potter believes that it is the humanity and growth of the Austen heroine that intrinsically draws the reader to the literary character in that “Austen's

heroines are complicated experiments in the delineation of human social error . . . they coax us into both loving these women as human beings and accepting our inevitable share in their flaws” (614). The Austen heroine is memorable and lovable because she is flawed, but even more so because she is mature enough to look into herself, evaluate her behavior and make changes to become a better person. This capacity for self-evaluation and self-correction is a rare and a unique quality both in the literary and the real world. Yet, as Mathison posits, “It is a character’s achieving maturity that makes her a heroine. For, to achieve genuine understanding of oneself and the world is difficult, as we are reminded in the novels by seeing how few of the characters have done so or ever will” (140). Truly, it is the moral core that Austen purposefully places in each heroine makes each leading lady memorable, relatable, and worth emulating for readers even in the twenty-first century.

Chapter Two

Emma: Heroine or Anti-heroine?

Scholars and critics love to point out that Austen purportedly labeled Emma as the heroine “whom no one but myself will much like” (qtd. in Austen-Leigh 126). Yet Austen unquestionably loved Emma and even viewed this heroine like a daughter. When her niece Anna gave birth to a little girl around the time that *Emma* was completed, Austen expressed great longing to see the new baby and to show off her “baby” as well: “As I wish very much to see *your* Jemima, I am sure you will like to see *my* Emma” (qtd. in Austen-Leigh and Le Faye 207). While it is easy to see how Emma as an attractive and endearing character reflects Austen’s special devotion, she *is* distinctly different from Austen’s other leading ladies. Social class and wealth hold a distinct position in Emma’s life, more than any of Austen’s other heroines.

In Austen’s England, wealth and bloodline defined one’s social mobility and marriage opportunities. Wealth is an important theme in all of Austen’s novels and plays a significant role in the marriages of Elizabeth, Elinor, Marianne, Catherine, Anne, and Fanny. Though none of Austen’s protagonists would marry for money without love, no heroine is foolish enough to believe that she could live on love alone. Emma, however, is set apart from the other heroines because she is “rich” (Austen 5) and therefore has no inducement to marry. Emma knows that, even if she remains single, she will never be viewed as a “disagreeable old maid” because she is wealthy, and “a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable” (69). Barbara Z. Thaden illustrates that when entering the world of *Emma*,

readers of Austen's three previously published novels would automatically be alerted that they are now in a different world, or rather the same world viewed from an entirely different perspective. Emma is at the pinnacle of her society,

with no inducement to marry or to change her position, unlike Elinor Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet, and Fanny Price. (48)

Emma has arrived at this “pinnacle” because of her family’s wealth, her own twenty thousand pound dowry, and because she is mistress of her father’s estate. Yet, “[b]y giving her heroine such perfection through the possession of every material thing and every social prerogative that ever a polite person could want,” Nancy Armstrong argues that “Austen creates deficiency on another level” (152-53).

Emma’s wealth and social superiority directly affect her character and behavior. She has an excessive amount of free time, time that she uses to fuel her overactive imagination. Terry Eagleton explains the connection between Emma’s wealth, imagination, and social responsibility:

If you are too rich and socially prominent you are likely to be idle . . . idleness can lead to imaginative self-indulgence, which in turn can result in harm to others. There is thus an indirect route from being extremely well-heeled to being morally irresponsible, which is the opposite of the paternalistic ethic of *noblesse oblige*—the doctrine that wealth and high rank bring with them responsibilities to others. Emma is at the summit of her society, but exactly because of this she is a kind of transgressor. (112)

Emma’s immaturity coupled with her sense of privilege results in a snobbery that is distasteful and disconcerting to many characters in the novel, including Emma’s future husband, Mr. Knightley, but even more so to modern readers who view a strict class structure, and especially class superiority, as a thing of the past. It is Emma’s snobbery and insistence on a strict social hierarchy that readers dislike most about her (Duckworth 150). Austen herself despised social

snobbery, as evidenced in how she portrays characters such as Lady Catherine de Burgh, Caroline Bingley, and Fanny Dashwood. All of these characters use their social arrogance to be cruel or manipulate others; unfortunately, Emma, as a member of the wealthy elite, also uses snobbery as a social weapon at times. The worst part of Emma's snobbery is that she is blind to this flaw within herself. It is only because the story is seen primarily through Emma's eyes that readers "travel with Emma rather than stand against her" (Booth 97). Thus the reader's eyes are also veiled, though not completely blinded, to Emma's character deficiencies.

Emma has rightly been identified as "the most flawed of all Austen's heroines" (Koppel 25). In fact, many of Emma's flaws and personal characteristics align her with Austen's anti-heroines. Like other wealthy women in Austen's novels, Emma received a private education from a governess whose "mildness of her temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint" (Austen 5). Emma's lax education by a mild governess was typical of daughters of the wealthy classes. The narrator of *Emma* reveals that "[t]he real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and disposition to think a little too well of herself . . . The danger, however, was at present so unperceived that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her" (5). This description of Emma's inner shortcomings also reminds readers of Mary Crawford whose self-importance and insistence on having her own way were the hallmark of her anti-heroic behavior. Along with her selfishness, Emma's interactions with her friend Harriet are often manipulative, especially when Harriet struggles to know whether or not to accept the proposal of Robert Martin, a young farmer that Emma feels is socially beneath Harriet. Emma takes advantage of Harriet's indecisiveness and subtly guides her friend to refuse the young man. This type of social manipulation is similar to Isabella's behavior toward Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*; however this time Emma is "the false friend" (Hannon 42).

Not only can Emma be favorably compared to anti-heroines in the Austen canon, she also has characteristics of several of the “social enemies” in Austen’s novels. Emma’s wealth, social standing, and lax educational standards eventually result in “doing just what she liked” (Austen 5). “Austen's other novels reserve such freedom and selfishness for unsympathetic characters . . . characters hopelessly incapable of regeneration, such as Mrs. Ferrars, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and Sir Walter Eliot” (Thaden 48 and 49). Emma’s behavior toward Harriet, the Martins, and other families in Highbury is often condescending, just as Lady Catherine looks down on Elizabeth Bennet. Elizabeth, Elinor, Catherine, and Anne are all the victims of this type of social snobbery; however Austen “has undertaken the much more difficult task of incorporating and correcting snobbery within the character of the heroine herself” (Shannon 644). And this is where Emma differs from the anti-heroines and social enemies of these other novels. By gaining self-awareness of her own mistakes and suffering the consequences of her own snobbery and social failings, she eventually does see her shortcomings and makes corrections to improve her behavior and relationships with others, even crossing previously impassable class barriers.

Because Emma’s sins are both social and moral, her most significant growth takes place when she changes her point of view toward her social and moral responsibilities, particularly in her acceptance of the lower classes, her charity to the less fortunate, and a reversal of her jealousy toward those who are superior to herself. *Emma* is unique not only because Austen makes a wealthy heiress her heroine, but also because the reader is invited into Emma’s mind as she journeys from snobbish girlhood to mature and compassionate womanhood.

While many critics and readers have labeled Emma as an unfeeling snob, she does possess a caring and loving heart, especially toward her immediate family. Her care for her valetudinarian father, whose personality quirks would exasperate the most patient of daughters,

is exceptionally long-suffering. Emma constantly looks out for her father's personal comfort, soothing his easily irritated nerves with the skill of an expert caretaker. Emma also often gives up or is willing to give up social engagements in order to keep her father company. The same devotion she gives to her father is also seen in her love for her sister, brother-in-law, nieces and nephews, and also for her governess-turned-best-friend, Mrs. Weston (Miss Taylor). Mrs. Weston offers sweet praise of Emma when she notes, "Where shall we see a better daughter, or kinder sister, or a truer friend?" (Austen 32). Emma's actions and motivations toward her family are pure and loving, and no fault can be found in her, especially regarding her tender relationship with her father.

Emma can also be praised for her devotion to the poor in Highbury. On more than one occasion, she sends gifts of food to Mrs. and Miss Bates, the widow of a vicar and her unmarried daughter. Mrs. and Miss Bates are poor, but often socialize with Emma and her father. Emma struggles with her relationship and attitude toward these women, even though they are all part of the same class: The clergy came from the wealthy class, though, as second sons of the landed gentry, these men were not given an inheritance. However, they did receive an education from Oxford, which gave the clergyman social respect but not a substantial income. The clergy often had to procure a patron to subsidize their meager income of tithes doled out by the Church of England. In a way, Emma acts as a type of patroness to the Bates, though now that Vicar Bates has passed away, they are in more need of her financial assistance. Mrs. and Miss Bates have been reduced to a charity case in Highbury, yet because of their connection to the church, these women also move in higher social circles. Emma distinctly feels the tension between social class and monetary wealth in relating to the Bates, and her charity toward them seems to be more out of obligation rather than eager desire.

Yet there is another type of poor that Emma tends to. She often pays charitable visits to the poor or sick in Highbury (Austen 67) and by doing so, she exercises her duty of *noblesse oblige*, a tradition harkening back to the days of feudalism where members of the upper class were expected to take care of the needs of the unfortunate. By this type of social service, Emma exercises her class privileges correctly and admirably: “the ability to exercise patronage, to offer charity, and generally to aid others—in brief, to encompass them as dependents—is a key mark of social superiority” (Segal 700). This is not the social superiority that contributes to Emma’s snobbery; rather, Emma uses her wealth and social status to serve those less fortunate than herself. In this way, Emma differs greatly from characters such as Fanny Dashwood whose greed and selfishness hinder her from even extending charity to her own family. Emma can be rightly admired for fulfilling her social obligations by regularly giving food, money, and service to those in need.

Finally, Emma’s character can be praised for the fact that she is free from vanity about her appearance. Not every Austen heroine is described as beautiful, but Austen writes that Emma is “handsome” (5) in the very first phrase of the novel. So it is pleasing to readers, as well as to Mr. Knightley, that Emma is not conceited about her looks. He remarks, “Considering how very handsome she is, she appears to be little occupied with it; her vanity lies another way” (32). His assessment of Emma is correct in both his positive and negative judgment of her character. As the narrator informs the reader, “Mr. Knightley, in fact, was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them” (9-10). Mr. Knightley’s frank assessments of Emma’s character are integral to her personal growth in the novel, as his view of Emma’s character acts as a mirror that helps her see herself for who she really is.

Although Mr. Knightley offers the best reflection of her character deficiencies, Emma is not *completely* blind to her shortcomings, at least those concerning her personal accomplishments. She knows that the cultivation of her talents is lacking—despite her wealth and private education, she certainly would never measure up to Miss Bingley’s description of an “accomplished” young lady: “She was not much deceived as to her own skill either as an artist or a musician, but she was not unwilling to have others deceived, or sorry to know her reputation for accomplishment often higher than it deserved” (35-36). Emma does not have Elizabeth Bennet’s candor and honest acceptance of her own shortcomings; rather, she is comfortable letting others think that she is more talented than she really is, even if in her heart, she knows this is not true. From this example, it is apparent that Emma possesses self-knowledge, yet here at the beginning of the novel, her attitude about her faults is much like that of Mary Crawford who begs “forgiveness” for her selfishness without any plans to change her ways (*MP* 76). Emma intuitively knows that she needs improvement but lacks the maturity and motivation to actually make changes.

The primary theme of *Emma* is her journey of growth from immaturity in her judgments and relationships to mature self-knowledge and character development. While “[a]ll of Austen’s works are concerned with the relationship of love and virtue,” Anne Ruderman points out that this “connection is especially important in *Emma*, [as] the heroine’s education is a central theme” (271). Because of this, many critics have classified *Emma* as a *Bildungsroman*. Elaine Hoffman Baruch applies this genre to novels with a female protagonist even though a *Bildungsroman* traditionally refers to “education of the hero who is brought to a high level of consciousness through a series of experiences that lead to his development, [yet] many of the great novels that deal with women treat similar themes” (35). Every experience Emma has in the novel contributes

to her education and personal growth, teaching her what it means to act as a compassionate woman in society.

