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Evil in the Works of Jane Austen

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EVIL IN THE WORKS OF JANE AUSTEN

A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Kathleen C. Scharff
1986
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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The purpose of this work is to expand the study of Jane Austen as a moralist by exploring her concepts of evil and how they influenced her writing. A definition of the two popular Anglican concepts of evil, physical and moral, precedes an examination of Austen's treatment of these concepts in three of her novels shows her changing attitude towards evil.

The work explores Auten's treatment of evil in one of her early novels, Pride and Prejudice, in Mansfield Park, written over a decade later, and in her last completed novel, Persuasion. Her changing concern with evil in her novels appears in the marked difference between the bumbling, comic Wickhams portraying moral evil in Pride and Prejudice; the charming but doomed victims of physical evil, the Crawfords, in Mansfield Park; and the heartless, insidious William Walter Elliot in Persuasion, whose moral evil escapes the notice of many modern critics and of all Eliot's peers except the heroine, Anne Elliot.

Austen's changing treatment of evil in her novels, from the comedy of the Wickhams to the frighteningly insidious evil of William Walter Elliot indicates that Austen's concern with evil in her novels grew over the years. And a look at the effect of her concepts of evil in her novels contributes to a thorough understanding of Austen as a moralist.
EVIL IN THE WORKS OF JANE AUSTEN
INTRODUCTION

Although critical views on the works of Jane Austen vary, one interpretation on which many critics agree is that Jane Austen was a moralist. Opinions on the seriousness of Austen's moral views in her novels vary from Marilyn Butler's claim that "the small scale and intimacy of her treatment, . . . involves a reach from the commonplace to high and permanent moral concerns . . . ."1, to H. W. Garrod's claim that Austen's "ideals were irredeemably humdrum."2 A. C. Bradley combined these two opinions by claiming that Austen's morality "is serious and, in some points, severe" but that "her novels make exceptionally peaceful reading. She troubles us neither with problems nor with painful emotions . . . ."3

These discussions of Austen's literary morality give little attention to Austen's concepts of evil. They range from Lionel Trilling's opinion that morality is what Austen felt maintained society to Gilbert Ryle's suggestion that Austen's morality was an Aristotelian measurer of character.4 Critics seem to be very interested in Austen's moral principles as they related to polite social interaction, but apparently no one focuses directly on Austen's view of evil, the adversary of morality. Evil
gives drama to a moral setting, and I believe that Austen's presentation of evil gives the reader, contrary to Bradley's opinion, plenty of "problems" to enliven his "peaceful reading."

Some critics, like Bradley, believe that Austen had a strong moral sense, but that she was unequal to the task of presenting evil eloquently in her novels. For example, Marvin Mudrick discusses the Austen villain William Elliot:

She simply cannot cope with his type . . . . Her plots require that all . . . [her villains] be ultimately defined as rakes; but her genius was either inadequate, or too blocked by moral taboos, to develop events . . . probable and vivid enough for the purpose. She could picture them ironically as flirts and agreeable triflers; she could respond to what she considered evil in them, however, not by picturing them, but only by giving them up to the annihilating disapproval of her society.5

I disagree that Austen's treatment of evil in her novels is "inadequate." Rather, I believe that Austen was concerned with concepts of evil which might not be correctible (sometimes not even detectable) by the normal sensibilities of society. In her concern with these concepts of evil, which, as I will show, she clearly portrays in her novels, Austen shows a religious and moral
depth often overlooked by critics.

It is reasonable to assume that Austen's education and family life as the daughter of an Anglican minister imbued her with the standard Anglican concepts of sin and evil. Among these concepts are the ideas of natural, or physical, evil and moral evil.

Soame Jenyns, an Englishman, wrote in 1757 that "Natural Evils [are] . . . comprehended pains of body, and inquietudes of mind." His examples are sickness and "a tedious law-suit [sic]".6 Natural, or physical evil, is therefore mental or physical suffering. A more modern definition of physical evil is found in the writings of the Catholic church, which is the father of the Anglican church and shares many of its theological terms and definitions. Physical evil, according to the New Catholic Encyclopedia, is "Moral pain or sorrow . . . which deprives the soul of its natural equilibrium . . . ". This evil can also include the sufferings involved in the destructive acts of nature, says the Encyclopedia.7 Here we have Jenyns' "pains of body" and the deprivation of the soul's "natural equilibrium" in Jenyns' "inquietudes of mind."

Physical evil is not an innate fault in a man's soul, but a learned pattern of behavior or an experience of pain which has the ability, depending on its duration, to alter a person's moral conscience, or disturb his mind, as Jenyns puts it. In Austen's world, suffering comes most frequently at the hands of man. Man causes "moral pain or sorrow" and
"inquietudes of mind" in Austen's novels; therefore he is her main source of physical evil. Austen draws a clear picture of physical evil in the words and acts of her characters, such as Mary Crawford, who has the intelligence to discern right and wrong, but has been raised in an atmosphere of physical evil—vanity, moral insincerity, marital infidelity—and has lost her "natural equilibrium".

