

7-2012

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Meredith Paige Luze
College of William and Mary

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Courting Revitalization: Companionate Marriage and the Problem of the Landed
Gentry's Reform in Jane Austen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

by

Meredith Paige Luze

Accepted for _____
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Kim Wheatley, Director

Elizabeth Barnes

Brett Wilson

Kathrin Levitan

Williamsburg, VA
May 1, 2012

“Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley, than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet’s having some hope of a return? It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!” –*Emma* (444)

When Emma Woodhouse finally discovers her own feelings and realizes “that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself,” she opens her eyes to two interrelated truths. While Emma’s love for Mr. Knightley primarily motivates her resolve to marry him, Jane Austen also implies that Emma finally realizes the social importance of marriage and its role in maintaining upper-class values. Why *is* it “so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley, than with Frank Churchill?” For one, Emma loves Mr. Knightley and not Frank, but Mr. Knightley also has more social value because he unites property, money, and moral propriety, and illegitimate Harriet Smith ought not to love someone so far above her. The “evil” of Harriet loving a member of the landed gentry is “so dreadfully increased” by her “having some hope of a return” because it creates the possibility of her altering the current social structure, with negative consequences. Emma’s love for Mr. Knightley and her social consciousness awaken simultaneously to convince her that she is the proper wife for Mr. Knightley, revealing Austen’s insistence that learning to follow her heart allows the heroine to marry to benefit the gentry. *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), and *Persuasion* (1818) all follow the development of the heroine and her experiences with courtship to show how the desired companionate marriage will revitalize the deteriorating landed gentry, even if only in the distant future. To varying degrees in each of the three novels, Austen expresses her dissatisfaction with the gentry and calls for its revitalization within the existing social

structure. This prominent social engagement distinguishes *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* from Austen's other novels and encourages their discussion together, since the three novels display a change in Austen's attitude toward the source of the gentry's redemption. Although Austen remains convinced of the gentry's eventual rejuvenation, her unease about the means of change underlies the happy endings of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* and peaks in *Persuasion*, as she begins to lose hope in endogamous revitalization. To illustrate how the landed gentry's morals have fallen, Austen consistently utilizes the heroine's viewpoint, providing an insider's insight which allows the reader to see clearly what needs to be rectified. The courtship process pinpoints how the gentry needs to and can be rejuvenated, and it enables Austen and her heroines to determine who is and is not a suitable match. The heroines (Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, Emma Woodhouse in *Emma*, and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*) realize through courtship and different imagined marriages the importance of the companionate marriage, which Austen shows is the best marriage for society. The social class of the ideal husband varies in the three novels, and his marriage to the heroine may not immediately revitalize the landed gentry, as it could take time to bring the proper people into the gentry.

Jane Austen lived and wrote during tumultuous times which inevitably influenced her opinions and left a mark on her writing. Before delving into the complexities of the three novels, I will briefly situate Austen within her historical period and the literary world of the time, especially her relationship to the genre of the novel. Following this background discussion, I will illustrate Austen's portrayal through courtship of the varying degrees of social degradation in these three novels, beginning with *Mansfield Park*'s moderate yet increasing moral corruption. *Emma* follows in *Mansfield Park*'s wake, picking up with the imperfections lingering after its resolution, only to have its

seemingly hopeful tone reversed in *Persuasion* as the gentry regresses into seemingly irreparable degradation. In showing how Austen's opinion of the landed gentry evolves and leads to the radical change in *Persuasion*, I will highlight how Austen undermines the happiness of her chosen marriages through the unsettling suggestions of incest and coercion. In the face of a changing society, Austen begins to question whether the marital solutions she poses in *Mansfield Park*, and again in *Emma*, for the landed gentry's imperfections will be enough. By the time she writes *Persuasion*, Austen becomes convinced that it is not, and in this novel she adopts the attitude that the current gentry is past redemption and places her faith in the next generation instead. Throughout this paper I will emphasize the role of courtship and the heroine's perspective in pointing out the flaws and possibility for redemption, as it is through the heroine's journey to finding a man who must marry no one but her that Austen reveals her social vision.

Despite some deprecating biographical depictions of her literary talents and goals in both early family biographies and a few later critical ones,¹ Jane Austen was always a determined novelist, as one critic² has termed her. While Austen undoubtedly wrote to entertain, it would be a mistake to "regard her writing first and foremost as a form of family entertainment," as Austen clearly aimed beyond the family circle and pure amusement (Nokes 172). Austen persisted in seeking to publish her novels despite initial setbacks and she shrewdly tracked her novels' printing progress and profits.³ As a determined, professional writer, Austen published for financial profit, but she also had

¹For example, see David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life*.

²Anthony Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author*.

³For further reading on Austen's interest in publication and her profits, see Jan Fergus, "The Professional woman writer."

strong opinions about society to share which influenced her writing style just as much as her desire for popularity. She once half-jokingly wrote to the Prince Regent's librarian James Stanier Clarke, "I am fully sensible that an Historical Romance, founded on the House of Saxe Cobourg might be much more to the purpose of Profit or Popularity, than such pictures of domestic Life in Country Villages as I deal in—but I could no more write a Romance than an Epic Poem....I must keep to my own style & go on in my own Way" (*Letters* 312). Her self-deprecating comment was intended both to deter any further unwelcome suggestions from him and to defend her choice to write realist novels. Austen could only write about "pictures of domestic Life in Country Villages" because these were the source of her knowledge and opinions, and it was in the landed gentry's domestic life that she saw the moral degeneration which prompted her to write.

"Historical romances" were indeed in vogue when Austen began publishing, and scholar Anthony Mandal notes, "[t]he Regency market is characterized by two significant developments: the efflorescence of Evangelistically minded fiction and the transformation of the national tale of the 1800s into the Scottian historical novel" (22). The category of the novel included (among others) sentimental, historical, and realistic forms, all of which were related to and yet distinct from romances, which typically revolved around sensationalized historical or foreign settings and plots (especially in the gothic). The non-historical novel was typified as a predominantly female writing form and was typically targeted at a female readership, according to scholars like Katherine Sobba Green and Kathryn Sutherland.⁴ In defiance of the stereotype, however, many men enjoyed novels, and Austen's novels in particular attracted significant male attention,

⁴ Mandal notes that the time period when Austen began to publish marked a general rise in female authorship (27).

most notably from the Prince Regent, who requested that Austen dedicate *Emma* to him—a very flattering indication of the Prince’s admiration. Austen’s novels fall into the courtship novel subgenre, commonly defined as novels written by women for women which detail “the time between a young woman’s coming out and her marriage,” a definition somewhat at odds with this prominent instance of male appreciation (Green 2).⁵ The theme of a heroine’s coming out and choice of marriage partner characterizes the courtship novel, and the heroine’s experiences in the world as she matures and eventually finds a companionate husband drive the plot. The courtship novel distinguishes itself by the heroines’ agency and their ability to make decisions for themselves, a unique characteristic that Green links to the rise of affective individualism, which encouraged young adults to choose their own partners.

Not all critics agree on the existence of a “courtship novel” subgenre, and many instead argue for a standard “courtship plot” within the novel. Mandal, for instance, prioritizes novels’ Evangelical or nationalistic themes over courtship and classes Austen within the broad category of popular novelists. William Magee sees courtship as a plot convention rather than a subgenre and views Austen as writing within the “courtship and marriage convention of the novel of manners” (198). No critical consensus exists about the existence of the “courtship novel,” but critics do agree on the centrality of courtship to Austen’s novels, whether as a plot convention or generic classification. One critic even

⁵ It is true that men were not the primary novel-readers in Austen’s time and some considered novel-reading emasculating unless the author was male, but the wide availability of novels at the time ensured a male readership (Mandal 168). Green’s definition, while providing a good starting point for understanding the courtship novel and common beliefs about it, restricts itself too much and ignores the fact that, as Edward Copeland stresses, a *man*, Samuel Richardson, is generally considered as the pioneer of the modern novel and the courtship plot (Copeland 100). While it is important to note that women were the primary courtship-novel readers, it is erroneous to assume that they were the only ones.

claims that eight narrative elements distinguish the courtship novel,⁶ a claim that suggests that courtship should be seen as more than just a plot device. Since similar themes and stylistic approaches appear in the novels of Austen's contemporaries, notably Maria Edgeworth, Fanny Burney, and Elizabeth Inchbald, I believe the courtship subgenre is a valid category. Austen incorporates some of the existing courtship-novel conventions, including perhaps the most standard convention of tracing the opening of the heroine's eyes and her comprehension of the truth. Edgeworth blatantly states this novelistic tactic in *Belinda* when Lady Delacour claims that Belinda will not open her eyes to the truth because it is something "which heroines make it a principle never to do—or else there would be an end of the novel" (84). Austen certainly read *Belinda* (she briefly mentions it in *Northanger Abbey*) and would have been familiar with this convention, one she valued enough to incorporate into her own work. The form of the courtship novel, with the heroine's slow recognition of greater truths, lends itself readily to Austen's desire to call attention to the need to rejuvenate the landed gentry.

A preference for companionate marriage also marks a novel as part of the courtship subgenre, since every courtship novelist defends love-based marriage as preferable to one based on status or money. Lawrence Stone, in his social history, cites three primary marital motivations as based on economic or social choice, personal affection, and lust, and suggests a movement over time toward companionate marriage (271-72). Stone posits several factors as the source of the shift, including novel-reading, a rise in the number of unmarried people, and a distaste for parental control and dictation.

⁶ Pamela Regis suggests the eight elements are: the definition of a corrupt society which the hero and heroine's marriage will reform, the meeting of the hero and heroine, the pair's mutual attraction, the pair's sense of the propriety of their attraction, the barrier between them, the point of ritual death where hope of marriage is lost, their declaration of love, and their betrothal (62-63).

Companionate marriage was certainly on the rise, and Austen further encourages it in her novels by prioritizing the heroine's perspective and thoughts on marriage through free indirect discourse. The use of free indirect discourse allows Austen to provide deeper insight into the heroine's development, and the causes and solutions of the landed gentry's problems, while her occasional use of the metanarrative voice encourages her readers to consider the full implications of the marriages she promotes and of how they are brought about.

Austen's narrative form allows her to further develop her political and social views and sway the reader to her convictions, but critics have not always granted her this clear political motivation. Early discussions of Austen emphatically denied her a political agenda, whether to her detriment or benefit, creating the image of the insulated Jane Austen, partly through the efforts of her family, whose early biographies stressed the "spinster aunt" Austen. Her political engagement has now long been acknowledged in critical circles, however, and debates over Austen's political stance have proliferated since Marilyn Butler and Claudia Johnson's seminal texts appeared in the 1980s. Butler defines the most adamantly conservative view of Austen, whereas Johnson pioneered the now common view of Austen as a subversively conservative writer who wove radical ideas into standard courtship plots. The majority of Austen criticism falls between these two poles, although some critics, like Margaret Kirkham, argue that Austen should be seen as a true radical, calling her a "radical wolf" in "orthodox moralists' sheep's clothing" (Kirkham 236). The debate surrounding Austen's relative conservatism primarily concerns itself with whether this conservativeness was a true reflection of her beliefs or a convenient disguise for more radical leanings.