Some critics, such as E.N. Hayes, an author who describes Emma a “vain, stupid, selfish little fool” (17), argue that *Emma* has little value for teaching “the modern reader to evaluate our society, [or] how to be and move in our world” (20). Hayes claims that “[t]he damning flaw of Jane Austen’s novels is that the author never participates in the lives of her characters, never feels for them, only watches them and smiles a vapid, [Mona Lisa] smile” (19). However, Hayes has missed the entire point of Austen’s novels, particularly, the foundational premise of *Emma*, which is the education of how a heroine should “be and move in our world.” Modern readers of *Emma* do not admire her because she is vain and selfish, but because she grows beyond her faults. Hayes declares that while “*Emma* does entertain the weary of mind; it does not instruct” (20); yet this assessment is simply untrue. Out of all of Austen’s novels, *Emma* is most concerned with the education of the heroine, and thus the education of the reader. Edgar F. Shannon provides a succinct argument for the moral benefits for readers of *Emma*, thoroughly refuting Hayes’ point of view: “Far from having nothing worthwhile to say to modern men and women, through the discrepancy between appearance and reality she reminds us of human fallibility and the need for modesty, unselfishness, and compassion” (650). Shannon’s observation is proof that even though *Emma* was written in the early 1800s, the social and moral lessons Emma learns are still relevant to readers in the twenty-first century: respect and compassion for others regardless of social status or personal idiosyncrasies, and the need for honest evaluation of one’s character, morals, and motives.

Emma’s education is seen in three distinct relationships throughout the novel: her friendship with Harriet Smith; her interactions with Miss Bates; and her relationship with Jane

Fairfax. In each of these relationships, Emma is confronted with the ugliest issues of her social and moral failings, namely her class snobbery, manipulative tendencies, judgmental attitudes toward others, shallow standards for picking friends, and lack of compassion.

When the novel opens, Emma's governess and friend, Miss Taylor, has married and left the Woodhouse estate, leaving Emma alone for the first time in her life. Ironically, it is only after her teacher has gone and Emma is unrestrained by educational boundaries (as lax as they were under Miss Taylor) that all of Emma's faults are revealed. This plotline is traditional of the *Bildungsroman* as it is only when the hero or heroine is free from social restraints and thrust into the world for the first time that the "real" education begins. Emma proves that she has much to learn when, lonely and bored, she looks for a friend to compensate for the absence of Miss Taylor. Yet instead of cultivating a relationship that would be mutually beneficial and enjoyable for both parties, Emma chooses Harriet Smith, a sweet, naïve girl of unknown parentage and little money. Emma sees Harriet as "a girl who wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect. *She* would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners" (Austen 19). However, in selecting Harriet as a companion, Emma is not forming a friendship; she is picking a pastime, essentially choosing a life-size doll that she can play with for her own amusement, all under the pretense of forming Harriet into a proper lady. Emma justifies her decision, however, by claiming that this was "certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers" (19). While she is right in realizing that her "situation in life" propels her toward kindness to the less fortunate, Emma misapplies her social responsibility by attempting to elevate Harriet to a social class that she cannot maintain. And Harriet, in her sweetness and gratefulness for being preferred by the

esteemed Miss Woodhouse, is only too eager to be molded: “Harriet certainly was not clever, but she had a sweet docile, grateful disposition; was totally free from conceit; and only desiring to be guided by anyone she looked up to” (21). Emma takes advantage of Harriet’s youth and impressionability in a significant way at the beginning of the novel.

Before meeting Emma, Harriet spent a happy summer with the Martin’s, a farming family with two daughters and an eligible son. Harriet talks at length with Emma about what an amiable young man Mr. Martin is. Emma, sensing that her young friend needs direction in choosing the right sort of people to socialize with, informs Harriet that “[t]he yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and . . . I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is therefore in one sense as much above my notice as in every other he is below it” (24). Unlike Mr. Knightley, who counts Mr. Martin as his good friend and admires him because he is “open, straight forward, and very well judging” (47), Emma sees Mr. Martin only as a working class farmer that is above her charitable notice and below her social consideration. Emma realizes that if Harriet attaches herself to Mr. Martin, she will not only be socially forced to give up the friendship, but she will also lose the amusement and satisfaction of determining Harriet’s romantic future. Emma’s snobbish feelings toward Mr. Martin reveal her selfish and immature character because, unlike Mr. Knightley, she is guided by her prejudices of class rather than by a true perception of inner character.

Emma’s social snobbery and her manipulation of Harriet’s impressionable nature are especially evident when Harriet receives an unexpected marriage proposal from Mr. Martin. Emma immediately assumes that Harriet will reject the proposal and crushes Harriet’s initial excitement about the offer. Harriet begs for Emma’s advice but Emma states, “I shall not give

you any advice, Harriet. I will have nothing to do with it. This is a point which you must settle with your own feelings” (42). Yet instead of letting her friend truly make a decision without her input, Emma manipulatively asks Harriet if Mr. Martin is the “most agreeable man [she has] ever been in company with” all the while hinting at a more socially acceptable man that Emma has been trying to match with Harriet. After a short emotional struggle, Harriet concedes to Emma’s point of view and decides “on her own” to refused Mr. Martin’s proposal. Emma’s reaction to Harriet’s decision clearly points out her snobbish views on class superiority: “You would have thrown yourself out of all good society! I must have given you up . . . I would not have visited Mrs. Robert Martin, of Abbey-Mill Farm. Now I am secure of you for ever” (43). Instead of logically realizing that Harriet’s lack of money and questionable family background places her, unfortunately, on a lower rung of the social ladder, Emma immaturely trusts her own imaginative view of Harriet’s social position: “[t]here can be no doubt of [Harriet] being a gentleman’s daughter” (25). When Mr. Knightley confronts Emma about Harriet’s decision, he is furious that Emma would discourage her friend from making such a good match. She tries to argue her opinion that Harriet is socially superior to Mr. Martin, but Mr. Knightley finds her arguments illogical and ridiculous. Emma, convinced by her own imagination and class snobbery, refuses to agree with Mr. Knightley that she has misled Harriet. Like a spoiled child, she stubbornly holds to her opinions and resents Mr. Knightley’s belief that, by her advice, Emma may actually be hurting Harriet’s future happiness.

However, Emma soon learns that people are not playthings, and the change she encouraged in Harriet comes to haunt her at the end of the novel. Harriet, influenced by Emma think outside the socially acceptable boundaries for a husband, confesses to Emma that she is in love with Mr. Knightley! This is a moment of intense revelation and deep regret for Emma. For

the first time, she realizes that she loves Mr. Knightley, and by socially elevating Harriet, she has created a romantic rival for herself: “Oh! Had she never brought Harriet forward! . . . Had she not . . . prevented her marrying the unexceptional young man who would have made her happy and respectable in the life to which she ought to belong—all would have been safe; none of this dreadful sequel would have been” (325). Emma discerns she has erred on two levels: She snobbishly looked down on Mr. Martin as a social inferior, and she wrongfully elevated Harriet to a false social status. Emma finally understands that she has thwarted her friend’s future happiness by encouraging Harriet to seek romantic attention beyond her established social position. Although Emma is confronted by Mr. Knightley on this issue and encouraged to change her behavior toward Harriet, it is only when Emma experiences the pain of her mistakes that she truly repents of her social sins. Her penitence toward Harriet is two-fold: When she discerns that her influence in Harriet’s life has been hurtful for both of them, she slowly lets the intimacy of their friendship fade. Even more significantly though, Emma releases her attitude of social superiority toward the lower classes. She finally recognizes the merit and exceptional character of Harriet’s former suitor, Mr. Martin. In the good fortune of all happy endings, Mr. Martin pursues Harriet again and she accepts his hand in marriage. This time, Emma acknowledges that Mr. Martin is the right man for Harriet, not because he and Harriet are from the same social class, but because Mr. Martin is a hard-working man of character who loves Harriet and will make her truly happy.

With Harriet, Emma misinterpreted and misused her social responsibility by believing she could show a type of “charity” to her friend in the same way that she gives charity to the poor of Highbury. As seen previously, one of Emma’s personal strengths is the way that she ministers to the needs of the less fortunate, but Emma misunderstands the word “charity” to

mean simply giving financial help, food, or medicine to the needy instead of showing true compassion, love, and respect for those who are in need. Emma learns this valuable lesson in the novel primarily through her relationship with Miss Bates. Though Miss Bates is a comedic character, it is not hard to see why she is so annoying to Emma. Miss Bates is a chatterbox, busybody, and gossip; and the financial fortunes of both women have sunk dramatically as the years have gone by leaving them dependent on the charity of others to survive. Despite her general annoyance with Miss Bates' personality, Emma admits that "she is only too good natured and too silly to suit me; but in general, she is very much to the tastes of everybody, though single and though poor . . . if she had only a shilling in the world, she would be very likely to give away sixpence of it; and nobody is afraid of her: that is her great charm" (69). Though Miss Bates is a great favorite in Highbury and a personal friend of her father, Emma has to force herself to visit her; in fact, she often struggles with personal guilt due to her social neglect of Miss Bates and her mother:

She had had many a hint from Mr. Knightley and some from her own heart, as to her deficiency—but none were equal to counteract the persuasion of its being very disagreeable,—waste of time—tiresome women—and all the horror of being in danger of falling in with the second rate and third rate of Highbury, who were calling on them for ever, and was therefore she seldom went near them. (121)

Emma snobbishly places Miss Bates in a lower social class even though they are both the daughters of gentlemen. The only difference between the two women is their age and wealth. Miss Bates' poverty and singleness, at her advanced age, has made her "ridiculous" to society, and especially to Emma (69). However, at times, Emma's sense of duty overpowers her social snobbery and she submits herself to a half an hour of blathering chatter about subjects she could

care less about. She would much rather carry out her charitable duty by sending a “hind-quarter” of pork than cultivate a relationship with Miss Bates (135). Despite Emma’s personal feelings toward this elderly woman however, she plays the part of kind benefactress well when in company with Miss Bates.

In the privacy of her own home and friends, however, Emma openly makes fun of Miss Bates, even going as far as presenting a diverting imitation of her (177). The imitation humorously captures Miss Bates mannerisms and verbal quirks, but immediately lays bare Emma’s lack of compassion and immaturity. Mrs. Weston, Emma’s former governess, lightly chastises Emma for the joke at Miss Bates’ expense but Emma does not heed her correction or repent. In fact, the next time Emma makes fun of Miss Bates, the two women are in company together.

Readers and critics have long pointed to the “Box Hill Incident” as a defining moment for Emma in her education. Emma, abandoning all social and personal self-control (Austen even writes “Emma could not resist” [291]) heartlessly makes fun of Miss Bates’ personal idiosyncrasies. Even more significantly, Emma’s joke reveals her impatient annoyance with Miss Bates. Miss Bates is embarrassed and hurt but receives Emma’s backhanded social criticism with grace. Emma, however, is completely unaware of the emotional pain she has caused Miss Bates until Mr. Knightley confronts her privately: “How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation?—Emma, I had not thought it possible” (294). Emma instantly remembers her mean-spirited joke but tries to “laugh it off” (294); she does not realize the severity of her social faux pas until Mr. Knightley firmly explains: “Were she your equal in situation—but Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she is sunk from the comforts she was born to; and if she live to old

age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done indeed!" (295). Mr. Knightley's chastisement of Emma's behavior is influenced by the philosophy of *noblesse oblige* but his interest goes much deeper than that—he is ultimately concerned with the motivations behind her actions, what these motivations say about Emma's character, and what her true responsibility should be toward her social inferiors. Ruderman offers further insight as to why Miss Bates' poverty should have kept Emma's tongue in check: "Liberties are allowed to be taken with those who are rich and superior because there they have no sting. The real need for cultivation is with one's inferiors—it is the ability not to make them painfully aware of their inferiority (be it of wealth, rank, virtue, or intelligence)" (274). Emma's lack of "cultivation" is painfully apparent at Box Hill. "Austen manages to make the reader feel that Emma has committed the gravest possible of sins by her offhand joke at a picnic" (Ruderman 274), and this realization proves to be a turning point in Emma's moral and social education.