The other concept of evil, moral evil, Jenyns refers to as "vice" and lists among its actions murder, luxury, vanity, superstition, avarice, selfishness, and ambition.8 The New Catholic Encyclopedia expands on Jenyns' definition by defining moral evil as "consisting essentially in the disorder of the will, [and] is called fault or sin. . . . Moral evil is . . . a privation of rectitude . . . affecting a free will, which through its own fault lacks a perfection it ought to have."9 Moral evil is seated in the workings of the soul, which, if faulty, can produce the desire to commit Jenyns' vices. Physical evil is the suffering resulting from these vices. Physical evil, as Jenyns and the Catholics agree, can be physical or mental pain. Moral evil is the sickness that causes that pain. A person with a moral evil has a fault or perversion of his mind which affects his conscience, weakening it in the areas of self-control and heedlessness. The effect of moral evil can range from general carelessness to specific malice towards an individual or group of people. A person with moral evil can merely neglect to think of how an action of his will
affect others, or the weakness of his soul can allow him to deliberately hurt a person, without provocation, for the purpose of self-aggrandizement.

Physical evil is bad, in Austen's view, because it can taint a person's soul if not checked. But moral evil, which exists in a person's soul regardless of his social contact, is a deeper wrong since it is not a pattern of correctible behavior, but an inner sickness no other human can alter. Austen seems to agree with the New Catholic Encyclopedia that

though the evil of the world with its attendant sufferings may be a heavy burden on man's reason, the perversity of the will, by which man denies his proper nature and insults God, is an even greater oppression.10

Many of Austen's characters exhibit symptoms of moral evil or of exposure to physical evil. Five of them, in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion*, show very definite signs of either moral or physical evil or both; and the differences in her treatment of them in these novels reflects a growing concern over this problem. Comparing Austen and Dr. Johnson, A. C. Bradley claims that

A main point of difference between Jane Austen and Johnson is that to her much more of the world is amusing, and much more of it is right. She is less of a moralist and more of a humorist.11
But by virtue of her presentation of her characters portraying evil, Austen is more serious than Bradley gives her credit.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, though, she does temper her presentation of evil with comedy. Her own assessment, in an often-quoted letter to her sister Cassandra, that *Pride and Prejudice* is "too light, and bright, and sparkling," reflects her treatment of the novel's villains and heroes. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the word 'evil' is used most often to mean either 'harm' or 'bad.' Comedy dominates the novel. Even the two principal malefactors, George Wickham and Lydia Bennet, while their souls are flawed with moral evils, are presented as comic bumbling. They may cause some distress to the central couple in the novel, Elizabeth and Darcy, but they neither dominate the story nor cause anyone lasting harm. Similarly, the minor characters in the story who show signs of moral evil such as selfishness or vanity are rendered by Austen into comic eccentrics rather than as awe-inspiring villains.

By the time she wrote *Mansfield Park*, Austen's view of evil's threat to society seems to have changed. Moral evil in *Pride and Prejudice* threatens the emotional peace of the heroes, Elizabeth and Darcy, but no one's happiness is destroyed. *Mansfield Park*, however, has no comic episodes during its crises. Marvin Mudrick claims that *Mansfield Park's* "prevailing tone is grave," and critics generally
agree that there is little that is light or bright in this novel. In *Mansfield Park*, the word 'evil' appears more frequently than in *Pride and Prejudice*. It is used with almost biblical seriousness, to mean 'temptation,' 'deception,' and 'sadness.' Austen seems to see Mansfield as a potential Eden invaded by an evil more serious than the Wickhams' comic bungling. In her portrayal of Mary and Henry Crawford as two London socialites trapped by physical evil, she reflects a much more serious attention to evil.

Mary, more than her brother Henry, threatens Fanny's happiness by nearly securing the love of Fanny's hero and mentor, Edmund Bertram. All of the Bertram family fall under the spell of the Crawfords' charm and gaiety, with the result that one family member ruins her future because of Henry and the whole family is disgraced. By showing us the Bertrams' easy acceptance of the Crawfords, who lack moral principle, Austen seems to be warning us that acceptance of flattery and attention to charm can blind us to a person's physical evil. This novel supports cultivating the selfless love and devotion to duty that Fanny Price possesses in order to learn to see beyond social charm and into a person's soul. Only with keen spiritual perception, in Austen's view, can we, like Edmund and Fanny, avoid the moral suffering that is physical evil. The Crawfords, tainted by their physical evil, are trapped in the same London society that perverted their souls. Unlike the comic Wickhams, the Crawfords are tragic characters.
This dark view of evil is fully developed in Austen's last completed novel, *Persuasion*. Although the word 'evil' is used less often than in the other two novels I have mentioned, this novel portrays Austen's strongest warning against it. William Walter Elliot is clearly spiritually perverted by moral evil—he subjects his first wife to a loveless marriage and deliberately bankrupts the Smiths, later ignoring Mrs. Smith's pleas for help. His unemotional demeanor and his lack of moral conviction reflects his self-centered, loveless soul; yet only Anne Elliot can detect anything wrong in her cousin.

Unlike Fanny Price, Anne Elliot has no family member to support her perception. Although her suspicions are eventually confirmed by Mrs. Smith, the chance appearance of the latter in the story seems to emphasize Anne's solitary spiritual position in her family. Once again Austen gives us a heroine whose moral sensitivity and selfless love give her the perceptual clarity to detect evil.

William Elliot is not a central character, and many critics of the novel seem to share Andrew Wright's opinion that Elliot is a "red herring" whose only role is as an unimportant romantic distraction to Anne and as the seducer of Mrs. Clay.13

Yet Elliot is an important character in the novel because he delivers Austen's most urgent warning against insensitivity or indifference to evil. The dramatic appeal of his character lies in the effectiveness of his deception,
the ease with which he conceals the moral evil in his soul. No one in the Elliot circle sees any wrong in him except Anne, and Lady Russell even recommends him to Anne as a suitor. In *Persuasion* Austen shows the reader moral and physical evil cloaked in charm, imperceptible to all but the most morally astute of her characters. Mr. Elliot seems harmless to his peers, harmless to critics looking at the plot of the novel, and perhaps appears harmless to the reader. But it is the possibility of such a deception that must be frightening to Austen. William Elliot is evil in soul and in practice, and Austen is showing the reader how easily evil can work in society unnoticed.