I take a moderate-conservative stance on Austen's political beliefs; Austen clearly believes that the existing social structure has merit and wishes to preserve it, charging the next generation with rejuvenating the corrupt landed gentry. Austen renews an emphasis on "good manners and morals among the propertied class" which has been suffered to lapse over the years (Tanner 18). During Austen's lifetime, English society had a fairly rigid and stratified structure dividing all levels of society, though only the upper levels are discussed and of interest here. The highest-ranking individuals were the royal family, followed by what David Spring calls three groups of rural elite: the aristocracy, the gentry, and the unlanded "pseudo-gentry." Levels can also be distinguished within the landed gentry, with the titled landed gentry (baronets and knights) ranking above their untitled counterparts and those with more land and money ranking above those with less. The latter two groups comprise Austen's primary focus, since their duties are the most pronounced and their failings are the most evident due to their elevated positions.⁷ Her desire to retain the values and positions of the landed gentry marks her as conservative (for, as critic Clara Tuite claims, "A primary function of conservative satire is correction, renovation and resoration" (96)), but her eventual turn to deserving naval officers for rejuvenation hints at a somewhat radical meritocracy. Preserving the values of the landed gentry, namely attention to duty (to family and dependents), charity, and morality, is of utmost importance to Austen, even as she becomes ever more unsure whether the current landed gentry will be able to preserve them. Austen retains hope even in her dark picture of the gentry in *Persuasion*, trusting to her vision that proper courtship and marriage will bring forward those who best embody and uphold the landed gentry's values.

⁷ Austen differs from her contemporaries in this respect, since courtship novelists like Edgeworth and Burney typically draw their characters heavily from the aristocracy. Austen's choice to focus on the gentry (and to portray those aristocrats she does write about in a negative light) helps contribute to her realist tone.

Pessimistic and Optimistic Views of the Landed Gentry

The members of the landed gentry in *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* have all slipped in their moral grounding, although Austen portrays the gentry at different stages of degradation in each of the three novels; each novel opens with morally degraded landed gentry, though *Mansfield Park* presents the only case where the problem worsens before it improves. The landed gentry is expected to set a good example for those lower on the social ladder and provide “society with its moral leadership,” but it no longer fulfills its duties or adheres to its defining morals (Monaghan 6). Land comes with “a specific agenda of duties, actions and rewards,” to borrow Tony Tanner’s phrase, which the landowners must fulfill while living up to the values ascribed to them, including charity to the poor and Christian morality (180). As one critic puts it, Austen believes that “the fate of society depends on the ability of the landed classes to live up to their ideal of concern for others and on the willingness of the other groups to accept this ideal” (Monaghan 7). Unfortunately, Austen suggests that the current members of the landed gentry are more and more unable to live up to this ideal, which their dependents still expect them to meet, so they will have to be replaced or reformed. As things stand, they have lost their social superiority, defined by “the ability to exercise patronage, to offer charity, and generally to aid others,” because they refuse to exercise these abilities (Handler and Segal 700).

One of the key duties of the landed gentry is to that which sets it apart from the “pseudo-gentry”: its land. In many ways, as Tuite suggests, “[i]t is the landed-ness of the landed gentry that is critical” in giving its position social value and in enabling it to maintain a respected position in society (98). A landowner’s identity is tied to his estate,

a fact that Austen emphasizes from the outset of *Persuasion* when she introduces Sir Walter as “Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire” (3) and concludes the Elliot entry in the Baronetage with, “Principal seat, Kellynch hall, in the county of Somerset” (4). Sir Walter values his estate as part of his valuable family legacy and refuses to sell any part of the land even when distressed for money, internally declaring that “he would never disgrace his name so far. The Kellynch estate should be transmitted whole and entire, as he had received it” (Austen 10). Yet this dedication to his estate’s integrity proceeds not from any actual attachment to the land or his role as a landowner (beyond the title), but rather from vanity, which Austen assures her readers is “the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot’s character; vanity of person and of situation” (4). Austen emphasizes the self-satisfied and snobbish dimension of Sir Walter’s character, especially with regard to his rank as baronet, insisting that no “valet of any new made lord [could] be more delighted with the place he held in society” (Austen 4). No other individual in Austen’s oeuvre receives such scathing and unredeemed treatment as Sir Walter; Austen places all of her disappointment in the titled landed gentry into him and refuses to develop his character in order to persuade her readers to adopt a similar dismissive attitude toward the irredeemable current landed gentry. By stressing Sir Walter’s self-complacency, Austen highlights the emptiness of his delight with his place in society, since his pride is in its symbolic rather than functional importance. Kellynch figures prominently into Sir Walter’s vanity of situation and he values it solely for that reason; he has no sense of or interest in his landowning duties, as their related values have simply “degenerated into snobbish reflexes” (Tanner 230).

Even as they prepare for departure, the only thought that Sir Walter and his daughter Elizabeth, who has been mistress since her mother’s death, give to the loss of

their estate is to prepare “condescending bows for all the afflicted tenantry and cottagers who might have had a hint to shew themselves” (Austen 38). Austen’s suggestion that the tenants have “had a hint to shew themselves” and feign sorrow about the Elliots’ departure implies duress and further emphasizes the corruption of the landed gentry in forcefully imposing empty values. While Austen and her readers have minimal interest in the tenants themselves, as they never appear in the novel, the image of dissatisfied tenants being forced to pay a respect they do not feel is a potent and critical one. Farmers and cottagers are, as Emma says, ““in one sense as much above my notice as in every other [they are] below it,”” but their close relationship to the land should make them interesting to the landowners—any deficiency there is important to Austen and her notions of duty (Austen, *Emma* 29). Sir Walter and Elizabeth clearly do not value their estate as Austen believes that they should, and it consequently falls to Anne, who is neither master nor mistress of the household, to perform the proper duties of a departing landowner, including ““going to almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave”” (Austen 41). Anne is the only Elliot who understands what it means to be the owner of Kellynch-hall, and she cannot help but agree with Austen that “they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners”” (Austen 136). Unlike her father and sisters, Anne realizes her family was not doing its duty by Kellynch and must make way for those who will.

Failure to pay proper attention to the land and its people also characterizes the landed gentry in *Mansfield Park*, who practice absentee ownership, with Sir Thomas Bertram as the most prominent example. Sir Thomas owns a plantation in the Antilles which he visits only when it begins to flounder, generally neglecting his workers there when they would benefit from his attention. Henry Crawford also endangers the welfare

of his tenants at his estate, Everingham, by leaving them to the mercy of his unscrupulous overseer. When courting Fanny, Henry begins to act like a true landowner and ventures to his estate to investigate a suspicious business dealing “in which the welfare of a large and (he believed) industrious family was at stake” and finally begins “acting as he ought to do” (Austen 469). The praise due to Henry for behaving properly is dampened, however, by the hint that he is only acting from ulterior motives. Austen hints at her disapproval through the parenthetical “(he believed),” suggesting that Henry would not know whether or not the family was actually “industrious” or deserving because he neglects his estate; for all Henry knows, the family should be evicted. Henry makes a valiant—though, it is suggested, short-lived—attempt to be the caring landowner society expects him to be, but Austen implies that his behavior might be too little, too late.

Even when the owners live on their estates in *Mansfield Park*, they disregard the community’s needs and turn their attention to only that which pleases them. While visiting Sotherton, the home of Maria Bertram’s betrothed, Mr. Rushworth, Maria remarks of the attached village, “Those cottages are really a disgrace. The church spire is reckoned remarkably handsome. I am glad the church is not so close to the Great House as often happens in old places” (Austen 96). Maria only pays enough attention to the cottages to note that they are in disrepair and “really a disgrace”; once she becomes mistress of Sotherton and benefactress of the village, Maria ought to assist the cottagers with their homes, but she simply passes over them in favor of the “remarkably handsome church spire.” Maria clearly will not be the first Rushworth to feel unobligated to aid the villagers, or the cottages would not have reached this state of disgrace; her lack of interest only builds upon a slipping sense of responsibility.

Depictions of acts of charity allow Austen to assess the landed gentry's falling standards in *Emma*, although in this case Austen uses instances of charity to show hope for its redemption. Austen follows her portrayal of relatively acute, and continually increasing, degradation of the landed gentry in *Mansfield Park* with an example in *Emma* of landed gentry that simply needs to reaffirm its social and moral values. Like Maria, Emma sees the needs of the poor, but takes action on their behalf, unlike Maria: "the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her patience, as from her purse" (Austen 93). Yet despite her compassion and generosity, Emma lacks consistency in her charity and easily forgets about those who ought to be foremost in her thoughts. Emma readily admits this failing, saying, "These are the sights, Harriet, to do one good. How trifling they make every thing else appear!— I feel now as if I could think of nothing but these poor creatures all the rest of the day; and yet, who can say how soon it may all vanish from my mind?" (Austen 93). As she predicts, "these poor creatures" are quickly pushed out of her thoughts to make way for her meddling matchmaking schemes.

While Austen chastises Emma for so easily forgetting her duties as a benefactress and for her nonchalance about it, Austen also uses such ready admission of failure to prove that the landed gentry is not beyond hope. If Emma can admit that she is not fulfilling her duties properly, she clearly understands what her proper duties are and can be taught to want to fulfill them. Emma's behavior to the Bateses further draws attention to how her failing could be rectified by teaching her to desire to act properly. As a wealthy, idle young woman and one of the elite in Highbury, she ought to be one of these poor women's main benefactors, yet she tries to keep her distance from them as much as

she can because she finds their society tiresome.⁸ Emma recognizes the seriousness of this failing, as “[s]he had had many a hint from Mr. Knightley and some from her own heart, as to her deficiency—but none were equal to counteract the persuasion of its being very disagreeable,—a waste of time—tiresome women” (Austen 165). Frustration at herself and the Bateses increasingly fragments her thoughts, since she knows that despite visiting the “tiresome women” being “disagreeable,” she should visit them anyway; her irritation at her inability to overcome her “deficiency” causes her to lash out inwardly at the women and call them “tiresome” and visiting them “a waste of time.”

