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“Where the Heart is Really Attached”: Partner Compatibility in the Works of Jane Austen

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the works of Jane Austen and how the author depicts marriages throughout her novels. It examines the values that Austen recommends to attain a happy marriage and argues that these values were shaped by Austen's Christian heritage. Austen encourages people to marry but cautions them to choose their partner wisely. She makes it clear that an unwise choice would lead to future strife in the relationship. Austen claims that the traits necessary for a healthy and happy marriage relationship are a partner that encourages intellectual stimulation, a partner that is compatible both morally and temperamentally, and a partner that stimulates personal and moral growth. These qualities were vital to the establishment of fulfilling marriages in Austen's time and are still relevant today.

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Abbreviations

Catherine	*Catherine and Other Writings*
E	*Emma*
Letters	*Jane Austen's Letters edited by Deidre Le Faye, 4th ed.*
MP	*Mansfield Park*
NA	*Northanger Abbey*
P	*Persuasion*
P&P	*Pride and Prejudice*
S&S	*Sense and Sensibility*

Chapter One

Introduction and Literature Review

The courtships in the novels of Jane Austen have fascinated both readers and scholars for generations. Either by enjoying the interactions between two characters that the audience knows are intended to be together or apprehensively cringing at the exchanges between two characters who are ill-suited, Austen captivates readers with relationship dynamics, inviting them to make comparisons between couples. As Isabella Thorpe remarks, "Where the heart is really attached, I know very well how little one can be pleased with the attention of anybody else" (*NA* 30). Austen spends a decent portion of her novels threatening to marry off her heroines to partners that are not suited to them. Catherine Morland is relentlessly pursued by John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*. Marianne Dashwood is heartbroken by the fickle John Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*. In *Pride and Prejudice,* readers cannot help but scoff at the potential that Elizabeth Bennet would marry Mr. Collins compared to Mr. Darcy. Fanny Price wisely turns down Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. Emma Woodhouse is shocked that Mr. Elton would pursue her in *Emma*. Anne Elliot politely discourages William Elliot in *Persuasion*. Austen makes it clear through her descriptions and interactions that none of these men are good marriage partners for her heroines; in turn, readers learn from these examples how to avoid their own mismatches. Austen demonstrates why one romantic partner should be preferred to another with the goal of producing happy marriages versus long-term marital strife, the sort that is so pronounced in some of Austen's other families like the Bennet household. Much of what Austen has to say on these subjects is informed by her biblical worldview.

Besides her Christian upbringing, several historical events affected Austen: The Napoleonic Wars, the American and French Revolutions, and the Enclosure Acts made the

Regency era an intense time of change and upheaval. The angst and sensibility caused by such monumental social transitions were often reflected in the literature of the period, which saw the rise of the Gothic novel, marking “a widespread shift away from neoclassical ideals of order and reason, toward romantic belief in emotion and imagination” (Hume 282). Notable examples of the Gothic novel include Horace Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* (1765), and Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794); both books that employed terror to grab the attention of readers through “horror, suspense and the supernatural” (Adkins xviii). Austen read and enjoyed the Gothic genre (Harman 3), and *Northanger Abbey*, the first of her novels to be drafted in 1794, satirizes many of its tropes.

Rather than centering on high adventure, horror, or politics, the central themes in Austen’s novels are love, romance, and marriage. This reflects a sentimental perspective on marriage that would grow in popularity in the Victorian novel as more people came to view marriage as more than an advantageous alliance. Her plots culminate when the heroine and her “intended” finally overcome all obstacles standing between them and the altar, a trope generally referred to by scholars as a marriage or courtship plot. This plot was definitive of the romance novel, another genre that gained popularity in the late eighteenth century (Hume 288-89). Austen read several romance novelists: Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Charlotte Smith (Harman 3), whose novels of “high romanticism” she actively engaged with (71; 4). Austen, influenced by the romance novel, follows many of the genre’s patterns. Another feature she utilized was “the power to convey ideas and issues essential to the heroines who were put at its center” (Regis 53). Unlike typical Gothic or romance novelists, however, Austen focused on the everyday lives of the British middling and upper classes in her novels, providing a realistic and relatable alternative to the sensationalized literature typical of her time. The impediments that Austen’s

heroines overcome might be financial issues or conflicts between family or friends, and the solution is often to secure a husband who can provide financially and is capable of navigating conflict. A heroine's happily ever after is often framed as a result of choosing an auspicious husband.

Austen's plots employ *bildungsromans*, a trope where the protagonist must undergo personal change before he or she can be rewarded with a happy ending (Morgenstern and Boes 654). The underlying obstacles that prevent her heroes and heroines from marrying are their character flaws, which prove more significant than issues with finances or family. Both must grow before they can marry, and a byproduct of their maturation is the resolution of the surface issues. Austen uses *bildungsromans* to teach young people that there are difficulties that beleaguer all marriages and that they will often need to change and mature before they are ready for such challenges. Austen uses marriage to an honorable lover as a reward for maturity (Shaffer 51). This conveys an important difference between her marriage priorities and the expectations of Regency culture: A couple who is a good fit together and feels mutual love is more important than making an advantageous match. Austen, having never married, seems an unusual figure to be establishing marriage goals; however, she drew from her faith to assert principles for choosing a marriage partner.

The daughter of Reverend George Austen, Jane Austen grew up in the Anglican church. Surrounded by God-fearing parents, Austen was primarily educated at home, brought up with the teachings of Christianity, and taught to follow religious duties. Whether through church services, family devotions, reading, or prayer, religion was an "influence which she encountered every day" (Collins xi). Her brother Henry Austen described his sister's life as one of "usefulness, literature, and religion" (327). She read the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer "from a

young age" (W. Baker 507), and she enjoyed other religious authors like Samuel Johnson and William Cowper into adulthood (H. Austen 330). She considered all she read and took instruction from all these sources in cultivating her faith. The Austen family created a home environment where religion was taken seriously, and their dedication was passed on to their children.

The result of Austen's religious education was that "[s]he was thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature…. [A]nd her opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church" (H. Austen 331). Her family makes clear that Austen saw her faith as fundamental to how she looked at the world and humanity and that to practice her faith meant loving her neighbor and treating others well (Collins xi, 50; *ESV* Matt. 22.39; Lk. 6.31). Because her faith was a personal part of her life she kept it private and made "her witness in the world through her behavior to others rather than by preaching" (Collins xviii). James Austen-Leigh, her nephew, states that he would "not venture to speak of [his aunt's] religious principles," but that she "was more inclined to *think* and *act* than to *talk*" (100). The few surviving prayers of Austen describe an ardent heart that wished to live out her devotion to God in every part of her life. She prays that she would not be considered a "Christian only in name" (*Catherine* 248), and that she would not forget "the value of that Holy Religion in which we have been brought up" (248). These testimonies attest that Austen was devoted both to God and to growing her faith and writing provided a place where she could practice Christian virtue and share it with others.

Austen's novels are not widely considered by the public to be overtly religious works, and her faith is often taken for granted by readers and even many scholars (Giffin 1). Many contemporary readers are unaware of any religious messages in her novels and generally

categorize Austen as a teller of "love-stories" (M. Byrde 284). Some might even interpret her works as mocking the clergy: the ridiculous Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* and the arrogant Mr. Elton in *Emma* certainly give clergymen a bad name (Bonaparte 54). While Austen's characters may mention God, attending church, and the clergy, these references are often in passing throughout her canon. Though allusions to religion may blend into the background of many of her works, Austen's religious values are communicated through the kinds of romantic relationships she encourages.

In her personal life, Austen was interested in romance and hoped to marry, though this was never to be. John Halperin notes that "despite what most people believe, she had a succession of admirers, a number of chances to marry, and several disastrous romantic disappointments" (719-20). Austen even was briefly engaged to Harris Bigg-Wither but broke off the engagement after only a few hours for ambiguous reasons. Her letters imply that there were other men who struck her fancy, but for one reason or another, these relationships never worked out. While historians have speculated why Jane never married, what is known is that in a letter to her sister, Cassandra, Austen states, "I consider everybody as having a right to marry once in their Lives for Love" (*Letters* 166). Given her commitment to doing what she felt was right, Austen would not budge and marry a man that she did not love and respect. In *Pride and Prejudice*, when Jane Bennet cautions Elizabeth to "do anything rather than marry without affection" (305), she is directly conveying the thoughts of the author. Austen's decision to stay single had great consequences: She remained financially dependent on family and invited the stigma of spinsterhood. This was preferable to entering a marriage without a sufficient attachment.

Without an independent income, Austen lived humbly, yet comfortably, which allowed her to give more time to her craft (Harman 27). Her life seems to have been primarily devoted to her writing, which seemed to bring her much personal enjoyment, even referring to *Pride and Prejudice* as her "own darling Child" (*Letters* 210). She wrote of nothing that she did not believe that she could describe with accuracy, and she was committed to the idea that her novels should be authentic. Austen even advised her niece Anna, who had written to her aunt for writing advice, to stick to settings that she was familiar with so as to not accidentally give "false representations" (Austen-Leigh and Austen-Leigh 356). As a lively single young woman, Austen was interested in romance and even would amuse herself making up fake weddings in her father's book of marriage registers (Collins 54). The subject she chose to write about with much amusement and insight in her books was "the love-stories of a number of imaginary young persons, of the same sort and in situations of the same sort as those with which she was familiar" (M. Byrde 284). Her stories are about middling and upper-class English women navigating life and searching for a husband. This was nothing that Austen did not have personal experience with. Through her discernment into human nature that was shaped by her religious upbringing, she sought to share with the world the principles she believed would result in a gratifying marriage.

Because the relationships between men and women are so prominent in Austen's novels, much scholarship has been published on this topic, providing a diverse collection of research. Laurence W. Mazzeno described Austen criticism as "beginning with a long series of drips and then suddenly erupting into a raging torrent" (2) as her works took decades to receive widespread attention from critics and scholars (Harman xv). Austen scholarship began to develop around the

late nineteenth century, and from the mid-twentieth century on there has been a massive expansion in research (Mazzeno 2).

Much of the research of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century appreciated Austen's talent as an author: her realistic and compelling characters, wit, satire, and humor. Austen's integrity to only describe the aspects of life that she knew was largely attributed to her accepting her place as a woman and not wishing to overstep the bounds of gender convention (Mazzeno 21). Victorian critics generally agreed that Austen "was a pleasant and talented practitioner of a minor form of fiction" (21). She was viewed as an amusing analyzer of domesticity, but her genius as a serious author with valuable messages to communicate went largely unappreciated.

As interest in her works grew in the mid-twentieth century, scholars began examining Austen's life and novels in more depth. In *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975), Marilyn Butler claims that, while Austen was committed to expressing realistic characters and places, her works are "full of signs that conveyed opinions" (1). Contradicting the Victorian critics who claimed Austen only wrote nice love stories, Butler asserts that her personal opinions on moral and social issues can be reasonably determined from her works. She argues that Austen subtly distinguishes her moral abstractions from social convention but never spells them out. This assertion is in line with Austen's conviction to communicate Christian values with readers while keeping outright moral instruction reticent.

Other scholars have commented on how Austen used her novel to convey her opinions on literature. Alan D. McKillop discusses *Northanger Abbey*'s references to the Gothic novels of Charlotte Smith and Ann Radcliffe, contemporaries of Austen, which satirizes Gothicism. For example, the young heroine who is captivated by Gothic novels, finds herself alone in a

mysterious castle with a suspicious male figure and soon suspects him of murder. She is proven wrong and shamed for suspecting her host of killing his wife. By mocking Catherine's overactive imagination, Austen portrays these tropes as silly and Gothic heroines as ethically lacking (Phil. 4.8). According to McKillop, Austen's references and harsh treatment of Smith and Radcliffe's works demonstrate that "Austen is evidently taking the[se] novels… seriously" (55). Austen expresses a reservation with becoming obsessed with the melodramatic Gothic novels that were popular, cautioning readers against allowing these novels to shape their imaginations and affect their judgment. McKillop's research demonstrates that Austen intentionally commented on her culture's social norms and even contradicted them.

Austen's social commentary was not limited to literature, and she ventured into offering advice about how one should live one's life. In his discussion of *Emma*, Arnold Kettle claims that it is an inadequate generalization to state the novel is about matchmaking and marriages (112). He contends that *Emma* is about navigating the "logic of life itself" as wealthy and clever Emma is confused by the complex characters around her: Jane Fairfax she wrongly thinks is an attention-seeker, and Frank Churchill she falsely thinks is a bounder. The reader is given an intimate perspective of Emma's "critical intelligence" as she learns to hone her judgment (114), and readers are "called upon to participate in life with an awareness" (113-14). Kettle suggests this awareness leads to a "moral concern" with the everyday choices of *Emma*'s characters. Emma's perspective is focused on "class snobbery and property qualifications" (116), opinions natural for a member of the upper-class landed gentry. Kettle asserts that Emma learns to be open to a different way of viewing life and marriage; which Kettle describes as a "more humane understanding" that reflects Austen's concern with "[h]uman happiness" (116; 115). *Emma* is about the heroine gaining a better perspective on life. One where she is more sensitive to the

feelings of others and forms more close relationships: a lesson the reader is invited to learn along with her.

Scholars no longer ignore the moral instruction in Austen's novels and much discourse since the mid-1900s has been on analyzing these moral messages, constructing a better picture of what Austen considered virtuous living. The virtues that Austen consistently calls her characters to develop throughout her canon are repentance, prudence, and charity. Repentance usually occurs alongside a humbling incident when one is confronted with one's failings and seeks restoration. *Pride and Prejudice* seems titled for the necessity that the main characters practice humility. Prudence, another name for wisdom, "is acting in one's own interest in accordance with virtue, but with a realistic appraisal of the limits and difficulties life presents" (Newman 702). Prudence is shown best in *Sense and Sensibility*, where Elinor demonstrates composure and good judgment, which is contrasted with the emotional and foolish Marianne. Charity, or love, is caring for and placing the good of another person above one's self-interest. Even though her family does not treat her well, Anne displays her love for them in *Persuasion*. She keeps her sister company and watches her children, even when it means forfeiting social engagements. These virtues make up the core of Austen's morality and exemplify the tenets that she wanted her characters and her readers to practice. These are the traits that will ultimately lead to the hero and heroine's happy ending.

Mary Augusta Austen-Leigh, Austen's great-niece, claims that repentance is a consistent trait in all Jane Austen's novels (68). Repentance is an "incident [that] recurs in all her novels, neither being dragged in as a moral nor dwelt upon as a duty, but quietly taking its place as a natural and indispensable part of the plot—as an inevitable incident in the formation and the development of each successive child of her imagination" (68). Mary Austen-Leigh traces the

theme of penitence in the characters of Catherine Morland, Anne Elliot, Marianne Dashwood, both Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, and Emma Woodhouse. Mary Austen-Leigh claims her great-aunt viewed repentance as a crucial part of living a virtuous life. C. S. Lewis remarks how repentance must be experienced by Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*. When Marianne is suffering the harsh consequences of pursuing Mr. Willoughby, Austen describes these trials as "the torture of penitence" (*S&S* 221). This marks a distinction that repentance is a necessary part of growth. Both Mary Austen-Leigh and Lewis assert the importance that repentance be experienced in Austen's canon, despite it being a painful process.

Lionel Trilling comments on a different aspect of Austen's morality in *Mansfield Park*: prudence in avoiding immorality. His famous commentary argues that the novel "anxiously assert[s] the need to find security, to establish, in fixity and enclosure, a refuge from the dangers of openness and chance" ("*Mansfield*" 210). Fanny Price, generally considered Austen's least-liked heroine due to her overt piety (212), practices prudence by avoiding the immoral behavior of her cousins and the Crawfords. Examples of their unprincipled behavior is clandestinely putting on a play without Lord Bertram's approval, the Bertram sisters' consistent flirtations with Henry Crawford, and Mary Crawford's disdain for the clergy; all actions that embody "worldliness" (M. Austen-Leigh 87). The cousins' immorality culminates in Julia Bertram's elopement with Mr. Yates and Maria Rushworth (née Bertram) and Henry Crawford's affair. Fanny closely guards herself from their influence and occasionally tries to speak up against their behavior, like when she refuses to participate in the unchaste *Lovers' Vows* play and defends the church to Mary Crawford. Fanny's character is usually regarded as boorish and prudish, and *Mansfield Park*, though scholars consider it "a great novel, its greatness [is] commeasure with its

power to offend" (Trilling, "*Mansfield*" 211). *Mansfield Park*'s offensive power comes directly from Austen's commitment to teach virtue through her novels.

Austen is not just teaching her private opinions of what constitutes virtuous living. Her values are grounded in Christian teaching; for *Mansfield Park* contains the most religious symbolism of Austen's canon as well as being the most heavy-handed with moral rebuke. This is the topic that Felicia Bonaparte examines. She claims that Edmund "is an everyman and the women between whom he stands represent the choices before him" (Bonaparte 55). Mary Crawford represents secular morality, characterized by hedonism and materialism (55). Fanny represents piety to "the essential ideals of religion" (50): prudence and charity. She demonstrates prudence by not accepting Henry Crawford's proposal—a relationship that will not lead to happiness or virtue—and charity through the acts of service Fanny shows her aunts. *Mansfield Park* reveals that Austen's idea of virtue is not just her personal opinion of what she thinks will result in a happy life, but morals that are specifically derived from her Christian faith.