The character of William Elliot is just one of Austen's depictions of evil. Mary Crawford, Lydia Bennet, and George Wickham also display, in differing degrees, her concepts of moral and physical evil. An examination of her treatments of these characters will expand our understanding of Jane Austen's position as a moralist.
NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION


12. Mudrick, p. 19

Austen's concept of evil did not spring forth full-blown in her first novel. Rather, she developed her idea of evil as she matured in her personal and professional life. 

_Pride and Prejudice_, one of Austen's earlier novels, which she wrote between 1796 and 1797, when she was twenty-one years old, and revised to its present form from 1811 to 1812, shows what Jane Austen's attitude towards evil may have been when she was a young girl.

Opinions vary on the amount of revision Austen made in _First Impressions_, the 1797 version of _Pride and Prejudice_. R. W. Chapman claims:

_Pride and Prejudice_ has always seemed to me a book of greater maturity than is credible if we suppose it to have been written, much as we know it, when its author was only one-and-twenty. . . . On the other hand, _Pride and Prejudice_ has its immaturities, and it would be difficult to argue, on internal evidence, that it is much later than _Northanger Abbey_.

A. Walton Litz tells us that "there is no reason to believe that _Northanger Abbey_ underwent extensive reworking after 1803." This observation would suggest that _Pride and_
Prejudice may also have retained much of its early content as First Impressions. Robert Liddell claims that "we cannot tell how many recensions of . . . [Pride and Prejudice] were made between . . . [1796 and 1812], and though criticism may hope sometimes to detect earlier or later strata in it, scholarship, unfortunately, has no real help to give."4 I believe the lightness and humorousness of the novel reflect the mind of a young authoress rather than that of a woman settling into middle-age.

The ability to laugh at others is often an advantage of youth. Marilyn Butler says of Austen's youthful cheerfulness in this novel: "... generations of Jane Austen readers have agreed in finding Pride and Prejudice the lightest, most consistently entertaining, and least didactic of the novels."5 Julia Prewitt Brown, commenting on Austen's first sentence in Pride and Prejudice, claims that it "contains an element of eccentric delight in human exaggeration."6 Jane Austen was no exception. According to Lionel Trilling

One of the striking things about Pride and Prejudice is that it achieves a quality of transcendence through comedy. . . . The novel celebrates the traits of spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness, and associates them with happiness and virtue. . . . It is animated by an impulse to forgiveness.7
Like Butler and Brown, Trilling sees the youthful laughter in *Pride and Prejudice*. The emphasis in *Pride and Prejudice* is on comedy. No one's faults are taken seriously enough to destroy the moral peace of any other character or of the reader. However, Jane Austen was too much the minister's daughter to write a novel without heroes and heroines guided by moral principle. And if there is no evil in society, there would be no need to illustrate proper morality. Evil exists in *Pride and Prejudice*, even though it is treated with a light touch.

The two "villains" of the novel are Lydia Bennet and George Wickham, whose affair and elopement parallel Elizabeth and Darcy's courtship. Lydia's "high animal spirits" are mentioned by Austen early in the novel; paired with her lack of moral principle, they make her a foolish girl. That she is "self-willed and careless" is obvious in her words and actions (*PP*, 213). She never thinks whether she offends others or not, and Austen calls her "always unguarded and often uncivil" (*PP*, 126). In one scene, Elizabeth Bennet's sensibilities are "shocked" by Lydia's "coarseness of sentiment" when she gaily says of a former girlfriends of Wickham's: "'I will answer for it he never cared three straws about her. Who could about such a nasty little freckled thing?'" (*PP*, 220). Ignorant of offending either Elizabeth or her sister Jane, she turns to them both and prattles, "'Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three and twenty! Lord, how ashamed I should
be of not being married before three and twenty!'" (PP, 221). The effects of this insult to her sister never cross her mind. Insulting Wickham's girlfriend makes her feel prettier, and commenting on Jane's spinsterhood emphasizes to Lydia her own youth and eligibility. With such talk she gratifies herself, and that is enough to please her.

Lydia pleases only herself and lacks the moral principle of selflessness which would make her think to please her family. Her lack of a sense of guilt causes her never to think of the harm she could bring to them either. Elizabeth points out to her father that "'Our importance, our respectability in the world, must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character'".8 Yet Lydia never worries about this and happily elopes with Wickham, completely ignorant of "the humiliation, the misery" she causes her family (PP, 278). Writes Julia Prewitt Brown: "Lydia . . . is the best example of Austen's understanding of ingratitude. . . . she is without shame, unconscious of the suffering and inconvenience she exacts from others."9 Austen, through Elizabeth, mentions Lydia's "disposition [from which] . . . evil might be apprehended" (PP, 237). This "evil" is moral evil, evidenced by her selfish spirit and her lack of self-control. Her soul is too flawed to recognize guilt or gratitude. Moral evil keeps her thoughts centered on herself rather than on the feelings of others.