Unlike Emma, Mr. Knightley has no similar “deficiency” to overcome, readily entering into the demands of his social position and finding pleasure in fulfilling them. Austen uses Mr. Knightley to exemplify how the landed gentry ought to behave, since he takes a sincere interest in his estate and tenants. Robert Martin, one of his best tenants, even solicits Mr. Knightley’s advice in marriage because, in Mr. Knightley’s opinion, ““He knows I have a thorough regard for him and all his family, and, I believe, considers me as one of his best friends”” (Austen 62). Whether or not Mr. Martin considers Mr. Knightley “one of his best friends,” he clearly holds him in high regard, a sentiment Mr. Knightley reciprocates in part because he has internalized the landowner’s necessary concern for his tenants. Mr. Knightley even takes more pleasure in his landowning duties than in society parties, claiming, ““I would rather be at home, looking over William Larkins’s week’s account; much rather, I confess”” (Austen 278). While Mr. Knightley’s firm statement may stem from some jealousy over his favorite’s seeming preference for another at these parties, Austen makes it clear that his interest in his estate is sincere.

⁸ Emma willingly provides as much charity as she can while remaining physically distant, however, like when she sends them food from her stores at Hartfield.

Untitled Mr. Knightley largely escapes the censure Austen places on the titled landed gentry, like Sir Walter Elliot and Sir Thomas Bertram, and she further reduces her criticism in her portrayals of the middling and lesser landed gentry, who could improve and assume their social superiors' neglected roles. However, Austen remains doubtful about the possibility of their improvement and their ability to fulfill the necessary roles, describing the Musgroves, her prime example of the middling landed gentry, in *Persuasion* as being "in a state of alteration, *perhaps* of improvement" (43, emphasis mine). A sort of chaos rules the family and house as they try to reconcile the "old English style" of the parents and the "new," modern style of the children, primarily producing "an overthrow of all order and neatness!" (Austen 43). Although Austen laments the "overthrow" of order and doubts that anything of value will result from this confusion, she refrains from passing absolute judgment and hopes for improvement.

In many ways, the elder Musgroves show an appealing modernity of opinion in their concern for their children, allowing them to choose spouses based on who will make them happy and "leav[ing] every thing to take its chance" rather than dictating the course of their courtship (Austen 81). Austen insists on the modern trend for young people to choose their own life partners, and the Musgroves' support of this trend implies Austen's tacit approval of them and their ilk. Despite Austen's praise of the Musgroves' genuine parental concern, she shows that they have tend toward over-sentimentality, as exhibited when Mrs. Musgrove produces "large fat sighings over the destiny of a son, whom alive nobody had cared for" (Austen 73). No one had cared for the living Richard Musgrove because he was "a very troublesome, hopeless son... [and] had been sent to sea, because he was stupid and unmanageable on shore," unmourned until his death (Austen 54). The narrator who explains Dick Musgrove's history may tend toward harshness in

undervaluing latent parental affection, but Austen reaffirms the negative impression of Dick through his old captain's opinion of him, as Captain Wentworth "had probably been at some pains to get rid of him" (Austen 73). Like the titled landed gentry, the Musgroves fall short in their similar sentimental excesses, which makes Austen doubtful that they can be suitable replacements, despite their promising modernization.

Parental failings in family duties receive Austen's heaviest censure since they have the greatest and longest-lasting effects on children and impact their moral sensibility and awareness of social responsibilities. In *Emma*, Mr. Woodhouse receives his share of gentle chastising for failing to properly discipline Emma and allowing her to have "rather too much her own way," which prevents her from fully understanding the repercussions of her actions (Austen 3). Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* conversely over-restricts his children and does not see how that produces moral failing in his children (other than Edmund) as bad as overindulgence. Austen entirely rejects Sir Walter Elliot as a proper parental figure due to his self-absorption and wholesale neglect of his most deserving daughter, Anne. With parents unable to provide the moral and social guidance expected of them, Austen's heroines must look elsewhere for instruction and learn from their own mistakes. In this respect, Austen follows the advice of Mary Wollstonecraft, who cautions against allowing filial affection to outweigh reason and advises children to rely on their own judgment rather than be swayed by their parents (153). Austen and Wollstonecraft agree that young people should be trusted to determine how they will be happy, even if it takes time for them to realize that they know how; asserting their moral authority, even if only by removing themselves from the gentry, once they become cognizant of it is crucial for the heroines to become the needed revitalizing force.

Possibility of Rejuvenation: The Hope of Endogamous Revitalization

The revitalizing force Austen envisions in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* is an endogamous one, focused on resolving the problems of the landed gentry within the existing members. In a telling process, primarily driven by the influence of related mentor figures, Fanny Price and Emma Woodhouse develop a preference for mates not only within their own class, but within their own families. Rather than disapproving of such intra-familial marriages, Austen suggests that these marriages are optimal for the gentry's rejuvenation and that partners outside of the family threaten its values and the potential for reform. One critic maintains that Austen reverses the typical negative connotation of incest, since in her novels it "creates a loving and enclosed family circle; by drawing in the bonds of the family tighter and tighter, the household is strengthened and reconsecrated" (Hudson 35). The household must be strengthened and reformed by the heroines marrying to optimally benefit their families and society. Fanny and Emma both marry within the family to strengthen it in those aspects which are most lacking: Fanny returns morality to the landed, moneyed, morally-impooverished Bertams, while Emma re-unites wealth and land through her marriage to Mr. Knightley. However, the incestuous undertones to the student and teacher pairings create a sense of unease at this method of reconsecration.

While similar in the heroines' hopeful marriages and potential for reform, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* portray worlds with rather different degrees of degeneration and therefore varying degrees of necessary repair. Not only does the landed gentry of *Mansfield Park* begin at a greater stage of deterioration, it continues to distance itself from the ideal throughout the course of the novel, as evidenced through its attitude

toward courtship and marriage. Successive events show the Bertrams' increasing moral corruption, beginning with the eldest son's extravagance which requires the family living to be sold, robbing "Edmund for ten, twenty, thirty years, perhaps for life, of more than half the income which ought to be his," and introduces outsiders with dangerous values into the family circle (Austen 27). Sir Thomas's chastisement of his son Tom produces "some shame and some sorrow," but this soon passes and Tom begins to feel "that his father had made a most tiresome piece of work" of reprimanding him (Austen 27). Tom remains uncorrected in his behavior, seeing his father's admonitions as only "tiresome," and continues to jeopardize the family fortune.

Tom's extravagance and the selling of the Mansfield living to the Grants creates a new social situation with matrimonial possibilities, and how the Bertrams respond to the ensuing courtships reveals hidden flaws in morality and values. Maria Bertram elects to follow what Kathryn Sutherland calls a conformist matrimonial route,⁹ choosing to marry for money rather than affection. Maria ignores her heart and marries a man she disdains out of spite for the man she does love, vowing, "Henry Crawford had destroyed her happiness, but he should not know that he had done it; he should not destroy her credit, her appearance, her prosperity too" (Austen 236). If she cannot have love, Maria will at least have wealth. Austen chastises this approach to marriage, satirically asserting, "In all the important preparations of the mind she was complete; being prepared for matrimony by an hatred of home, restraint, and tranquillity; by the misery of disappointed affection, and contempt of the man she was to marry" (236). The fact that this misery encompasses "the important preparations of the mind" for matrimony stresses the incorrectness of the marital model at Mansfield and the need for change. All of the parties involved

⁹ See Sutherland, "Jane Austen and the serious modern novel," 258.

understand the perverseness of this model, particularly Sir Thomas, who in a burst of paternal feeling speaks to Maria about her clear dislike of her fiancé, thinking to himself, “Advantageous as would be the alliance, and long standing and public as was the engagement, her happiness must not be sacrificed to it” (Austen 234). Nevertheless, Sir Thomas is all “too glad to be satisfied” that Maria wants to marry Mr. Rushworth, as it is “an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain” (Austen 234). Despite their attempts to move toward the companionate marriage, selfish and conservative motivations ensnare the Bertrams and set them up for further degradation.

The ensuing moral degradation culminates in unabashed adultery by recently-wedded Maria and in Julia Bertram’s associated elopement. The narrator emerges in the final chapter to provide the final neat summary of the motivations and just desserts of the ill-behaved and the rewards of the good, asserting that she is “impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest” (Austen 533). Without love to keep her faithful to her husband, Maria readily commits adultery with Henry Crawford when the opportunity presents itself. The adultery is all the more unfortunate because entirely avoidable, as Sir Thomas acknowledges, thinking, “He felt that he ought not to have allowed the marriage, that his daughter’s sentiments had been sufficiently known to him to render him culpable in authorising it” (Austen 534). Sir Thomas should have prevented Maria’s loveless marriage, or at least should have made her think seriously about its consequences, so he is partly culpable for its collapse. Maria’s adultery also directly precipitates her sister Julia’s elopement with foppish Mr. Yates, since “had not her sister’s conduct burst forth as it did, and her increased dread of her father and of home, on that event—imagining its certain consequence to herself would be greater severity and restraint—made her hastily resolve

on avoiding such immediate horrors at all risks, it is probable that Mr. Yates would never have succeeded. She had not eloped with any worse feelings than those of selfish alarm” (Austen 540). One loveless marriage begets another as the resentment and fear that drive the first daughter into marriage also motivate the second daughter’s marriage upon the former’s breakup. Like Maria’s choice to marry due to “a hatred of home, restraint, and tranquillity,” Julia’s “increased dread of her father and of home” and fear of “greater severity and restraint” drive her to elope. Had Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram instilled in their daughters the proper respect of marriage and family duty, both marriages could have been avoided, since “Mr. Yates would never have succeeded” without Julia’s “selfish alarm” at her sister’s adultery.

Only Edmund and Fanny hold the proper esteem for marriage, and the disparity between them and the other Bertrams increases as unfortunate consequences of the loveless marriages compound and drive the Bertrams further from the respectability and values associated with the landed gentry. As the Bertrams focus on marriages based on status and money rather than affection, they shift their attention to Fanny and Sir Thomas attempts to force her into a status marriage with Henry Crawford. Sir Thomas cannot understand Fanny’s refusal of Henry, exclaiming in shock, ““Refuse Mr. Crawford! Upon what plea? For what reason?”” (Austen 364). Fanny has to defend her decision in a pseudo-trial for her right to refuse Henry, as Sir Thomas demands in legalistic language to know “upon what plea” her refusal rests. Sir Thomas simply cannot comprehend how Henry’s superficial qualities do not please Fanny, calling him ““a young man...with every thing to recommend him; not merely situation in life, fortune, and character, but with more than common agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to every body”” (Austen 364). “Situation in life” and “fortune” matter more to Sir Thomas than

“character,” and the principal qualities that interest him are “common agreeableness” and pleasing “address and conversation,” rather than moral uprightness. Fanny’s objection rests upon the latter quality, and while she does feel “almost ashamed of herself, after such a picture as her uncle had drawn, for not liking Mr. Crawford,” her disgust at his morals prevents her from being won over (Austen 365). The thought of a high position and wealth warps Sir Thomas’s judgment, as seen when he forwards Maria’s match with Mr. Rushworth, leading him to only see and promote an attractive picture of Henry.