Austen specifically wants her characters to practice these virtues when choosing a marriage partner. Rory Muir argues that though Austen's novels show different aspects of romantic relationships due to the characters' varying personalities and situations, they contain "messages [that] were commonplace if not universal" (310). These messages encouraged men and women to marry for love, instead of money, and advised them to carefully consider their compatibility with a potential spouse in various areas. Essentially, these ideas reflect Austen's virtues of prudence and charity as they promote caution and condemn greed in courtship. By practicing these virtues, one would select a good spouse, ensuring a happy marriage.

Austen has received much attention from feminist critics over the last several decades. Particular focus is given to Austen's courtship plots and her presentation of women. Lloyd

Brown discusses how “contemporary pressures, generated by the liberation movement, for thoughtful evaluation of female images in… literature” are responsible for this shift in Austen criticism (322). Some feminist scholars argue that Austen was limited by the gender ideology of her day by presenting romantic relationships where a woman must learn from a man, an idea that is demeaning to women and would not result in a fulfilling marriage (322-23; Morrison 337; Moffat 46). While these perspectives certainly have their place, scholars who focus only on the roles of women in Austen’s canon may miss the potential for the broader moral instruction that was at the heart of Austen’s writings.

Other feminist scholars argue that Austen’s pedagogical romances are not degrading. Joanne Cordón makes the case that Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* supports gender equality through her “ability to transgress the contemporary guidelines for feminist speech” by “directly voic[ing] her thoughts and feelings” (41). Catherine rejects Henry’s attempts to control her speech by defending her description of a book as “nice” (*NA* 95). In this sense, Catherine asserts her own perspective in her relationship with Henry. Patrick Fessbecker discusses love and pedagogy, stating, “Austen’s novels are generally stories about a man correcting a girl’s erring nature” that conclude with her falling in love with her teacher (748). Mr. Knightley often acts as a reproving moral guide to Emma, for instance, criticizing her attempts to matchmake her friend, Harriet (*E* 60). Fessbecker agrees that Austen places women in relationships with a power disparity but argues that pedagogy is an important part of a marriage relationship because it results in the heroine’s “moral education” (748). This moral development is necessary for both the hero and the heroine as the precursor to a happy marriage. Austen communicates that both the hero and heroine are on an equal moral plane and must learn from each other. This

perspective is a recognition of the need for all men and women to repent of their failings and pursue a life of virtue: a distinctly Christian ideal.

Much scholarly discourse has focused on Austen's courtships, marriage advice, and even her religious background, but there seems to be a lack of research treating these themes as united. Irene Collins states that despite the large number of biographies published about Austen, the majority have "ignored or mentioned briefly and with apparent reluctance" the novelist's Christian convictions (xi). Collins asserts that Christianity "added greatly to her happiness and to her understanding of human nature" (xi). Religion cannot be taken out of her opinions on courtship and marriage without distorting them. Austen's convictions should not be disregarded as they inspired her to write the very novels that are beloved to this day.

The focus of this study is the six canonical novels: *Northanger Abbey* (Austen started writing this work around 1798, but it was published posthumously in 1817), *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (1817). Austen's juvenilia and her unfinished works, such as *Sanditon* are not utilized. Personal information about the author is given through her letters to family members, specifically her sister Cassandra. Primary biographical information is given by Austen's brother, Henry Austen, in "Biographical Notice of the Author" that was the foreword to *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* which were published together in 1817. Biographical information is also used from Austen's nephew, James Austen-Leigh, in *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1869), which recounts their family's account of the writer's life. These works will provide the crux of discourse throughout this study.

Chapter Two of this thesis provides context for marriage expectations during the Regency period. The focus of this study is on middle and upper-class marriages, as these are primarily the

kinds of marriages that Austen presents in her novels. Class specification is necessary as marriage expectations in Regency Britain varied depending on a person's station in life. The thesis then discusses how Austen affirms some of Regency culture's marriage customs and counsel, primarily the practical reasons given for marriage. The first main reason people were encouraged to marry is merely because they were expected to by societal standards. While Austen did not always conform to societal expectations, she did value abiding by what was deemed culturally proper. Henry Austen declares that Jane "paid her dues to the status quo" (Harman 62). Indeed, she would not have depicted romance so enjoyably unless she held a positive view of getting married. The second practical reason Austen supports people marrying is because women were placed at a massive financial disadvantage if they remained single unless they were upper-class and independently wealthy (Moffat 49). At the time, women were not allowed to own anything themselves. They could only inherit or enjoy prosperity through a husband or male family member. Though she cautions against money being the only driving force behind a romantic match, Austen does not shame women for having financial motivations for marriage. After all, once Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy have overcome their differences and can now marry, Elizabeth jokes with her sister, Jane, that her feelings for Mr. Darcy, a man she initially hated, began when she "first [saw] his beautiful grounds at Pemberley" (*P&P* 305). Couples cannot live off love alone; money is an inevitable aspect of marriage.

After establishing the necessity of marriage in Austen's time, Chapters Three, Four, and Five discuss the qualities Austen portrays as necessary for a successful romantic match in her novels. The first quality is that a relationship that is a good match will exhibit mutual intellectual stimulation. Both partners will engage each other mentally, iron sharpening iron (Prov. 27.17). The second quality discussed is how Austen depicts the importance of moral character and

personality compatibility in a romantic partner. Austen makes it clear that a relationship where both parties are not in moral harmony is riddled with strife. Personality is also important, though Austen provides more nuance here than with moral character. Some of Austen's couples share similar personalities (e.g. Jane and Bingley), which Austen describes as a positive occurrence. Other Austen couples have different personalities (e.g. Elizabeth and Darcy), but their different strengths complement each other. Some Austen couples have different personalities that do not complement each other, leading to marital strife (e.g. Lydia and Mr. Wickham). Other Austen couples have similar personalities that lead to imbalance, making the couple unsuitable (e.g. Marianne and Mr. Willoughby). Austen seems to argue that the combined personalities of a couple do not have to necessarily be the same, but even if they are different, they should be compatible. The third and final quality Austen seems to argue is the most important. A romantic relationship should lead to mutual personal growth. The biggest Austen indicator of a successful romantic relationship is if both partners improve each other. Final conclusions are discussed in Chapter Six.

Though the discourse is generations old, there is still more to say regarding Austen's novels about middling and upper-class women pursuing love. The rich pool of Austen scholarship from the past, and current scholarship being published supports this. Though Austen's day has long since passed, her ideas about love and marriage are still relevant today. Austen sought to encourage Christian marriage values when she felt her culture had largely rejected them in practice; the same loss continues today, to an even greater extent. Despite the changes that time brings in so many parts of life, fallen human nature remains the same. Truths about human nature, which Austen so effectively captures in her writing, are timeless. This is

why, for over two hundred years, the works of Jane Austen have survived, bringing entertainment and instruction to new generations of readers.

Chapter Two

Regency Courtship Customs: Societal Expectations & Material Necessity

Marriage was a high priority in the Regency era. Still following a social structure that began during medieval feudalism, the *noblesse oblige*, British society followed a strict class system (Adkins xx). The upper classes governed the lower classes, and the lower classes were obligated to serve the upper classes. Maintaining social stability meant making sure people knew their station and remained in the appropriate class and rank. To prevent social mobility and control the usage of farmland in Britain, the law of primogeniture was established (Ayres 1). This ensured that estates and titles would be passed down only through the oldest male heir. In families with no sons, entailed property would be inherited by a male relative; a daughter could not inherit and the family could not sell the estate (1). One example of this is in *Pride and Prejudice*: The Bennet family home, Longbourn House, is an entailed property. As Mr. and Mrs. Bennet only have daughters, when Mr. Bennet dies his estate will be inherited by Mr. Collins, a cousin and a "stranger" to the Bennets (*P&P* 56). The primogeniture law maintained the power of the upper classes since their properties were preserved and the system of class and rank was maintained (Adkins 3). Arranged marriages provided a way for wealth and property to be kept in the same families through dowries so that wealth and titles might be passed on through generations (Ayres 1).

Marriage was the foundation of British society, and deciding who to marry profoundly impacted one's future prospects. For the middling and upper classes, "[c]ourtship was a game played for high stakes, and while it brought much excitement, delight and pleasure, there was also an undercurrent of anxiety, doubts to be suppressed and fears for the future" (Muir 18). A potential partner should ideally be wealthy, or at least financially stable enough to support a

comfortable lifestyle for a family. Primogeniture laws "often forced younger sons into other professions and coerced daughters into marriages that might increase or establish their wealth…. [S]econd sons or gentlemen without 'a good fortune' might look to seduce an heiress to improve their wealth" (Hall 3). While men were primarily considered to be providers for the family, many men pursued women from wealthy families who would provide a large dowry or inheritance. A potential partner should ideally increase one's social position, or at the very least, not decrease one's standing. Many men or women might marry just for rank if their family already had wealth, or just for wealth if their family was already high in rank; few members of the upper-classes were indifferent to both qualities. A potential partner should also enhance the personal happiness of their spouse, but "[h]appiness was of secondary importance" to securing financial gain or rank (Adkins 3). For any and all these reasons, marriage was largely considered to be necessary for most people in Austen's culture. As the now-famous opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* states, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (1). Young people were encouraged to adopt their culture's priorities for selecting a spouse.

With so much at stake, young people were expected by their parents to take great care in selecting a marriage partner. Marrying above one's station would open the door to many beneficial connections and would improve one's prospects. Parents placed immense pressure on sons and daughters to marry advantageously: "[P]arents still threatened to withdraw financial support for a son or daughter who married against their wishes" (Olsen 11). Austen's canon contains several examples of the insistence that young people marry well. In *Northanger Abbey*, General Tilney encourages his son Henry's relationship with Catherine Morland because he mistakenly believes that her family is wealthy (224). Once he realizes that he has been

misinformed, he strives to separate the two. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bennet daughters face much persuasion from their parents to find wealthy husbands to support them as there are no sons to inherit the family home (29). Mr. Darcy is also pestered by his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, to marry her daughter in order to join their "splendid" fortunes and "noble" lines (290). In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price is living with the Bertrams, who are her aunt and uncle, because of her penniless parents' "imprudent marriage" (6). Fanny is later harrassed by the Bertrams to marry Henry Crawford because of his wealth (291). Family pressure alone made courtship a difficult field to navigate. A young person faced censure and possible ostracization from his or her family if the wrong partner was picked but risked long-term unhappiness in the marriage if one were to marry a partner to whom one was ill-suited.

Despite the importance of money and social position, the prioritization of marrying a spouse that would bring personal happiness was a relatively recent development that was growing in popularity (Adkins 3). Earlier cultures encouraged advantageous marriages without concern for personal happiness as extramarital relationships for both men and women were not abnormal. In fact, infidelity to one's spouse was so common among the upper classes that the Regency era became known as the Age of Scandal (Fullerton 143). British citizens became increasingly aware of the scandals of the upper classes, while "[c]lergymen… preach[ed] fidelity and morality from the pulpit" (144). The persistent infidelity and scandals of the royals set a negative example that some followed, but many learned from, causing fidelity to become more highly valued in marriages. Attitudes were shifting, and "Marital love was now widely accepted as a principal source of human fulfilment" (Thomas 217). People began to recognize the personal fulfillment that was possible by marrying a suitable spouse, and this concern was growing in priority among the middling and upper classes. Jenny McAuley reflects, "[i]n a newly

sentimental age, expectations that marriage should meet emotional needs were disrupting the courtship rituals that had safeguarded families' property interests" (1). The personal impact of marrying an ill-suited spouse was so profound that nineteenth-century parents began moving away from arranged marriages for their children. Rory Muir states, "loveless marriages were at risk of leading to adultery and scandal. This led most parents to step back from an active role in bringing couples together, although they still felt free to object to an impractical or unsuitable marriage" (16). It became apparent that selecting a spouse meant making a choice "with lifelong implications, for good or ill" (Olsen 4). This cultural shift led to young people having more freedom in selecting a romantic partner, provided their parents ultimately approved of their choice.

Courtship customs looked different depending on a person's sex, but both men and women were expected to abide by societal courtship norms. Women were expected to marry relatively young by modern standards. Most girls were educated until roughly fourteen years old when they would begin accompanying their parents on social calls to friends and neighbors. Education for girls was intended on instructing them in skills that would make them more marriageable: such as drawing, painting, needlework, playing a musical instrument, singing, dancing, and social skills like possessing a calm demeanor and politeness (Horwitz 136; J. Austen-Leigh 37). Such talents were expected of upper-class women so they might seem more refined and attract a more high-profile suitor. Austen herself was "well educated, though not highly accomplished" (H. Austen 44). Austen seems to place little importance on the accomplishments expected of women and even seems to argue that they are impractical in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth Bennet, responding to Mr. Darcy's statement that he only knows six women accomplished enough in the various artistic skills expected of upper-class women,

replies, “I am no longer surprised at your knowing *only* six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing *any*” (*P&P* 38). From Austen’s life and her writing, it is apparent that she believes women should spend their time learning more valuable principles—history, philosophy, and ethics—than merely how to make oneself more marriageable.

During the courtship period, women were expected to accentuate their youth and beauty through their dress. Women wore full-length dresses with free-moving skirts and high waists, accentuating figures that were “tall, womanly, full-formed, and fair” (Bruley 2; Davidson 52). Dresses would be worn with corsets and other accessories like gloves, bonnets, and ribbons (P. Byrde 133). Dress was taken very seriously, with upper-middling and upper-class women changing their clothing five times a day or more for different times of day and different occasions (Davidson 26). The latest fashions would come from London and Bath and were spread by word-of-mouth (P. Byrde 131). The appearance of women was a subject open to comment from the rest of society. Women sometimes faced harsh comments if they failed to conform to culture’s beauty standards, and “[m]en could—and did—comment openly on the appearance of women” (Muir 23), to varying degrees of politeness. Austen reveals some of this discourse in *Northanger Abbey*, when Catherine’s parents, in her hearing, say that “she is almost pretty today” (5). Wealth was often communicated through clothing, though as gown styles had simplified, wealth was communicated more through expensive fabrics than ornateness as was typical in the mid-1700s (P. Byrde 132). Clothing was an important part of their daily life as women were essentially competing for husbands, hoping to catch the eye of an advantageous suitor.

Around the age of eighteen, young women would be introduced into society at a public event like a ball. From this point on, they were allowed to court and receive marriage proposals

(Curzon 132). The daughters of upper-class families who were part of the aristocracy would have to be presented at court where they would be introduced to the royals if they wanted to be included in the topmost part of London society (Muir 4). As soon as a young woman was introduced into society she experienced pressure to find a husband before she got too old. Once a girl debuted, "she was regarded as a finished article: a year or two of balls and country house visits might give her added assurance and poise, but only with a commensurate loss of freshness and naivety; and she was as likely to marry at eighteen as at twenty-two or any other age" (5-6). For many young women, there was little point in putting off matrimony. While searching for a potential husband, young women heavily relied on public events, like balls, to help broaden their acquaintance and experience. Balls provided an environment for young women to get to know potential suitors and to compare them to others while enjoying dancing, games, entertainment, and conversation.

Conversations as a tool of courtship were crucial. Courtship relationships were developed based on access to conversation, which usually came from public or private balls. In a society with strict rules of propriety between male and female interactions, public conversation was usually the only option available to spend time with someone one was interested in. Opportunity for conversation was slim. Abiding by Regency propriety could make it very difficult to get to know a potential love interest, and suitors had to learn how to best guide a situation to enable them the greatest opportunity to converse with a lady. As social customs would not allow a woman to dance with a man more than twice, the suitor could escort a lady to dinner, thereby allowing more time to converse (Muir 41) Some gentlemen developed skill in conversing and would employ that skill "to charm women through the art of conversation" (Malone 435). Men

and women were constantly trying to create opportunities to converse and potentially develop a courtship relationship.

Young women were placed in a difficult position when dealing with men's affections. On one hand, they were "never [to] take the initiative" in revealing romantic interest (Muir 25), and instead had to rely on the man to advance the relationship or propose. If women were too forward with their interest, they also risked being humiliated if their suitor did not make a proposal. This is exemplified by Marianne Dashwood and Mr. Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*. On the other hand, if a woman was too undemonstrative in her interest, her suitor might doubt her affection and not pursue her. Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice* are an example of this: Mr. Darcy misinterprets Jane's reservedness as indifference and convinces Mr. Bingley to abandon the relationship (165-66). Courtship for many was a period of uncertainty and anxiety.

As women did not have a means to support themselves aside from a husband, parents often had an "obsession with pairing off daughters with suitable men" (Adkins 3). Not everyone in Austen's day approved of how the courtship system impacted women: treating daughters like they were objects to be auctioned off to the highest bidder was criticized by some in Austen's day. One such critic was Mary Wollstonecraft. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she speaks against the "frippery of dress" that would prevent women from focusing on the development of their moral character and minds (84; Ch. 4). She states that a woman's "strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty" with a shallow education (21; Intro.). Wollstonecraft argues that this is dehumanizing and prevents women from being meaningful citizens (183; Ch. 12). She laments that women's accomplishments largely ignored moral instruction were designed

to make them “alluring mistresses [rather] than affectionate wives” (21; Intro.), and she protests the restrictions placed on women in the interest of making them marriageable.