Her letter to her friend Mrs. Forster shows that
Lydia's soul is incapable of a sense of guilt or moral sensitivity. There is no concern for her family, nor for the reputation of her guardian, Mrs. Forster, in her letter, only the laughter of a girl whose pleasure means all to her. When Lydia and Wickham visit the Bennets after Darcy has arranged for the couple to marry, Elizabeth and Jane are amazed at the Wickham's pride and bliss. "Elizabeth blushed, and Jane blushed; but the cheeks of the two who caused their confusion, suffered no variation of colour" (PP, 316). The Wickhams are incapable of guilt for the unhappiness they have caused because they are incapable of feeling for others and realizing the damage of their actions to the Bennets. Since they do not care whether they hurt the Bennets, they feel no remorse. Their souls have only the capacity for selfishness. Says Austen, "They seemed each of them to have the happiest memories in the world. Nothing of the past was recollected with pain; and Lydia led voluntarily to subjects, which her sisters would not have alluded to for the world" (PP, 316).

Wickham is as selfish and thoughtless as his wife. Denis Donoghue writes that Austen "knew the force of charm, she relished it, and . . . feared it. Clearly she was afraid of charming, worthless clever men like . . . Wickham . . . ."10 And Wickham is a charmer. In his first appearance in the novel, the narrator says, "... the young man wanted only regimentals to make him completely charming. His appearance was greatly in his favour . . . ." (PP, 72).
Throughout the novel, various characters comment on Wickham's handsome and gentlemanly appearance. Jane's exclamation typifies these comments: "'Poor Wickham; there is such an expression of goodness on his countenance! such openness and gentleness in his manner'" (PP, 225).

Yet he has none of the selflessness or charity of the true gentleman. His words and actions betray a stronger streak of moral evil than Lydia's in that instead of hurting others out of carelessness, he does so as a result of deviousness. He deliberately maligns Darcy out of a need for self-preservation. Although he admits to Elizabeth that it was "'the prospect of constant society'" which brought him to Meryton (PP, 79), we soon see the fruits of his mixing in society when he drops Elizabeth to court an heiress whose father has recently died. Since Wickham needs money and he wants to marry it instead of earning it, he cannot afford to have his past uncovered. He tells Elizabeth: "'I have no right to give my opinion'" on Darcy; then he proceeds to do so (PP, 77), and he has no scruples about twisting the facts to make himself appear a gentleman. After Elizabeth returns from Rosings, Wickham ignores her implied warning that she knows about his past and asks if Darcy looks less proud. He then says that he is happy to hear that Darcy "'is wise enough to assume even the appearance of what is right. . . . for it must deter him from such foul misconduct as I have suffered by'" (PP, 234). Even when he suspects Elizabeth knows the truth, he cannot
stop falsely accusing Darcy. Although his accusations spring more from an impulse of self-preservation than from malice, his cowardice in continuing a lie shows the moral evil in his flawed and weakened will.

Wickham is guilty of the same selfish vanity which engrosses Lydia and causes her shameless flirting. He is incapable of seeing any fault in himself; therefore he thinks that other people delight only in self-gratification also. Elizabeth notices this when, after Darcy has told her of Wickham's past, she meets Wickham at a party and is disgusted at his "idle and frivolous gallantry" towards herself. She is offended by his renewed attentions after the heiress' departure, realizing that he thinks that she would welcome any appeasement of her vanity.

Moral evil has made Wickham incapable of the selfless sentiment of love (PP, 233). Money is his motive. Wickham schemes to turn Meryton against Darcy while he searches for the rich wife to ensure his future. His vanity makes him take Lydia with him to London, but he will never love her enough to inconvenience himself with marriage. He has to be bought by Darcy. Francis Warre Cornish reflects on Wickham's moral evil and its attendant lack of the power of love when he says of Wickham: "... [he is] condemned because ... [he is a] poor creature, led by appetite, ambition, or avarice, not ... [a victim] of high passion ..."11 As Marvin Mudrick says, Wickham "... is also an evil agent, quite willing to corrupt others as well, to involve them in
public disgrace if he can thereby assure his own security. The "evil" Mudrick sees is the flaw of selfishness in Wickham's soul: moral evil.

Wickham has Jenyns' vices of vanity, avarice, and selfishness, but these vices were not the results of his upbringing. Moral evil has poisoned Wickham's soul. His will, as the New Catholic Encyclopedia says, "... through its own fault lacks a perfection it ought to have." Darcy tells Elizabeth that Wickham had a childhood as privileged and as morally respectable as his own. "'Mr. Wickham is the son of a very respectable man ... whose good conduct in the discharge of his trust, naturally inclined my father to be of service to him,"' writes Darcy (PP, 199). He also writes to Elizabeth that the senior Mr. Darcy "'liberally bestowed'" his kindness on George Wickham and gave the boy an education at public school and at Cambridge (PP, 199-200). Wickham had no need to fear for financial security, either, as the senior Mr. Darcy left him one thousand pounds and the promise of a good living when Wickham became a clergyman (PP, 200). His faulty soul, however, showed itself to Darcy even as he received Mr. Darcy's largesse in childhood, and he quickly refused to become a clergyman. Wickham deliberately hid his "'vicious propensities'" and "'want of principle,'" as Darcy puts it, from Mr. Darcy. And his lack of self-control caused him to quickly go through three times the amount of Mr. Darcy's legacy (PP, 200).
Despite the advantages Wickham received from Mr. Darcy, he develops into a selfish, uncontrolled wastrel. Only the flaw of moral evil in his soul could resist such moral and financial advantages. Moral evil, not her home environment, is also the source of Lydia's flawed soul. Mrs. Bennet may be a fool and Mr. Bennet a neglectful father, but out of five girls, Lydia is the only truly selfish and uncaring daughter. Mary and Kitty are controllable, and the upbringing which produced Lydia also produced Elizabeth and Jane, who Austen tells us, through Elizabeth, never sees a fault in anyone or speaks ill of any person (PP, 14). Lydia had the same chances to form selfless moral principles as her two elder sisters have done, yet like Wickham, she acts according to Jenyns' vices instead of following the principles of Elizabeth or Darcy. Both Lydia and Wickham are the products of moral, not physical, evil.