Although Sir Thomas cannot or will not see Henry’s flaws, Austen indicates that Fanny does and bases her refusal equally on Henry’s failings and her love for Edmund. Fanny firmly believes that “[h]ad her own affections been as free [as Henry’s,] he never could have engaged them” because her moral nature recoils from him (Austen 379). Although Henry’s charm and agreeableness attract many readers and Fanny’s stark morality at times appears cold and unattractive (to the extent that critics like Nina Auerbach have called her a “monster”), his qualities are portrayed as amusing for a friend but deficient for a husband. Sir Thomas’s anger at Fanny’s insistent disobedience further shows the perversion of the landed gentry’s values as he unfairly berates her:

I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse, that *you can and will decide for yourself*, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you—without even asking their advice.
(Austen 367, emphasis mine)

Simply because Fanny does not blindly follow Sir Thomas's demands, he labels his meek and subservient niece "wilful and perverse" while failing to see how "those who have surely some right to guide" her do not actually have the moral grounding to do so. As Claudia Johnson claims, Austen here promotes "her critique of the gentry family by registering its impact on a heroine who, though a model of female virtue and filial gratitude, is betrayed by the same ethos she dutifully embraced" (96). Austen encourages the reader to support Fanny's "independence of spirit" as admirable rather than "offensive and disgusting" because it shows that Fanny has the proper regard for marriage, and it prevents her from making the same mistakes as her cousins. Not only *can* and *will* Fanny decide for herself, she *must* decide for herself in this situation, or she will fall victim to improper advice.

Austen designs Henry's determined courtship of Fanny to be the greatest trial of her moral fortitude and self-knowledge, since only by knowing her own heart and needs can she decide whether or not to accept Henry. Unlike her cousins, "Miss Price ha[s] not been brought up to the trade of *coming out*," so her mind has not been formed to catch a husband, leaving her open to other, more moral influences (Austen 309, emphasis Austen's). Fanny learns "the trade of coming out" only by watching her cousins, remaining removed from the courtship process and able to formulate her own ideas about marriage. By silently watching Maria weigh her matrimonial options, Fanny realizes the importance of respect and love in marriage; her own courtship with Henry promotes further self-examination and convinces her of the supreme importance of morality in her future husband. This introspection characterizes all of Austen's heroines in these three novels, and Austen stresses its importance in combating the social pressures that come with courtship, pressures notably demonstrated by Sir Thomas, who sends Fanny back to

her home in Portsmouth to coerce her into marrying Henry. Self-knowledge brings the heroines, particularly meek Fanny, the strength to combat these social pressures and eventually marry beneficially.

The potential match between Fanny and Henry poses an interesting dilemma to Austen and her readers since Henry seems to make such a valiant effort to change himself for Fanny. Austen encourages her readers to question whether the corrupt landed gentry (and outsiders at that) can be reformed by loving marriages to people with staunch morals; the courtship between Henry and Fanny allows Austen to test whether Fanny could truly have a moral influence. The narrator asserts that the marriage could have happened under the right conditions, since if Henry had “persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward—and a reward very voluntarily bestowed—within a reasonable period from Edmund’s marrying Mary” (Austen 540). Determination and behavioral change deserve some recognition and “reward,” a fact the narrator suggests since Fanny would have married Henry not out of love but as his due reward, and one “very voluntarily bestowed.” While Henry’s reformation would have removed one of Fanny’s two objections (she would no longer be “pressured to exchange her most important values for prestige, security and wealth” (Monaghan 108)), the fact that she would only marry him “within a reasonable period from Edmund’s marrying Mary” brings her closer to Maria’s choice to marry from “the misery of disappointed affection.” Henry cannot be reformed, however, and although he allegedly pursues Maria “without the smallest inconstancy of mind towards her cousin,” his pride triumphs, justifying Austen’s fear of outsiders’ misguided principles (Austen 541).

Having shown what courtship and marriage ought not to be through the examples of Maria and Rushworth, Julia and Yates, and Fanny and Henry, Austen pushes the one

“proper” courtship in the novel (Fanny and Edmund’s) offstage, a shift that marks her unease with it. Austen only briefly mentions Edmund’s growing love for Fanny and his wondering “whether it might not be a possible, an hopeful undertaking to persuade her that her warm and sisterly regard for him would be foundation enough for wedded love” (Austen 544). Edmund believes a companionate marriage with Fanny is possible, and the metanarrative voice interrupts to gloss over the reader’s doubts about the speed of this new match and to persuade the reader to sympathize with Edmund’s hope:

I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people.—I only intreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (Austen 544)

Although Fanny and Edmund truly fall in love and become equally “anxious to marry,” the very intrusion of a justifying narrative voice suggests that something is wrong with the marriage, or the story would not have to pause to justify their marriage. The greatest cause of unease that the metanarrative voice attempts to remove is the undertone of incest in Fanny and Edmund’s marriage. Fanny has a “warm and sisterly regard” for Edmund because they have been raised as brother and sister, and all parties concerned believed that such a relationship would deter romantic affection, since, as Mrs. Norris says, “[D]o not you know that of all things upon earth *that* is the least likely to happen; brought up, as they would be, always together like brothers and sisters? It is morally impossible” (Austen 7, emphasis Austen’s). The classification of the marriage as “morally

impossible” has a damning ring in light of their later marriage, although critic Glenda Hudson suggests that it is an instance in which children’s defiance of ill-judging parental authority shows their superiority of judgment, reversing the typical implications of incest.

The deliberate abstention from dates in their courtship also savors of unease at the incestuous implications and the quick change from Edmund’s preference for another. The narrator lightly satirizes the intensity of emotion frequently lauded in courtship novels (as she also does in *Persuasion*), joking that “the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people” in order to assuage at least some of the uneasiness about their marriage. However, the narrator must “intreat” the reader to believe in the suitability of their marriage and its “natural” conclusion, which only further deepens suspicion about it. The speed and unprecedentedness of Fanny and Edmund’s marriage could even be, as Auerbach claims, “deliberately designed to banish love from our thoughts,” though Austen’s unease does not seem to go that far (216). Austen further expresses her uneasiness at the marriage by having it take place only after those members of the family who transgress morally and defy familial duty are cast off. Maria’s divorce “ended in Mrs. Norris’s resolving to quit Mansfield, and devote herself to her unfortunate Maria, and in an establishment being formed for them in another country—remote and private, where...it may be reasonably supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment” (Austen 538). Maria and Mrs. Norris are essentially exiled, sent to a “remote and private” place with “little society,” and Julia and Mr. Yates are not welcomed immediately back to the family fold; Tom alone shows improvement as he becomes “what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself,” displaying the positive values of the

landed gentry (Austen 534). The permanence of this alteration remains to be seen, however, as Austen does not mention Tom or his improvement after this instance.

Much like the capricious Mrs. Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility* who finds herself with varying numbers of sons as she disowns and acknowledges them at whim, the Bertrams also find themselves with varying numbers of “true” children. After the first shock of Maria’s adultery, Edmund greets Fanny with “only these words, just articulate, ‘My Fanny—my only sister—my only comfort now’” (Austen 514-15), and by the end of the novel Sir Thomas thinks to himself, “Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted” (Austen 546). Fanny’s position as the rightful, desired daughter can only be solidified after “Sir Thomas’s natural children disgrace themselves in turn,” not because she is the “last resource,” as Auerbach claims, but because only then is her merit visible (Auerbach 452). Austen demonstrates that Fanny’s merit has already begun to influence Sir Thomas and encourages his positive attitude toward her marriage to Edmund, as “[s]ick of ambitious and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper, and chiefly anxious to bind by the strongest securities all that remained to him of domestic felicity, he had pondered with genuine satisfaction on the more than possibility of the two young friends finding their mutual consolation in each other” (Austen 545-46). Sir Thomas has learned to desire and “prize” Fanny, turning to her to be the “guiding spirit of the humbled Bertram family” in the wake of their disastrous “ambitious and mercenary connections” (Auerbach 213).

Yet the forcefulness of the language Sir Thomas uses to describe his desire for Fanny’s integration, to “bind” her “by the strongest securities,” raises the question of just how much choice Fanny had in marrying or falling in love with Edmund. By “[l]oving, guiding, protecting her, as he had been doing ever since her being ten years old, her mind

in so great a degree formed by his care,” Edmund essentially raised Fanny to be his wife, and their marriage shows an uneasy blurring of the lines between not only brother and sister and husband and wife, but also between teacher and student and husband and wife (Austen 544).¹⁰ Fanny may bring much needed “sterling good of principle and temper” back to the Bertrams, but it is unclear just how much good that will do, since she and Edmund may never inherit Mansfield. Regardless, Fanny and Edmund will still be a revitalizing force in the family and community with their staunch morals and sense of duty. As Mary Crawford jokingly says to Edmund, ““At this rate, you will soon reform every body at Mansfield and Thornton Lacey,”” and her prophecy seems accurate (Austen 530).

Although it will take effort to “reform everybody at Mansfield and Thornton Lacey,” the landed gentry in *Emma* can be reformed much more easily, as it only needs to be re-solidified in its values; its members know how they ought to act, and Austen suggests they simply must learn to desire to fulfill their social responsibilities. Austen focuses her criticism much more in *Emma* than she does in *Mansfield Park*, aiming it primarily at her heroine through her use of free indirect discourse from the heroine’s viewpoint. *Emma* employs a much more heroine-centric narrative by filtering the novel’s events through Emma’s eyes, intimately acquainting the reader with Emma’s flaws and emphasizing her errors in judgment, particularly regarding the social importance of courtship, while demonstrating the need for and possibility of revitalization.

Like Fanny’s, Emma’s maturation throughout the novel leads her to an endogamous marriage which will be the means of revitalizing both the family and the

¹⁰ Not only is their love incestuous, it also has narcissistic implications (particularly for Edmund) according to Hudson, since “they love each other because they resemble each other” (37). While notable because it impacts Edmund’s eventual attraction to Fanny, the desire to find a similar mate is common and rational.

landed gentry as a whole. Land, money, and morals comprise the three foundations of the landed gentry which the final marriages must unite; Fanny brings morals back into the largely morally bankrupt Bertram family, while Emma augments the wealth and land of George Knightley. Austen does not specify the origins of Emma's wealth and only remarks that the Woodhouses' "fortune, from other sources [than their estate], was such as to make them scarcely secondary to Donwell Abbey itself" (147). Although Austen does not explain what these "other sources" are, the most likely alternative is trade, which would make the Woodhouses of more middle-class origins. The Woodhouses' estate, Hartfield, is "inconsiderable, being but a sort of notch in the Donwell Abbey estate" belonging to Mr. Knightley, but his marriage to Emma will unite the two estates (Austen 147). This reunion symbolizes the revitalization of the entire landed gentry: The landed gentry relies on the land for its position, and if the land can be reunited and rejuvenated, then the landed gentry can be as well.