The courtship experience men had was quite different than that of their sisters. After middling and upper-class boys finished their childhood education, around the ages of twelve and fifteen, they might go into a profession or join the navy and be sent to sea (Adkins 68-69). Young men from the upper middling and upper classes might attend university at Oxford or Cambridge at seventeen or eighteen. Boys from more privileged families, might take a gap year to go “on a grand tour of the Continent, possibly studying at Edinburg rather than Oxford or Cambridge” (Muir 2). It was abnormal for young men the ages of eighteen to twenty-two, the range where young women were considered the most desirable, to consider marriage. Unless they were from aristocratic families and already in possession of a private fortune, it was expected that young men would pursue a career until they grew a fortune large enough to support a wife and potential children prior to looking for a spouse. This usually was not achieved until mid-to-late twenties at the earliest (Olsen 5). It was normal for men to be five to ten years older than their wives, and a husband being even older than this was not uncommon. Regency society “expected that a young man embarking on matrimony would have rather greater experience and knowledge of the world than his bride” (Muir 6). This created a culture ripe for pedagogical romances, as men were expected to be significantly older and wiser in the ways of the world than their wives, who were expected to be young and virginal.

Women were expected to enter a marriage relationship pure (Black 103), and until then, to patiently wait for a suitable man to take interest in them. For many women, it was upon this that their whole futures rested. Regency society did not necessarily encourage men to have premarital sexual relations, but it largely permitted it: “there was a rising belief in a male desire

that was incapable of restraint. The responsibility for chastity shifted to the woman, who was now celebrated for her modesty and presumed to be relatively passionless" (Olsen 9). Contrary to standards of behavior for women, it was accepted for men to have some previous sexual experience going into marriage, though certainly not all did. After a young man left home to pursue his career and fortune, it was not abnormal for him to begin having sexual encounters, "whether from prostitutes, landlady's daughters, shop girls or a regularly established mistress" (Muir 7). Some young men might go through a phase of "drinking, whoring and gambling to the full extent that their pay or their allowance, their credit, their friends and their health would permit" (7), to little consequence. But once they decided to court and marry a respectable woman, it was expected that the couple wait until marriage to consummate the relationship (Jones 191). This demonstrates that a harsher sexual ethic was imposed on women than on men in Regency society as most first-time brides were virgins, while their new husbands most likely were not.

Coming from this culture, Austen interacts with Regency courtship expectations in her novels, sometimes by reinforcing, sometimes by subverting, cultural expectations. Austen's novels do not ignore the Regency rules of an advantageous marriage: seeking a partner with wealth or status. Instead, Austen addresses and offers a nuanced take on these courtship tenets. Austen never claims that money is not a factor when looking for a spouse. In fact, prior to Mrs. Ferras reconciling with her son—which allows Edward and Elinor more income—Austen states that "[Elinor and Edward] were neither of them quite enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a year would supply them with the comforts of life" (*S&S* 303). In Austen's novels, as was understood throughout the upper classes of the Regency, money is clearly an

important factor when choosing a spouse, and all Austen's heroines end up marrying men who do not jeopardize their financial stability and usually increase their economic position.

Austen makes it clear that men and women should not marry primarily for financial security. She contends that marriages that are made chiefly with money in mind are destined to be unhappy. This belief would have been confirmed by her Christian heritage as the Bible has several references about the danger of greed. The Scriptures warn not to allow the love of money to consume one's life (Heb. 13.5; Matt. 6.24), and also teach that those who pursue wealth as their highest priority will always find their income insufficient and never be fulfilled (Eccl. 5.10; Prov. 20.21). These principles are seen throughout Austen's canon as there are multiple examples of unhappy mercenary marriages. The following are some of the most notable.

Mr. Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* toys with the affections of multiple women on his road to finding a wife who will bring him wealth. After breaking the hearts of Eliza Williams and Marianne Dashwood, he eventually marries a Miss Grey, a girl with "fifty thousand pounds" (158). Though he gets what he most desires, money, his marriage does not prove fulfilling and he still pines for Marianne. In the end, Mr. Willoughby gets his comeuppance and realizes that "had he behaved with honour towards Marianne he might at once have been happy and rich" (312). Though he does indeed marry rich, Willoughby's is not a happy ending.

Similar to Mr. Willoughby, is *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr. Wickham. Mr. Wickham proves that he will do whatever is necessary to make a mercenary marriage. His first attempt at this was to pursue a fifteen-year-old Georgiana Darcy. Wickham "persuaded" her to fall in love with him and "to consent to an elopement" (168). Mr. Darcy, who foiled Wickham's plan, is convinced that Wickham's "chief object was unquestionably [his] sister's fortune" (169). When this attempt fails, Wickham also pursues the wealthy Mary King, only for this attempt to fail as well (172).

Wickham finally succeeds in his quest for wealth when he preys on the susceptible Lydia Bennet and runs off with her, effectively ruining the reputations of her as well as her sisters. While the Bennets do not have any money, Wickham refuses to marry Lydia until Mr. Darcy is essentially blackmailed into giving him money to make Lydia an honest woman. Redeeming Lydia saves the reputation of Elizabeth and allows her and Mr. Darcy to marry (247). The marriage between Mr. Wickham and Lydia, one motivated by greed on his side and lust on hers, is destined to be unhappy because of its immoral start. Because Wickham loves extravagance and Lydia is immature, no amount of wealth is ever enough and their money soon runs out. Without luxury, their attraction quickly turns “indifference” (316), and Lydia must resort to soliciting money from Elizabeth and Jane.

Mansfield Park’s Maria Bertram is a classic example of a gold-digger. Austen states that “Maria Bertram was beginning to think matrimony a duty; and as a marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father’s, as well as ensure her the house in town, which was now a prime object, it became, by the same rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could” (*MP* 37). Marry him she does, but the relationship leads to (un)surprisingly less happiness than Maria envisioned. Maria eventually tires of her husband, who she does not love, and who is described as “a heavy young man, with not more than common sense” (37). Infatuated with Henry Crawford, she begins an affair with him that culminates in them running off together. This results in a scandal that leaves Maria divorced and disgraced (431). These, and other examples, show that Austen did not look kindly on mercenary marriages.

Austen is clear that greed and marrying someone one does not love are the reasons marriages fail or are filled with strife, not money itself. Several of Austen’s heroes, and some of

her heroines, are blessed with a comfortable living that serves as no barrier to their marital bliss. Nor does Austen shame her heroines for desiring a wealthy husband or having wealth. The Bennet family is in dire financial need and the family is relying on Jane, the eldest and prettiest daughter, to make an advantageous marriage. Mrs. Bennet practically throws Jane in the wealthy Mr. Bingley's path in hopes that they will fall in love (*P&P* 10). Jane dutifully pursues Mr. Bingley and finds him to be "just what a young man ought to be" (18). She tells her sister Elizabeth that Mr. Bingley is "sensible, good humored, lively; and I never saw such happy manners!—so much at ease, with such perfect good breeding!" (18). The text never treats Jane as dishonest for pursuing Mr. Bingley as she genuinely likes him and truly falls in love with him. Elizabeth does not set out to pursue the wealthy Mr. Darcy at all. Rather, he pursues her, and the first time he proposes to her she rejects him, stating that "[he] could not have made [her] the offer of [his] hand in any possible way that would have tempted [her] to accept it" (161). Mr. Darcy's "astonishment was obvious" at Elizabeth's refusal to be influenced by his wealth (161). Once Elizabeth is assured of his character, however, Mr. Darcy's wealth is an additional boon, and Elizabeth is clearly appreciative of Mr. Darcy's "beautiful grounds at Pemberley" (305). Austen is aware of the importance of financial stability and does not shame women for seeking a marriage partner to fill such a void. She makes it clear though that the pursuit of financial stability should not lead to one compromising one's morals. Instead, financial stability is a reward for the moral growth that the hero and heroine have experienced. This is a Christian principle as the Bible teaches that those who put honoring God first will be blessed (Matt. 6.33; Prov. 10.22).

Austen expresses a similar opinion on marrying for social advancement as she does on financially motivated marriages. Essentially that social position is not a bad thing in and of itself,

but it should not be a strong determining factor in selecting a spouse. Nearly all Austen characters are members of the middling and upper classes, though Austen is not preoccupied with social position, and seems to mention it minimally. James Austen-Leigh states: "Her acquaintance… constituted the very class from which she took her imaginary characters, ranging from the member of parliament, or large landed proprietor, to the young curate or younger midshipman of equally good family" (19). Austen wrote about the type of people she was familiar with and did not seek to add shock value with ill-bred characters. James Austen-Leigh continues that Austen "is entirely free from the vulgarity, which is so offensive in some novels, of dwelling on the outward appendages of wealth or rank, as if they were things to which the writer was unaccustomed; and… she deals as little with very low as with very high stations in life" (19). Austen, prioritizing authenticity, kept a narrow focus on just those characters necessary to accomplish her story. James Austen-Leigh differentiates his aunt from other authors who would use "well bred characters" to make their works more dramatic and used people with "underbred manners" to make the upper-class characters look more elite (19): This was a trope used by Frances Burney in her novels. Austen's novels feature surprisingly few members of the aristocracy and those she does write about are background characters. As she was not preoccupied with rank, it is no wonder that her courtships do not focus on socially advantageous matches.

There are a few key examples of Austen's opinions on marriages for social advancement. In *Pride and Prejudice*, it seems that Austen is almost mocking such practices. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Darcy's aunt, objects to Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's union because of Elizabeth's "inferior birth" (*P&P* 289). Lady Catherine views Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's marriage as a "pollution" of the family name (291). The opinions that Lady Catherine expresses are outright

refuted by Elizabeth, and based on Elizabeth and Darcy's later marriage, it is reasonable to assume that Austen herself disagreed with such prejudiced notions.

In *Emma*, the meddling matchmaker that lends the book its name works hard to bring together her friend Harriet with the respectable Mr. Elton. If successful, the match would increase Harriet's social standing. Emma disapproves of Robert Martin, the man that Harriet fancies because he is a farmer, "a man whom [Emma] could never admit as an acquaintance of [her] own" (*E* 58-59). Emma argues that Mr. Martin "is undoubtedly [Harriet's] inferior as to rank in society. – The sphere in which she moves is much above his. – It would be a degradation" (59). Emma eventually realizes her prejudice and moves out of the way of their relationship. Emma realizes "that Harriet had always liked Robert Martin; and that his continuing to love her had been irresistible" (467-68). Emma is shown to be wrong to try to force a relationship to better her friend's social position.

Despite not encouraging marriages to better one's social position, Austen's novels also rarely feature relationships where her characters marry well below their social status, also known as a *mésalliance*. Muir points out that Austen's characters do not marry lower than middle class (128). Elizabeth Bennet describes herself and Mr. Darcy as, "[h]e is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal" (*P&P* 290). This shows that Austen adhered to standards of propriety as defined by Regency culture. While she did not think that one should base a marriage on a partner's social position, the absence of courtships that break class barriers in her novels suggests that she did find *mésalliances* disagreeable, or at least something to be avoided.

In her novels, Austen seems to agree most with the Regency standard that an ideal marriage partner should contribute to one's personal happiness; however, she draws a distinction

between superficial happiness and genuine fulfillment. As the examples already discussed have shown, the happiness that comes from money or rank is not the kind that will lead to long-term marital happiness. Even the allure of mere physical attraction does not make a happy marriage; after all, Mr. Bennet married Mrs. Bennet because he was "captivated by [her] youth and beauty" (*P&P* 195). It must take more than money, titles, or attraction to make a marriage happy (Prov. 31.30). Austen promises that her couples have learned the secret to marital happiness.

Austen stresses in each of her novels that the marriages of her heroes and heroines will lead to their happiness. *Northanger Abbey* describes Henry and Catherine's marriage as "perfect happiness" (230). *Sense and Sensibility* concludes by assuring the reader of "the happiness of Elinor and Marianne" in their marriages to their respective husbands (312). *Pride and Prejudice* similarly assures that both Jane and Elizabeth were in possession of "every other source of happiness" in their respective marriages (314). Elizabeth even turns down Mr. Collins' proposal by telling him, "[y]ou could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so" (94). *Mansfield Park* describes "the happiness of [Fanny and Edmund]... as secure as earthly happiness can be" (439). In *Emma*, the marriage of Emma and Mr. Knightly results in "perfect happiness" (470). *Persuasion* similarly states that Captain Wentworth is "securing the happiness" of Anne (178). Though some might claim that Austen is merely writing a happy ending, she is reinforcing that marriage to the right person should lead to personal flourishing. Personal happiness is a worthwhile pursuit, though Austen cautions against being too concerned with one's own well-being that it turns into self-centeredness. Austen is careful to differentiate the marriages that will be truly happy from the relationships between two people who put their own well-being above their spouse. Examples of this are the marriages of

the aforementioned Mr. Willoughby and Mr. Wickham, both of whom are self-centered men who follow their basest inclinations.

Given that Regency culture was full of sexual scandal, it is valuable to note that Austen's novels contain essentially no sexual content. Austen's work also remains mostly free from any discussions of risqué content. This is not because Regency society was devoid of sexual encounters, but because to discuss and include such content would be considered vulgar and improper to discuss in polite society. Henry Austen makes it clear that Jane would not stoop to using immorality as entertainment. He states, "[w]ithout the slightest affectation she recoiled from every thing gross. Neither nature, wit, nor humor, could make her amends for so very low a scale of morals" (330). Any sexual misconduct that Austen makes relevant to her story she keeps discreet and implicit.

Austen includes few examples where sexual misconduct is mentioned and in every case, it serves a valuable purpose to the plot, usually providing an example for readers to avoid. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Colonel Brandon recounts the tragic story of Eliza, his former love who married his brother. The brother, who only married Eliza for her money, mistreats her and they divorce. Austen is delicate with the language used to describe Eliza's fallen position. Brandon states that he "could not trace her beyond her *first* seducer, and there was every reason to fear that she had removed from him only to sink deeper in a *life of sin*" (*S&S* 169; emphasis added). Eliza's lifestyle resulted in a daughter—also named Eliza—whom Colonel Brandon adopts. It is important to the plot to include Eliza's descent into a life of assumed prostitution, as it shows the potential damage of a mercenary marriage and explains why Colonel Brandon fell in love with Marianne, who reminds him of his former love. Colonel Brandon continues telling how Willoughby seduced the younger Eliza and ran away with her for eight months (171). It is

impossible to believe that during this time Willoughby and Eliza remained abstinent. In describing Willoughby's scandalous behavior, Brandon is clear yet reserved, stating, "[Willoughby] had left the girl whose youth and innocence he had seduced in a situation of utmost distress" (171). Relating this information reveals Willoughby's character and explains why Colonel Brandon would risk his own reputation to save Marianne from Willoughby. Colonel Brandon's story is not mere scandal for drama's sake; revealing the sexual misconduct of Eliza and Willoughby teaches readers to avoid mercenary marriages, to strive for good sense and not get swept up in passion, the dangers of passivity, and the virtue of compassion.

Mansfield Park includes much immoral behavior. Felicia Bonaparte described the culture of the Crawford's as "amoral" (58), and Lionel Trilling describes it as "the Terror of secularized spirituality" ("*Mansfield*" 230). The chief example of moral degradation is the aforementioned affair between Maria Rushworth and Henry Crawford. As with *Sense and Sensibility*, any immorality is implied but left to the reader's imagination. The immorality of the Bertrams and the Crawfords similarly serves a purpose: it contrasts Fanny's piety. Felicia Bonaparte reflects that "the presence of sin is what sends Austen to religion" (58). Showing the damage that is done when people compromise their sexual purity effectively communicates the importance of both men and women remaining pure until marriage and faithful to their spouses. These values were not followed commonly in Regency society but are encouraged in Christian traditions (Matt. 5.28; 1 Cor. 7.2). By avoiding salacious depictions of the sexual impropriety that occurred in society but not neglecting to exhibit the harmful consequences of such loose morals, Austen reinforces a Christian sexual ethic.

A different aspect of Regency courtship life significant to Austen's works is the portrayal of spinsters and bachelors. After all, the cultural perception of those who remained unmarried

would greatly influence young peoples' motivations to seek a marriage partner. Women who reached the age of thirty without finding a husband were unlikely to ever do so (Muir 135). Many women became spinsters through a loss—or lack—of opportunity to find suitable matches. Some women would choose to remain unmarried because they were disinterested in marriage, were not able to marry the man they loved, or refused to marry a man that they did not love or respect.

Because a primary aspect of marriage included the husband assuming the care and responsibility of the wife, unmarried women often remained in the care of their families. Women in this position typically faced a life of shame since they were viewed as a burden on their family. Many spinsters helped with running the household as a way to contribute to their family. To avoid staying in such a position, some spinsters were forced to find work (Adkins 15). To have hope of remaining in polite society, spinsters were restricted to jobs that would be acceptable (Young 3-4); such as being a school teacher, or "working in the household of strangers as a governess or companion" (3). Such jobs meant that the woman would live with their employer, sacrificing much of their personal lives to their employer, often for little money.