Although she portrays moral evil in Lydia and Wickham, Austen never lets evil overwhelm the comic theme of Pride and Prejudice. The main plot in the novel is the romance between Elizabeth and Darcy, the two characters who hold the reader's attention and sympathy throughout the story. Lydia and Wickham's antics may distract the reader from time to time and momentarily threaten Elizabeth and Darcy's happiness, but they never do serious damage to the romance of the two main characters. Elizabeth never falls in love with Wickham; she tells Mrs. Gardiner: "'I am now convinced . . . that I have never been much in love.'" (PP, 150). Darcy
does not let the scandal of Lydia's elopement shake his resolution to marry Elizabeth; rather, he exerts himself to repair the Bennets' reputation by making Wickham marry Lydia. This gesture strengthens Elizabeth's love for Darcy and proves his love for her. In fact, at the first news of the elopement, Elizabeth reflects on the scandal of the act and the prospect of her losing Darcy and "... never had she so honestly felt that she could have loved [Darcy], as now, when all love must be vain" (PP, 278).

Lydia and Wickham's acts, springing from their moral evil, cement Elizabeth and Darcy's love. The difficulties their affair appear to pose for Elizabeth and Darcy's courtship actually advance it. Comedy and romance are still Austen's main concerns in *Pride and Prejudice*. Even Lydia's gay selfishness can sometimes be amusing, as we see when she and Kitty meet Jane and Elizabeth at an inn on their return route to Meryton. Jane and Elizabeth find the girls have had a full luncheon set out for them at the inn, upon which Lydia exclaims: "'And we mean to treat you all, but you must lend us the money, for we have just spent ours at the shop out there'" (PP, 219). Not even this one charitable gesture of Lydia's escapes her selfishness, and she gleefully ends up eating at her sisters' expense, still sure she has given them pleasure with her 'generosity.' This "'agreeable surprise,'" as Lydia calls it, shows us that her only steadfast quality is her silliness.

Austen makes Wickham amusing, on occasion, also. The
reader smiles in triumph along with Elizabeth when she hints to Wickham, after his marriage, that she knows his lies. But without an apparent qualm, he claims that he had already told her he did not want to become a preacher, a claim in complete contradiction to his earlier accusations that Darcy cheated him out of that profession. We as readers must marvel at Wickham's effortless manipulation of the truth and smile at Austen's claim that "Mr. Wickham was so perfectly satisfied with this conversation, that he never again distressed himself . . . by introducing the subject of it . . ." (PP, 330).

*Pride and Prejudice* is meant to amuse, not sadden, its readers. Austen's treatment of her characters never points to tragedy. The serious spiritual flaws that she exhibits in the Wickhams, she exaggerates in other characters to keep us laughing at these bumbling, harmless 'villains.' Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Darcy's aunt, has a selfishness like the Wickhams', but her selfishness is mixed with a pride of comic proportions. Lady Catherine is a sort of unfeeling nanny gone mad, a paragon of pride who must make everyone behave by her standards. Lady Catherine's constant failure to frighten off Elizabeth makes us laugh at her pride rather than fear its consequences. Mrs. Bennet also provides some comedy, as she is the older model of Lydia, and just as silly. Mrs. Bennet may lack the moral sense to see the shame in Lydia's elopement, but her overblown emotional outbursts during crises keep our attention on her reactions.
and away from a contemplation of the morality behind them. Mrs. Bennet's selfishness and misplaced pride in Lydia never threaten Elizabeth and Darcy's happiness as the Wickhams' faults do and as Lady Catherine tries to do. Finally Mr. Collins has the taint of pride and selfishness we see in the Wickhams, Lady Catherine, and Mrs. Bennet; but his pomposity is so overblown that we can only laugh and never take him seriously.

Austen has written a "light, and bright, and sparkling" novel with representatives of moral evil in Lydia and Wickham. But Wickham and Lydia are both bumbling, never succeeding in deceiving Elizabeth and ultimately are harmless to the heroic couple's happiness. Austen consigns the bumbler Wickham to a loveless marriage with Lydia, whose soul is equally flawed and both are too wrapped up in themselves ever to despair over their fates. Lydia contents herself with courting Elizabeth, and the Darcy money enables Wickham to take occasional pleasure trips to London and Bath (PP, 387). Austen also shows in the novel's end the "forgiveness" Trilling mentions. Miss Bingley, who had spited Elizabeth to try to attract Darcy, becomes a pleasant visitor to Pemberley after the Darcys' marriage. Even Lady Catherine "condescended to wait on Darcy and Elizabeth at Pemberley" (PP, 388). *Pride and Prejudice* ends happily, with the comic mention of Lady Catherine reminding us that even moral evil and its attendant selfishness and pride, which we have seen in differing degrees in Lydia, Wickham,
Lady Catherine, Mrs. Bennet, and Mr. Collins, are subjugated in this novel to comedy. *Pride and Prejudice* has just a forshadowing of the concepts of evil Austen develops in her later works.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE


3. Litz, p. 176.


11. Francis Warre Cornish, *Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1913), p. 109. This character analysis shows us that the perception of Wickham as a man with a flawed soul, incapable of love, is one of long standing.