Mr. Knightley's confrontation about Miss Bates gives Emma a lens to see herself for the first time, and she is devastated when she views her own heart: "Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life . . . As she reflected more, she seemed to feel it more. She never had been so depressed" (Austen 296). Emma weeps the whole way home from Box Hill but then must compose herself in order to care for her father that evening. In this simple domestic act Emma is struck again with the deficiency of her own compassion. She knows that her father, like Miss Bates, can be tiresome and even obnoxious, but with him, she serves out of a selfless heart: "As a daughter, she hoped she was not without heart. She hoped no one could have to say to her, 'How could you be so unfeeling to your father?'" (296). Emma recognizes her inconsistent character and firmly determines to make improvements, especially regarding her

relationship with Miss Bates: “She had been often remiss, her conscience told her so; remiss, perhaps, more in thought than in fact, scornful, ungracious. But it should be so no more. In the warmth of true contrition, she would call upon her the very next morning, and it should be the beginning, on her side, of a regular, equal, and kindly intercourse” (296-97). Austen’s wayward heroine “at last recognizes that her intelligence, wealth, and social pre-eminence require kindness, rather than contempt, toward Miss Bates. She awakens to the obligations of her position” (Shannon 641). Yet even more than gaining an understanding of true charity, Emma experiences a change in the way she thinks about others. She finally realizes that her social position, wealth, and influence mean nothing if she does not have love for those she is trying to help. Emma’s reformation of character perfectly echoes the model of biblical charity found in 1 Corinthians 13.3: “If I give all I possess to the poor . . . but do not have love, I gain nothing” (NIV). In this moment, Emma releases her selfish, childish outlook on life and takes her first steps toward maturity as a woman and a true Austen heroine.

While Mr. Knightley is instrumental in Emma’s development throughout the novel, he is not the only person that directs Emma toward growth. Indeed, “it is Jane Fairfax as much as Knightley who sets in motion Emma's recognition of her short-comings” (Perry 193). Like her relationship with Harriet and Miss Bates, Emma’s feelings toward Jane Fairfax at the beginning of the novel are colored by her prejudices, snobbery, immaturity, and lack of compassion. However, by the end of Emma’s journey, Jane not only becomes a friend, but also plays an instrumental role in Emma’s education.

Emma’s impressions of Jane Fairfax come primarily from Jane’s aunt, Miss Bates. Miss Bates, extremely proud of her niece, makes sure that Emma always knows what is going on in Jane’s life, much to Emma’s chagrin: “One is sick of the very name of Jane Fairfax. Every letter

from her is read forty times over. . . I wish Jane Fairfax very well; but she tires me to death.”

(Austen 70). And Miss Bates is not the only person in Highbury to sing Jane’s praises: Emma is constantly being reminded by her family and friends how “sweet [and] amiable” Jane is; how she is “so very accomplished and superior;” and how she “would be such a delightful companion for Emma.” After all, Jane is “exactly Emma’s age” (83). For Emma, Jane’s celebrated character and accomplishments do more than just irritate her—Emma feels as though her position as a social favorite in her community is threatened by such a rival. When Jane finally visits her aunt and grandmother in Highbury, Emma discovers that Jane’s character and accomplishments were not exaggerated. Emma senses a rivalry immediately for, “it is embarrassingly clear to Emma that Jane is not just the only girl around who is not her inferior—she is superior” (Morgan “Charms” 42). Mr. Knightley points out as much to Emma, though she is reluctant to agree with his reason for why she dislikes Jane: “Mr. Knightley had once told her it was because she saw in her the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself; and though the accusation had been eagerly refuted at the time, there were moments of self-examination in which her conscience could not quite acquit her” (130). Emma ponders her mixed feelings toward Jane once again when Jane comes to Highbury. In a moment of generosity of mind and feeling, Emma “[determines] that she would dislike her no longer” (131), especially considering Jane’s precarious social position. As a girl with no dowry, Jane should be pitied because she must soon earn her way in the world as a governess. However, Emma’s compassionate resolve quickly evaporates (132) when Emma is reminded of another reason to dislike Miss Fairfax: “She was . . . so cold, so cautious! There was no getting at her real opinion . . . She was disgustingly, was suspiciously reserved” (132). Emma’s irritation at Jane’s reserved nature, coupled with her jealousy, fuels Emma’s future behavior toward the girl who should have been

her natural friend.

Emma's immaturity and lack of compassion is exposed when she lets her vivid imagination run away with her concerning Jane's romantic history. Based on a few vague details, Emma imagines that Jane is in love with Mr. Dixon, a married man. She allows her little fiction to grow and taint her view of Jane; even worse, she shares her thoughts with Mr. Frank Churchill, a young man who also knew Jane from a seaside resort. Frank encourages Emma's imagination and the two often speak negatively about Jane in private. Frank seems to delight in the thought of a forbidden romance between Jane and Mr. Dixon, so much so that Emma begins to regret ever proposing a relationship between the two. The situation comes to a climax when all three young people are playing a scrambled word game. Frank spells "Dixon" for Emma and then playfully indicates that they should show it to Jane: "I will give it to her—shall I?"—and as clearly heard Emma opposing it with eager laughing warmth. 'No, no, you shall not; you shall not, indeed'" (274). Frank takes Emma's laughter for encouragement and gives the letters to Jane, much to her confusion and embarrassment. Mr. Knightley suspiciously watches these events unfold and questions Emma about what was going on that gave Jane so much distress. Emma's reaction displays feelings of contriteness: "She could not endure to give him the true explanation; for though her suspicions were by no means removed, she was really ashamed of having ever imparted them" (275). Emma's self-awareness in this moment is indicative of her moral and social growth. She realizes that her joke at Jane's expense has gone too far and, from this moment on, her actions toward Jane are guided by compassion instead of spite.

As before the word game incident, Emma's harsh opinions of Jane begin to fade. Emma "most heartily [grieves] over the idleness of her childhood—and sat down and practiced [the piano-forte] vigorously an hour and a half" (181). She decides to release her jealousy over Jane's

superior accomplishments, and in doing so Emma discovers that Jane's talents are worth admiring and even emulating. Jane also helps Emma to see herself honestly: as an imperfect girl in need of personal improvement. Further acquaintance with Jane also produces compassion in Emma when she remembers Jane's future as a governess. Instead of trying to avoid Jane, Emma starts to seek out her company in an effort to offer emotional support. Emma "had scarcely a stronger regret than for her past coldness; and the person, whom she had been so many months neglecting, was not the very one on whom she would have lavished every distinction of regard of sympathy" (306). Jane, though, after these months of neglect, and for reasons unknown to Emma, scorns Emma's attempts to befriend her. When she finally grasps that her previous actions have caused the loss of friendship with such an excellent girl, Emma is "very, very sorry. Her heart was grieved for a state which seemed but the more pitiable from this sort of irritation of spirits, inconsistency of action, and inequality of powers; and it mortified her that she was given so little credit for proper feeling, or esteemed so little worthy as a friend" (308). But as hurt as she is over Jane's rejection, Emma knows that she has brought the situation about herself. But Jane's negative feelings toward Emma run even deeper than Emma comprehends.

The reason for Jane's reserved nature and scorn for Emma's kindness is shockingly revealed at the end of the novel—she has been secretly engaged to Frank Churchill for months! In an effort to conceal his true feelings for Jane, Frank feigned attraction for Emma, and Emma, flattered by his attention (though only viewing him as a friend) engages in outrageous flirtation with Frank in Jane's presence. When Emma learns the truth about their secret engagement, she apprehends the meaning behind Jane's cold behavior toward her: "No doubt it had been from jealousy.—In Jane's eyes she had been a rival" (317). At the same time that Emma was envying Jane for her superior accomplishments, Jane's jealousy of Emma also prevented the friendship

from forming on the other side. When the truth is revealed however both girls maturely seek each other's forgiveness. Like Elizabeth Bennet who finally sees the merit and superior character in Mr. Darcy, Emma also discerns that her immature feelings and actions toward Jane have hindered what could have been a beautiful friendship. While readers hope that both girls will be able to mutually benefit from their newly formed relationship, it is not to be. Ruth Perry comments on the "interrupted friendship" between Emma and Jane, stating that, "the great unfinished business of the novel is the never-quite managed friendship of Emma and Jane Fairfax, the two superior young ladies whose association we wait for, whose conversation promises the most delightful equality of tastes and interests, but who are parted on the eve of their mutual good-will by their two marriages" (189). Sadly, though Emma is able to move past her immaturity to find compassion for and eventually forgiveness from Jane, the two are never able to develop the friendship that they both desire.

Emma's journey toward moral and social growth does produce a significant and long-lasting relationship for her, though. Happily, at the end of the novel, she and Mr. Knightley marry. It is significant to note that in every relationship in which Emma needed considerable growth, Mr. Knightley offers advice to Emma and tries to help her grow past her weaknesses. Austen points out that Mr. Knightley "was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma" (9), and though Emma heartily resists his correction in most instances, she always accepts his wisdom in the end. Mr. Knightley is the key figure in Emma's inner education; his actions are always motivated by his care for her, yet it is only at the end of the novel that he realizes that he is in love with her. In his ever blunt manner he professes his feelings, and hopes that she will accept him despite the fact that he has played the "teacher" in her life: "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.—I have blamed you, and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it” (338). Even in his confession of love, Mr. Knightley offers “nothing but truth” to Emma. He loves her for who she was and who she has become, and to him, she is the “sweetest and best of all creatures, faultless in spite of all her faults” (340). As Ruderman observes, Austen uniquely joins romantic love and the desire for virtue in the relationship between Mr. Knightley and Emma: “*Emma* is a love story, but an unusual one, for Austen shows us how a concern for virtue is the ground for the deepest attachment to others” (271). Emma herself discovers that she loves Mr. Knightley *because* of his concern for her character and personal growth. Despite Emma’s immature behavior throughout the novel, and the fact that she “has negative qualities not possessed by any other Austen heroine . . . most readers believe that Emma has matured and improved by the end of the novel—if not completely, then at least enough to deserve Mr. Knightley” (Thaden 52). In her relationship with Mr. Knightley, Emma displays the character growth of a true Austen heroine: “What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own. Nothing, but that the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in future” (373). Her humbleness in this moment is a far cry from the self-satisfied girl at the beginning of the novel. Through Mr. Knightley’s love and attention, she has learned to see herself for who she really is, to shed her selfish nature, and to become a compassionate, mature woman in her relationships with those in her community, in her family and friendships, and most happily, with her husband.

Chapter Three: Jane Fairfax: An Austen heroine

While *Emma* is Austen's only novel named for its protagonist, Emma's behavior is often anti-heroic; her weaknesses are painfully evident throughout the majority of the novel, and it is only at the end that she transforms into a recognizable model of an Austen heroine. Emma's character flaws are highlighted by her actions toward others, particularly Jane Fairfax, a minor character who plays a significant role in Emma's personal growth. Many critics and readers have even turned to analyzing Jane, Emma's would-be friend and rival, as an Austen heroine because her personality, character, and self-awareness guide her toward character development. While Jane's story is sparse and purposefully shrouded in mystery throughout *Emma*, nevertheless by comparing her characteristics with the other heroines in Austen's works, and by taking an imaginative leap into fleshed-out versions of her story, it is clear that Jane Fairfax can be classified as a true Austen heroine.

Like many other secondary female characters in Austen's novels, Jane's character is revealed only through the narrator or through the narration of the main characters. From the very first description of Jane in the novel, however, readers can easily see that she is unique, both in *Emma* and in the Austen canon. Lynda Hall believes that despite Emma's negative feelings toward Jane, "Jane Austen clearly does like Jane Fairfax and treats her compassionately," and out of plethora of secondary characters in all of Austen's novels, "[t]here is no minor character in

Austen's novels depicted as sympathetically as Jane Fairfax" (76). Though many may sympathize with Emma's jealousy of Jane, most readers secretly like Jane because of her endearing qualities and moral character. Jane is admired by all of Highbury for her "sweet, amiable" nature, and because she is "so very accomplished and superior" (Austen 83). She is a dutiful and loving niece and granddaughter and writes them every week. Her character is morally upright having been shaped by her relatives and friends, further enhancing her "pleasing person, [and] good understanding" (128). Though she is an orphan, she is blessed with good friends who gave her an "excellent education" as well as "every advantage of discipline and culture" (128-29).