Aside from unfortunate circumstantial consequences, spinsters faced harsh social treatment. Because the culture of Austen's age attributed women's value to their ability to achieve an advantageous marriage, women who failed to do so faced harsh stigma. Spinsters were viewed as failures by their communities and frequently treated poorly (Black 107). Spinsters were assumed to be ill-tempered and were considered laughing stocks by the rest of society. Boys would play tricks on them and girls would sneer at them; spinsters might even face violence (Morris 99; Muir 136). It is little wonder that many women married, not necessarily

from a desire to, but to escape the stigma of spinsterhood and because they did not have the means to support themselves unless they inherited wealth from a male family member.

The same shame and poor treatment were not experienced by men who did not marry, called bachelors. As previously discussed, men married much later than women anyway and did not face a matrimonial expiration date. Men's societal value did not come from who they married—unless they married high above their station or into wealth. Their value came from their career, social position, and wealth. If a man was privileged in any of these other areas, he could remain single as well as respectable. The men in Austen's novels who are eager to marry, notably Mr. Wickham and Mr. Willoughby, are desperate because they lack position and money and hope to gain these from a wife. Respectable, well-established gentlemen had much more choice about if and when they married without experiencing the consequences women faced by remaining single.

Austen only includes a few references to spinsters in her novels; however, many of her female characters convey the pressure they felt to marry, indicating an anxiety about remaining single and becoming a spinster. Jane Bennet, the oldest and most beautiful of the Bennet sisters, rejoices at sharing the news of her engagement to Mr. Bingley with her family "to know that what I have to relate will give such pleasure to all my dear family! how shall I bear so much happiness!" (*P&P* 283). She is happy to marry a man she truly loves, and equally happy to let her mother and sisters know they are saved from destitution. Many women were not as lucky as Jane Bennet and were happy marrying almost any respectable gentleman if it kept them from spinsterhood.

Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* is an excellent example of this. The twenty-seven-year-old Charlotte shrewdly diverts Mr. Collins' affections from Elizabeth Bennet to

herself, not because she is in love with Mr. Collins, but to save her family from the burden of supporting her. Austen describes Charlotte's perspective: "Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object: it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and, however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want" (*P&P* 107). Charlotte has no affection for Mr. Collins; love did not persuade her into matrimony. Austen states about Mr. Collins' proposal that: "The stupidity with which he was favoured by nature must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance; and Miss Lucas… accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment" (106). It is clear that readers are not to view the Collins' marriage as ideal or attractive. Charlotte's marriage did benefit her family who "were relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte's dying an old maid" (107). Many single women about to enter spinsterhood were placed in a position of choosing an ill-matched husband or disappointing their family.

Austen's treatment of Charlotte throughout *Pride and Prejudice* can be described as sympathetic and understanding. Charlotte is not harshly judged for marrying the odious Mr. Collins—except by Elizabeth Bennet. She is grimly respected for believing that she can maintain a contentment with life while married to him. Charlotte defends her decision to marry Mr. Collins to Elizabeth stating, "I am not a romantic… I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state" (*P&P* 109). Charlotte is determined to make the best of life with her mismatched spouse, but Austen expresses some doubt about Charlotte's future happiness. Elizabeth comes and stays with Charlotte and Mr. Collins, and upon her leaving reflects, "Poor Charlotte! it was melancholy to leave her to such society! But she had chosen it with her eyes open; and… she did not seem to ask for compassion.

Her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms" (179). Austen seems to imply that Charlotte's the benefits of having her own home to manage will eventually lose their charm and her future with Mr. Collins will tend toward misery. Charlotte is clearly to be pitied for the marriage partner that kept her from spinsterhood.

Austen counters Regency attitudes toward spinsters by encouraging that they be treated with compassion. This is evidenced by her treatment of Miss Bates in *Emma*. Though Miss Bates has a ridiculous and annoying personality, her community treats her with love and respect. The daughter of a poor widow, Miss Bates is very popular in her community "for a woman neither young, handsome, rich, nor married" (*E* 18). Readers should feel sympathy for Miss Bates' situation, for "she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself, or frighten those who might hate her into outward respect" (18). Austen indicates the mistreatment that many spinsters endured; Miss Bates is only spared them because of "her own universal good-will and contented temper" (18), which "were a recommendation to every body, and a mine of felicity to herself" (18). Only through a persistent positive and loving attitude is Miss Bates able to avoid the stigma that came along with spinsterhood, "the very worst predicament in the world for having much of the public favour" (18). Throughout *Emma*, the Highbury community—particularly Mr. Weston and Mr. Woodhouse—includes, loves, and defends Miss Bates, practicing Christian charity to the least of these (Matt. 25.40), a practice Emma herself struggles with.

Austen had a particular investment in such discourse since she herself was a spinster along with her beloved sister, Cassandra. She considers spinsters with compassion, even stating in a letter to Cassandra, "Poor Mrs. Stent! it has been her lot to be always in the way; but we

must be merciful, for perhaps in time we may come to be Mrs. Stents ourselves, unequal to anything, and unwelcome to everybody" (*Letters* 107). Austen takes issues around singleness a step further and rebels against her culture's norms by arguing that being a spinster is not reprehensible. Jane and Cassandra's decision to remain single and to lead lives that, as far as can be ascertained, were relatively happy and full proves that they did not consider singleness to be a debilitating situation. She lived a lively life and spent much time with her siblings and nieces and nephews, and "her friends of all ages felt her enlivening influence" (J. Austen-Leigh 92). Austen's success as a writer, proves that "For Austen herself, of course, spinsterhood did not mean failure" (McAuley 2). Austen did not let her unmarried status keep her from pursuing her passion for writing and she seemed to assert that being a spinster is only a problem if one does not have money. In a letter to her niece, Fanny Knight, she writes, "Single Women have a dreadful propensity for being poor—which is one very strong argument in favour of Matrimony" (*Letters* 347). Austen saw no issue with an independently wealthy woman remaining single. She then encourages her niece to "Donot [*sic*] be in a hurry" to marry and to wait for "the right Man" (347). Austen advises her niece to use caution rather than jump at the chance to get married.

This bold opinion is further discussed in *Emma*, where the title character declares that she will most likely never marry unless in the unlikely occasion that she falls in love (81). Harriet, Emma's friend exclaims, "you will be an old maid! and that's so dreadful!" (82). Here she expresses the common cultural opinion on spinsterhood. Emma replies, "I shall not be a poor old maid; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid!... but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable" (82). Though readers learn that not all Emma's opinions are to be agreed with, Austen at least partially supports this proclamation through her

own private letters to her niece. Emma is unique among Austen's heroines as she does not have any motivation to marry and is even set against matrimony so that she can stay home and care for her father. It is only by falling in love with a partner who is her perfect match that Emma is convinced to marry.

The marriage and courtship culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was focused on selfish pursuits. The mentality that it developed encouraged men and women to only think about what their partner could do for them. The term "advantageous marriage" literally means a marriage that would give one an advantage (*P&P 288*). Women would be advantageous wives if they were beautiful and ideally from a wealthy and important family. Men would be advantageous husbands if they were wealthy and had an important career that reflected well on their wife. With changing cultural attitudes, both parties sought companionship from their spouse. While these reasons are important, Austen encourages people to seek much more valuable benefits from a spouse: a genuine bond of love and affection and a partner that will catalyze personal growth. There is nothing particularly wrong with money or social position, and both are needed to live comfortably in society. Because of Austen's Christian upbringing, she realizes that there are more worthwhile pursuits than these. She believes that it is not worth missing out on the more fulfilling blessings of marriage—love and growth—for the surface-level rewards like wealth or position. Presumably, this is an important reason she turned down her own potential suitors, including Harris Bigg Wither, a young man with a large inheritance (Halperin 730). In Austen's eyes, it is better to remain single than to enter a marriage without love to a partner who has worldly advantages but lacks virtue.

Chapter Three

Encouraging Intellectual Maturity

Conversation was a crucial aspect of Regency culture. It was a tool used to reinforce the British class system: "[O]ne of the ways in which the aristocracy kept themselves apart from the masses was by creating their own rules, restrictions and a system of etiquette that enabled them to recognize and connect with those of their own order" (Kloester 64). A person's speech revealed much about them, like where they were from and their social status (65). For instance, *Sense and Sensibility*'s Lucy Steele reveals her lack of education and breeding through her colloquial dialogue (Bray 118). Conversation—what was discussed, when, and how—was controlled by Regency etiquette; there was a correct way to speak, and an incorrect way. For example, as it is Catherine's first time in Bath, Henry teaches her the protocols of Pump-Room conversation in *Northanger Abbey* (15-19). Social exchanges required a "mask of formality" (Bray 118), and the upper classes used wit, decorum, and charm to distinguish themselves from the lower classes (Malone 435). Those who did not follow conversation etiquette were looked down upon as unfit for polite society. As mentioned in the previous chapter, conversation played an important role in courtship as well.

Clever conversation was valued in Regency courtship, and many men practiced being able to dazzle women with their manners and wit. But money and social rank were the most important judges of a potential suitor, and many a young woman married a dull man for these reasons—like Maria Bertram in *Mansfield Park* or Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*. During courtship, having good manners was often considered as important as professional success to engage in polite society and pursue a romantic interest (Muir 27); as the idiom goes, "manners maketh the man" (Wykeham). Though presumably one would want to enjoy talking to

their potential future spouse, the sorts of conversations Regency etiquette demanded were performative and did not permit couples to truly get to know each other.

Typical of Regency literature, much of the plot takes place through conversation and Austen novels feature little dramatic action. This was typical of the epistolary novel, a genre popularized in the 1700s by Samuel Richardson (Singer 60), where "the novel [is] cast in letter form" (vii). Several of Austen's early works adopt the epistolary mode, like *Lady Susan* and *Love and Friendship*, and both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* started out as epistolary novels as well. The epistolary novel relies on the "power of dialogue" to describe what might otherwise be mundane information in an engaging way; a trait Austen learned well and carried over into all her writing (97). Her domestic novels feature conversations between people in conventional settings, such as in one's home or a friend's home, on a walk, traveling to friends or family, or at a ball.

Austen's dialogue does more than relate important plot information or merely keep the reader entertained. Ian Watt considers dialogue to be "one of the cardinal postulates" in Austen's works—that "conversations to and about other people are actually unveilings of a more consequential reality, the self" (1). He goes on to explain how the conversation in her novels demonstrate the characters' personalities, "intellectual capacities," and "operative moral values" (1). The ultimate goal of speaking to another person is to reveal oneself to that person. This becomes an important premise when studying Austen's couples. It is often the conversations had between the heroine and her love interests that reveal their compatibility or inappropriateness.

Mutual self-revelation is the foundation of relational intimacy and is accomplished in all relationships through verbal communication. Conversation at its best results in both parties arriving at an intimate knowledge of the other. Failed conversation results in misunderstandings

and estrangement unless one or both parties seek reconciliation through more communication. When Mr. Darcy first proposes to Elizabeth Bennet, their communication is broken. Pride at believing she already understands Mr. Darcy's character has kept Elizabeth from looking at him objectively. Early in their acquaintance, Darcy even tells Elizabeth that her defect is "wilfully to misunderstand" others—by which he is referring to himself (*P&P* 53). His arrogant assurance of being accepted by her because of his superiority prevents him from addressing her charitably. The resulting conversation becomes a full-blown argument full of insults, accusations, and contempt. Only when Mr. Darcy is able to fully explain his actions in a letter to Elizabeth does she reevaluate her judgment and "grew absolutely ashamed of herself… feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (173). The communication between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy is different from this point on: "[B]oth Elizabeth and Darcy indicate their recognition of the other as teacher" (Fessbecker 759). The next time they meet at Pemberley, Elizabeth is aware that Mr. Darcy might perceive her compliments of his estate as "mischievously construed" (208) and takes pains to show her respect. Now that Elizabeth is aware that she misunderstood Mr. Darcy, she is conscious of the possibility that she too might be misunderstood.

Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill's secret engagement is jeopardized by poor communication in *Emma*. Jane and Frank quarrel over Frank's indiscretion with their secret relationship. Frank, hurt at Jane's seeming indifference, flirts with Emma Woodhouse, telling himself it is to disguise his affection for Jane. Jane, wounded by Frank's behavior and convinced he no longer loves her, writes to Frank to break off their engagement and then accepts a job offer as a governess. Greater evidence of their poor communication is that Frank's letter reaffirming his love accidentally never gets mailed, leading Jane to believe he never responded. The only salvation for Jane and Frank's relationship is honest communication. Frank seeks his uncle's

permission to marry Jane, which is granted. Frank then seeks Jane to clear up the misunderstanding. Upon doing so, Frank reflects, "we are reconciled, dearer, much dearer, than ever, and no moment's uneasiness can ever occur between us again" (*E* 430). Once communication has been repaired, Jane and Frank have a deeper understanding of each other and love for each other.

Austen is clear about the importance of gaining a personal knowledge of one's partner prior to marriage and conversation is the tool by which this is accomplished. Austen employs three types of conversation to achieve different purposes in her novels: social, informative, and collaborative. It is important to note that multiple types of conversations can overlap in the same dialogue between characters. Some conversations share elements of two or even all three kinds of conversations. For instance, when Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy converse at Rosings Park, their conversation is composed of both social niceties as well as collaborative exchange: They discuss music and their former acquaintance in Meryton, but in a way that challenges the other's thinking (*P&P* 147-48). Conversations between Emma and Mr. Knightley are usually informative and collaborative: They share information about the people in their community, like Robert Martin or the Westons, but their talk goes beyond gossip as they exchange opinions and quarrel with each other (*E* 54-65; 140-46). These three conversation types, by no means, provide a definitive categorization of Austen's verbal exchanges. The purpose of breaking down different ways of conversing is to make distinctions that are helpful in exploring how Austen employs dialogue to reveal courtship compatibility.

Social conversations conform to class and cultural conventions and usually convey niceties. These seem to be the most common conversations between characters; characters greet each other, say goodbye, and exchange the latest news from their family and friends in a

ballroom. Social conversations tend to be very shallow in subject matter, usually revolving around discussing the weather, finances, social plans, gossip, and clothing. Mrs. Thorpe brags about her children to Mrs. Allen (*NA* 21). The Bennet daughters' aunt, Mrs. Philips, keeps the girls up to date on "the officers' names and connections" and her conversations were "productive of the most interesting intelligence" (*P&P* 29-30). Miss Bates is a constant fount of information about her neighbors and her daily goings ons, ready to "overpower [her visitors] with care and kindness, thanks for their visit, solicitude for their shoes, anxious inquiries after [their] health, cheerful communications about her mother's, and sweet-cake from the beaufet" (*E* 150). Between the characters where most of their dialogue consists of social conversations, hardly a serious or significant topic is discussed. Such conversation was expected by Regency etiquette, but Austen utilizes this small talk to reveal important aspects of her characters.

The characters whose speech consists primarily of shallow social conversation do so because they are not able to go beyond conventional thought. They are unable to be challenged by others, to learn from others' words, and to grow as a result. Their speech is shallow because their moral character is shallow. There are several characters, usually those who take a background seat to the main plot of the book, who only participate in superficial conversations, such as Mrs. Thorpe, Sir John Middleton, and Mrs. Phillips. Their dialogue separates them from the characters whose speech contributes moral advice to the life of the heroine. In *Pride and Prejudice*, most of the conversations between Mrs. Bennet, Lydia, and Catherine could be described as shallow social conversations; all they talk about are clothes, balls, and officers. Though they are kin, they rarely share deeper thoughts or ideas with each other, unlike Elizabeth, Jane, or even Mary Bennet—Mary tries to make moral contributions, but her immaturity prevents her from being impactful to others (*P&P* 12). In conversation, Jane and Elizabeth

exchange their real opinions and counsel each other in virtue (185-89). In *Northanger Abbey*, Mrs. Allen provides a steady supply of superficial conversation, and though Mrs. Allen talks a good deal, her speech is "without anything to say or to hear" (*NA* 127). There is nothing particularly wrong with superficial social conversations, but these characters' inability to have deeper discussions when appropriate or necessary reveal a moral stagnation that prevents them from enriching the lives of others.

These fleeting characters are by no means the only ones who employ shallow social discussions, and a character need not be superficial themselves to use social conversation. All Austen's heroines and heroes participate in social dialogue at several points. Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe quickly begin chatting about "dress, balls, flirtations, and quizzes" (*NA* 22). Elinor and Marianne Dashwood converse with the "chatty" Lord Middleton and his wife (*S&S* 26). Anne Elliot patiently listens to the silly conversation of her sister, Mary Musgrove, as she chatters about her children, her in-laws, social engagements, and her health (*P* 31-33). Social conversation is just that, the kinds of topics discussed between acquaintances and friends in public settings; it has its place and serves to provide a platform for people to engage each other and learn about each other. Upon a longer acquaintance, however, polite conversation should develop into more substantive sharing. The inability to change speech among intimate family and friends, like Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Allen, and Mary Musgrove, differentiates these characters from those who are capable of moral growth, like Austen's heroes and heroines. Austen's heroines engage in polite conversation when appropriate, but they prove capable of deeper thoughts and exchanges when they are with a character they are intimate with.

A second kind of conversation popular in Austen novels is informative dialogue. Informational conversations on their surface do not always say much about the speaker's

character but help the plot by relating important knowledge, usually about someone other than the speaker. This kind of dialogue, while adding to the practical knowledge of the heroine and the audience, often contributes to the perception of the person relating the information, however, as they inevitably share their thoughts or feelings about the information they are relaying.