CHAPTER TWO: MANSFIELD PARK

Mansfield Park is as lacking in comedy as Pride and Prejudice is dominated by it. Austen wrote Mansfield Park when she was in her thirties, and the years between her composition of that novel and Pride and Prejudice had matured her moral philosophy. Morality, not romance, is the central theme of the novel, even though the characters in the story do engage in courtship. Evil has again appeared in Austen's fiction, but this time it is not subdued by comedy. Mansfield Park is Austen's serious exploration of physical evil, the suffering of the soul when it is deprived of moral principle. It is her study of Jenyns' "inquietudes of mind" and the New Catholic Encyclopedia's "moral pain or sorrow."

R. W. Chapman claims that the subject of Mansfield Park is "Environment." Environment is an important source of physical evil, for a materialistic environment, lacking any reverence for moral development and its lessons of selflessness, causes physical evil. A soul taught only to think of selfish desires lacks the capacity for selfless love. A person raised in an atmosphere of selfishness, accustomed to measure happiness by his material well-being alone, cannot love other people or gain any pleasure from events which do not directly enhance his physical possessions. Such a
person can only satisfy the physical side of his soul, while the spiritual side withers from a lack of moral gratification. This person's spiritual suffering is physical evil. In *Mansfield Park*, several characters appear whose childhood environments never force them to use their intelligence for anything but the pursuit of selfish pleasure. They never have had to work to support themselves, never had to subordinate their selfish desires. The material indulgences provided by these environments have stunted their victims' spiritual development and caused them the moral suffering of physical evil. In this novel, Austen also shows the threats that sophisticated, cosmopolitan, money-oriented manners pose to the more simple, religious, heartfelt morals of rural gentry. As Lionel Trilling writes, Austen was "the first novelist to represent society, the general culture, as playing a part in the moral life . . . ." 4 And in *Mansfield Park*, society is represented by degrees of "moral pain or sorrow." These three worlds are London, Portsmouth, and Mansfield, which Julia Prewitt Brown calls "three irreconcilable worlds . . . [that] finally come to be seen as Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, each a place or a prison for the human spirit . . . ." 5

In the beginning of the novel, Mansfield is not Heaven, but "a world that is in decline," and a study of the Bertram family validates this comment. 6 Physical evil shows in the emotionally stagnant lives of the Bertrams. As Jane Nardin puts it, ". . . the decorum of Mansfield . . . is still more
concerned with purely social consequence and less with the heart and conscience than it ought to be." The Bertrams, with the exception of Edmund, the youngest son and hero of the novel, are a family whose easy life of wealth has allowed them to value money over love. In fact, they seem to have almost lost the capacity to love. Lady Bertram is a listless, decorative woman, not a caring mother, who "spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa . . . thinking more of her pug than her children . . . ." Sir Thomas Bertram is "a truly anxious father," but "he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of . . . [his children's] spirits before him" (MP, 19). When Sir Thomas Bertram and his eldest son, Tom, leave for a dangerous voyage to Antigua, the selfish lovelessness which seems to rule everyone except Edmund and Fanny shows in the other Bertrams' easy acceptance of Sir Thomas' departure. Tom is said to be "nominally missed," and Lady Bertram "... was soon astonished to find how very well they did even without his father . . . ." (MP, 34).

The Bertram girls, Maria and Julia, are Austen's clearest examples of the effect of the lovelessness, or physical evil, which has Mansfield under its cloud. Maria and Julia have been raised by their sycophantic maternal aunt, Mrs. Norris, whose repeated praise of the girls' beauty and intelligence "served to strengthen them in believing they had no faults" (MP, 35). An atmosphere of
vanity and the absence of emphasis on the cultivation of "self-knowledge, generosity, and humility," as Austen describes Maria and Julia's education, have combined to taint the girls' minds (MP, 19). Their souls have never learned to love. The girls cannot even love one another, as they prove when Henry Crawford jilts Julia to court Maria. Maria flaunts her flirtation with Henry, careless of its effect on Julia. Austen comments that the girls "had not affection or principle enough to make them merciful or just, to give them honour or compassion" (MP, 163).

Sir Thomas, at the end of the novel, muses on the "evil" of his daughters' upbringing, which has left them without "active principle" (MP, 463). This "active principle" is the selflessness of a healthy soul, the ability to love others and deny selfish desires, to practice what Austen calls the "sense of duty" and "necessity of self-denial and humility" (MP, 463). Mansfield's spiritual atmosphere at the beginning of the novel, which produces physical evil in the Bertram sisters, prevents love. Maria's courtship and marriage to Rushworth mirrors this physical evil. She thinks of marriage as her "duty" because Rushworth's wealth will give her "the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's, as well as ensure her the house in town, which was now a prime object . . . ." (MP, 38). Sir Thomas is equally bloodless in his approval of the merger of the Bertrams and Rushworths: "It was a connection exactly of the right sort; in the same country, and the same
interest . . . ." (MP, 40).

Maria never loves Rushworth; in fact Austen tells us that the thought of the impending marriage is "a gloomy prospect" to this girl who knows her future husband is a dolt (MP, 107). Sir Thomas also decides after meeting Rushworth that his future son-in-law "was an inferior young man, as ignorant in business as in books," yet he approves of Rushworth, ". . . happy to secure a marriage which would bring him such an addition of respectability and influence . . . ." (MP, 200-01). Both Sir Thomas and Maria neglect to use Austen's "active principle" to see the "necessity of self-denial and humility" which could save them from future sorrow.