For all her personal and social advantages though, Jane is poor and her poverty marks her with distinct social drawbacks in life. She must marry well, which, considering that she has no dowry, will prove a difficult task. The only other option is to become a governess. Her education has prepared her for this profession, but it is not an occupation that was desired or highly respected in Austen's England. Historian Lawrence Stone explains that "governesses suffered from both economic hardship and social stigma . . . equivocal social status deprived them from any companionship or sense of belonging" (384). Cecilia Wadso Lecaros, in her study of the English governess novel, recounts story after story of the horrid treatment of middle-class spinsters who had no choice but take care of other people's children. Along with social marginalization, the work of a governess was very hard, demanding long hours with little financial compensation (Stone 384). Though a career as a governess gave a woman a roof over her head and saved her from a life of moral degradation as a prostitute (in most cases, the only other "career" available to women during this time), women only chose to become governesses out of dignified desperation (Lecaros 27). Jane herself compares her fate as a governess to slavery, "not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect" (Austen 235). Employers of

governesses frequently viewed them as lower class servants, even though governesses were raised in upper class families. There were often clashes of personality, respect, and pride between the governess and the lady of the house; and the governess was too often subject to class snobbery, isolation, and a lack of personal, social, and vocational respect (Lecaros 40). Jane's sad destiny procures compassion from both readers and from Emma. In fact, it is Jane's future as a governess that first softens Emma's negative feelings toward her.

Although Emma is jealous of Jane's "perfection" in talent and character, Jane, like all Austen heroines, has negative qualities. As Mr. Knightley observes, "not even Jane Fairfax is perfect. She has a fault. She has not the open temper which a man would wish for in a wife" (225). However, while Jane's reserved nature is a flaw in Mr. Knightley's eyes, this shortcoming is the result of a more serious character defect: Jane is concealing a secret engagement from her family and friends. The reasons behind her secrecy are tied up with complex social regulations. Jane is engaged to Frank Churchill, a man who is an heir to a large fortune and estate; Jane, however, is a penniless governess-in-waiting, and if their engagement is revealed to Frank's aunt, he will be in danger of losing his inheritance.

The concealment of an engagement presents serious risks to the character of a young woman during Austen's era, and Jane's decision to agree to such an arrangement casts a doubtful shadow on her place next to Austen's other heroines, for no other heroine purposefully deceives others concerning her relationship to the man she loves. And throughout the novel, Jane feels the weight of her decision: her health begins to fail due to the stress and jealousy she feels in keeping the engagement intact. Frank too, feels this same stress; however the anxiety of concealing the engagement does not affect his health. Rather, it reveals the worst qualities of Frank's character, as demonstrated during the Box Hill outing. Irritated by a lovers spat with Jane, Frank meanly

quips in her presence: “How many a man has committed himself on a short acquaintance, and rued it all the rest of his life!” (293). Though they are in the presence of others, Jane cannot help but answer him: “A hasty and imprudent attachment may arise—but there is generally time to recover from it afterwards . . . it can be only weak, irresolute characters . . . who will suffer an unfortunate acquaintance to be an inconvenience, an oppression for ever” (293). While Jane’s remark is an obvious jab at Frank’s callous proclamation and questionable character, her statement could also be applied to herself. She realizes that her own character is “weak” because she agreed to a hasty engagement and then a long concealment; she fears that she might “suffer . . . oppression for ever.”

Because *Emma* is not written from Jane’s perspective, we will never know exactly how she wrestled with her conscience, but in her actions, she behaves like a true Austen heroine in the chapters that follow. She recognizes her faults, realizes that her moral character is in need of improvement, and as a result of this revelation, she breaks off the engagement. Though the pair is eventually reunited, Jane reveals, in a rare disclosure of her own thoughts, her crisis of character and conscience: “The consequence . . . has been a state of perpetual suffering to me; and so it ought . . . I can never be blameless. I have been acting contrary to all my sense of right; and the fortunate turn that everything has taken, and the kindness I am now receiving, is what my conscience tells me ought not to be” (329). Although this speech reveals Jane’s self-awareness and desire to reform, she does not give the reason for forming the engagement in the first place. Emma, along with readers, can only guess at Jane’s reasoning: “She loves him then excessively, I suppose. It must have been from attachment only, that she could be led to form the engagement. Her affection must have overpowered her judgment” (329). Jane bears resemblance to Marianne in that her intense feelings led her to make poor decisions. Thankfully, both Marianne and Jane

see the error of their ways before they marry. While Frank Churchill does slightly resemble Willoughby in his character, readers can only hope, as the characters in *Emma* do, that by Frank's marriage to Jane, "his character will improve, and acquire from her's [sic] the steadiness and delicacy of principle that it wants" (352), for by the end of the novel Jane has made amendments to restore her moral core and deserves a man who is equal to her character and principles.

Jane is not only favorably compared to Austen's other heroines in relation to her character, but also in her social situation. Her upbringing and financial circumstances are most like Fanny Price's. Paul Pickrel examines the similarities of Fanny and Jane, acknowledging that they "both [grow] up as semi-adopted members of families far richer than themselves yet both are unprovided for after girlhood, [and] both [fall] in love with young men from among the rich they have grown up with" (144). Interestingly, Austen started *Emma* directly after she finished *Mansfield Park* (135). Perhaps she chose not to write Jane Fairfax as the heroine her next novel because Jane's social situation is so similar to Fanny's.

Because Jane is personally poor, but was raised by and socializes with the rich, she is forced into many of the same social dilemmas as some of the other Austen heroines. Like many of the leading ladies in the Austen milieu, Jane is the "victim of [social] snobbery," though not at the hands of an antagonist, but at the hands of Emma, an Austen heroine (Shannon 644). Also, "like Elizabeth Bennet, Jane must endure the constant company of well-meaning but socially despised and ludicrous relatives. Like Fanny Price, she must endure silently while a flirt of high social standing plays with the man she loves" (Thaden 55). Anne Eliot also helplessly watches as the young man she loves give attention to another woman, and Elinor Dashwood experiences a similar dilemma. Morgan has even described Jane Fairfax as "a Marianne and Elinor Dashwood

rolled into one” (41), perhaps thinking of Jane’s extreme emotional self-control when witnessing, like Elinor, the affection of a beloved young man bestowed a rival. In the end, however, for all of Jane’s superior self-control, she “turns out to be the Marianne of this novel” (McMaster 734). Despite having the self-will of an Elinor, Jane also has the romantic nature of a Marianne, for it is her romantic sensibility, and not her common sense, that persuades her to enter into a secret engagement in the first place.

Because Jane Fairfax has so many similarities to Austen’s heroines, one must wonder why Austen wrote Jane Fairfax into such a minor role. Wayne Booth explores this conundrum: “The major problem is that any extended view of [Jane] would reveal her as a more sympathetic person than Emma herself . . . In matters of taste and ability, of head and of heart, she is Emma’s superior, and Jane Austen, always in danger of losing our sympathy for Emma, cannot risk any degree of distraction” (100-101). Yet readers and scholars *are* distracted by both Jane’s heroic characteristics and her untold story. Although Austen unveils many of the mysteries surrounding Jane at the end of *Emma*, readers are still left wondering why did the word “Dixon” make Jane so angry when Frank presented it to her during the word game; was there a secret relationship between Mr. Dixon and Jane Fairfax? And what was really said in the conversations between Jane and Frank that Austen only mentions in passing? Is Frank Churchill really a man of questionable moral character? Perhaps Austen never reveals all of Jane’s mysteries because the novel is written from Emma’s perspective, and the heroine herself never discovers the answers to these questions. Yet many readers, critics, and writers, intrigued by Jane Fairfax—the “underdog” of *Emma*, and even a precursor to the long-suffering Victorian heroine who is rewarded in the end for her virtue—have sought to know Jane more intimately, even if it means writing her story themselves.

Jane Fairfax has gained the attention, not only by academics and critics, but by Janeite authors as well. In recent years, these devoted fans of Austen's fiction have expressed their love for Austen (and their own creativity) by producing a new genre of literature: the Austen sequel or the rewritten novel. Sensing that there was something special about Jane Fairfax, these authors rewrite *Emma* from Jane's perspective, making Jane the heroine of the novel. While dozens of critics have written about Jane Fairfax's character and role in *Emma*, only three or four novelists have undertaken the task of placing Jane as the heroine of a novel. The three novels examined in this chapter are *Jane Fairfax: A New Novel* (1940) by Naomi Royde Smith; *Jane Fairfax: Jane Austen's Emma Through Another's Eyes* (1990) by Joan Aiken; and *Lovers' Perjuries, Or the Clandestine Courtship of Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill* (2007) by Joan Ellen Delman. Each author offers a unique view of Jane's background, personality, and moral character; yet not every novelist succeeds in writing Jane as a heroine that is consistent with the moral qualities and personal growth that Austen requires of her leading ladies.

In *Jane Fairfax: A New Novel*, Smith invents the back-story of Jane's life. The novel begins when Jane is a young girl, and recounts her life with the Campbell's. Smith describes Jane's education in detail, stressing the fact that Jane will one day be forced to support herself as a governess. The novel is divided into three "books," after the form of Austen's novels; however it is not until the third book that the *Emma* narrative comes into play.

Smith vividly captures the emotions of Jane and Frank's whirlwind romance in Weymouth, as well as how quickly they abandoned their sense of social and moral propriety in forming their secret engagement: "Little by little each learned how the other had attempted to follow the dictates of reason and to abandon all thought of persisting in a course to which so much opposition was bound to be made—and how each had failed" (261). While both Jane and

Frank are overpowered by their emotions and choose to ignore their consciences concerning the social indiscretion of their secret engagement, Jane tries to hold on to a shred of personal ethics concerning how far their secrecy and deception should go—“She was already so far gone on the road leading away from strict rectitude and propriety, she was finding so much joy in the abandonment of those principles which might have enabled her to resist him, that he obtained her all her promises but one” (263-64)—she will not involve their mutual friends or servants in the burden of keeping their secret. Jane’s decision to keep their engagement between herself and Frank only speaks loudly of her moral conscience; she is aware that she is transgressing social and moral principles but she did not want to force their servants or friends to keep their secret, and in doing so, compromise their own consciences.

Smith also conceives Jane as a person of mixed character by highlighting Jane’s intense jealousy over Frank’s flirtatious behavior toward Emma. Yet Smith’s Jane is also concerned that Frank will end up hurting Emma if, by his attentions, he actually secures her affection:

It is for *her* that I ask your consideration...is it unreasonable for me to imagine that some degree of what I myself have felt for so long might be troubling her also—and with no prospect of a return? . . . Will you not, in return for that assurance . . . [try] to reduce your public flirtation to a more reasonable, a purely friendly level? (306-07)

It is refreshing to see how Smith portrays Jane in these instances, for readers (and Emma herself!) wonder how Jane can stand watching her fiancé publically romance another woman. Far from being one-dimensional though, Smith’s Jane also has a compassionate heart and the ability to see beyond her own emotional needs. While Austen does not reveal if Jane is concerned for Emma’s emotional well being, the compassion Smith gives to Jane’s character is consistent with

how Austen's Jane gives swift forgiveness to Emma for her flirtatious relationship with Frank. Overall, Smith, like Austen, portrays Jane Fairfax as a sensitive, intelligent, and elegant heroine with a moral core that, while flawed, guides her character throughout the book.