An example of this kind of conversation is when Colonel Brandon explains to Elinor Dashwood his history with Mr. Willoughby and Eliza in *Sense and Sensibility*. Colonel Brandon is sharing very private information; it is much more important and substantive than any conversations that would be considered appropriate for social conversations with acquaintances and indicates his high esteem of Elinor and their friendship. Throughout Colonel Brandon's speech, he does not ask for her opinions and she does not share her them. Rather, he relays his story, sharing the information that is necessary for Elinor—and the audience—to know. Throughout his story, Colonel Brandon's character is also revealed. He shows his concern for Marianne, his deep capacity for love and grace, and his honor. This conversation is a crucial element of the plot as it completely changes the Dashwoods' previous perceptions of Mr. Willoughby.

Another example is when Elizabeth and Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner explore Pemberly and talk to Mrs. Reynolds, Mr. Darcy's housekeeper, in *Pride and Prejudice*. Mrs. Reynolds essentially acts as a character reference for Mr. Darcy. She shares stories about his life, particularly his good treatment of others. Mrs. Reynolds assures Elizabeth and the Gardiners that Mr. Darcy's servants, tenants, and sister will all attest to his good character. She corroborates Mr. Darcy's account of Mr. Wickham's bad character, validating Mr. Darcy's actions and feelings toward Wickham (*P&P* 201). Throughout this, neither Elizabeth nor the Gardiners share their opinions or speak much, other than "Mr. Gardiner, whose manners were easy and pleasant,

[who] encouraged her communicativeness by his questions and remarks" (202). The purpose of this dialogue is to provide Elizabeth with a separate account of Mr. Darcy's good character—the first being the letter he writes her after his first failed proposal.

The third kind of conversation is the dialogue between two people whose minds challenge and improve each other. These conversations are some of the most notable and memorable in Austen's fiction and are usually the most enjoyable to read. Even as early in Austen criticism as 1821, people recognized the brilliance Austen displayed in these kinds of conversations. A critic at *The Reviewer* said about Austen: "To invent indeed a conversation full of wisdom or of wit requires that the writer should himself possess ability" (qtd. in J. Austen-Leigh 141). Collaborative conversations may begin as either social or informative dialogue but become intellectually stimulating conversations by the people conversing; deep thinkers can hardly help but share their opinions in casual conversation. The person they are speaking to either learns from the opinions shared or questions them, leading to a sharpening of the mind on both sides. The effect of collaborative conversation is that it enables intimacy to grow between the people conversing as they get to know each other more meaningfully.

Such in-depth conversations seem to only happen between characters who are open to introspection. Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney are an example of this. Whether talking about simple, surface topics, such as picking out muslin for a dress (*NA* 15-19), or talking about deep philosophical issues, like moral propriety in romantic relationships (*NA* 133-37), both people enrich the mind of the other through their insight or wit. They are each individually perfectly capable of having polite conversation with anyone they happen to meet; when they begin talking to each other what starts as exchanging simple niceties quickly turns into exchanging deeper thoughts and opinions. Often these conversations between heroes and

heroines begin as disagreements, such as Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth's disagreement about female accomplishments, or Emma and Mr. Knightley's disagreements about matchmaking. Over time, the hero and heroine discuss more and grow, and their opinions often change. Such conversations represent the meeting of two open minds: Through discussion with each other, both party's minds are sharpened and improved.

Given Austen's own background, it is easy to see why she would place such a high importance on choosing a romantic partner that excels at collaborative conversation. Austen came from a family that highly valued intellectual stimulation. The Reverend Austen ran a school out of his home and cultivated his children's classical education, emphasizing biblical instruction. Austen was an avid reader from a young age and valued the Christian education she received (W. Baker 5; Harman 25-26). In addition to the Bible, her reading consisted of "Shakespeare, English history and fiction, contemporary fiction, and the 18th-century philosophers, moralists, and poets" (W. Baker 5). James Austen-Leigh states about his aunt's upbringing and youth that, "every available opportunity of instruction was made use of… and she certainly enjoyed that important element of mental training, associating at home with persons of cultivated intellect" (43-44). Her parents were more concerned with the intellect and moral character of their children than encouraging superficial accomplishments. The Reverend Austen believed it was his Christian duty to encourage his daughter's writing skills (Collins xix).

Descriptions of Jane Austen's family confirm that they prioritized stimulating conversation. Austen's mother is described as combining "strong common sense with a lively imagination, and often expressed herself, both in writing and in conversation, with epigrammatic force and point" (J. Austen-Leigh 11). Austen's brother, Henry, is described as possessing "great conversational powers, and inherited from his father an eager and sanguine disposition. He was a

very entertaining companion" (13). Austen's upbringing among such intellectually challenging and devout Christians instilled in her the same values.

Though Austen avoids explicit Christian teaching and keeps biblical references subtle, she carefully reflects Christian thought through the morals she teaches. The Bible teaches that in order to be transformed Christians must renew their minds (Rom. 12.2), and that Christians are to admonish each other in knowledge and goodness, thus learning from each other (Rom. 15.14; Col. 3.16). Proverbs corroborates this with "[a]s iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (27.17). The maturing alongside others that is described in Scripture is accomplished through collaborative conversation. The Bible also speaks against gossip and useless talk and instructs Christians to speak words that benefit the listener, building them up according to their needs (Eph. 4.29). Such Scriptural injunctions were clearly taken to heart in the Austen home. Jane Austen reflects these same principles in her novels by depicting her characters growing alongside each other.

Austen provides many examples throughout her novels of the drudgery of marital relationships devoid of mutual intellectual stimulation. Mr. and Mrs. Allen in *Northanger Abbey* are a prime example. Mr. Allen is described as a "sensible, intelligent man" who enjoys discussing politics (*NA* 10; 59). Though he is less involved in the main action of the novel, his brief interactions illustrate that he is a man of steadiness of mind and moral integrity. He demonstrates this through concern for Catherine's integrity, safeguarding Catherine by making sure she is talking to reputable gentlemen at the ball and cautioning against her taking a carriage ride with her brother and the Thorpe siblings. As Mr. Allen is an "unprejudiced" bystander and a sensible man, Catherine respects his opinion and defers to his judgment (90).

Perhaps one of Mr. Allen's only misjudgments was his choice of a wife, for Mrs. Allen can hardly claim to share any of her husband's good qualities. Mrs. Allen is unforgivingly described as "of that numerous class of females, whose society can raise no other emotion than surprise at there being any men in the world who could like them well enough to marry them. She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner" (*NA* 10). *Northanger Abbey* provides many illustrations of Mrs. Allen's inability to have meaningful conversations. The topic that appears most present in Mrs. Allen's mind is clothing as "dress was her passion" (10). In her first mention, she is concerned that she has lost her shoes (9). After Catherine is rudely ejected from Northanger Abbey, Mrs. Allen can barely focus on her charge's trauma, instead interjecting about friends and her "silk gloves" (217). Other topics that occupy her thoughts are gossip and money (21). The conversations between husband and wife are thus devoid of any real significance. Mrs. Allen, having no real thoughts of her own about the serious topics discussed by her husband, simply repeats her husband's opinions back to him (90; 217). Mr. and Mrs. Allen spend little time together, as Mrs. Allen spends much of her time shopping or on social engagements. They are unable to discuss matters meaningfully and share opinions with each other.

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice* are perhaps the most well-known of Austen's mismatched couples. Mr. Bennet is quick-witted and has a high value for intelligent conversation. Because Mrs. Bennet is incapable of meaningful speech, Mr. Bennet spends much of his time avoiding talking to his wife by seeking respite in his library where he is "always sure of leisure and tranquility" (*P&P* 64-65). Surrounded by family and friends he considers "silly" (30), Mr. Bennet uses conversations to goad others into exhibiting their foolishness even more (the dinner dialogue with Mr. Collins in Chapter Fourteen is an excellent example of this).

Though Mr. Bennet enjoys intelligent conversation, his speech does not build up or admonish others; instead, he entertains himself at the expense of others. He does not enjoy talking to his wife unless he is making fun of her, and he does nothing to help his wife improve in wisdom. Austen attests that intelligent conversation must be guided by a desire to encourage virtue and not merely for selfish gratification.

Similarly to Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Bennet primarily talks about money, gossip, and clothes. The only serious concern she expresses she only minimally shares with her husband (Hourican 1): the financial future of the Bennet family after Mr. Bennet passes. This concern constantly occupies her mind and often her lips. Mr. Bennet's disinterested avoidance largely prevents him from sharing this concern with his wife and when she brings it up, he avoids the topic. The dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet often borders on squabbling, including the opening conversation of *Pride and Prejudice*, which establishes their unhappy relationship. If Mrs. Bennet understood her husband's character better, she would be appalled to realize how frequently he insults her intelligence and denigrates their marriage.

When the hero or heroine converses with a potential love interest and their conversation does not develop into collaborative speech, it is a sign that their relationship will not lead to courtship. Their conversation may begin as social or informative, but it cannot progress because the hero or heroine has learned that the moral character of the person seeking their attention is deficient. Conversations with that person cannot lead to intimacy or growth and are abandoned by the hero or heroine as quickly as is still polite. Austen gives many examples of mismatched courtship couples who do not have intellectually stimulated conversations.

Catherine Morland and John Thorpe are a couple who have very little to say to each other. When Catherine tries to bring up her own interests, novels, Mr. Thorpe immediately shuts

her down, exclaiming: "I never read novels, I have something else to do" (*NA* 37). His reaction humbles and shames Catherine, and she wants "to apologize for her question" (37). Throughout many of their conversations, Mr. Thorpe dominates the dialogue, usually discussing topics that do not interest Catherine, such as horses, carriages, and his own merits. The discussion of Mr. Thorpe's carriage provides an example of Catherine's reaction to his attempts at conversation: "She followed him in all his admiration as well as she could. To go before or beyond him was impossible. His knowledge and her ignorance of the subject, his rapidity of expression, and her diffidence of herself put that out of her power; she could strike out nothing new in commendation, but she readily echoed whatever he chose to assert" (53). Catherine is not at all attracted to the arrogant Mr. Thorpe and their conversations reflect their lack of connection and unequal attraction. She can share nothing that interests him, and he can share nothing that interests her. With their poor conversations, it is no wonder that their relationship concludes with a miscommunication: Mr. Thorpe is about to propose, certain Catherine is aware of his affections and reciprocates them, while Catherine is blindsided and displeased.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy each demonstrate an unfitness with prospective marriage partners through conversation: Elizabeth with Mr. Collins, and Mr. Darcy with Miss Bingley. Elizabeth and Mr. Collins' conversations typically consist of "pompous nothings on his side, and civil assents" on hers (*P&P* 65). Because conversation with him is tedious, Elizabeth adopts the habit of "not often speak[ing] unnecessarily to Mr. Collins" (78). Mr. Collins' conversation consists primarily of flattery or religious rebuke. He is a sycophant whose manner of speech directly contradicts Elizabeth's blunt honesty.

Miss Bingley is hardly a better match for Mr. Darcy than Mr. Collins is for Elizabeth. Miss Bingley's principle object is to impress Mr. Darcy in the hopes of making him fall for her.

This she does through conversation, endlessly complimenting him, insulting others to make Mr. Darcy and herself look better, or merely trying to catch his attention. Mr. Darcy finds himself constantly "accosted" by Miss Bingley's attempts at conversation (*P&P* 28). Miss Bingley's jealousy at Mr. Darcy's attentions toward Elizabeth drive her to insult Elizabeth repeatedly to Mr. Darcy, unaware that her vitriol and simpering makes her even more unattractive to Mr. Darcy (34-38). Every attempt by her to connect with Mr. Darcy through conversation is soon shut down by him. Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley's terse and unprofitable conversations reveal how unfit they are as a couple.

In *Mansfield Park*, the conversations between Fanny Price and Henry Crawford are merely nice. Henry Crawford is a womanizer who uses his charming speech to get in the good favor of others. Upon first impressions, the Bertram sisters consider Henry "absolutely plain" (*MP* 42); after a few nights of conversing, he becomes "the most agreeable young man the sisters had ever known" (42). Henry accomplishes this through his charming manners and "pleasing address" (42). After charming the Bertram sisters into falling in love with him, Henry transfers his attention to Fanny and attempts to seduce her; ironically, he falls for her instead. Henry, enticed by Fanny's warm-heartedness (217), makes passionate speeches to her that are ultimately hollow. Dalene Joy Fisher points out that it is "difficult to discern if Henry's motives and actions are sincere, or if he is an actor—a manipulator—throughout" (145). Henry can never challenge or build Fanny up because his speech is an act and thus dishonest. Fanny, by resisting acting in the play put on by her cousins, demonstrates how important honesty is to her speech. By refusing Henry's proposal, Fanny adheres to honesty even when incentivized to be dishonest about her convictions. She cannot, in good conscience, marry a duplicitous man. By observing Henry's speech and behavior to herself and Maria and Julia Bertram, Fanny sees through his flattery to

his inconstant nature. She is aware that every conversation with her and every plea for her affection is not to be trusted, as Henry does not use his speech to build up others but to build up himself in their eyes.

The trivial and dishonest conversations between the heroine or hero and their misfit partner can be contrasted to the conversations had between the heroine and her eventual partner. Mr. Thorpe, Mr. Collins, Miss Bingley, and Henry Crawford are all self-centered people, which is communicated through their speech. Being obsessed with their own feelings, they do not care to know the genuine feelings of those they speak to, making it impossible for the hero or heroine to develop a greater intimacy with them even if they desired to. Where one conversation is unpleasant and the heroine wishes it to end quickly, conversations are enlivening with the partner they are meant to be with. The difference is sharply delineated.

Catherine is destined for Henry Tilney, and their conversations reflect the easy intimacy between them. Upon meeting, they immediately fall into a playful banter that is enjoyable to both (*NA* 15-19). They listen to each other and play off each other naturally; Catherine is "[e]ntertained… by the liveliness of his conversation" (Cordón 49). After they are longer acquainted, their conversations go even deeper. They begin discussing meaningful topics, such as what kind of behavior is and is not appropriate for betrothed couples. Throughout, Catherine is "truthful and direct even in difficult situations" (45). She candidly disagrees with the scandalous behavior of Isabella, her friend, who, while she is engaged to Catherine's brother, flirts with Frederick Tilney. Catherine expresses enjoyment "talking to him, but she can also disagree with [Henry]" as he is more restrained when expressing his values (53). Her transparency inspires Henry to be more open and honest. Henry, a proper gentleman, is constrained by his "'masculine' language" that conforms to "the social script" (52; 53).

Throughout *Northanger Abbey*, Henry educates Catherine on propriety, but she challenges his ability to take a moral stand for what he believes is right.

Even while Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy seem to have complete disdain for each other, their conversations are engaged and sagacious. Each conversation acts as a verbal duel between two people who view the other as their temperamental opposite. Whether conversing about dancing, female accomplishment, music, or marriage, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's conversations venture beyond the polite, surface exchanges typical between two people disinterested in each other. During their dance at the Netherfield ball, Elizabeth commands the conversation, and Mr. Darcy allows her to lead: "Darcy both speaks and remains silent as a result of her wishes. Though Darcy passively resists the conversation by remaining silent after his first remark, her second address operates in such a way that he cannot help but respond—indeed, he smiles at the manner in which she controls his response" (Fessbecker 757). Elizabeth's bold speech communicates that she is not intimidated by Mr. Darcy's position, wealth, or disapproval. Through their conversational sparring, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are constantly challenging each other's ideas and beliefs. Once both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy confront their own pride, their conversations evolve: They learn from each other and allow the other person to influence their opinions.

Throughout *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram's conversations center around advising and learning from each other in religious virtue. Both characters are devout Christians: Edmund feels called to become a clergyman, and as Fanny's upbringing "is marked by contemplative moral improvement" (Fisher 114), her faith becomes the bedrock of her character. Edmund is a man of "strong good sense and uprightness of mind" (*MA 21*), and when Fanny is a child, his conversation instructs her in navigating life with the Bertrams and following

Christianity. Both characters do their best to follow Christian virtue in their actions, and Edmund and Fanny rely on conversations with each other to maintain their convictions. Almost every conversation, no matter the topic, turns into a moral discussion. Fanny's fear of moving in with their aunt Norris becomes a conversation of their aunt's "acting like a sensible woman" and Edmund being glad "[their aunt's] love of money does not interfere" in her suggesting the move (25). They both defend the church, which Mary Craford insults, further testifying to their religious devotion (86-88). Fanny and Edmund have multiple exchanges about Mary's character as they both try to ascertain her nature; Edmund falling victim to infatuation, concludes wrongly, while Fanny's judgment proves true (422-27). After Edmund breaks up with Mary, it is only by sharing his mind with Fanny that "he had so well talked his mind into submission as to be very tolerably cheerful again" (429). Their bond of friendship turns to love through their conversations.

Some scholars argue that Austen's novels, primarily *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*, feature pedagogical romances; a trope where the man assumes the position of teacher or instructor to an intellectually and/or morally inferior woman. As all Austen's heroes are years older than their heroine—as was customary in Regency culture—these accusations are common. While this assertion would not conflict with the argument that Austen's heroines learn from and are improved by the heroes, it would dispute the claim that the heroes learn from the heroines as well and must therefore be addressed.