Marriage provides the means for uniting land and money (a union key for providing the necessary charity) and for revitalizing the gentry, so it and its precursor, courtship, must be taken seriously by those in a position to marry, like the heroines. Fanny and Anne both understand the importance of courtship, but Emma must learn to view it seriously by discovering her errors in manipulating others' romances and by beginning to be an object of matrimonial interest herself. Emma initially treats courtship like a game and plays matchmaker because "[i]t is the greatest amusement in the world!" (Austen 10). Emma acts as matchmaker for amusement because she does not see the careful consideration that goes into marriage and personally has "very little intention of ever marrying at all" (Austen 90). No one suitable has yet presented himself to Emma, and she insists, "I do *not* wish to see any such person. I would rather not be

tempted. I cannot really change for the better. If I were to marry, I must expect to repent it” (Austen 90, emphasis Austen’s). Emma declines to “be tempted” because she has ““none of the usual inducements of women to marry,”” but qualifies, ““Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing!”” (Austen 90). The “usual inducements of women to marry” revolve around money, status, and employment (all inferior to love in Austen’s eyes), temptations which would lead Emma to later repentance.

Austen begins Emma’s education in the importance of courtship and its social function with the introduction of an eligible young outsider, Frank Churchill, with whom Emma can fancy herself in love. Partly because her friends expect her to be, Emma begins to persuade herself “that she *must* be a little in love with him, in spite of every previous determination against it” (Austen 282-83, emphasis Austen’s). Emma cites “[t]his sensation of listlessness, weariness, stupidity, this disinclination to sit down and employ myself, this feeling of every thing’s being dull and insipid about the house” as proof of her love, a satirical jab from Austen at novelists’ common portrayals of symptoms of love (Austen 283). Although convinced that she is at least “a little in love” with Frank, Emma does not take their courtship seriously and “the conclusion of every imaginary declaration on his side was that she *refused* him. Their affection was always to subside into friendship” (Austen 284, emphasis Austen’s). Emma may be attracted to Frank, but he cannot be more than her friend.

A preference for a husband who possesses the moral qualities that Emma has learned to value, and Frank’s lack of those qualities, prevents Emma from seriously considering him as a suitor. As in *Mansfield Park*, a reluctance to accept outsiders due to their different moral standards influences Emma and Frank’s courtship, and Emma faults Frank for lacking proper pride in his landed position, thinking to herself that “his

indifference to a confusion of rank, bordered too much on inelegance of mind” (Austen 213-14). Austen suggests that Emma’s disdain of “a confusion of rank” is overly strict but does disapprove of Frank’s “inelegance of mind” and negligence of rank which leads him to act improperly to those he loves, like his fiancée Jane Fairfax, and those deserving of his charity and pity, like Miss Bates. His inappropriate behavior influences Emma to act likewise, drawing her further away from the ideals which she struggles to uphold, though, as Butler says, “[i]t is only a temporary perversity that leads her astray” (266). Emma’s affection for Frank clouds her judgment on numerous occasions and encourages disrespectful behavior, like when she takes an improper conjecture about Jane too far. Emma defends herself by claiming she acted in jest, but Mr. Knightley reprimands her wrongful behavior, observing, “The joke...seemed confined to you and Mr. Churchill” (Austen 379).

Mr. Knightley’s censure goes unheeded, however, and Emma again slips into jesting at others’ expense at Box Hill, a slip in morals Austen succinctly emphasizes with the brief, free-standing sentence, “Emma could not resist” (Austen 403). Emma knows her disrespectful speech to Miss Bates is wrong but gives in to Frank’s bad influence anyway. For this Emma deserves Mr. Knightley’s angry scolding: “You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honour, to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her—and before her niece, too...” (Austen 408). Frank’s attention inspires only thoughtlessness and disrespect, and Emma’s pride in their courtship motivates her to act improperly, indicating that the courtship itself is improper. The incident leads Emma to understand the impropriety of continuing her courtship with Frank as she dwells on her behavior in distress and thinks, “[n]ever had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved at any

circumstance in her life....How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates!” (Austen 409). To be “so brutal, so cruel” to a woman like Miss Bates is out of character for Emma, Austen suggests, and has much to do with Frank’s negative influence. Frank lacks the sensitivity required of the landed gentry so Austen rejects him as a potential husband for Emma, instead pairing him with the more morally strong and less easily swayed Jane Fairfax, who will hopefully have a reforming effect upon him.

Her flirtation with Frank Churchill is not Emma’s only brush with courtship, as her earlier misleading behavior to Mr. Elton accidentally makes her the object of his marital aspirations. Emma realizes that her behavior in attempting to bring together Harriet Smith and Mr. Elton was indeed misleading, but thinks “nothing of his attachment, and [is] insulted by his hopes. He want[s] to marry well” and fancies himself in love with her (Austen 146). Although Emma easily dismisses Mr. Elton’s professed attachment, Austen suggests that the experience has begun to teach her that courtship is more than just an amusement. Employing free indirect discourse to reveal Emma’s growth, Austen shows Emma considering her actions and thinking, “It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, *making light of what ought to be serious*, a trick of what ought to be simple” (Austen 148, emphasis mine). Matchmaking crosses a line, Emma realizes, “adventuring too far, assuming too much,” turning love into a “trick.” Yet while Emma finally begins to understand that she is “making light of what ought to be serious” in her attitude toward courtship, this comprehension does not fully sink in, as she still maintains that she was correct in persuading Harriet to refuse an eligible match. Emma berates herself, ““Oh! that I had been satisfied with persuading her not to accept young Martin. There I was quite right. That was well done of me; but there I should have

stopped, and left the rest to time and chance” (Austen 148). Emma has begun to mature and deepen her social consciousness but has further to go, as she still thinks she “was quite right” in convincing a young woman of limited means to refuse an eligible match which would have raised her to a respectable position, an act one critic calls “a particularly perverse manipulation of rank” (Monaghan 125). Not only does Emma’s “romantic mythmaking about Harriet...[lead] her to disregard the social disruption she causes by her interference and speculation,” she fails to fully comprehend why her wrong actions were wrong or how breaking off a promising match can be as disruptive as forcing one (Mandal 157).

Even when Emma begins to realize the error of her ways, she still adopts a lighthearted tone toward courtship which encourages the reader to view courtship in a similarly lighthearted manner. Emma’s self-congratulation of “There I was quite right. That was well done of me” hardly expresses a serious attitude toward her behavior, since those sentiments could easily apply to a well-played game of chess. Austen’s emphasis on Emma’s viewpoint, and her characterization of her as intelligent from the opening sentence of the novel (“Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich...”), encourages the reader to adopt Emma’s outlook and trust her judgment (Austen 3). The reader increasingly realizes how flawed this judgment is, however, and has to look beyond Emma’s self-confidence and explore the underlying implications of her actions. Austen develops a sense of unease in her reader in the aftermath of Mr. Elton’s unexpected proposal, but the full import of courtship and its key social role do not fully burst upon the reader and Emma until Emma finds herself, as Mr. Knightley suggested she should be, “in love and in some doubt of a return” (Austen 41).

Having begun to open her eyes, as a heroine ought, to the truth—in this instance, the social function of courtship and marriage—after Mr. Elton’s undesired proposal and her foolish flirtation with Frank Churchill, Emma completes her journey when she discovers her love for Mr. Knightley. This discovery of love accompanies a discovery of the consequences of courtship in terms of maintaining and subverting the social structure, particularly within the class of the landed gentry. The moment of Emma’s realization of her love for Mr. Knightley, illustrated at the beginning of this paper, shows Austen’s insistence on and Emma’s cognizance of the interrelation of these truths, as she narrates,

It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!

Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! (Austen 444)

Emma’s eyes are opened “with the speed of an arrow” to both her error in interfering in the courtships of others and to her desire to marry the man for whom she believes she is destined. Despite her denial of social mobility throughout the novel, Emma has actually been encouraging a young woman to dream of marriage far above her station, into Emma’s very class. Harriet claims that Emma inspired her hope to marry Mr. Knightley, remarking, ““But you know they were your own words, that *more* wonderful things had happened, matches of *greater* disparity had taken place than between Mr. Frank Churchill and me...” (Austen 443, emphasis Austen’s). Emma had allowed herself to be carried

away by romantic thoughts about Harriet's situation and by misplaced ideals, which she realizes only when Harriet looks above Frank to Mr. Knightley for a husband.

Mr. Knightley ranks above Frank, as Harriet's comment suggests, in Austen's opinion because he adheres to the expected charitable and courteous behavior of a landed gentleman and takes pleasure in performing his duties. (As mentioned earlier, this provides a social answer to the loaded question that Emma asks, "Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley, than with Frank Churchill?" (Austen 444).) By not understanding in just what she was encouraging Harriet, Emma has truly been "inconsiderate...indelicate...irrational," accidentally behaving contrary to her beliefs. Emma finally realizes she understands Mr. Knightley's earlier, slightly unfair, assessment of Harriet's situation and likewise wonders, "'What are Harriet Smith's claims, either of birth, nature or education, to any connection higher than Robert Martin?'" (Austen 64). Emma completes her journey by realizing that marriage ought to place people in their proper social positions, a belief that Austen emphasizes with all of the final endogamous marriages (Emma to Mr. Knightley, Harriet Smith to Robert Martin, Jane Fairfax to Frank Churchill). Jane's and Mrs. Weston's marriages may seem to contradict Austen's model, but Jane has been raised and educated in the wealthy Campbell family and has a gentlewoman's breeding and morals, while Mrs. Weston lived with the Woodhouses long enough to raise her status from governess to companion and friend, making both of their upwardly mobile marriages acceptable.

The shock of Harriet potentially marrying Mr. Knightley (she has "some hope of a return" which even Emma must acknowledge) awakens Emma to her thoughtless behavior and the too-convenient love that points her toward the best marriage for the landed gentry. As in *Mansfield Park*, Austen deliberately utilizes this convenient

revelation to question the happiness of this marriage and to show her discomfort with such endogamous marriages. In many ways, as one critic claims, “[w]hat Emma learns in this novel is not to think like Mr Knightley, but that she has always, in fact, thought like him” (Wiltshire 36). Like Fanny, Emma has been effectively raised to be her husband’s wife, receiving her primary moral instruction from him. Austen suggests that Mr. Knightley, although the model of a gentleman, at times behaves almost too harshly to Emma in trying to educate and reform her, remarking to the reader, “Mr. Knightley, in fact, was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them,” in ways which might not always be agreeable to her (9). Mr. Knightley also realizes that his attempts to change Emma have been heavy-handed, commenting to her, “I have blamed you, and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it” (Austen 469). Austen approves of Mr. Knightley’s marriage to Emma, but the truth of this statement suggests to the reader that Emma has been rather browbeaten and manipulated, implied by her being “blamed” and “lectured,” into adopting his views and from there falling in love with him. Luckily, it is in Emma’s best interest to adopt Mr. Knightley’s staunch ideals because they bolster her morals where they are slipping.