Although Mansfield is not a caring, selfless world at the novel's beginning, Austen wants to show us that physical evil, if it has not permanently weighed down a soul with selfishness, can be overcome. All is not lost at Mansfield. Austen's two practitioners of moral principle, Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price, live at Mansfield. As the youngest son, Edmund must prepare himself for a career; and Fanny Price, as a poor relation of the Bertrams, has made a career for herself in serving the family. As Jane Nardin points out, "Fanny . . . and her cousin Edmund have acquired the essential moral habit which the leisured young people in the novel lack: the habit of struggling to live up to an ideal of duty."9 Their industriousness has saved them from physical evil, which Nardin says results from "the evil of
having talents, energies, and feelings which lack the . . . outlet that work can provide . . . ."10 Edmund has absorbed enough of his family's reverence for social prestige to keep him from independently throwing off the Mansfield lifestyle which produces physical evil, but Fanny has none of the mind-altering habits of selfishness and wealth to overcome. As Stuart Tave says, "It is Fanny who must take the direction and reestablish . . . [the dormant morality] of Mansfield Park."11

Fanny's life at Mansfield is a far cry from the coddling her female cousins receive. Before she arrives at the Bertram household, Sir Thomas says he anticipates that his niece will have ". . . gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner . . . ." (MP, 10). Fanny proves to be much more agreeable than Sir Thomas' predictions, but she still grows up at Mansfield as her aunt Bertram's servant and the object of scorn by her female cousins and Mrs. Norris. As Austen says, Fanny's mind "had seldom known a pause in its alarms or embarrassments" (MP, 35). Her life of humility is such that Sir Thomas is forced to admit to her after her childhood that Mrs. Norris has treated her too severely and that he is "aware that there has been sometimes, in some points, a misplaced distinction . . . ." (MP, 313). Yet Fanny has a moral strength, a capacity to love and help others, which can rise above her daily degradations. Since she has no money or social consequence or vanity to cloud her soul to
the point of physical evil, her mind has none of Jenyns' "inquietudes." When Maria's adultery with Henry Crawford ruins the Bertrams' social prestige, Fanny is there to reintroduce the quiet atmosphere of love and caring that has received little attention at Mansfield for many years. She comforts Lady Bertram by listening to her lamentations until they wear out, she brings Edmund happiness as a loving wife, and she becomes Sir Thomas' perfect daughter.

Mansfield is not totally undeserving of Fanny's moral salvation. It eventually becomes the "Heaven" Julia Prewitt Brown calls it because it is never a world entirely without proper morals, only a world which has neglected them. And as Austen seems to want to remind the reader, neglect can be reversed if caught in time. Physical evil need not triumph in all cases. Early in the novel, Mary Crawford comments on "the sturdy independence of your country customs" (MP, 58). She is referring to the neighborhood farmers' refusal, in the middle of the harvest, to rent her a cart to transport her harp. Austen's point is that, in Mansfield's world, money cannot tempt people to drop their traditional lifestyles. The farmers value their annual harvest over the momentary pleasure of receiving Mary Crawford's money.

Integrity also still lives in Mansfield, as we can see in Sir Thomas' description of Edmund's future duties as a clergyman. Sir Thomas, although he may neglect to actively regulate his own family's morals, realizes that a clergyman cannot teach selfless devotion to duty if his regular
absence from his parishioners shows that he values his own comfort over the spiritual comfort of others. Edmund echoes his father's views when he defends the clergy to Mary Crawford:

A clergyman . . . has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, . . . temporally and eternally--[he] has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence (MP, 92).

The Bertram household may have contributed to the vanity of the Bertram sisters, but Sir Thomas' hidden virtues have surfaced in his youngest son.

Mansfield, in the person of Sir Thomas and Edmund, does have its virtues as well as its faults. Besides the integrity of the country people and Sir Thomas' recognition of the importance of duty and of religion, there is Sir Thomas' kindness in taking in his nieces. He intends to give Fanny a better home than her impoverished parents can provide. And years later, in the middle of the crisis of Maria's adultery, he opens his home to Fanny's sister, Susan. Austen emphasizes Sir Thomas' generosity in Edmund's comment about the offer to Fanny: "I am sure you will feel such an instance of his kindness at such a moment!" (MP, 443). Fanny appreciates Mansfield's virtues when she visits her family in Portsmouth. Amid the chaos of her parents'
household, Fanny remembers the "propriety" of Mansfield which respects every person's role in the family (MP, 383).

Mansfield is a world of propriety, where each person knows what is expected of him. In the case of Lady Bertram and her daughters, vanity taints their lives, but even they must bow to the rules of society. When Julia finds herself stuck with Mrs. Rushworth on a walk at Sotherton, she is unhappy to be missing the fun her sister and brother are enjoying with the Crawfords, but "The politeness which she had been brought up to practise as a duty, made it impossible for her to escape . . . ." (MP, 91). When Fanny returns to Mansfield after Maria's adultery, she adds love and sympathy to Mansfield's code of politeness, making it a "Heaven" for its reformed inhabitants. It has shaken off its cloak of physical evil by adding to its country integrity and its once-forgotten sense of religious duty and its sense of propriety the selflessness and love Fanny brings with her.