Scholars accuse Henry Tilney of patronizingly instructing Catherine about upper-class societal customs and interpret Catherine's eagerness to learn from him as her accepting her subjugation. Diane Hoeveler argues that Catherine Morland is "too dense to understand clearly at any time what is going on around her" (7). Terry Castle agrees, specifying that it is only through

the guidance of Henry Tilney that she “makes her way out of mental slavishness toward a kind of liberation” (32). Catherine is not stupid, but merely naive and good-natured, and her character is intended, to some degree, to satirize portrayals of Gothic ingénues. As previously discussed, however, she ends up teaching Henry in arguably more valuable ways than he instructs her. While Henry teaches Catherine about Pump Room propriety (*NA* 15-19) or how to have an artistic eye (97-98), Catherine teaches him how to stand up for his values. This is evidenced by Henry confronting his father about his father’s mistreatment of Catherine when he suddenly turned her out of Northanger Abbey (203-10). Catherine reveals doubts that Henry, who had previously been submissive to his father, would stand up to him on her behalf (218; 226). Catherine’s awareness of Henry’s flaws and awareness of his development contradicts the idea that their relationship is merely pedagogical.

Emma and Knightley’s relationship has also faced scrutiny from feminist critics. Wendy Moffat’s “Identifying with Emma: Some Problems for the Feminist Critic” asserts that Emma, obligated to the men in her life, does not possess autonomy, making her relationship with Mr. Knightley pedagogical (52; 54). Of all Austen’s heroines this seems to make the most sense. Though Emma seems proud and self-possessed, she is sixteen years younger than Mr. Knightley. He often confronts her about her faults in a manner that sounds patronizing. After Emma insults Miss Bates, Mr. Knightley harshly reprimands her: “It was badly done, indeed!” (*E* 365). One must step back and look at their relationship as a whole to get a better perspective: Other than when he is the only person brave enough to confront Emma about her matchmaking missteps and uncharitable words to Miss Bates, Mr. Knightley treats Emma as an intellectual equal in all their encounters, despite their large age gap. After chastising her, Knightley explains that his rebuke emanates from his concern for her as Emma’s intimate friend: “I will tell you truths while I can;

satisfied with proving myself your friend by very faithful counsel, and trusting that you will some time or other do me greater justice than you can do now" (365). Mr. Knightley essentially acts as Emma's conscience. His attempts to correct Emma only occur when she has egregiously errored and are accepted by her because of their close relationship. In return, Emma contests Mr. Knightley in every conversation; she does not passively accept his censure. In all respects, they meet each other as close friends, advisors, and equals.

Austen consistently ensures that her heroines will end up with partners who improve them intellectually. She does not do this by making her heroines intellectually feeble so that their heroes will seem smart by comparison; a temptation given into by other authors like Maria Edgeworth in *Belinda* (1801). Instead, Austen pairs her heroines with men who are equally interested in intellectual growth. It was important to Austen to nurture relationships that challenged one mentally. She portrays marital partners as the greatest potential asset in this way: a lifelong partner who provides continual intellectual stimulation and growth. Austen sets a precedent that couples learning from one another is an essential component of a good marital relationship.

Chapter Four

Character Compatibility: Personality and Morality

As marriages in the Regency era were frequently made for one's financial or social betterment, not much emphasis was placed on partner compatibility in other areas. In Austen novels, characters who represent typical cultural ideas of Austen's day might sympathize with a man or woman who married someone with an unpleasing personality or character faults, but largely that person would be congratulated if the match was advantageous. For example, Charlotte's family and most of her friends support her marriage to Mr. Collins as she will be domestically stable, but they also sympathize that she will have to put up with his less than charming personality. Marriage partners, depending on the couple, were expected to tolerate much for an advantageous spouse, unless a person's moral character was too egregious to ignore (like Maria Rushworth's infidelity). It was largely considered an added benefit, but not necessary for a spouse to have similar values or a compatible personality.

Regency attitudes were changing to value the potential for personal fulfillment from one's spouse, cultivating a growing concern with choosing a spouse one would get along with and would not mind spending the rest of their lives with: "[M]arriage was increasingly regarded as potentially the highest form of friendship" (Thomas 217). Through conversation, one could determine if a love interest would make a good spouse. As married couples deal with all the minutiae of daily life, "they were much more likely to be happy if their inclinations on these points were similar, and if neither had to sacrifice too much to satisfy the other. Enjoying living with each other was just as important, in the long run, as loving each other" (Muir 207). A person's personality, the traits and preferences that make up their nature, is revealed through their speech and behavior. For instance, certain characters are contemplative and erudite, some

might prefer solitude or are cautious when making decisions; other characters are more emotionally expressive or thrive in conversation with others, while others are obliging and gentle, or emotionally reserved. Even a person's preferences can be a part of their personality. All these traits will impact the likelihood that a couple would get along in a marriage. Austen demonstrates that personality compatibility is an important component of finding a good romantic partner.

Austen's take on personalities between couples is complex. She attests that a spouse should have a compatible personality, but compatible does not necessarily mean similar. Austen gives many examples of different kinds of personality combinations in couples, but she does not give a strict definition of what combination is consistently successful or even typically incompatible. Yet, given that so much marital strife or marital bliss is determined by a bad combination of temperaments, it is evident that personality is an important aspect of selecting a prospective partner.

Austen's famous unhappy marriage couples, the Allens and the Bennets, are excellent examples of two couples who are bad matches because of their incompatible personalities. Mr. Allen is a contemplative man who mainly keeps to himself. He spends much of his time at home, enjoys discussing politics and playing cards, and takes his duty as a guardian of Catherine seriously. Mrs. Allen is more sociable, spending much time out of the house shopping, or attending the opera or balls. She keeps Catherine company but is more interested in shopping and talking with Mrs. Thorpe than keeping an eye on Catherine. She also mimics the values her husband expresses but shows no connection to his moral reasoning. When Mr. Allen suggests that it is inappropriate for Catherine to go on the carriage ride, Mrs. Allen agrees but for different reasons: she is concerned that Catherine will dirty her dress (91). Their marriage is not

necessarily unhappy, but their differences keep them from intimacy and their marriage is certainly not meant as a role model.

Mr. Bennet is "fond of the country and of books; and from these tastes had arisen his principle enjoyments" (*P&P* 195). Mr. Bennet amuses himself with the foolishness of others, and his wife, unknowingly, loves to be foolish. Mrs. Bennet is melodramatic and a hypochondriac. She is gregarious, constantly talks to her daughters and neighbors, and is concerned with what others think of her. Mr. Bennet knows his wife is silly: "To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement. This is not the sort of happiness which a man would in general wish to owe to his wife; but where other powers of entertainment are wanting, the true philosopher will derive benefit from such as are given" (195). Mrs. Bennet feels that her husband does not take her worries seriously, either about her overdramatized bad health or their daughters' financial future, which causes her to complain even more. Their marriage is full of constant bickering and neither seems truly happy.

Charles and Mary Musgrove from *Persuasion* also have a tense relationship due to their different personalities. Mary Musgrove, Anne Elliot's sister, seeks validation from others, primarily Charles and Anne, to make herself feel more important (*P* 5). Like Mrs. Bennet, Mary is a hypochondriac and spends much of her time in bed, wishing for Anne—and anyone else—to cater to her every need. Because she wants attention, Mary loves social engagements, which is about the only trait she shares with her husband. Charles is "civil and agreeable" (*P 31*), but his manners and conversation skills are rough. Anne, ever observant, ponders if "a more equal match might have greatly improved him; and that a woman of real understanding might have given more consequence to his character, and more usefulness, rationality, and elegance to his habits

and pursuits" (*P 31*). Their marriage is full of conflict as Mary is always unhappy and Charles responds to her complaints with frustration.

Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford are an example of a courtship couple that separates because of their clashing natures. In *Mansfield Park*, Edmund is more reserved and erudite while Mary is much more warm and expressive. Their personalities are opposite, yet they initially appreciate the ways in which they are different. The more significant dissimilarity, however, is the cultural gap between them. Edmund and Mary were raised in completely different environments: Edmund grew up at Mansfield Park, a country setting, and during his youth the church heavily influenced him; Mary grew up in London, where she learned to follow cultural fashions and to pursue her desires above virtue. Mary frequently remarks to Edmund how she hopes she "shall understand all your ways in time… I was a little embarrassed at first by the sturdy independence of your country customs" (*MP* 56). When Mary fails to stand up for propriety when her brother has an affair, it becomes evident that her cultural differences have influenced her beyond mere propriety and have affected her virtue. Edmund laments that their "difference could be such as she had now proved it" (425). Their different upbringings, country and city, religious and secular, formed their identity, making them ill-suited for each other.

From these examples, it would seem that Austen is suggesting that couples with vastly different natures will not be happy together. However, just because a husband and wife have similar personalities does not mean that their marriage will lead to fulfillment. Some of Austen's couples may get along, but their personalities are not grounded in Christian virtue. Their marriage does not lead to growth and results in a stronger inclination toward immorality, preventing their intimate connection.

John and Fanny Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* are one such couple. John Dashwood is a vain and selfish man. After the death of his father, he essentially kicks out Mrs. Dashwood and his three stepsisters, Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret, after promising his father he would care for and provide for them. Austen sarcastically describes him as "not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted and rather selfish is to be ill-disposed" (*S&S* 5). Fanny Dashwood is described as "a strong caricature of [her husband]... [but] more narrow-minded and selfish (5). Their negative qualities influence each other, and they are more callous together than they might otherwise be separately. Even though they have plenty of money already, Fanny convinces John to gradually give his stepmother and stepsisters less and less financial assistance. In line with their greed, John and Fanny encourage those around them to make mercenary marriages (183). As money is their chief concern, there is little reason to believe that they feel a genuine love for each other.

Mr. Philip Elton and Augusta Elton in *Emma* are another example of a couple with similar personalities who are not good together. Mr. Elton is a respectable member of the community; he uses charm and conversation to appeal to others and thinks very highly of himself. Mr. Elton is originally perceived by Emma to be "good-humoured, cheerful, obliging, and gentle" (*E* 31). The rest of Highbury thinks Mr. Elton is "quite the gentleman himself, and without low connexions" (31). With Mr. Elton's ungenerous rejection of Harriet Smith, Emma's friend, and his forwardness with Emma herself by seeking her hand, his true nature is revealed. He is a self-centered flatterer with "a want of elegance of feature" (32). After he weds the wealthy Augusta, who was raised in luxury and ease, the new couple make an interesting addition to the neighborhood. Emma soon observes that "Mrs. Elton was a vain woman, extremely well satisfied with herself, and thinking much of her own importance;… she meant to

shine and be very superior, but with manners which had been formed in a bad school, pert and familiar… her society would certainly do Mr. Elton no good" (264). Together they are arrogant, self-important, and invasive in the lives of others. Mr. Elton's goal when he marries his wife is to acquire her fortune as well as recover from his humiliating failed proposal to Emma Woodhouse. As they marry a few weeks after they meet, they hardly know each other. Their marriage seems agreeable to both, but none of their interactions speak to a deeper connection between them. Clearly, possessing a similar personality to one's spouse does not guarantee that a couple will be a good match.

The personality combinations of Austen's main couples are also not so straightforward and raise discussions of compatibility. Catherine and Henry are both introspective; they seriously consider the behavior of those around them, evidenced by their discussions about the interactions between Isabella Thorpe, James Morland, and Captain Tilney. Henry is sensitive to Catherine and converses easily—albeit teasingly—with her about novels and muslin; likely such ease with feminine topics is borne from his close relationship with his sister, Eleanor. Both Henry and Catherine care about living according to virtue and express their disapproval of Isabella and Captain Tilney's flirtations with each other when Isabella is already engaged to James. Catherine and Henry's personalities are very similar, they are both amicable and "pleasing" (*NA* 8; 15). They also have some notable differences.

Henry may be more confident socially as he has been less sheltered, but he is also less courageous than Catherine is morally. Catherine has proven that she is willing to go against the wishes of those whose opinions she respects to do what she thinks is right. Though it pains her to do so, Catherine defies the wishes of her brother and Isabella to keep her appointment with the Tilneys. While Catherine clearly admires Henry Tilney, she is not blind to his weaknesses,

though she does not call him out. Catherine is stricken by Henry very soon after they meet, yet, she still notices, "as she listened to their discourse, that he indulged himself a little too much with the foibles of others" (*NA* 19). Though Catherine is aware of Mrs. Allen's faults, she does not view them as something to make fun of. She treats Mrs. Allen with respect though it would be easy and tempting to tease her without her knowing; something that she perceived Henry doing. Catherine is also surprised that Henry would stand up to his father for ejecting her from Northanger Abbey. She perceives Henry's intimidation of his father and has witnessed how he has consistently submitted to his father's overbearing and volatile nature. Henry is able to confront his father because he "was sustained in his purpose by a conviction of its justice" (226), a statement reminiscent of Catherine's "conviction of being right" in refusing to go with her brother, Isabella, and Mr. Thorpe in their drive to Clifton (88). These moments convey a difference between them, more in moral character, than in personality. Catherine and Henry's personalities are compatible, evidenced by the fact that Henry "truly loved her society" (222). Though Henry has some weaknesses of character, they are not so great as to say he is immoral or reprehensible like Mr. Thorpe. Their happiness together seems likely.

Elinor Dashwood and Edward Ferras in *Sense and Sensibility* also have similar personalities and natures. Both are intellectual and connect over books. Both are very reserved emotionally. Elinor holds her more emotional mother and sisters together as she "possesse[s] a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgement" (*S&S* 6). Edward's character is described as being "too diffident to do justice to himself; but when his natural shyness was overcome, his behaviour gave every indication of an open, affectionate heart. His understanding was good, and his education had given it solid improvement" (13). Edward is more socially reserved than Elinor is, but they both keep their feelings private, sacrificing their preferences to their obligations.

Perhaps the strongest similarity between them is a shared commitment to duty. Elinor feels that it is her responsibility to care for her mother and sisters. She "says that what had sustained her in a bad time was the consciousness that she was doing her duty" (Trilling, "Why" 526). Edward knows that he should honor the imprudent commitment he made to Lucy Steele even though he is not in love with her.

Elinor expresses caution and constancy throughout *Sense and Sensibility*: She consistently keeps her emotions under control despite the tense circumstances of learning of Edward and Lucy's engagement and caring for Marianne after her heart is broken by Mr. Willoughby. Edward's foolishness in getting involved with an immature girl like Lucy Steele reveals areas of immaturity and short-sightedness in his character. Given her prevailing level-headedness, it is difficult to envision Elinor making the same mistake if their situations were reversed. Nonetheless, once Lucy Steele breaks off her and Edward's engagement, Edward is released from his duty and is free to pursue Elinor. Their similar temperaments assure readers of their future happiness.

The marital happiness of Marianne Dashwood and Colonel Brandon is reasonably dubious. Readers may be a little uncomfortable by this particular match due to the almost twenty-year age gap between the characters: Brandon being thirty-five, and Marianne seventeen. Readers may also be concerned about Marianne's lack of attraction and connection to Colonel Brandon. Their temperaments are very different from each other and Marianne expresses no romantic interest in Colonel Brandon throughout their acquaintance. Her heart is dazzled by Mr. Willoughby, who is temperamentally very similar to her. Marianne is the sensibility in *Sense and Sensibility*. She is emotionally expressive, quick-witted, and makes quick judgments about the people around her, immediately deciding on Mr. Willoughby's good character, and ironically,

that Colonel Brandon is "an old bachelor" (*S&S* 29). Marianne is what would more modernly be called a free spirit. Her nature is completely contrary to Colonel Brandon's "silent and grave" personality. About the biggest common ground in their natures is that they both "could never love by halves" (312), a statement originally made about Marianne but that applies to them both. This sentiment is proven by Colonel Brandon's original devotion to Eliza and later to Marianne, despite both women's unattainability (Eliza is unattainable because she is married to Colonel Brandon's brother, and Marianne is initially unattainable because she is in love with Mr. Willoughby). Marianne proves her loving spirit in her continual pursuit of Mr. Willoughby despite the mounting evidence that he has abandoned her. Austen claims that it is because Marianne "never love[s] by halves" that her marriage to Colonel Brandon will be a success, despite their natures and personalities being very different, Marianne soon falls in love with Colonel Brandon, resulting in mutual happiness.

Despite being known best for their arguments, *Pride and Prejudice*'s Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy do share some similarities in personality, such as "quick wit, and precision of speech" (A. Baker 171). To anyone familiar with the novel, they are both very proud. Elizabeth is one of the few members of the Bennet family who is sensible. She is clever and quick-witted, evidently due to the training of her father (whose character has been discussed at length in previous chapters), and the family library. Elizabeth shines in every social situation as she is bold about her opinions yet never strays into impropriety. Due to her often accurate perceptions, it is difficult for Elizabeth to believe she might be wrong about the arrogant Mr. Darcy. Darcy, having grown up the oldest child of very wealthy parents, has a sense of entitlement and arrogance. Though he is aware of Elizabeth's bluntness, when he proposes to her the first time he is confident that she will consent to marriage because of his wealth and stature. He is incredulous

and mortified at her rejection (*P&P* 161). The pride shared by Elizabeth and Darcy keeps them from communicating effectively with each other.