In *Jane Fairfax: A New Novel*, Emma plays a very minor and socially neutral role. Joan Aiken, in contrast to Smith's novel, portrays Emma as a definitive anti-heroine in *Jane Fairfax: Jane Austen's Emma, Through Another's Eyes*. Aiken captures the outlook of Hayes when he hypothesizes about the effects of placing Jane in the position of heroine in *Emma*: "Had [Jane] been more fully developed, more frequently permitted to enter the scene . . . she would have rapidly usurped the central position of Emma, and by contrast have indicted the sort of person the heroine actually is—a vain, stupid, selfish little fool" (17). And in Aiken's novel, this is the exactly how the reader sees Emma. While Aiken's portrayal of Emma may be slightly exaggerated, it is nothing compared to the liberties Aiken takes in her attempt to write Jane Fairfax as both an Austen heroine and as a character that resonates with modern readers as well. Though Aiken favorably compares Jane family and social situation to that of Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, the similarities of Aiken's Jane to the other Austen heroines ends here. In fact, she takes the story in a direction inconsistent with Austen's other heroines or plotlines. Aiken fails to follow the Austen paradigm for a romance plot, and also does not fashion characters whose "voices" are consistent with Austen's. More importantly though, Aiken does not succeed in fashioning a heroine who is clearly guided by her moral character.

Aiken begins her novel when Jane is a young girl; in fact, most of the book describes her childhood and adolescence with the Campbell's, with only a third of the book recounting the events that take place in *Emma*. Aiken's portrayal of Jane as a young girl is inconsistent with how Austen's heroines typically behave. For example, Jane argues with Colonel Campbell when

he unfairly chastises her and his daughter for not learning their lessons: “Jane, unlike [Miss Campbell], stood up for herself, though terrified. ‘Sir! You are unjust!’” (64). This outburst, even coming from a child, is completely out of character for an Austen heroine. Rather, “Austen's heroines,” as Thaden points out “are usually characterized by restraint and self-effacement. Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Anne Elliot are quiet and decorous, while Elizabeth Bennet, though not usually self-effacing, is certainly restrained when among her superiors” (49). One can only assume that Aiken included this scene in her novel to showcase Jane as a strong, outspoken, and independent individual—characteristics admired by contemporary readers. But this scene seems out of place in an Austen adaptation. Out of reverence for her elders, as well as respect for proper social behavior, no true Austen heroine would speak to her superior, let alone her guardian, in such a way without rebuke, which Jane does not receive for this outburst.

While Aiken attempts to make Jane a compelling, modern heroine at the beginning of the book, Jane’s strength and consistency of character, so praised in *Emma*, soon dissolves when romance enters the story. Jane’s romantic attachments even seems to mirror that of Harriet Smith as Jane falls in “love” with three men throughout the Aiken’s novel. Aiken solves the alphabet game mystery in *Emma*, where Frank spells out the word “Dixon” by theorizing that Jane and Mr. Dixon mutually fell in love. However, Jane cannot marry Mr. Dixon because she has no dowry, and Mr. Dixon needs a rich bride who can pay off his gambling debts, so he chooses to marry Miss Campbell instead. Heartbroken over losing the man she loves, and filled with anxiety about her looming future as a governess, Jane agrees to enter into a secret engagement with Frank Churchill, a man who is barely an acquaintance. Jane’s Harriet-like flightiness continues when, even after Jane accepts Frank’s proposal, she nurtures romantic fantasies that one day, her childhood hero, Mr. Knightly will ask her to be his wife (112). While readers are told that Jane

comes to love Frank over the course of their engagement, her attachment to him is never believable and we are left wondering why she ever agreed to enter into such a morally reprehensible arrangement in the first place. Aiken's Jane seems to agree to the secret arrangement simply out of desperation or for mercenary means. These motives are completely inconsistent with Austen's other heroines, who marry only for love. Rather, marrying for money is often a sign of morally questionable inner character. While Austen's heroines are never perfect, they are guided by a strong moral compass, one that Aiken's Jane seems to lack in her relationships with men, and Frank Churchill in particular.

Booth remarks that Austen's choice of heroine in *Emma* was purposeful for, "by showing most of the story through Emma's eyes, the author insures that we shall travel with Emma rather than stand against her" (97). And throughout most of Aiken's book, the reader is, along with Jane, against Emma. At the end of the novel, however, Jane and Emma form a sort of friendship, only to mourn the fact that they will be separated when their impending marriages take place. Strangely, the novel concludes on this sad note. Aiken again deviates from the traditional conclusion of the Austen novel by not ending the book with the marriage of the heroine and her love. While Aiken takes a unique approach into the mind, motives and character of both Jane and Emma, she does not create a heroine who, like Austen's leading ladies, has a strong moral core that guides her toward personal and social growth throughout her story. This deviation, while inconsistent with Austen's paradigm, is understandable when considering the twentieth century audience Aiken was writing for, who, unlike nineteenth century readers, would not necessarily expect the moral growth of the heroine to be the central theme of her novel.

While one may question the morals, motivations, and true affection of Jane Fairfax in Aiken's novel, there can be no doubt as to Jane's motives for entering into a secret engagement

in Delman's novel, *Lovers' Perjuries*. In an email interview, Delman reveals her inspiration for writing this adaptation of *Emma*:

for years I entertained a notion that someday I would write a novel about Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill. Then Joan Aiken, author of many Austen sequels, prequels & retellings, published her own *Jane Fairfax*, and I thought I was off the hook: now I wouldn't have to write it myself! Unfortunately, Aiken's interpretation of the tale turned out to be drastically different from my own, and (I thought) from Austen's. Besides, she seemed more interested in the relationship between Jane and Emma than in the relationship between Jane and Frank. (Email Interview, 22 April 2010)

Not only does Delman center her novel on the romance between Jane and Frank, she also follows the Austen model of moral heroine. She writes: "Wishing to be as faithful as possible to the original, I scoured *Emma* for every possible clue provided by Austen, combining these with ideas which had long been simmering in my mind" (Delman). Unlike Smith or Aiken's adaptations that explore Jane's childhood, Delman concentrates the plot of *Lover's Perjuries* around the timeline in *Emma*. The novel opens with the Campbell's trip to Weymouth where Jane is introduced to Frank Churchill and is soon smitten. Delman's Frank is charming and handsome, as well as compassionate and devoted. Jane witnesses and admires Frank's inner character when he is reunited with his beloved childhood governess, and finding that she is sick and living in poverty, he takes it upon himself to move her to a new home and take care of her financially and emotionally. When Jane observes Frank's compassion toward his former governess, the very profession she is destined for, she falls even deeper in love with him.

When Frank's aunt abruptly proposes to leave Weymouth, Frank confesses his love to

Jane and she to him. Frank, knowing that his aunt will never agree to a marriage with a penniless governess, declares that he will denounce his wealth and take up a trade instead. Jane heroically refuses to allow him to give up his inheritance, and the two agree that the only alternative is to enter into a secret engagement. Jane's moral character is pricked to the core upon making this decision: "She deeply felt that she had done wrong to enter into this engagement; was doing wrong in maintaining it. Yet Frank Churchill now possessed her whole heart; she loved him too well to give him up" (Delman 147). The conflict in Jane's heart is deeply felt and the reader shares her struggle as Delman fleshes out Jane's tale in *Lovers' Perjuries*.

Delman adheres closely to the plot of *Emma*, but instead of seeing through Emma's eyes, readers look through Jane's. Emma herself is reduced to a minor character, though she is still vastly important to the plot of the story, unlike the Emma in Smith's novel. While the childish animosity between Jane and Emma seen in Aiken's novel is thankfully absent from *Lover's Perjuries*, the jealousy Jane feels when she witnesses Frank's attentions to Emma are strikingly believable. Through Delman's account, we learn that Jane was never in love with Mr. Dixon. In fact, she is horrified to learn that Frank has indulged Emma's fantasies about Jane's relationship with her friend's husband. Frank, on the other hand, finds the whole situation hilarious and thinks that giving the word "Dixon" to Jane during the alphabet game will make her laugh. Jane, however, is not amused and does not wait around to see the word "pardon" pushed hurriedly in her direction by Frank (283). Delman also expounds upon the argument that Frank and Jane have when they meet on her way home from the strawberry picking party. Although they bicker about Jane's refusal to let Frank walk her back to Highbury, Delman reveals that the core of the quarrel is jealousy, misunderstanding, and miscommunication, making the lovers spat very realistic.

Delman follows the Austen model of heroine by writing Jane as a flawed yet deeply

moral character. When Frank voices his frustration at Jane's coldness and reserve toward him during his visits to Highbury, Jane is "determined to remain firm, even in the face of his displeasure. She felt herself to be in the right, and she *would* act prudently" rather than expose the secret of their relationship before their engagement can be made public (268). In *Emma*, even after everyone finds out about the engagement, Jane's character is still praised, despite "this one great deviation from the strict rule of right" (Austen 375). Delman's novel displays how acutely Jane suffers for this mistake and how much courage and strength it took for her to eventually break off the engagement. In fact, Delman reveals that when Frank returns to Highbury in order to reconcile with Jane, she refuses to renew the engagement at all. Even under the influence of Frank's most sincere apologies, explanations and promises, Jane holds firm. Yet, "how powerfully she longed to yield to his persuasion! 'But the idea of going on as we have been,' she said, 'of continuing in this deception—is horrible to me. I cannot endure it any longer!'" (Delman 325). Frank then reveals that he has told his uncle everything, and the need for concealment is over. It is only when the curse of deception and secrecy is lifted that Jane renews her promise to marry Frank.

Delman concludes her book in the Austen fashion—with marriage announcements! She apparently took great delight in this portion of the novel because she marries off nearly every single person in the book, including marrying Miss Bates to the widower Mr. Churchill. The second marriage of Mr. Churchill proves important to Frank and Jane's future, as well as to upholding the traditional moral tone of an Austen novel. Only twelve months after Mr. Churchill and Miss Bates marry, the happy couple is blessed with a son, an heir who, instead of Frank, will now inherit his estate. Delman writes that, although Frank would now be "displaced by this young olive branch . . . it is well for us, reader, that he did; for where would be the moral of our

story be if, through deceptions and stratagems, Frank Churchill had obtained for himself not only a beautiful, virtuous, loving and beloved wife, but a great fortune and a splendid estate as well?” (362). Through this clever twist of events, Delman follows the moral paradigm found in all of Austen’s novels; the end of *Lover’s Perjuries* reminds readers that Austen’s novels, and subsequently, Delman’s, are written “to instruct, as well as to amuse” (Knoepflmacher 65).

Austen intended *Emma*, and her other novels, for much more than just a delightful read. Austen’s works do delight, but they also instruct. As readers identify with the heroine, they too travel the path of emotional and moral growth. However, this moral core is not as evident in some of the rewritten novels by Austen’s admirers. Some of modern rewrites deserve the criticism of Hayes: “[they do] not teach the modern reader to evaluate our society, how to be and move in our world” (20). The portrayal of Jane in Aiken’s novel, specifically, is lacking. Though Aiken provides a unique and in depth look at Jane’s upbringing and how she and Emma eventually form a friendship, when one compares Aiken’s heroine to the model portrayed in *Emma* and Austen’s other novels, it is evident that she lacks a moral core that teaches readers how to “evaluate our society, and how to be and move in the world.” Rather, for a Janeite author to be a true lover of Austen, she must be faithful to the Austen model of heroine: a character who grows ethically and socially, and challenges the reader to do the same.

Through *Emma* and, perhaps even more significantly, the story of Jane Fairfax, Austen emphasizes that one’s decisions hold grave consequences, and that love—and marriage, specifically—“is not a game” (Shannon 650). Both Jane and Emma learn these valuable lessons as they interact with their friends, neighbors and lovers. Jane, especially, realizes that selfish decisions are never worth the cost of one’s character, and at the end of *Emma* and the rewritten novels that follow in Austen’s literary footsteps, Jane’s corrections of her past failings and

subsequent moral growth mark her as a true Austen heroine. Although *Emma* is presumably about its namesake, a detailed look at Jane's character and actions reveals that she can stand up amongst the leading ladies of Jane Austen's world. It takes a skilled writer to imitate an Austen heroine; Smith and Delman have succeeded in following in Austen's footsteps by fashioning morally developing protagonists. Aiken, though, chose not center her plot on the moral development of her heroine, perhaps because such plotlines are not as appealing to contemporary audiences. While Aiken should be praised for writing her novel with her audience clearly in mind, her portrayal of Jane and other characters falls flat because what makes the Austen heroine (or Austen-adaptation heroine) memorable and admirable is because she is thoroughly human, and learns to mature past her inner weaknesses. Jane Fairfax a true Austen heroine not because she is beautiful, accomplished, witty, or intelligent, but because she possesses moral character that is tried and triumphs in the end. What is not clear however, is why Jane Austen herself did not choose to tell this heroine's story.