The incestuous undertones in *Emma* do not make themselves as apparent to the reader as they do in *Mansfield Park*, in part because Emma and Mr. Knightley only became related after the marriage of Emma’s sister Isabella and Mr. Knightley’s brother John. Unlike Fanny and Edmund, Emma and George Knightley have not been raised as brother and sister, but they have still behaved as such to each other since becoming in-laws. In order to justify their attraction, Emma and Mr. Knightley must distance themselves from their association as siblings; Emma expresses this conscious separation

when she asks Mr. Knightley to dance, saying, “[Y]ou know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper” (Austen 358). To this Mr. Knightley retorts, “Brother and sister! no, indeed,” his flustered exclamations attempting to deny that they are really “brother and sister” at all (Austen 358). As much as they try to ignore and deny it, Emma and Mr. Knightley *are* brother and sister, and this affinal siblingship (along with their teacher-student relationship) has encouraged the development of their romantic love, just like Fanny and Edmund in *Mansfield Park*. Austen attempts to remove the negative stigma of incestuous relationships by showing the positive nature of this evolution of affection, showing that sibling and romantic love “closely resemble each other in that they are relationships forged through trust, deep affection, and the common beliefs of members of the same family” (Hudson 52).¹¹ The merging of the Woodhouse and Knightley families solidifies their “common beliefs” and values by making them “the same family,” expressing both hope for the landed gentry’s ultimate revitalization and uneasiness at the degree of endogamy.

The convenience of Emma and Mr. Knightley’s evolving relationship further emphasizes the forced nature of Emma’s attachment and the inherent dangers of training young women to marry within the landed gentry. Fortunately for Emma, her husband is of high moral caliber and his good principles will reaffirm hers, but Maria and Julia Bertram receive similar instruction in the “trade of coming out” and it predisposes them

¹¹ The close, almost romantic, relationship of Fanny and William Price in *Mansfield Park* further idealizes sibling attachment and Austen upholds their relationship as a model for romantic love. It is by witnessing Fanny and William’s mutual love that Henry Crawford first forms serious designs on Fanny, as their affection forms “a picture which Henry Crawford had moral taste enough to value” (Austen 274). The narrator intrudes on the siblings’ reunion to remark, “even the conjugal tie is beneath the fraternal. Children of the same family, the same blood, with the same first associations and habits, have some means of enjoyment in their power, which no subsequent connections can supply” (Austen 273). Intertwining the conjugal and fraternal ties produces the most superior means of enjoyment, since it bestows the best characteristics of the fraternal relationship onto the conjugal.

to marry disadvantageously. The major difference between the instruction Fanny and Emma receive to make them resemble their future spouses is that Fanny knows that she loves Edmund; Fanny knows Edmund's moral instruction has taught her to think like him and love him, and she sees his failings and where her judgment is sounder than his. Fanny's conscious attachment to Edmund and her faith in her own powers of reasoning and judgment make her instruction less dangerous than Emma's because Emma remains unconscious that she is being manipulated. This unconscious conformity to Mr. Knightley's (at times severe) lessons leaves her open to not fully grasping their implications and misapplying the principles she does learn. Were Mr. Knightley to fail in his judgment, Emma would be unlikely to see the mistake or correct it—all correction and perception of error remains on Mr. Knightley's side. Austen clearly realizes the potential negative consequences of the student-teacher relationship becoming a husband-wife relationship, as she ultimately rejects this endogamous model for an exogamous one in her next novel, *Persuasion*.

Hope for the Future: The Rise of the Naval Class in *Persuasion*

As she looks deeper into the forces driving the endogamous marriages that she promotes in her previous two novels, Jane Austen becomes increasingly unsure about the desirability of these marriages and their effectiveness in promoting the necessary changes in the landed gentry. Precisely why Austen shifts her attitude toward the landed gentry and classifies the current members of the landed gentry as unredeemable is unclear, as a multitude of factors likely sparks the shift, but it is clear that the end of the Napoleonic Wars influenced her opinions. *Persuasion* stands alone of Austen's novels in establishing a concrete date for the beginning of the action, "the summer of 1814," a significant

deviation that demands its due consideration (Austen 9). The summer of 1814 marks the (temporary) cessation of the Napoleonic Wars, a time of burgeoning nationalism and buoyant celebration at Napoleon's apparent defeat; this patriotic fervor appears to have influenced Austen to place the highest value in the navy, a key player in Napoleon's ultimate downfall. Unlike characters in other professions, including even the clergy, Austen paints her naval characters in what Brian Southam calls "a warm and romantic light" (4). This "warm and romantic" portrayal of the navy is not unique to *Persuasion*, as naval officers also appear in an overall favorable light in *Mansfield Park*. Although Mary Crawford makes a deprecating pun about seeing enough "'Rears, and Vices'" among the naval officers, her censure is mitigated by Austen's very positive portrayal of William Price (Austen 71, emphasis Austen's). William's merits and the dashing nature of his profession dazzle the Bertrams and Crawfords, and Henry Crawford enviously thinks to himself of the "glory of heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance" of the navy (Austen 275). The attractiveness of the naval officers in *Mansfield Park* overrides their occasional coarseness, and Austen further develops their positive qualities in *Persuasion*.

Jane Austen began writing *Persuasion* in the summer of 1815, after Napoleon's final defeat, yet sets it in the previous year when the officers might still be in expectation of combat and would not be in a position to settle permanently, as she shows in Anne's "tax of quick alarm" (Austen 275). By setting the novel in the lull between Napoleon's initial defeat and return, Austen is able to convey an atmosphere of impending change (particularly evident in Anne and Wentworth's marriage) without delving into the details of the change. This deliberate vagueness contributes to Austen's aim of showing the desirability and hopefulness of change in the landed gentry and prevents it from being

undermined by disagreements over the method of change. In 1815 popular opinion of the navy remained as high as it had been in 1814 and presumably influenced her (along with her greater personal familiarity and preference for the navy) to place the good “English” qualities into naval characters. Historian Linda Colley notes the pride with which “men of rank mingled with men of action, and blue-blooded peers acquired luster from association with red-blooded heroism” (178). The mingling of “men of rank” and “men of action,” and the benefit that “blue-blooded peers” receive from the interaction, fully supports Austen’s conviction that naval officers will rise to fill the ranks of the landed gentry. The affection Austen proudly displays for the navy in *Persuasion* marks it, rather than *Emma*, as her most nationalistic novel, and her affection and patriotism lead her to see naval officers as the means for a true revitalization.

The wars and other global changes make Austen increasingly unsure that the old order can keep up with the changing world, a failure she begins to show in *Emma* with the poverty that leads to the gypsy attack on Harriet and the “crime wave” in Highbury, when “Mrs. Weston’s poultry-house was robbed one night of all her turkeys—evidently by the ingenuity of man. Other poultry-yards in the neighbourhood also suffered” (Austen 528). Austen masks the seriousness of the situation with a mocking tone, as by jesting that the turkeys were stolen “evidently by the ingenuity of man,” when “man” is clearly the cause. Austen also voices concern about the situation primarily through always-fearful Mr. Woodhouse, laughing that “[p]ilfering was *housebreaking* to Mr. Woodhouse’s fears” (Austen 528, emphasis Austen’s). The mockery has a ring of truth to it, however. Stealing is on the rise, since not only are Mrs. Weston’s birds taken, other houses suffer from thefts. The world is becoming more dangerous as morals degrade, and it is a small step from petty theft to wholesale robbery if left unchecked by the landed

gentry. The ineffectiveness of the landed gentry underlying the hopeful final marriage in *Emma* sets the scene for the opening of *Persuasion* where ineffectiveness has reached ineptitude and the landed gentry cannot save itself or act as it ought.

On the surface, the novel appears to be Austen's most pessimistic (as many critics have argued), but in many ways *Persuasion* is her most radical and optimistic novel. Although the upper reaches of the landed gentry have become entirely corrupted, demonstrated by Sir Walter Elliot's entirely unredeemed character, Austen continues to place her trust in the idea of the gentry and believes that the next generation will return the landed gentry to what it once was. Marilyn Butler remarks that "the *form* of each novel makes it clear that Jane Austen looks to a new generation of leaders who are on the point of redeeming the mistakes of the old," as the courtship novel form ensures that the morally dominant character retains control of the family via a marriage which places this character (Mr. Knightley, Fanny, Anne) in a position of epistemological power and thus of revitalization (285, emphasis Butler's). Unfortunately, Austen can no longer find this new leadership to redeem "the mistakes of the old" within the landed gentry. The preference for naval officers to be the next landowners marks *Persuasion* as Austen's most radical novel, since she envisions the navy filling the landed gentry's shoes on the basis of merit.¹²

Even though Austen does not know precisely when the naval officers will acquire estates to raise them to the level of the landed gentry, she expresses an optimistic confidence that they will and that their inherent good qualities will make them worthy

¹² Butler remains convinced of Austen's conservatism even in this novel and contradicts the view of *Persuasion* as radical, commenting, "The comparison Jane Austen makes between an idle, useless 'gentleman' proud of his rank, and the eminently useful sailors, has been seen as a notable example of Jane Austen's willingness to be radical....On the contrary, the tone of Austen's criticism...together with its fictional source [in Anne's mind]...belong to a familiar kind of conservative social comment" (284). Butler remains determined to deny Austen even a "willingness to be radical."

leaders. The meritocratic rise of the navy can only take place after the existing landed gentry is removed, however, which Austen suggests will be brought about by them dying unwed and without leaving heirs in their mould. Aging Elizabeth Elliot feels “her approach to the years of danger, and would have rejoiced to be certain of being properly solicited by baronet-blood within the next twelvemonth or two” at the beginning of *Persuasion*, and her situation does not change by the end (Austen 7). Elizabeth has no certainty of ever marrying since she has such strict and vain expectations for a husband, leaving her to spinsterhood; at the close of *Persuasion*, the narrator remarks, “a change is not very probable [for Elizabeth’s marital status]...and no one of proper condition has...presented himself to raise even the unfounded hopes which sunk” with Mr. Elliot’s removal from the family (Austen 272). Neither Elizabeth nor Mr. Elliot, the two Elliots in the best position to return the family to its former prestige, has much hope of marrying a partner with the moral qualities and sense of duty to turn the family around.