Their biggest difference in personality is that Elizabeth is much more extroverted and sociable, and Mr. Darcy is more shy and introverted (which incidentally comes off as rudeness). Elizabeth is willing and eager to "form… new acquaintance[s]" (*P&P* 82), while Darcy refuses to dance because he did not know "any lady in the assembly beyond [his] own party" (147). Darcy even tries to justify this rudeness to Elizabeth and explains, "I certainly have not the talent which some people possess… of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done" (148). This talent is certainly possessed by Elizabeth, who converses cleverly and politely with (almost) every new acquaintance. By nature alone, one would expect the conversations between Elizabeth and Darcy to be tense and argumentative as both are confident in their opinions and willing to stand up for themselves; this is certainly how their relationship starts. Only once Elizabeth's reproofs of Mr. Darcy, and his of her, finally penetrate the other's heart do they recognize their flaws, repent, and learn from each other. Once they reconcile, their personalities go well together, as the bold Elizabeth draws out the more reserved Mr. Darcy.

Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley are a couple with many similarities: They are both amicable and sweet-tempered and seek to always be in harmony with others. Both are loyal and always look for the best in others. For instance, when others perceive Mr. Darcy as rude and proud, Bingley and Jane, separate from each other, defend him; when Elizabeth's opinion of Mr. Darcy has altered, Jane states that she "always had a value for him" (*P&P 305*). Both Jane and Bingley are humble, Bingley defers to the judgment of his friend—even when he should not—because he believes Mr. Darcy's judgment is better than his own. Jane refuses to talk badly of others in case

her judgment proves incorrect (185-89). Recognizing their kinship, they converse easily with each other and quickly fall in love. The main difference between them is that Jane is much more reserved with her feelings: She always abides by propriety and thus is not as exuberant in communicating her affection as Mr. Bingley is. Even Mr. Bennet recognizes their similarities and seems assured that Jane will have a happier marriage than her parents: "I have not a doubt of your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike. You are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income" (*P&P 284*). The similarity of their personalities is considered a predictor of Jane and Bingley's wedded bliss.

Persuasion's Anne Eliot and Captain Wentworth are also very different temperamentally. They seem to have been initially drawn to each other, in part, because of their differences. Captain Wentworth was a man "with a great deal of intelligence, spirit, and brilliancy" (*P* 19). He is full of confidence, a "sanguine temper, and fearlessness of mind" (20). This is contrary to Anne who is described as "an extremely pretty girl, with gentleness, modesty, taste, and feeling" (19). Anne has a more reserved nature, and she wants to please others as best she can. It is Anne's propensity to please others that caused her to break off her engagement with Captain Wentworth when they were young, which broke both their hearts (she immediately regrets following the advice of Lady Russell who did not approve of Anne marrying a penniless sailor). Their differences drive Anne and Wentworth apart, and Wentworth comes to resent Anne's overly meek personality.

The biggest similarity between Anne and Captain Wentworth is that they are both introspective, thinking deeply about their feelings and the behavior of others; indeed, this is a trait that almost all Austen's main couples share. Anne is constantly analyzing the behavior of

others, whether Captain Wentworth's attention to another woman, her cousin William Eliot's perplexing behavior, or even admitting her feelings of regard for Captain Wentworth, and regretting following her aunt's well-intentioned but wrong advice. Captain Wentworth is constantly analyzing Anne's behavior, trying to determine if she still has feelings for him. Wentworth also learns to evaluate his behavior, and he realizes that he has over-committed himself to Louisa Musgrove out of bitterness toward Anne. Once they reconcile, Wentworth's bold nature is not an opposition to Anne's softness, as she has learned to stand up for herself by pursuing her love for Wentworth, and he has learned not to act brashly.

It is difficult to find a consistent pattern of compatible personality combinations in Austen's couples. Whether their natures are different or similar, Austen promises that her couples will be happy together. She argues that similar personalities are likely to get along easier—like Elinor and Edward and Jane and Mr. Bingley. However, couples with different personalities can balance each other out—like Marianne and Colonel Brandon, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, and Anne and Captain Wentworth. Based on the number of couples in Austen's works whose different personalities do not balance each other resulting in one or both partners going unchecked—like the Allens, the Bennets, or the Musgroves—or the couples with similar natures that tend toward extreme self-centeredness—like the Dashwoods or the Eltons—it is clear having a similar personality with one's spouse is not a guarantee of felicity, and different personalities do not make a relationship unhappy. While the combined personalities of a couple often determine their interactions, it is not a determiner of marital fulfillment. Couples may have an easier time of getting along if they marry someone with a similar personality, but the biggest determining factor of a fulfilling marriage is mutual respect and a willingness to grow that comes from a moral sensibility grounded in Christian virtue.

If Austen's opinion on compatible personalities is nuanced, her opinion of compatible moral character is plain: She makes a clear entreaty that people avoid romantic partners with corrupt morals. While there is a place in happy marriages for couples to disagree on issues such as tastes or preferences, Austen makes a clear argument that on matters of virtue, prospective husbands and wives should share the same opinion. Through the examples of numerous couples in her novels, Austen claims that a marriage where both partners do not share the same moral values is doomed to fail or lead to misery.

Catherine Morland and Mr. Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* could not be more different in almost all areas. While they have little in common interests to discuss, more concerning is that Mr. Thorpe does not share the same principles as Catherine. Mr. Thorpe, at his most innocent, is prone to exaggeration. At his most sinister, he uses deception to control others. When Catherine refuses to go out with him because of a prior engagement with the Tilney siblings, Mr. Thorpe lies to her saying he saw Henry Tilney leaving town to convince Catherine to come anyway (*NA* 72). While in the carriage with Mr. Thorpe, Catherine sees Henry and Eleanor, which reveals Mr. Thorpe's lie. Catherine begs Mr. Thorpe to stop the carriage so she can explain to the Tilneys and preserve her relationship with them, but Mr. Thorpe refuses and callously drives on (74). A similar situation occurs later when Catherine is previously engaged with Eleanor Tilney when she is propositioned by Mr. Thorpe and her brother. Mr. Thorpe, without Catherine's consent or knowledge, goes to Miss Tilney's house to cancel their appointment (87). Catherine feels torn between both social parties: She wants to get to know Henry and Eleanor Tilney better as well as accompany Isabella, her brother, and Mr. Thorpe on an exciting outing. What makes Catherine's decision is her firm belief that to behave duplicitously and cancel on Miss Tilney (again) would be, not just a breach of conduct, but a breach of morals. To her friends' and brother's

protestations, she says, “If I am wrong, I am doing what I believe to be right” (87). Catherine’s moral compass is steady, despite coercion from those around her whose good opinions she values. Mr. Thorpe proves through his behavior that he is willing to behave immorally to suit his own purposes. Catherine soon discovers Mr. Thorpe’s moral corruption, and despite his constant attempts to pursue her, she never for a minute considers him as a potential husband.

Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford from *Mansfield Park* similarly do not share moral values. Edmund spends the majority of the novel pursuing Mary Crawford. Edmund is a very moralistic and serious sort of man. He is on his way to becoming a clergyman and is glad to do so. Edmund is the only one in his family to show kindness to his adopted cousin Fanny, whom everyone else shuns. In general, Edmund is “the model for correct judgment and principles in the novel” (W. Baker 215). Perhaps a slight weariness from his moral rigidity is why he is so susceptible to the dynamic, beautiful, and alluring Mary Crawford. William Baker refers to Mary Crawford as a “temptress” (222): Her blatant materialism and hedonism is a constant snare to Edmund. Mary’s chief goal is to get Edmund to give up his calling to the church as it would not be a very lucrative profession. She also expresses a clear dislike for the corporate church and a general bad opinion of clergymen, considering them “nothing” (*MP* 86). As her virtues are opposite to the altruism and self-restraint taught by the church, it is understandable why Mary would dislike being married to a clergyman who would pressure her to conform to biblical morality. Eventually, Mary reveals how immoral she is and how much wrong she would permit for the pursuit of pleasure when she fails to condemn the behavior of Maria and Henry. Such (a)morals, Edmund says, “are faults of principle… of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind” (423). Mary’s unaffected response to such amoral behavior causes Edmund to recognize

their ethical difference and he realizes that it is impossible for them to be together. Austen makes it clear that sharing a similar moral foundation is imperative when selecting a spouse.

Austen also argues that a marriage where both partners are morally corrupt is also doomed to dysfunction and infelicity. By the end of *Pride and Prejudice,* some readers might feel like the selfish Lydia and scheming Mr. Wickham deserve each other. Lydia is consumed with self-interest and impervious to reality and reason. She constantly makes a fool of herself in any situation she is in, and her biggest self-obsessed and idiotic act is when she elopes with Mr. Wickham. This critical decision potentially could ruin her family as it would make her sisters disgraced and unable to marry well simply because of their association with her. Lydia is unapologetic and proud of herself, choosing to remain ignorant of her misdeeds and how they might have affected those closest to her. Mr. Wickham shares Lydia's self-centeredness. His bad morals have been proven prior to his elopement with Lydia due to his attempted seduction and manipulation of Georgiana Darcy. Mr. Wickham's chief motivation is to improve his financial prospects, though he is also driven by revenge, hoping to damage Mr. Darcy (who had formerly withheld Mr. Wickham's living) by going after first Darcy's little sister, and then the sister of the woman Darcy is in love with. Indeed, Lydia's selfishness finds good company in Wickham. Lydia and Wickham's marriage, however, does not lead to marital bliss, a surprise to no one but themselves. After their marriage, "[h]is affection for her soon sunk into indifference: hers lasted a little longer" (*P&P* 316), but it is implied that Lydia's fervor also faded. Lydia and Wickham surely prove that moral bankruptcy will not lead to personal fulfillment.

Austen contends that couples who get along well will not have a fulfilling marriage unless both partners strive for Christian virtue. This teaching comes from the Bible which cautions Christians to not be mismatched with unbelievers, as righteousness and immorality are

not compatible (2 Cor. 6.14). This does not mean that every person that practices virtue does so perfectly: All have areas where they are weak and need to grow. Austen portrays this clearly, as all her heroes and heroines must practice virtue before they can enjoy a marriage with a well-suited partner. Austen also demonstrates that compatibility does not necessarily mean similarity. Marriages between couples with differing personalities do not have to be unhappy; they can be rewarding if both partners seek virtue. Personality may make a person initially attractive or unattractive upon first impressions. What makes Elizabeth incompatible with Mr. Wickham—a man she initially likes very much—is not their personalities, but his moral character. What she initially dislikes about Mr. Darcy is his personality, what eventually makes her fall in love with him is his virtue. It is a similar comparison with Marianne, who initially likes Mr. Willoughby—who is identical to her—and does not like Colonel Brandon who is opposite in many ways. First impressions are not to be trusted, instead, a partner's tested moral character should be the true test of compatibility.

Chapter Five

Becoming Better Together: Catalyzing Personal Growth

While Jane Austen stresses the importance of choosing a marriage partner who will provide intellectually stimulating conversation and compatible morals and personalities in all her novels, there is a trait that is even more critical. The most important element in a marriage relationship is that both partners catalyze personal or character growth in the other; thus Austen establishes her novels as *bildungsromans*. According to Austen, courtship relationships that do not result in both the man and woman increasing in Christian virtue will not make truly fulfilling marriages.

There are some negative courtship pairings between characters that have stimulating conversations, such as Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Wickham, who "immediately [fall] into conversation" (*P&P* 68), and whose dialogue together is full of clever observations about the people around them. There are some courtship pairings between characters with similar personalities who get along well that are not positive, like Marianne Dashwood and Mr. Willoughby, who soon after meeting Marianne feels that "[t]heir taste was strikingly alike" (*S&S* 40). Neither prospective partner is a suitable match for the heroine because of deficiencies in moral character as previously discussed. Prior to such reasons being discovered by the heroine, however, both men can predictably be ruled out for another reason. Their relationship with the respective heroine does not lead to mutual growth but to mutual stagnation. Both men are affable and handsome, and the heroine is quite taken by each man for much of their stories, but the effect that both Wickham and Willoughby have on their respective heroines is to merely affirm their preexisting opinions. They fail to effectively change their heroines unlike Colonel Brandon and Mr. Darcy, the eventual spouse, do through their interactions. If intellectual, ethical, and

personality compatibility are advisable and beneficial, catalyzing mutual personal growth is the most personally beneficial reason to get married to a suitable spouse. The heroine's journey toward finding the man who affects this growth and whom she herself can influence change is one of the biggest aspects of Austen's novels that makes them so satisfying to most readers.

Effecting personal growth was clearly very important to Austen. Jane Austen took her walk with God seriously though she kept much of it private. The testimony of her family attests to Jane Austen's practical faith. James Austen-Leigh states that his aunt "brought them all into subjection to the piety which ruled her in life" (23). He also states that she "satisfied to have shown how much of Christian love and humility abounded in her heart, without presuming to lay bare the roots whence those graces grew. Some little insight, however, into these deeper recesses of the heart must be given, when we come to speak of her death" (100). Austen's faith in the midst of death left a clear impression on her family, and Henry Austen reflects that even while Jane was dying of a painful illness, "[n]either her love of God, nor of her fellow creatures flagged for a moment" (328). The Bible teaches that Christians are to practice virtue and to grow in maturity (Eph. 4.14.15). Austen's religious background as the daughter of a cleric instilled in her that growing in virtue was a direct extension of practicing her faith.

That God uses life's circumstances to bring about maturity is a foundational belief of Christianity (Rom. 8.28), and Austen's novels reflect this same claim. After Catherine and Henry receive General Tilney's blessing on their marriage, they were "convinced that the general's unjust interference, so far from being really injurious to their felicity, was perhaps rather conducive to it, by improving their knowledge of each other, and adding strength to their attachment" (*NA* 230). Austen's written prayers reveal that growing is virtue was important to her and she entreats God to assist her maturity. She prays that God will "in mercy make [her]

feel [her sins] deeply" so that she will sincerely repent and avoid those sins in the future (*Catherine* 247). She states that one's sin leads to "the discomfort of our fellow-creatures, and the danger of our own souls" (247). Indeed, she discusses how failing to practice Christian virtue leads to giving pain to others—lessons she demonstrates through Mr. Willoughby and Mr. Wickham, neither of whom care who they hurt with the pursuit of their own greed. Austen prays for God to keep her from "deceiving [herself] by pride and vanity" by failing to reflect on her moral failings and to learn from them (247). This prayer reflects the attitude she believed appropriate for all Christians. This prayer, and others by Austen, demonstrate that she was not content to merely attend regular church services, but that her faith impacted her personal life and how she treated others. She herself strove to grow in virtue, and it is this same instruction that she carries out in the relationships of her heroes and heroines. Austen's great-niece, Mary Austen-Leigh, further illustrates this point, stating that Jane Austen's:

> penetrating gaze went down to the hidden springs of action, prompting her to reflect upon the race that all human beings have to run in this world, upon the various courses they pursue, and upon the necessity of powerful influences being exercised over them, in order to bring about the improvement of character which is the final purpose of it all. (79)

Austen's commitment to "the improvement of character" came *from* her faith and the depiction of successful improvement was formed *by* her faith (79). Austen does not ignore the "powerful influences" for ill that tempt people to sin (79): The societal influences to become wealthy and the familial pressures to marry well at any cost are felt by many of her characters. She argues that equally influential forces for good must be submitted to in order to bring about "the final purpose of it all" (79). Repentance is the first step toward character growth. It is the courtship

relationships that lead to repentance and then growth that eventually conclude with the heroine's happy ending.

Couples who do not base their marriage on biblical principles, like the Dashwoods, the Eltons, and the Musgroves, will not cultivate personal growth in virtue. Rather, he or she will enable further practice of sin and dysfunction. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet do not make a virtuous couple, and their relationship leads to Mrs. Bennet's continued foolishness and Mr. Bennet's continued failure to lead his family. Mr. and Mrs. Bertram's marriage depicts similar failures: an absent father—though Mr. Bertram leans toward overbearing than apathetic—and a silly, indolent wife. For both the Bennets and the Bertrams, the failure of both husband and wife to lead each other in virtue results in a frustrated and distant marriage relationship. And the failure to lead their children in virtue results in Lydia Bennet's elopement with Mr. Wickham, Maria (née Bertram) Rushworth's affair and elopement with Henry Crawford, and Julia Bertram's elopement with Mr. Yates; all foolish relationships that represent a degradation of the girls' virtue, and culturally would be a degradation of their entire family. Austen contrasts these failures of virtue with her heroes and heroines, who by the end of each novel, have become more Christ-like by developing Christian virtues, having learned them as a result of their relationship.

Austen sets up good marriage relationships with two people who have learned to love each other as a result of the positive effect of that person on his or her life. The impact the hero and heroine have upon each other is to catalyze a growth in Christian virtue. Austen stresses the importance that couples grow together before they get married, lest they be stuck with an unsatisfactory spouse, like with Mr. Allen and Mr. Bennet. Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy must overcome pride; Anne Elliot must grow bolder, and Captain Wentworth must learn forgiveness. Only once this maturity has occurred are Austen's couples allowed to marry.