Chapter Four: The Modern Austen Heroine

While several Austen lovers have written entertaining neo-Regent novels with Jane Fairfax as the heroine, no Janeite novelist or screenwriter has produced a fictional work set in modern times with Jane as the protagonist. Jane Fairfax may be the more traditional model of heroine in *Emma*, but Emma herself is a heroine whose character and moral dilemmas transcend time to relate to audiences today. After all, as editors of *Jane Austen in Hollywood* Linda Troose and Sayre Greenfield claim, “[t]he concerns at the center of Austen’s plots—sex, romance, and money—are central concerns of our own era” (4). Yet, while these plot themes are still applicable to contemporary readers, Austen’s model of the moral heroine is not as prominent in most of these modern versions of *Emma*.

Twenty-first century readers and writers have responded to Austen’s novels by borrowing from her literary genius and joining it with their own imaginations to rewrite Austen’s works in a contemporary setting. Two novels and one film have been published or produced in recent years that retell *Emma* with a contemporary heroine in a postmodern world. While the moral education of the heroine is the main theme of *Emma*, these modern versions explore this theme with varying degrees of attention and respect. Compared to Austen’s original audience, twenty-first century readers and writers, influenced by postmodern ideals of moral ambiguity, do not as readily write themes of personal morality or growth for their characters. The focus of the majority of these rewritten novels is the development of the romantic plot rather than the growth of the inner character of the heroine. Compared to *Emma, Amanda* (2006) by Debra White Smith, and *The Importance of Being Emma* (2008) by Juliet Archer only hint at the moral growth of their heroine. Rather, it is Amy Heckerling’s film *Clueless* (1995), more than either of the two

rewritten novel versions of *Emma* that most genuinely follows the Austen model of moral values and personal growth in the portrayal of the heroine.

Smith sets her modern version of *Emma* in Australia and renames her protagonist Amanda. In addition to updating the heroine's name, Smith makes several other modern adaptations. Amanda is several years older than the 21-year-old Emma; Smith may have chosen to increase Amanda's age to compensate for the higher education that her heroine has received. Amanda has her bachelors and masters degrees and is now the successful CEO of her family travel agency. Like Emma, Amanda uses her education and life experience to give abundant advice to others. This aspect of her character, of course, is consistent with her literary predecessor. A major plotline of the story centers on Amanda's intentions to find a suitable match for her best friend and personal assistant Haley—a sensitive, sweet, yet more intelligent version of Harriet Smith, complete with an attractive, contemporary name. The novel is unique in its narration of events in that, while the book is written in third person, the reader “sees” from the perspective of several characters, unlike in *Emma* where the reader looks only through Emma's eyes. Smith splits her narration primarily between Amanda and Nate Knighton, (the updated version of George Knightly) a man who, almost as soon as the novel opens, realizes that Amanda is no longer his “little sister” and that he is in love with her. Smith cleverly incorporates the changing brother-sister dynamic between Amanda and Nate that Austen includes in *Emma* when Mr. Knightly emphatically announces, “Brother and sister? No indeed!” (Austen 280) Yet Amanda, like Emma, is so busy trying to orchestrate everyone else's love life that she is oblivious to Nate's changing feelings toward her. The romantic plotline drives the story forward, as readers wonder if Amanda and Nate are *ever* going to get together.

They do, of course, as is expected in romance novels. In an attempt to write for a modern

audience, Smith transforms *Emma* into a highly romantic love story, complete with rose-tinted daydreams and cheesy description and dialogue. Smith's writing style is a far cry from Austen's tight, witty prose; some of the phrasing in *Amanda* even borders on the ridiculous, such as describing Amanda "chewing . . . gum like a turbo-charged rodent" (16). One can only assume that Smith was trying to write a fresh simile, but comparing her heroine—one modeled after Austen's beautiful and complex Emma Woodhouse—to a rodent is not only laughable but inappropriate and confusing. A rodent is a negative image, one that most authors would never want apply to their protagonists. This phrase is only one example of Smith's inconsistent tone and writing style in *Amanda*; sadly her prose, plot, and portrayal of her heroine do not measure up to Austen's standard.

Amanda's personal and moral growth is also lacking in the novel in that it often seems forced and unbelievable. Strangely, though Smith reconstructs many key scenes from *Emma* in her contemporary retelling, she leaves out the pivotal Box Hill outing, which is the most significant event affecting Emma's personal growth. Amanda never insults Betty Cates, the Miss Bates character, and thus, is never compelled to examine her own heart and motives to make amends. Smith also never cultivates the relationship between Amanda and Janet French, the Jane Fairfax character in the novel. Amanda is supremely jealous of the beautiful and talented Janet but the two girls rarely interact, and there is no redemption of their relationships at the end. The closest Amanda comes to moral growth concerning her jealousy of and strained relationship with Janet is by praying a brief prayer of confession: "I know Janet doesn't deserve my dislike, and I'm not even sure I understand it . . . Please, please help me" (177). However, after this moment of spiritual clarity, nothing ever transpires in the relationship between the two girls; in fact they never interact again in the rest of the novel. It seems as if Smith wanted to include a Jane Fairfax

character but did not know how to make her fit in a modern setting, or how to make her relationship with Amanda significant. Janet is not a catalyst for personal growth for Amanda, unlike the important influence of Jane Fairfax on Emma's personal growth and moral change.

The most significant "growth" Amanda experiences is when her matchmaking attempts for Haley (Harriet) completely fall apart. At the Christmas party, Amanda begins to sense that Mason (Mr. Elton) has feelings for *her* and not for her friend. Amanda knows that she has encouraged Haley to fall in love with Mason, and she is very concerned that her meddling might result in the broken heart of her friend. She confesses her need for help and personal reform in a prayer: "Oh Lord . . . Please, please fix this mess. And—if You do, I'll try my hardest to never play matchmaker again!" (145). Yet, like the heroine she is modeled after, Amanda is not ready to entirely change her ways. When she remembers her success in playing matchmaker for her governess, Amanda's prayer takes on a less convincing tone: "All right, Lord . . . I won't play matchmaker again unless it's absolutely necessary" (145). While this less-than-sincere promise of change is consistent with Emma's struggle to achieve maturity, Smith does not advance the growth of her heroine any further, nor does she include the severe consequences of meddling and matchmaking that Emma experiences. While Smith includes the plotline where Amanda believes that Haley and Nate Knighton are mutually in love, Amanda mistakenly thinks that Haley has feelings for Nate unlike in *Emma* where Austen's heroine suffers acute emotional pain and regret when she realizes that it is her fault that Harriet has fallen in "love" with Mr. Knightley. Rather, Amanda never undergoes the moments of pivotal growth in her relationships with Haley, Janet, and Betty Cates because Smith chose not to develop these characters or situations in her contemporary version of *Emma*. Perhaps Smith decided not to write in detail about these characters and their relationships with Amanda because she wanted to concentrate on the

romance plot. But Smith severely weakens her novel and heroine by not providing Amanda with these key moments of growth. Amanda may be modeled after Emma but she is morally underdeveloped and therefore appears flat and even shallow. Overall, Amanda is a weak version of Austen's feisty, opinionated, socially snobby, yet endearing heroine, and while Amanda does recognize some need for growth in the novel, her transformation is pale in comparison to Emma's.

Unlike Smith's novel with its Christian themes and intended conservative audience, Juliet Archer's novel, *The Importance of Being Emma*, is a modern romance written for a secular audience. Like Amanda, Archer's Emma is a successful businesswoman with an MBA from a prestigious school. Emma is introduced as a twenty-three year old fresh out of graduate school. Like Smith, Archer adds to Emma's age to compensate for her advanced degrees. The novel opens as Emma returns to her family business, Highbury Foods, in order to bring the company into the twenty-first century. Archer and Smith appropriately imagine their "Emmas" as businesswomen on the brink of launching successful careers. In Austen's novel, Emma has just "graduated" from "governess school" and is ready to fully take her place as the mistress of her father's estate. During the Regent period in England, running a household could be favorably compared to running a small business. Historians Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall list the responsibilities of wealthy women like Emma: keeping track of the financial book-keeping for the entire estate; buying food and provisions to provide for both family and household staff; overseeing servants and daily household routines; providing education and charity for servants and the less fortunate; and maintaining business and social correspondence (384, 385, 387, 392). Emma's role as mistress of her estate corresponds perfectly to the modern businesswoman model that both Smith and Archer use. Like Austen's Emma, Archer's heroine feels ready to take on

her new responsibilities but the contemporary Mr. Woodhouse—a perfect modern rendition of the health-consciously paranoid father in *Emma*—is worried about Emma taking on too much and employs Mark Knightley, long-time family friend and wealthy business owner of Donwell Organic Foods, to be Emma’s business mentor—much to Emma’s reluctance. While much of Emma’s inner growth in the novel is about achieving confidence as a businesswoman, and discovering that she has long loved Mark, Archer does include several scenes that are consistent with the personal growth that Austen writes for her Emma.

Contrasted with Smith’s novel, Archer follows the plotline of *Emma* with admirable faithfulness. She transforms the Box Hill outing to a corporate party at the Box Hill Restaurant. Like the original novel, Emma, influenced by Flynn’s (Frank Churchill) bad manners, meanly insults Mary “Batty” Bates, family friend and long-time secretary of Highbury Foods. Mark immediately confronts Emma and the two have a heated argument about her cruel joke. Though Emma and Mark are less polite to each other during this incident than in Austen’s novel, the result of their interaction is the same. Emma, convicted by Mark and her own conscience, rises early the morning after the party—“There was something weighing on my mind, something I needed to do as soon as possible” (366)—to go and apologize to Miss Bates. Though Emma does not have the complete crisis of conscience that the original Emma has concerning her past and present treatment of Miss Bates, the fact that Archer includes a modern rendition of the Box Hill outing shows that she understood the value of this incident for Emma’s personal growth. Though the plot of the novel is on the growing romance between Emma and Mark, by including the Box Hill scene in her novel, Archer consistently portrays Mr. Knightley as playing a critical role in helping Emma mature past her flaws, and by including these aspects, Archer insinuates that the personal growth of her heroine is important.

While Archer accurately reproduces some of the relationships and episodes that mark Emma's growth as a woman, she fails to measure up to the original novel in other ways, particularly in her portrayal of Jane Fairfax as an instrumental relationship in Emma's life. Archer does adhere to *Emma* concerning Jane in several aspects. Emma is very familiar with Jane's superior character and accomplishments and is constantly being reminded of them by her proud aunt, Miss Bates. But when "Saint Jane" (184) comes to Highbury unexpectedly and is offered an internship at Highbury Foods, Emma's irritation and jealousy rises to new levels as she is confronted with her talented rival on a daily basis. Archer captures Jane's reserved nature perfectly, as well as Emma's frustration about Jane not being "very forthcoming about her personal life" (185). However, the faithful comparison between Austen's novel and Archer's concerning Jane Fairfax ends here. The two girls never reconcile their conflicts or forgive each other for their mutual jealousy; in fact, Archer, like Smith, never gives readers an inside look into Jane's mind via dialogue or narration. Her story simply ends when Emma learns that Jane has gone to "live in sin with Flynn Churchill" (367), Archer's modern twist on revealing the romantic attachment between the two secretive lovers.

Archer also clearly envisioned *Emma* through modern eyes in fashioning the love story between Emma and Mark. Though they share a long history and a playful relationship, Emma wants to be respected by Mark as an adult even though he is twelve years her senior and has long treated her like a little sister. Like Smith, Archer particularly wanted to emphasize the changing brother-sister dynamic between Emma and Mark. In an *Author's Note* at the end of her novel she writes: "This book was inspired by Jane Austen's *Emma*, in particular, this extract . . . when Emma says, 'You have shown that you can dance and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper' (2:2). Mr. Knightley replies 'Brother and sister?