If Mr. Elliot does remarry, Austen suggests that the marriage will be as mercenary as his first and will only deepen the moral weaknesses already prominent in the Elliot family. As a young man, Mr. Elliot chose to pursue a loveless marriage instead of courting Elizabeth and “purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth” (Austen 8). Austen expresses her disapproval of him marrying for money through Mrs. Smith as she recounts to Anne her impression of Mr. Elliot’s first marriage, narrating, “Mrs. Smith hesitated a little here. ‘Oh! those things [marriages for money] are too common. When one lives in the world, a man or woman’s marrying for money is too common to strike one *as it ought*’” (Austen 218, emphasis mine). People *ought* to disapprove of mercenary marriages, but their commonness has removed their stigma, a development of which Austen and Anne both disapprove. Having secured money and

“independence,” Mr. Elliot seeks a second marriage with Anne to grant him a stable position in the Elliot family to ensure his inheritance. Anne’s renewed engagement to Captain Wentworth thwarts his selfish intentions, however, and he loses “his best plan of domestic happiness, his best hope of keeping Sir Walter single by the watchfulness which a son-in-law’s rights would have given” (Austen 272). “Keeping Sir Walter single” appears to have its greatest challenge from social climbers like shrewd Mrs. Clay, whom the narrator describes through Lady Russell’s eyes as “a clever young woman, who understood the art of pleasing; the art of pleasing, at least, at Kellynch-hall,” where she has ingratiated herself (Austen 17). Austen encourages the reader to view Mrs. Clay negatively by emphasizing Lady Russell’s and Anne’s negative views of her (though class prejudice could have a role in Lady Russell’s opinion), and Austen’s tone in describing Mrs. Clay’s move to London with Mr. Elliot reinforces her negative image from a less biased standpoint—Mrs. Clay has a “cunning” which helps her “wheedle and caress” people into doing what she wants (Austen 273).

Mr. Elliot’s ambitions regarding Sir Walter are Austen’s only indication that he has some semblance of the family’s best interests at heart—and there he is primarily motivated by selfish concern for his own position. Mr. Elliot at least understands what he loses in Anne’s character by her marrying another, but all the merit would have been on her side and would not have altered his deeply settled egotism. Austen turns the tables on Mr. Elliot after he is “discomfited and disappointed” in his marital hopes and makes him the victim of selfish scheming (Austen 272). The narrator remarks in amusement, “it is now a doubtful point whether his cunning, or hers [Mrs. Clay’s], may finally carry the day; whether, after preventing her from being the wife of Sir Walter, he may not be wheedled and caressed at last into making her the wife of Sir William” (Austen 273).

Whether Mr. Elliot is “wheedled and caressed” into another loveless, mercenary (on Mrs. Clay’s part) marriage or escapes and remains single, he will remain firm in his poor morals and insensibility to duty, unable to be the proper landowner that Kellynch needs.

The only Elliot capable of effecting the necessary revitalization in the landed gentry within the existing system is Anne, but she quickly rejects the socially desirable endogamous marriage to Mr. Elliot that she envisions. Anne entertains the possibility of marrying Mr. Elliot because it would afford her security of position and the opportunity to remain in her beloved home, but she dismisses the marriage as soon as she visualizes Mr. Elliot as her lover and husband. While she considers the benefits of the marriage, the narrator offers the reader a poignant glimpse into Anne’s consciousness as “[f]or a few moments her imagination and her heart were bewitched. The idea of becoming what her mother had been; of having the precious name of ‘Lady Elliot’ first revived in herself; of being restored to Kellynch, calling it her home again, her home for ever, was a charm which she could not immediately resist” (Austen 173-74). Anne’s consideration of this prospect creates a striking visual of the sort of endogamous revitalization that Austen promotes in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, but this vision is nothing more than “a charm,” something that briefly “bewitches” Anne. Tellingly, Anne uses words like “revived” and “restored” when thinking about what her marriage to Mr. Elliot would produce, hoping to return her family to the respected position from which it has fallen and to be the initiator of this change by “having the precious name of ‘Lady Elliot’ first revived in herself.”

The dream can do no more than temporarily charm Anne, since she soon recollects that it can only be brought to fruition through marriage to Mr. Elliot, whom she does not love and is not certain she even trusts. Austen recalls Anne from her bewitchment with the “image of Mr. Elliot speaking for himself....The charm of

Kellynch and of ‘Lady Elliot’ all faded away. She could never accept him” (Austen 174). Like Emma, Anne will only marry for love, and she cannot love Mr. Elliot because she cannot trust his character; it is too guarded, too polished, devoid of “any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight” (Austen 175). Anne can no longer find the qualities she desires, “the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character” within her own class because its members have become too self-interested, so she must look outside it (Austen 175). The charm of the endogamous marriage has “faded away” for Jane Austen as well as for Anne because the landed gentry no longer possesses more than a superficial pretension (if even that) to the qualities that it ought to have. No other match is put forward in the current landed gentry for Anne, aside from the earlier offer from Charles Musgrove, and no other partner could be as desirable as Mr. Elliot for tightening and consolidating the family circle.

Once she rejects endogamous marriage, Anne looks to the navy for her ideal husband as she (though in a quieter manner) shares Louisa Musgrove’s “admiration and delight [in] the character of the navy—their friendliness, their brotherliness, their openness, their uprightness; protesting that she was convinced of sailors having more worth and warmth than any other set of men in England” (Austen 106-7). Although Louisa exaggerates her convictions about the worth of the navy, Austen invites the reader, as Southam comments, to both smile at her naval fervor and share it, particularly since Anne also notes these same positive attributes (Southam 5). Anne observes “such a bewitching charm in a degree of hospitality so uncommon, so unlike the usual style of give-and-take invitations, and dinners of formality and display” to further disgust her with her family’s obsession with empty prestige and their behavior “of formality and display” (Austen 105). Here the “bewitching charm” of naval life reveals its desirability

and contrasts it with the disappointing reality of what is and what could have been.

Unlike the charm of marriage to Mr. Elliot, this ideal future promises a man with “worth and warmth” whom Anne can only obtain by marrying exogamously.¹³

Anne’s previous experiences with love and courtship have taught her the importance of love and relying on one’s own feelings to make decisions about marriage so that the prejudices of others do not unfairly interfere. Once persuaded to sacrifice her happiness to others’ biases, Anne refuses to do so again and will act only in conjunction with her heart. Anne still believes that she was right to follow the advice of a trusted and responsible advisor (although Austen at times appears to question her decision), but time has given her the confidence in her own opinions and moral strength to prevent her from bowing to social pressure again. Attention to duty must be paid, especially for Anne, who tells Wentworth, “I should have suffered in my conscience” otherwise, but the consequences of obeying that duty must be duly considered (Austen 268). Austen demonstrates through Anne’s maturation, much as she does through Fanny Price’s nearly identical growth in *Mansfield Park*, that the individual’s own happiness must be prioritized over the welfare of the family (particularly if the sacrifice of happiness will not reverse the family’s fortunes). Marrying Mr. Elliot would not have made Anne happy, despite the charm of being able to call Kellynch “her home for ever” and filling her beloved mother’s shoes, so she is right to reject him as a potential suitor and turn her hopes to Wentworth, who will make her happy. Duty must be acknowledged, but blindly following duty produces unhappiness.

¹³ Kathryn Sutherland also notes in “Jane Austen and the serious modern novel” that Anne and Wentworth’s courtship “is played out in opposition to established structures and in defiance of the endogamous marriage settlements which secure the gentry societies of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*” (253).

As in *Mansfield Park*, Austen utilizes the experience of courtship to demonstrate the irreversibility of the degradation of the gentry in *Persuasion*, though in the latter novel she uses the inability to produce courtship and marriage (rather than producing ill-chosen marriages) to show the degeneration. Every possible redemptive courtship for the landed gentry is eliminated before it can come to fruition—temptation, as Anne demonstrates, is easily overcome by those possessing the necessary values. Instead, the most successful courtships belong to the navy: First Louisa Musgrove, then Anne Elliot, become happily engaged to Captain Benwick and Captain Wentworth respectively and leave their positions in the landed gentry. Since these two women come from the landed gentry and understand its demands and values, they will be able to assist the navy in eventually supplanting the existing gentry by ensuring that their husbands behave like proper landowners.

Despite her radical meritocracy in *Persuasion*, Jane Austen still believes in the social structure itself and in the idea of the landed gentry. She restricts her pessimism about the class to only those inept individuals currently comprising it, not viewing the structural position of the class itself pessimistically. In her continued faith in the social structure, Austen displays her conservativeness even while advocating an apparently radical change, reinforcing it in those she elects to fill the place of the fallen gentry. Austen does not choose the lower members of the navy for producing reform but its high-ranking officers, who occupy what Southam calls “the world of the gentry, the naval gentry, the officers and the aspiring Midshipmen” (7). Instead of arguing for a complete meritocracy, where even the lowest sailors can immediately assume positions in the gentry, Austen proposes a lateral shift whereby the naval gentry move into landed gentry positions. Having already proven that they have the necessary values, morals, and sense

of duty to be effective leaders, the higher-ranking naval officers are excellent choices for becoming members of the landed gentry. The officers' certain capacity to fulfill the necessary duties allows Austen to infuse *Persuasion* with "a buoyant assertion of the absolute superiority of the forces that are assuming control of English society" (Monaghan 146). These forces, the naval gentry, do have an "absolute superiority" over the current landed gentry and the proposed lateral shift marks Austen's vision of the inevitable movement forward of society.

The happiness of Anne and Wentworth's engagement and marriage at the end of the novel remains unsullied by any undertones of incest, so the reader can feel a much greater level of comfort with their marriage than with the endogamous marriages of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. Although her exogamous marriage means that "Anne ha[s] no Uppercross-hall before her [unlike her younger sister Mary], no landed estate, no headship of a family," Austen insists that Anne does not regret the loss and neither should the reader (Austen 272). Anne "glorie[s] in being a sailor's wife," and her home life is happier for marrying outside the family into a profession only "more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance" (Austen 275). These "domestic virtues" provide the assurance that while nothing has yet been accomplished to bring the navy into the landed gentry, except on a temporary basis by renting, its inherent virtues are sure to produce a change in the future. The naval officers are wealthy enough to purchase estates, and thus become the landed gentry, whenever those estates come up for purchase. No other marriage in Austen's novels leaves a wife "glorying" in her position, and the enthusiasm of the statement provides a great recommendation for outsiders over insiders; the preference for insiders in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* led only to a quiet, somewhat guilty happiness (Fanny is described as "happy in spite of every thing" (Austen,

Mansfield Park 531)), whereas this newfound preference for outsiders leads to overflowing joyful feelings. As the naval officers supplant the previous landed gentry, they will become the new insiders and previous endogamous preferences will be restored, as the insiders will now possess the proper morals and values.

Through the Heroine's Eyes

A courtship novel revolves around its heroine, and it is through her eyes that the reader experiences the action of the story; consequently, the author's manipulation of her viewpoint has key implications for how the reader views other characters and the outcomes of the courtships. The heroine's position within her society largely influences her point of view, since whether she is marked by the author and others within the novel as either an outsider or an insider affects the degree to which the reader can trust her judgments and opinions. In different ways, each heroine in *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* is to some extent both an outsider and an insider, a disparity Austen develops in expounding her social view. Austen's decision to use the form of the courtship novel and her development of free indirect discourse allows her to foreground the heroines' reasons for choosing their particular spouses and to present them as universally desirable for the landed gentry. The heroines mature through soul-searching sparked by the juxtaposition of undesirable and desirable courtships, and this maturation (which forms an integral part of the courtship novel) leads them to become fully insiders or outsiders, in accordance with the group that has the greatest potential to enact revitalization.