In *Northanger Abbey* Catherine practices integrity and learns confidence tempered by rationality. She does this by standing up to her brother and Isabella when they tempt her to do wrong by going away with them. Catherine was genuinely conflicted between desiring to see the cliffs and staying to visit with the Tilneys. Whereas Catherine previously gave in the first time by accompanying them on their trip, she perseveres in her commitment to stay behind, thus doing what she believes is right. Seeing Henry may be Catherine's motivation, but she learns to trust her judgment and do what she believes is right as a result of her affection for him. Catherine, her head full of Gothic stories and swept up in the romance of staying at Northanger Abbey and her love for Henry, mistakenly believes that General Tilney has murdered his wife. After she expresses her suspicions to Henry, she is properly admonished for letting her undisciplined imagination. While Catherine was wrong about her accusation, she was right to trust her judgment of General Tilney's character. Austen restores Catherine's confidence by stating that Catherine, "in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife… had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty" (*NA* 225). By standing up for injustice and defending Catherine when he defies his father, Henry similarly learns from Catherine's integrity to "be strong and courageous" himself (Josh. 1.9). Catherine's affection for Henry gives him the motivation to stand up to his overbearing and sinful father who only cares about making a mercenary marriage for his son. Henry's courage, a result of Catherine's influence and affection, brings them together in the end.

In *Sense and Sensibility,* Marianne's maturity takes priority, yet Elinor and Edward's relationship is also a chance for them to improve their moral character. Elinor's faith is tested and rewarded when Lucy marries Robert Ferras instead. Elinor practices patience because she is confident in Edward's character even when it seems like their relationship will not work out.

Edward is drawn to Elinor's maturity, which is a contrast to Lucy Steele, a woman with little substance whom he was sure would make him unhappy. Edward learns to "love wisdom" (Prov. 4.8) as a result of loving Elinor who seems to be prudence itself. Edward repents of his relationship with Lucy Steele which leads to Edward and Elinor's union.

Marianne goes through a harsh period of growth before she can be happy with Colonel Brandon. Originally a character who followed her heart, Marianne is initially selfish and only concerned with her own happiness. Mary Austen Leigh states that *Sense and Sensibility* centers "upon the evils inflicted by the heroine upon herself and her family through too violent indulgence in a romantic passion" (72). Marianne is disillusioned and "denounce[s] sensibility" when her feelings lead her wrong and she trusts an untrustworthy man (Magee 207). Her heartbreak results in an illness which she barely recovers from. Throughout her illness and grief, Colonel Brandon remains by her side, demonstrating his love for her. Marianne learns to value constancy and stability through Brandon's care for her and the result of her experience is the cultivation of maturity (1 Cor. 13.11; 14.20). Colonel Brandon's affection for Marianne gives him the courage to overcome his shame and passivity by sharing with Elinor his past with Willoughby, thus revealing Willoughby's bad character. His actions help Marianne escape Willoughby's clutches. Brandon learns from Marianne's vivacity to move on from his guilt over feeling like he failed Eliza and to allow himself to be happy (Ps. 103.3; Jn. 10.10). Marianne initially becomes the "reward" of Colonel Brandon's charity as her "society restored his mind to animation, and his spirits to cheerfulness" (*S&S* 311). Marianne's marriage to Colonel Brandon is not a punishment, however, as she finds "her own happiness in forming his" (311). Marianne finds that selfless love is the antidote to unhappiness, and "her whole heart became, in time, as

much devoted to her husband as it had once been to Willoughby" (312). Marianne's loving nature is rewarded once her virtue has been improved by learning to value prudence.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy are both humbled by the other as each realizes the different ways their pride has been blinding them. Elizabeth learns to not be overconfident in her judgment after Darcy's accusation that she misjudged his own character and the character of Mr. Wickham proves to be justified. Elizabeth has overestimated Mr. Wickham's virtue and underestimated Mr. Darcy's: She reflects, "How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation!" (*P&P* 173). Darcy, likewise, has been humbled by Elizabeth pointing out how he had mistreated her and her family out of a sense of arrogance and superiority. After this, Darcy is more careful of how he treats others: He shows respect toward the Bennets and the Gardiners, and even restores Lydia's dignity. Mr. Darcy desires to "lessen [Elizabeth's] ill opinion, by letting [her] see that [her] reproofs had been attended to" (302). The revelation of their moral failings leaves each of them ashamed and both Elizabeth and Darcy seek the forgiveness of the other. Mary Austen-Leigh, Austen's great-niece, remarks, "The whole scheme of the book depends upon [repentance] being felt, in a very high degree, by the two principal characters, upon its influencing their actions during the last half of the book and leading steadily up to its closing scenes" (73-74). Only once Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy have repented of their faults by showing humility are they able to be together.

In *Mansfield Park,* it may seem that Fanny is already so virtuous that she does not need improvement from Edmund. While this certainly is the case, it is important to remember that much of Fanny's moral education in her childhood was facilitated by her cousin, Edmund, who "[gave] her advice, consolation, and encouragement" (*MP* 22). Fanny has such a firm sense of Christian virtue in large part because of the Christian love that Edmund showed Fanny as she

grew up in the Bertram household. By her adulthood, Fanny is a stalwart, albeit quiet, force of virtue at Mansfield Park. While Fanny certainly would have resisted marriage to Henry Crawford—a man she does not love and whose virtue she doubts—if she was not also in love with Edmund, her love for Edmund is an added motivation to resist the coercion of the Bertrams, pressure Edmund applies as well. Edmund is much more improved by Fanny throughout the course of the novel. Edmund is tempted by the alluring Mary Crawford, who is beautiful and sweet but has been heavily influenced by secular ideals. With increasing exposure to Mary's influence, Edmund gradually surrenders some of his virtue. A chief example is *Lover's Vows'*: the play the rest of the Bertram siblings, Henry Crawford, and Mr. Yates wish to put on. Edmund, certain of Lord Bertram's disapproval, vocally opposes the play. Originally stalwart, Edmund gives in to please Mary. This situation depicts a gradual decline of Edmund's principles: he first consents to putting on the play, then allows the others to select a play depicting immorality and a mockery of the clergy, and then agrees to act in the play himself, all choices that he knows are wrong. Edmund compromising his virtue for Mary with the play reveals the likelihood of the further erosion of his morals had they married. After Edmund is disillusioned about Mary's moral virtue, it is Fanny's constant voice of piety that eventually allows Edmund to overcome his attraction to Mary Crawford and to recognize that Fanny would be a wife with real virtue.

Emma Woodhouse's cleverness and "disposition to think a little too well of herself" (*E* 3-4) leads to her attempts to manipulate those around her in order to control them. She becomes obsessed with arranging marriages for Harriet Smith, Mr. Elton, and Frank Churchill, and is unable to form a true friendship of equals with those around her, with the exception of Mr. Knightley. Harriet Smith, Emma's most frequent companion, is a girl below her in rank who

worships her and trusts her judgment. Emma feels threatened by the beautiful Jane Fairfax, who diverts attention away from herself. After Emma's eyes are opened to her wanting virtue, she "bitterly regretted not having sought a closer acquaintance with [Jane Fairfax], and blushed for the envious feelings which had certainly been, in some measure, the cause" (408). Emma realizes that she has isolated herself from those who might help her. Mr. Knightley, knowing that he is the only one whom Emma will listen to, consistently challenges her on her unwise choices to make matches for their friends. Once all her plans have repeatedly gone awry, to the misery of all involved, Emma admits her faults and laments: "With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of every body's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange every body's destiny. She was proved to have been universally mistaken; and she had not quite done nothing—for she had done mischief" (401). Emma, consumed with guilt and shame, realizes that Mr. Knightley's influence constantly encouraged her to grow in virtue. Through Knightley's consistent honesty, Emma realizes her mistakes in judgment by playing with people's lives and feelings without regarding the consequences.

Mr. Knightley, often accused of being a pedagogical figure, also receives some correction from Emma. Mr. Knightley is initially very prejudiced against Harriet Smith, who is devoid of connections, wealth, and family. He tells Emma that Harriet "has been taught nothing useful… and with her little wit, is not very likely to have any [experience] that can avail her. She is pretty, and she is good-tempered, and that is all" (*E* 58). Emma shows a great affection for Harriet and she defends her character to Mr. Knightley, insisting that "[Harriet] has better sense than [he] is aware of" (60). Emma teaches Mr. Knightley to humble himself so that he might value Harriet's personhood. Mr. Knightly befriends Harriet and later admits to Emma that he was wrong to judge her so harshly. Mr. Knightley and Emma have demonstrated the iron sharpening iron

effects over the course of their friendship. They always speak honestly to each other, pointing out the faults of the other, yet always forgiving the other, despite their failings. Though Mr. Knightley consistently points out Emma's mistakes, he considers her "faultless in spite of her faults" (419), a comment that reminds one of the Christian doctrine of justification, where God declares a Believer to be holy at the moment of salvation.

Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth have much growth to go through after their initial separation. Anne immediately repents, breaking off their engagement as she is "conflict[ed] between two schemes of values: those of prudence, and those of love" (Wright 145). Anne initially sided with prudence by following the advice of Lady Russell, ignoring her love for him. Knowing she has made a mistake, Anne demonstrates true humility by accepting Captain Wentworth's anger and bitterness toward her. Anne consistently shows charity to others through the care of her sister and her nephew. When Louise Musgrove has her accident, Anne does not freeze and panic, like Captain Wentworth and the others in their party do. She takes charge and acts wisely to best care for Louisa. She proves to Captain Wentworth that being able to act in spite of one's feelings is not always bad.

The virtue Anne demonstrates softens his heart toward her and he realizes the value of "the resolution of a collected mind" (*P* 172). Wentworth begins to value that part of her character that he formerly resented and he "lament[ed] the blindness of his own pride, and the blunders of his own calculations" (173). Wentworth must now humble himself to propose to Anne for a second time, which was considered humiliating by Regency standards. Anne, having never stopped loving him, accepts his proposal. As Captain Wentworth has succeeded in making his fortune, she is able to choose love without sacrificing prudence; though their relationship does cause strife between Anne and her snobbish family who regard Captain Wentworth as socially

beneath them. Austen clearly expresses her opinion on their match: "[H]ow should a Captain Wentworth and an Anne Elliot, with the advantages of maturity of mind, consciousness of right, and one independent fortune between them, fail of bearing down every opposition?" (176-177). Austen claims that a match where the couple is proven to be mature, virtuous, and prudent is better than a match that prioritizes the class suitability of the partner—though it is important to remember that Captain Wentworth is not so beneath Anne that their match would be considered a *misalliance*. Once Anne and Wentworth overcome their personal failings, all other objections become irrelevant and their relationship "bear[s] down every opposition" (177).

At the start of their stories, none of these couples are ready for marriage. Some heroes and heroines have to prove their Christian virtue by going through difficult circumstances: Elinor Dashwood and Fanny Price already demonstrate Christian virtue, but they must patiently wait for their heroes to experience growth. Other heroes and heroines have aspects of their virtue that they have to improve to learn how to demonstrate love better: Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse both must be humbled, though in different ways, before they can appreciate their heroes' affection. Each partner must demonstrate and grow in Christian virtue before Austen considers them to be ready for marriage. The couples that view their marriage partner as providing a continual opportunity to practice Christian charity and a constant resource of character growth are the pairings that Austen assures readers will live happily ever after.

Chapter Six

Finding a Happily Ever After

Jane Austen's novels have made a profound cultural impact: They are still read by new generations of readers, studied in classrooms, adapted into films and spin-off novels, and discussed in academia. Austen's insight into human nature and love have rung true for all kinds of readers, not just Christians. Some scholars have argued that the reason Austen has remained popular is because "human nature requires the restraint, civility, decorum, and organized beauty of art" (Brownstein 64). Modern critics tend to evaluate Austen by modern standards: They discuss if Austen was a "social conservative" or a feminist (22), how she portrays the slave trade (M. Byrde 280), or if her pedagogical romances are oppressive to women (Fessbecker 747); essentially analyzing if Jane Austen is progressive enough for her works to be valuable to modern readers. While such discussions are valuable, and indeed, natural, such perspectives might neglect to appreciate the equality Austen accomplished through her love stories: both men and women seeking betterment of the self. Over time, her Christian heritage has been ignored or avoided by readers and academics (Collins xi), but at the core of her novels runs a distinctly Christian message about the blessings that result from pursuing virtue, the greatest of which is a happy marriage.

James Austen-Leigh considers Jane Austen's upbringing and education at Steventon as "the cradle of her genius" (23). The Reverend and Mrs. Austen believed that it was their duty to instill in their children Christian virtue as well as develop the areas in which their Creator had given them skill. Jane Austen's dedication to Christianity and writing inspired her to write novels that would instruct young people how to select a spouse that would lead to a fulfilling marriage.

It is not unjustified to say that without her Christian upbringing, Austen would not have become one of the greatest authors of the modern age.

The focus of the middling and upper-class British society was on marriages that would be advantageous financially and socially, given the reliance on marriage to maintain social norms. As Regency culture was changing to appreciate the value of the marriage bond, courtship novels gained popularity (Adkins 3), and different voices, like Maria Edgeworth and Fanny Burney, offered their opinions on how to make the best love-match. Regency culture now encouraged people to find "someone who would make them happy" (Muir 242), shifting to prioritize personal gratification in marriage, in addition to financial and social advancement. Austen counters these priorities, arguing that true marital fulfillment comes from pursuing Christian morality, and that only by repenting of one's faults and practicing charity would one make a prudent match.

She argues that it is not fulfilling to follow the cultural norms without being guided by Christian virtue: Her novels "[posit] a fairly close connection between the code of propriety and the sort of social conduct Christian morals would dictate" (Nardin 5). Austen does not ignore the relevance of money and does not ignore class distinction: All her heroines marry respectable gentlemen who are able to provide for them. But she stresses that these concerns have their proper place when choosing a marriage partner: "[She] exposes the fundamental discrepancy in her society between its avowed ideology of love and its implicit economic motivation" (Newman 695). She makes it clear that these priorities alone are not enough to make a happy marriage.

At the heart of all Jane Austen's novels is the importance of maturing in Christian virtue. Her characters that do not undergo growth do not live fulfilling lives; the characters that do develop their moral character flourish. Without making mutual growth the foundation of the

marriage, the relationship is doomed to result in unhappiness. The marriages between morally stagnant characters do not lead to intimacy but estrangement. Mr. Allen and Mr. Bennet spend much of their time avoiding their wives, as they are unable to connect with them. Mr. Elton and Mr. Willoughby both married women they did not know and did not have a connection with. These marriages are warnings of the dangers of pursuing material advantages without virtue.

A theme that recurs in Austen's canon is that the marital partner one chooses can either improve or contaminate one's moral character. A person not interested in growth because they are distracted by secular pursuits, like wealth, social position, or beauty, will only encourage those same bad values in their romantic partner. Once married, Lydia and Mr. Wickham live an unsettled life, "moving place to place in quest of a cheap situation" resulting from their both being "extravagant in their wants, and heedless of the future" (*P&P* 314; 315). John and Fanny Dashwood, concerned about their ability to provide for their family (*S&S* 7), become a couple who value other people based on wealth, not as individuals (183). The marriages between characters that ignore their need for growth result with both partners' moral decay.

Austen recognized that being virtuous required a contemplative mind and an awareness of one's thoughts and how the behavior of others would reflect their morality. Conversation was an important tool to discover a potential marriage partner's values and personality, and many were found to be poor marriage partners through conversation, such as Mr. Thorpe, Mary Crawford, and Mr. Collins. Austen stresses that it is important to know someone well before marriage, and once their virtue was proven and the match made, the stimulating conversation became a reward of the relationship that would be enjoyed throughout married life.

Austen recognized that, while personality had a big impact on if a potential partner would be initially appealing, it was not necessarily a determining factor of long-term marital happiness.

If characters lacked virtue, personality differences would be magnified, making the marriage unhappy, like with the Allens and the Bennets. But if both partners pursued Christian virtue then differing personalities could make a marriage exciting, like Elizabeth and Darcy, and Marianne and Colonel Brandon. The much more important commonality between couples was their moral character. Only a marriage between two virtuous people will lead to happiness and fulfillment.

Mary Austen-Leigh reflects that Austen wished not just to provide each of her heroines with a good husband, but "in dealing with these heroines, she desired to leave them, not only happier, but better, than she found them; wiser, stronger, humbler, and more charitable, richer in self-control, and in that self-knowledge on which she always places a high value" (79-80). Austen rewards virtue in her heroines by blessing them with virtuous husbands. Marianne Dashwood is redeemed by the virtuous Colonel Brandon after she repents of her imprudent relationship with Mr. Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*. Elizabeth Bennet's humility is honored with the love of the similarly humbled Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. Fanny Price is rewarded for her unwavering integrity and patience through the recognition and love of Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park*. Emma's maturity enables her to recognize and accept the love of Mr. Knightley in *Emma*. Austen encourages virtuous living by portraying the goodness that overflows from living the way God intended.

Austen knew that one of the most important decisions one makes is in choosing a marriage partner, as it is the most influential relationship of a person's adult life. Her belief in how special this relationship is caused her to take the selection of a spouse very seriously as it was a big opportunity that could bring fulfillment or unhappiness (Olsen 4). A relationship that will have such a profound effect should cause one to carefully select a partner that will have a positive effect in one's life. She viewed marriage as one of the best ways to cultivate personal

growth. Austen's couples are brought together by more than just mutual affection; the true love they feel is a result of a mutual growth in Christian virtue.

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