No, indeed!’ (399). When Mark sees Emma for the first time since she has been back from school, he begins to have the “most unbrotherly thoughts” about her (377). Archer divides her narration between first-person accounts from Emma and Mark, giving readers a perspective of their relationship from both characters. With this unique view into Mark Knightley’s mind, readers find out that he is as mesmerized by Emma’s legs and curvy figure as he is in love with her quick wit and charming personality. Archer also embellishes and modernizes the scant love story in *Emma* by writing some very steamy, though un-Austen-like, scenes into the plot.

Though contemporary audiences are not surprised and even expect sexual encounters in modern romance novels, it is interesting to note that Austen herself never even included a celebratory engagement kiss between lovers in any of her novels; rather, she writes her heroines as completely chaste and even un-tempted by sexual passion. In this regard, Austen departs from her near literary predecessors and contemporaries: many heroines in eighteenth-century literature (Pamela, Clarissa, and others) were defined by their virginity and sexuality. Although almost every Austen heroine interacts with sexual situations, each circumstance is negative, immoral, and is never in reference to the heroine herself. Susan Morgan’s exploration of sexuality in Austen’s novels is helpful for understanding the ways Austen adjusts the lens for how literary heroines were viewed in the nineteenth century: “All of Austen’s heroines are virgins, including one aged twenty-seven. But the enormous difference . . . is that Austen does not define their innocence in sexual terms . . . Austen renders irrelevant what in previous English novels enjoyed a place of central relevance, that the heroine is a virgin” (351). This is not to say that forfeiting one’s innocence is not a prominent theme in Austen’s fiction. Morgan also explains that “Austen’s heroines usually do lose their innocence, and the point is that they should” (352). The innocence that each heroine “should” give up though is the innocence that keeps her from seeing

herself and others as they truly are. This type of loss does not mean that the heroine parts with her sexual innocence or that she becomes jaded or “worldly-wise.” Rather, it is when a heroine releases the naivety of self-innocence that she can see her personal weaknesses in order to improve her character. A true Austen heroine never falters and, at least by Austen’s admission, is never tempted sexually. Sexual purity is part of the heroine’s moral make-up; readers are never induced to admire (though they may often pity) a character that indulges in premarital or extramarital sex.

Most twenty-first century authors, however, do not hold to Austen’s standards of purity concerning the sexuality of their literary characters, and Archer is no exception. In her imaginative rendition of *Emma* she clearly wanted to showcase the sexual attraction and consummation between Emma and Mark to appeal to contemporary romance novel readers. While Archer is entitled to her personal response to *Emma* as well as to her original contemporary retelling, one must wonder if a Janeite can successfully produce a praiseworthy version of one of Austen’s novels if she includes attitudes and actions that are morally inconsistent with the character of Austen’s original leading ladies. Some may argue that contemporary heroines, even those modeled after Austen’s chaste protagonists, should embrace a modern standard of sexuality. After all, if Emma can be transformed into a successful businesswoman, surely her love life should correspond to that of a sexually savvy twenty-first century woman. The question then, comes back to that of faithfulness to Austen and her standards. It speaks strongly of Austen’s own principles that there are no sexual themes tied to any of her heroines. Though she is not afraid to explore sexual issues in her plots, Austen only applies these sexual situations to secondary characters, often to women who, because they lack a strong moral core, cannot stand up next to the moral and maturing leading ladies at the center of

each novel. Thus, while Archer's contemporary version of *Emma* can be praised for its memorable characters, witty dialogue and description, and clever updating to a modern setting, her Emma is not made of the same moral fiber that Austen's Emma is, and therefore cannot be classified as a true Austen heroine.

However, *Emma* has successfully been rewritten with a modern heroine who explores the issues of sexuality and yet chooses chastity. The 1995 film *Clueless* is loosely based on *Emma* in its plotline, but writer and director Amy Heckerling captures the essence of what it means to be a true Austen heroine in her protagonist, Cher, not only concerning sexuality but also in Cher's recognition of her need for personal growth.

Emma and Cher have much in common: They are both rich, opinionated, the queens of their social circles, yet are essentially "clueless" when it comes to truly knowing themselves or others. Like Emma, Cher's wealth gives her social advantages and ensures that she will not need to work or marry. *Clueless* critic Suzanne Ferriss points out that "[t]hough, unlike Emma, Cher, as a woman of the 1990s, is clearly afforded the option of pursuing a career, Heckerling sidesteps these issues, focusing instead on Cher's need for 'direction.' Like Emma, her 'occupation,' apart from matchmaking, is charitable" (126). Though Cher represents a spoiled rich girl that most people would "love" to hate, she has a sweet and infectious personality as well as a strong desire to help others.

Perhaps the most refreshing comparison between the novel and the film is that both heroines realize the need to improve their character and mature in their relationships with others. While this is not a surprising element of a novel written in the nineteenth century, when moral growth and self-improvement of a protagonist was an essential element of any "good" novel, it is unique to observe this theme in a film produced in a postmodern era. The way each heroine

comes to realize her need for growth is quite different though. While Heckerling chose to exclude the Box Hill outing from the climax of *Clueless*, Cher still experiences personal development as a result of her own social failing. Just as the Box Hill incident acts as a catalyst for Emma's growth toward self-knowledge and correction, it is only after Cher fails the driving test that she is humble enough to see into her own heart. Though failing a driving exam may seem trite compared to Emma's social faux pas toward Miss Bates, both the Box Hill incident and failing the driving test help each heroine to realize that she is not perfect and that improvement is needed.

The reality of personal imperfection and the need for inner improvement coincides with the realization of romantic love in each story, though Emma and Cher realize the love for their heroes at different points in their journey. After Mr. Knightley's confrontation at Box Hill, Emma immediately begins to work on her character by replacing selfishness with self-awareness and loving acts toward others. This newfound self-knowledge gradually leads her to realize that she loves Mr. Knightley. Cher, on the other hand, desires to improve her character after she discovers that she loves Josh. She realizes that he is a mature person who wants to make a difference in the world and she, in turn, is superficial. While Cher's desire to improve her character *after* realizing her feelings for Josh may seem selfish at first, Cher does not try to change in order to win his affection. She recognizes that her character and actions have been immature and self-serving. Her personal make-over takes her to new depths of integrity as she forgives a friend and learns acceptance of a social outcast, as well as new heights of character in her relationship with others and the world: She organizes a disaster relief effort and devotes long hours to help her father on an important legal case. Cher's change of character at the end of the film is the result of genuine self-reflection and improvement, and she is "rewarded" for this

change when Josh returns her affection. Like Emma, Cher only “wins” her hero after she has purposefully improved herself and her relationships with others.

While Heckerling successfully develops a modern Mr. Knightley that urges Emma to mature past her flaws, she chose not to include the character of Jane Fairfax in *Clueless*.

Heckerling explains her reasoning behind this decision:

Here is the one character that didn't work for me. Jane is a girl of “genteel poverty” and so Knightley thought her a better companion for Emma than Harriet (pesky low birth). This seemed snobby to me, and Jane Austen is usually the antithesis of snobbery. Of course, Knightley could be referring to Harriet's lack of intelligence (not her fault) or her flightiness, but Jane Fairfax is a bore. So out she went. (178)

Heckerling was most likely imagining a modern Jane Fairfax through Cher's eyes; Jane reserved nature certainly would have produced a yawn in Cher. However, I believe that Heckerling mistakenly judges Mr. Knightley's motives for promoting a friendship between Emma and Jane, or discouraging Emma's relationship with Harriet. The friendship between Emma and Jane was desirable not (simply) because they were from the same social class, but because these two young ladies would have been able to mutually benefit each other by providing stimulating company and the challenge of growth among equals. Harriet and Emma are ill matched as friends not because they are from different class, but because they are not equally matched in intelligence, emotional maturity, or desires in life. True friendship cannot occur when mutual respect and equality are absent. Mr. Knightley saw the equality of mind, heart, and personal interests between Emma and Jane, but the reciprocal respect between the two girls was blocked by jealousy until the end of the novel. Translating the complexity of Emma and Jane's

relationship to the screen would be difficult because of the amount of time and effort required to make their relationship effective and believable in a two-hour film. Yet the real difficulty in transforming Jane Fairfax into a modern character is in Jane's precarious social position as a would-be governess, as well as the complexity of her secret engagement. While both of these plot elements work seamlessly in Austen's novel, translating these essential aspects of Jane's character and back-story would be nearly impossible in a contemporary version of *Emma* because Jane is a character defined by her nineteenth century social position and mistakes. The fact is, rather than Jane Fairfax being "a bore," her story is too complex and historically defined to be rewritten for a modern audience.

Like *The Importance of Being Emma*, *Clueless* was produced for an audience primarily unconstrained by nineteenth century standards. Interestingly though, Heckerling constructs a heroine that possesses Austen-like principles concerning sexuality. While many of Cher's friends brag about their sexual encounters, "Cher (like Emma and other respectable nineteenth-century women) remains . . . a virgin" (Ferriss 125). Ferriss also observes that "[t]he fact that she is saving herself for Luke Perry makes her chastity a joke, but does little to diminish the essentially conservative image of relationships presented in the film. Marriage remains the goal" (125). Cher, as a postmodern heroine, is saving herself for a significant relationship or (ideally) for marriage; this connects her more closely to her literary forerunner, Emma. Unlike Archer who freely wrote sexual encounters for her characters, Heckerling uniquely chose to honor the Austen ideal of moral chastity in her heroine; whether she intended to do this or not, however, is unknown.

What is clear though is that Heckerling intentionally formed her plot around the personal development of her heroine. In an article about how she formed the idea for *Clueless*, she writes,

“The novel *Emma* is better than ‘modern,’ it’s timeless and universal. It had the perfect structure for the growth of an optimistic person” (176). Out of these three contemporary adaptations of *Emma*, only Heckerling’s heroine takes the initiative to purposefully analyze her heart and behavior; she uses this knowledge for a new make-over project—not of her friends or teachers, but of her own soul. *Clueless* critic Nora Nachumi argues that this personal makeover is not simply for Cher herself: “Cher’s new perspective is more than a realization about her feelings for Josh. She sees her old behavior as shallow, and this gives her the power to alter her world . . . in its own charming way, *Clueless* encourages its viewers to ‘makeover their souls’” (137). Cher can be considered a true model of an Austen heroine because she grows past her superficial and immature behavior to mature into a compassionate and considerate woman. Even more importantly though, like Austen’s leading ladies, Cher inspires audiences (or readers) to greater heights of moral and social sensitivity and responsibility. Although *Clueless* was written and filmed at the end of the twentieth century in a postmodern age of moral ambiguity, the Austen model of a moral heroine still resonates with audiences today.

When Janeites take *Emma* and transform her into a contemporary heroine, these writers are filling in the gaps left by Austen with their own imaginations. By imagining *Emma* as modern businesswoman or spoiled Beverly Hills teenager, these authors are participating in extensive reader response criticism. Before they could even write their novels, these authors had to respond to *Emma* in a personal way, in fact, in a very different way than any other reader. Literary critic Stanley Fish argues that personal interaction is one of the key components of reader response criticism: “they are not alike at all, and neither, therefore, are their meanings” (78). This is not to say that the meaning of a text is completely determined by individual response. Norman Holland, a promoter of reader response criticism, points out that “most

professional critics assure us that there are right and wrong, better and worse readings, and they insist often quite fiercely, that the themes and other literary entities they discover have an ‘objective’ validity” (120). However, one cannot deny that a reader’s personal experience, education, age, and even gender influences how he or she perceives a work of fiction.

It is when a reader joins his or her experience and imagination with a written work that the mystical relationship between text and reader is born. Wolfgang Iser writes of this phenomenon:

the literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of the text and imagination. (54)

The relationship formed between reader and text is also a bond with the author as well; as Holland explains, “My act of perception is also an act of creation in which I partake of the artist’s gift” (130). Readers share in the artistic imagination of the author when they escape into the world of fiction. Yet even if many people read the same work, each reader will “see” the story differently because he or she each brings a unique personality and life experience to the reading encounter.