The dilemma of Fanny Price's proper social position in *Mansfield Park* boils down to a conflict between nature and nurture, or into which class she was born and in which class she was raised. Fanny's "nature," or birth, makes her a member of the

middling class and not of the landed gentry, marking her as an outsider from the start. The Bertrams' treatment of Fanny, kind as it is, only reminds her "that she is not a *Miss Bertram*" (Austen 12, emphasis Austen's) and that her "rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different" from those of her cousins (Austen 12). Despite her "natural" classification as an outsider, Fanny is brought into the wealthy, landed-gentry Bertram family as a young girl, so her "nurturing," or upbringing, transforms her into an insider by providing her with the same education as her cousins and by instilling into her the values of the landed gentry. Fanny rapidly becomes an indispensable part of the family, as Lady Bertram frequently remarks, "I *cannot* do without her," clearly delineating her position as an insider (Austen 92, emphasis Austen's).

In fact, Fanny becomes more truly a member of the landed gentry than her adoptive family since she grasps and embodies the values of the landed gentry better than it does itself. Fanny's indefinite social classification and her sense of her separateness from the rest of the Bertrams allow her, and the reader through her, to see the gentry's failings more clearly. As Butler remarks, "Fanny's free indirect speech becomes the vehicle of the narrative, and the special quality of her mind colours, or dominates, the story" (237). Austen encourages the reader to trust Fanny's opinions by illustrating instances in which her judgment triumphs over that of her teacher, Edmund, like in the dispute over the performance of *Lovers' Vows*. Even Edmund acknowledges the merit of Fanny's opinions, telling her, "If you are against me, I ought to distrust myself," though he quickly overrules her objections to suit his interests (Austen 182). By retaining her sense of inferiority and not belonging, Fanny can view her family members rather objectively since she will never enter fully into their self-serving interests, and she begins to anticipate the unbiased consideration of the landed gentry that Anne Elliot possesses.

Whereas Fanny and Anne's classifications as insiders and outsiders manifest themselves primarily within the family, Emma Woodhouse finds herself as both an insider and an outsider in the landed class at large. Emma essentially remains an outsider to the landed gentry because her family possesses only a small portion of land which "certainly was inconsiderable," so she does not have the extensive land holdings to give her a strong foothold in the community (Austen 147). Although well-respected in Highbury, Emma remains in an unstable social position as long as she stays unmarried—she could find herself in poor Miss Bates's position, who has fallen in society significantly "from a period when her notice was an honour" (Austen 408). Miss Bates is an object of pity to all of Highbury because, as Mr. Knightley reminds Emma, "She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more" (Austen 408). Emma could also sink "from the comforts she was born to" if she does not secure her position through marriage, a danger Harriet Smith alludes to when she exclaims at Emma's desire to remain single, "But still, you will be an old maid! and that's so dreadful!" (Austen 91). No matter how much Emma emphasizes the benefits of remaining single, it would still be a "dreadful" fate that would confirm her as an outsider.

Owning a limited amount of land and refusing to marry may mark Emma as an outsider of the landed gentry, but the fact that she does own land and possesses a large fortune places her within the class. Austen also emphasizes throughout the novel that Emma is Highbury's understood benefactress, a fact that even Frank Churchill recognizes when he tries to flatter Emma into promoting a ball by telling her, "She who could do any thing in Highbury!" (Austen 213). Being the village's benefactress reinforces her place as an insider, which is part of why she takes such offense to Mrs. Elton's attempt to usurp

her role, since it would push her more to the edge of the social class. Emma sees herself only as an insider, ignoring the signs that she might be in a more precarious position than she believes she is, and that view of herself colors how she views others in Highbury. Utilizing free indirect discourse nearly exclusively from Emma's viewpoint reinforces for the reader Emma's image of herself as an insider, but the reader begins to challenge the image she constructs when he or she realizes that Emma deliberately ignores those aspects of society which disagree with her view. The contrast between Emma's perceived reality and actual reality encourages the reader to reassess how well the landed gentry accomplishes what it believes it does and to what degree its prejudices impact its actions.

In many ways, Emma "shapes the narrated world according to her presumptions, pre-conceptions, and demands" (Wiltshire 25). A prime example is Emma's offense at the "upstart" Coles hosting a dinner party to which they invite the Highbury "elite," as she thinks to herself in annoyance, "The Coles were very respectable in their way but they ought to be taught that it was not for them to arrange the terms on which the superior families would visit them. This lesson, she very much feared, they would receive only from herself" (Austen 224). Emma is clearly in the wrong to be so harsh to the Coles, but since the incident is narrated from her perspective it is easy to overlook her underlying prejudices. The Coles made their fortune in trade and now wish to improve their position, but their "low" origins prejudice Emma against them and she believes that they should remain in their place. Her attempt to exert her supposed authority backfires, however, and she is nearly "left in solitary grandeur" because she cannot accept movement up the social ladder (Austen 224). Emma believes her actions are helping society, but the perceptive reader sees that she is actually hindering it and that her determination to cling

to her prejudices is alienating her; Emma's judgment thus cannot always be trusted until she opens her eyes to the real consequences of her actions.

Anne, unlike Emma, fully understands her tenuous position in the family as both an outsider and an insider. Although Anne is just as much of an Elliot as her sisters, she is "nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;—she was only Anne" (Austen 6). Anne has as much influence on her family as an outsider, a true "nobody," would, despite possessing "an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding" (Austen 6). No one in her family values her mental powers, which "any people of real understanding" would rate highly, and she is reduced to insignificance, to being "only Anne," much like Fanny would have been had the Bertrams not learned to value her morals and understanding. As much as the Elliots slight Anne by relegating her to an outsider, she remains an insider because she will continue to be an Elliot and a member of the landed gentry. Like Fanny, Anne also possesses the virtues which her relatives have lost, making her more of a true member of the landed gentry than her pompous father and sister ever will be. The contrast between Anne's apparent and actual position reveals the landed gentry's degradation and its determined rejection of the values historically attached to that class. Anne expresses her consciousness of her conflicting position more than either of the other two heroines but only lets it distress her when her outsidership prevents her from helping her family, particularly when they refuse to take her advice about retrenching. The fact that Anne does not try to manipulate her social position to suit a particular agenda contributes to making her perspective appear unbiased and encourages the reader to trust her portrayals of the gentry and the low to which it has fallen. Anne, like Fanny, remains a trustworthy source of information because of her

moral strength, a strength which largely excludes her from the gentry and makes her “a perceptive bystander, implicitly the conscience and censor of her world” (Butler 283).

If the reader cannot trust the heroine at the outset of the novel, Austen ensures that he or she will be able to by the end after the heroine has undergone the necessary maturation to open her eyes to the truth. The reader’s ability to trust the heroine and her judgment by the end of the novel is key if Austen wants to persuade him or her to accept her final marriages as the “right” ones. The trajectory of the courtship novel places the heroines in one definite category, either outsider or insider, based on the group which Austen believes will revitalize the landed gentry. For *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, this means Fanny and Emma become true insiders by marrying endogamously and guaranteeing their full acceptance into the landed gentry, supplementing the one element of their “insiderness” that was lacking. The lessons that these two heroines learn focus on their social integration, as Anthony Mandal claims, particularly Emma who “must detach herself from her grandiose snobbery and romanticism and integrate herself into community life, symbolized through her union with Knightley” (161). In *Persuasion*, where Austen views naval outsiders as the source for future revitalization, Anne becomes a true outsider by marrying into the navy and largely renouncing her claims to the landed gentry, until her husband finds himself in a position to buy an estate. The positions of the heroines become stable through their marriages to the “right” people, resolving the narrative tension caused by their dual status as insiders and outsiders.

Jane Austen deliberately employs the form of the courtship novel to devote the necessary attention to the heroine’s perspective, since it is through sympathizing with this central perspective that the reader becomes amenable to the means and outcomes of the social changes Austen proposes. The degree to which a proposed suitor adheres to

Austen's preferred qualities determines if the courtship is desirable or not, and each heroine analyzes these qualities as she weighs the suitor's desirability. Fanny, Emma, and Anne all find themselves compelled to do some soul-searching as Austen juxtaposes desirable and undesirable courtships in their consciousness, a contrast which acquires further depth since the desirable courtship is always apparently inaccessible. Even if the heroine cannot have her perfect partner, she refuses to compromise on her values by marrying someone undesirable simply to secure a position in society. The interiority Austen provides as the heroines consider their marital options shows due consideration of all possibilities (as with Anne's drawn-out image of herself as Mr. Elliot's wife and mistress of Kellynch), and their balanced consideration works to persuade the reader of the correctness of the chosen courtship. Focusing her attention on a single individual within a given novel allows Austen to extrapolate the heroine's views onto the landed gentry as a whole, since by the conclusion of the novel she moves into a position to represent the entire landed gentry. The moral considerations which encourage love remain the same throughout the three novels, but in which groups they manifest themselves varies depending on the desirable outcome, whether for insiders or outsiders.

Romantic and social interests intertwine in the course of Jane Austen's three most socially-engaged courtship novels, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*.

Companionate marriage, the only form of marriage that Austen deems truly acceptable and the only hope for reform, can only take place through a similarity of values and an understanding of the duties of social position. As Marilyn Butler claims, "the reforms [Austen] perceives to be necessary are within the attitudes of individuals" in the landed gentry, not within the structure itself (1). Personal value matters more to Jane Austen than

rank, as she writes bluntly to her sister Cassandra, “I do not care for Sir Brook’s being a Baronet I will put M^r Deedes first because I like him a great deal the best” (*Letters* 244). Austen will always put those first who adhere to her notions of pleasing and proper behavior, a preference which appears in these three novels.

Individuals must change their moral priorities for Austen to place them first, and the maturation of the heroines throughout the novels enables them to recognize where moral reform needs to take place, a recognition (as shown in my opening quotation from *Emma*) that also reveals to them the social significance of their actions. In order to act in her own, and thus the landed gentry’s, best interests, the heroine must understand her values so that she can find a mate who shares them. Where Austen believes this mate can be found evolves over time, as she becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the state of the landed gentry and indicates a growing preference for high-status individuals outside of the gentry. (Whether her unfinished novel *Sanditon* appears to continue this pattern would be of interest to further assess her changing attitude toward the gentry, though it will not be examined here.) The inherent power and value of the landed gentry never fails in Jane Austen’s opinion, but as Claudia Johnson states, its members “have lost their prestige and their moral authority”; their positions and titles decrease in worth without the moral integrity and attention to duty to support them (145). Nevertheless, despite the unease from incestuous implications and insinuated forced affections, the overwhelming sentiment at the end of *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* is hope: Hope for revitalization, hope for the future generation, all through the heroine’s successful courtship and marriage to the socially desirable suitor.

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