And not only will each reader imagine the written story differently, he or she will also fill in the gaps of the unwritten story in individual ways. As Iser argues, “with a literary text we can only picture things which are not there; the written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without . . . the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imagination” (58). Janeite authors that write Austen’s

novels from the perspective of minor characters, such as Jane Fairfax, or others who transplant their heroine to a contemporary setting practice this type of imaginative “gap-filling.” In doing this, Janeite authors that create these contemporary versions of *Emma* not only transform Austen’s works for a modern audience, but they are also recording their own journey of admiration for the character of Emma. Nachumi theorizes: “If the fact that we misread the evidence suggests that we, like Emma, are shaped by the shape of our world, then Emma’s awakening suggests that we also are able to consciously improve how we think and behave” (137). Growing along with the heroine and overlapping the character’s experiences with our own is perhaps one of the most flattering and significant forms of reader response criticism.

Readers have long been enchanted by Emma’s mishaps and have willingly traveled along with her on her journey toward personal growth. Indeed, by the end of the novel, Austen’s flawed heroine may not be the only one who experiences change. When readers marry their experiences with this novel, they are interacting with Austen and her characters in an emotional, intellectual, and even spiritual way. Without a deep respect for Austen’s genius and a genuine affection for her heroines, modern adaptations would never have been written. While interacting with the original *Emma* provides the purest avenue for experiencing Austen’s journey of heroic maturity, in reading or viewing these adaptations, we learn more about ourselves: our desires, impressions of others, or need for personal maturity. As Troost and Greenfield argue, “These adaptations . . . have more to tell us about our own moments in time than about Austen’s writing. In watching them, we watch ourselves” (11). And in watching ourselves, we, in turn, participate in transforming into persons of moral maturity because it is only in analyzing our character that true, heroic growth can occur.

Conclusion

Jane Austen lovers are born every day, either by watching the most recent film adaptation; picking up the latest Austen fan fiction novel; stumbling upon a wildly active online message board at “The Republic of Pemberly”; or by discovering for the first time the magic in the phrase “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich (7). Austen’s influence continues to permeate popular culture, and her novels still delight and instruct readers in the twenty-first century. The fact that Austen has established her place both in the literary canon and the hearts of her devoted readers is hardly debatable; however, the discussion surrounding the causes and effects of Austen’s influence in popular culture, especially concerning contemporary Austen spin-offs, has just begun.

While most of these adaptations showcase an Austen heroine or another female character, some Janeites have rewritten Austen’s novels from the perspective of the hero. Author Amanda Grange has explored the inner workings of Austen’s heroes in her novels *Mr. Darcy’s Diary: A Novel* (2005), *Mr. Knightley’s Diary* (2007), *Captain Wentworth’s Diary* (2008), *Edmund Bertram’s Diary* (2008), and *Colonel Brandon’s Diary* (2009). Other books in this genre include Susan Kaye’s *None But You: Frederick Wentworth, Captain Book I* (2007), and Barbara Cornthwaite’s *George Knightley, Esquire: Charity Envieth Not* (2009). Like the lack of scholarship about contemporary adaptations featuring Austen’s heroines, little has been said about the Austen hero as he has been envisioned in these contemporary novels. Perhaps future scholarship will reveal that the Austen hero, like the Austen heroine, is most successfully realized when the hero is written as a man who reaches toward self-recognition, personal growth, and moral change.

While readers or viewers still delight in Emma’s foibles and faux pas in these updated

versions of *Emma*, the intrinsic character qualities of self-recognition and personal change have been watered down or left out of some of these contemporary adaptations. It is interesting to note this change because it is not Emma's love story (the primary theme of the majority of these modern retellings) that is the most memorable part of Austen's original work: It is Emma's journey toward maturity that makes her an unforgettable character. While authors who write contemporary versions of *Emma* must be praised for their creativity, ingenuity, and even for their love of Austen, I propose that for a Janeite author to be a true imitator of Austen, she must be faithful to the model of heroine that Austen writes in her original novels. Truly, it is Emma's journey toward personal growth that draws and even endears readers to her character and makes *Emma* a classic. While the rewritten versions of *Emma* provide a delightful afternoon read, these novels, because they fail to measure up to Austen's standards of character improvement and overarching moral construct, will most likely fade into literary obscurity: they will not be made into films, or television serials; they will not be included in the literary canon, nor will they be taught in high school or college classrooms. However, *Emma* and Austen's other novels, will be read, filmed, taught, and analyzed for years to come because her universal themes even now engage, inspire, and challenge readers.

Works Cited

Primary Sources:

Aiken, Joan. *Jane Fairfax: Jane Austen's Emma, Through Another's Eyes*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1990. Print.

Archer, Juliet. *The Importance of Being Emma*. London: Choc Lit, 2008. Print.

Austen, Jane. *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others*. Collected and Edited by R.W. Chapman. London: Oxford, 1932. Print.

---. *Emma*. 1815. Ed. James Kinsley. London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

---. *Mansfield Park*. 1814. New York: Signet Classics, 2008. Print.

---. *Northanger Abbey*. 1818. Ed. Marilyn Gaull. New York: Longman, 2005. Print.

---. *Persuasion*. 1818. Ed. Gillian Beer. London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

---. *Pride and Prejudice*. 1813. New York: Bantam Dell, 2003. Print.

---. *Sense and Sensibility*. 1811. London: Signet Classics, 2008. Print.

Byron, George Gordon. *Don Juan*. 1821. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2004. *Google Books*. 30 Aug. 2010

Clueless. Dir. Amy Heckerling. Perf. Alicia Silverstone, Stacey Dash, Brittany Murphy, Paul Rudd, Donald Faison. Paramount, 1995. DVD.

Delman, Joan Ellen. *Lovers' Perjuries, Or, the Clandestine Courtship of Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill. A Retelling of Jane Austen's Emma*. N.p.: Joan Ellen Delman, 2007. Print.

Smith, Debra White. *Amanda*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2006. Print.

Smith, Naomi Royde. *Jane Fairfax: A New Novel*. London: Macmillian, 1940. Print.

Secondary Sources:

- ApRoberts, Ruth. "Sense and Sensibility, or Growing Up Dichotomous." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 30. 3 (1975): 351-365. *JSTOR*. 19 October 2009.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York: Oxford, 1987. Print.
- Austen-Leigh, James Edward. *A Memoir of Jane Austen*. USA: BiblioBazaar, LLC, 1870. Print.
- Austen-Leigh, William, and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh. *Jane Austen: A Family Record*. Revised and Enlarged by Deirdre Le Faye. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1989. Print.
- Booth, Wayne C. "Point of View and the Control of Distance in Emma." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 16.2 (1961): 95-116. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 November 2009.
- Brownstein, Rachel M. *Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels*. New York: Viking Press, 1982. Print.
- Davidoff, Lenore, and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*. Chicago: U of P Chicago Press, 1987. Print.
- Delman, Joan Ellen. "Re: Jane Austen Sequels." Message to author. 22 April 2010. Email.
- . "Re: Jane Austen Sequels." Message to the author. 5 June 2010. Email.
- Duckworth, Alistair M. "Emma and the Dangers of Individualism." *The Improvement of the Estate: a Study of Jane Austen's Novels*. Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1971. Print. 146-178.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Maldon, MA: Blackwell, 2005. Print.
- Ferriss, Suzanne. "Emma Becomes Clueless." *Jane Austen in Hollywood*. Ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield. Lexington, KY: U of P Kentucky, 1998. 122-129. Print.
- Fish, Stanley E. "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics." *Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Ed. Jane P. Tompkins. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins U of P. 70-100. Print.

- Gross, Ursula Marie. "What Happens Next: Jane Austen Fans and their Sequels to *Pride and Prejudice*." MA Thesis. Georgetown University, 2008. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 December 2009.
- Hall, Lynda A. *Grounding the Figure of the Heroine: The "Other Women" in Jane Austen's Novels*. Diss. Claremont University, 2009. *Proquest*. Web. 1 June 2010.
- Hannon, Patrice. *Dear Jane Austen: A Heroine's Guide to Life and Love*. New York: Penguin, 2005. Print.
- Hayes, E. N. "Emma: A Dissenting Opinion." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 4.1 (1949): 1-20. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 November 2009.
- Heckerling, Amy. "The Girls Who Don't Say 'Who!'" *A Truth Universally Acknowledged*. Ed. Susannah Carson. New York: Random, 2009. 175-179 Print.
- Holland, Norman N. "Unity Identity Text Self." *Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Ed. Jane P. Tompkins. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins U of P. 118-133. Print.
- Holy Bible: New International Version*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984. Print.
- Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Ed. Jane P. Tompkins. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins U of P. 50-69. Print.
- Johnson, Reginald Brimley. Introduction. *Sense and Sensibility*. By Jane Austen. 1811. London: Dent, 1922.vii-xxiv. *Google Books*. 4 Mar. 2008. Web. 1 Apr. 2010.
- Koppel, Gene. *The Religious Dimension of Jane Austen's Novels*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1988. Print.
- Lecaros, Cecilia Wadsó. "The Victorian Heroine Goes A-Governessing." *Silent Voices*:

- Forgotten Novels by Victorian Women Writers*. Ed. Brenda Ayres. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003. 27-56. Print.
- Mathison, John K. "Northanger Abbey and Jane Austen's Conception of the Value of Fiction." *ELH* 24.2 (1957): 138-152. *JSTOR*. Web. 30 May 2010.
- McMaster, Juliet. "The Continuity of Jane Austen's Novels." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 10.4 (1970): 723-739. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 November 2009.
- Morgan, Susan J. "Emma Woodhouse and the Charms of the Imagination." *Studies in the Novel* 7.1 (1975): 33-48. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 15 November 2009.
- . "Polite Lies: The Veiled Heroine of Sense and Sensibility." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 31.2 (1976): 188-205. *JSTOR*. Web. 30 May 2010.
- . "Why there is no Sex in Jane Austen's Fiction." *Studies in the Novel* 19.3 (1987): 346-356. *Ebscohost*. Web. 19 February 2010.
- Myers, Sylvia H. "Womanhood in Jane Austen's Novels." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 3.3 (1970): 225-232. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 March 2010.
- Nachumi, Nora. "'As if!' Translating Austen's Ironic Narrator to Film." *Jane Austen in Hollywood*. Ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield. Lexington, KY: U of P Kentucky 1998. 130-139. Print.
- Perry, Ruth. "Interrupted Friendships in Jane Austen's Emma." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5.2 (1986): 185-202. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 November 2009.
- Pickrel, Paul. "Emma as Sequel." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40.2 (1985): 135-153. *JSTOR*. Web. 31 October 2009.
- Potter, Dawn. "In Defense of Dullness Or Why Fanny Price is My Favorite Austen Heroine." *Sewanee Review* 118.4 (2008): 611-618. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 23 March

2010.

Ruderman, Anne. "Moral Education in Jane Austen's *Emma*." *Poets, Princes, and Private Citizens: Literary Alternatives to Postmodern Politics*. Ed. Joseph N. Knippenburg and Peter Augustine Lawler. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996. 271-87. Print.

Shannon, Edgar F. "Emma: Character and Construction." *PMLA* 71.4 (1956): 637-650. *JSTOR*. Web. 31 October 2009.

Shaw, Valerie. "Jane Austen's Subdued Heroines." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 30.3 Jane Austen 1775-1975 (1975): 281-303. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 March 2010.

Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. Print.

Thaden, Barbara Z. "Figure and Ground: The Receding Heroine in Jane Austen's 'Emma.'" *South Atlantic Review* 55.1 (1990): 47-62. *JSTOR*. Web. 31 October 2009.

Trilling, Lionel. "Mansfield Park." *Mansfield Park: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. Claudia L. Johnson. New York: Norton, 1998. 423-434. Print.

Troost, Linda, and Sayre Greenfield. Introduction. *Jane Austen in Hollywood*. By Troost and Greenfield. Lexington: U of P Kentucky, 1998. 1-12. Print.