Fanny saves Mansfield because she has moral strengths it has forgotten, moral strengths born in her years of hardship both at Mansfield and at her first home, in Portsmouth. Portsmouth is not a world of ease and wealth, as Mansfield is. As Mudrick says "... Portsmouth is the Limbo of the morally unborn."12 The physical evil which taints the Price household in Portsmouth is the physical evil of neglect. Fanny realizes during her visit there that the household lacks the attention to propriety that Mans-
field has. The Price family members have no clear distinction of roles, no code of politeness to guide their behavior. They are "morally unborn" because Mr. and Mrs. Price have never taught their children morals, yet they have not taught them evil. They have simply neglected them in the household's atmosphere of chaos. Austen, through Fanny, tells us that the Price household "was the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety. Nobody was in their right place, nothing was done as it ought to be" (MP, 388-389).

With Portsmouth, Austen is showing us a world of physical evil caused not by wealth or prestige, but by a chaotic lifestyle which produces moral neglect. No one is deliberately mean to Fanny in this household, as Mrs. Norris or the Bertram sisters are at Mansfield. Yet with the exception of William, who is at sea most of the time, and Susan, none of the Prices give her any notice. Mr. Price, Fanny observes, "did not want abilities; but he had no curiosity, and no information beyond his profession" (MP, 389). He is selfishly absorbed in his world of ships and beer, with no care for his family. When Fanny visits the Prices after having been gone almost half her lifetime, Mr. Price "scarcely ever noticed her, but to make her the object of a coarse joke" (MP, 389). Mrs. Price is similarly neglectful: "... Fanny never met with greater kindness from her, than on the first day of her arrival. The instinct of nature was soon satisfied and Mrs. Price's attachment had no other source" (MP, 389).
Mrs. Price is as absorbed in her household troubles as her husband is in his pursuits. Her maternal emotions surface only when she indulges her sons and her youngest daughter Betsey, while ignoring her other children and her husband. Says the narrator, "... her time was given chiefly to her house and her servants. Her days were spent in a kind of slow bustle; always busy without getting on, always behindhand and lamenting it, without altering her ways ... ." (MP, 389). Austen, through Fanny, tells us that Mrs. Price "was a partial, ill-judging parent, a dawdle, a slattern, who neither taught nor restrained her children," and as a result her "house was the scene of mismanagement and discomfort from beginning to end ... ." (MP, 390). The bad food, half-cleaned dishes, and unfinished household chores are only some of the signs of Mrs. Price's neglect. Her younger sons, whom Fanny finds "quite untameable" with their "riotous games all over the house," and Betsey, "a spoilt child" continually stealing the silver spoon her deceased sister Mary willed to Susan, are also examples of the wildness and chaos Mrs. Price's neglect has produced (MP, 391).

Fanny's arrival at Portsmouth also shows us another form of physical evil: vulgarity. Mrs. Price, when she finally takes notice of Fanny and talks to her, asks only one question about her sister's family: "'How did her sister Bertram manage about her servants? Was she as much plagued as herself to get tolerable servants?'" (MP, 385).
All Mrs. Price's following conversation is about her own servant problems "and the shocking character of all the Portsmouth servants, of whom she believed her own two were the very worst . . . . The Bertrams were all forgotten in detailing the faults of Rebecca . . . ." (MP, 385). In the Price household, human faults, not virtues, draw attention, whether they are the servants' slovenliness or the halloes of the young Price boys or Betsey's petulant swiping of Susan's heirloom spoon. Mrs. Price is too busy with her own cares and complaints to notice or value Fanny's industriousness and caring, in getting her brother Sam's belongings packed in time for his first voyage (MP, 390) and Fanny's gift of a spoon to Betsey, which stops Betsey's arguments with Susan (MP, 397). Fanny goes unnoticed in her own home because she does not figure in her parents' self-centered interests. Says Trilling, "... in Jane Austen's novels vulgarity has these elements: smallness of mind, insufficiency of awareness, assertive self-esteem, the wish to devalue, especially to devalue the human worth of other people."13 The Prices, with Mr. Price's total absorption in the shipyard and Mrs. Price's absorption with her servant problems, are a vulgar pair whose neglect of the moral principles of devotion to duty and selfless love has made their household a world of chaos.

Austen's Portsmouth world is her picture of the physical evil of vulgarity, caused by selfishness and neglect, which has produced Mudrick's "Limbo of the morally
unborn." Yet some Prices escape this world. Fanny escapes to Mansfield, as does Susan at the end of the novel. Portsmouth may not teach its inhabitants morals, but its atmosphere of neglect can leave those neglected free to form a sense of right and wrong if that sense is born in them. As Tony Tanner writes of Portsmouth: "Human impulses here are not perverted; but they are unregulated." Fanny's quiet, humble temperament has given her a sound moral sense. Susan, overlooked by her mother in favor of Betsey, gets her sense of right and wrong from her own intelligence. Austen, writing of this younger sister of Fanny's, says that "Fanny soon became more disposed to admire the natural light of the mind which could so early distinguish justly . . . . " (MP, 395). And Susan does her best to help her family. Fanny perceived, "that Susan was useful . . . , that things, bad as they were, would have been worse but for such interposition, and that both her mother and Betsey were restrained from some excesses of very offensive indulgence and vulgarity" (MP, 395-96).

Susan has the potential to be as morally just as Fanny, but her potential is wasted in Portsmouth. When this intelligent, self-confident girl goes to Mansfield with her sister, she lives up to her potential and soon supplants Fanny as Lady Bertram's chief comfort: "Susan became the stationary niece--delighted to be so!--and equally well adapted for it by a readiness of mind, and an inclination for usefulness . . . . Susan could never be spared" (MP,
And William, Fanny's loving brother whom Sir Thomas establishes in the Navy, also comes out of the chaos of Portsmouth to become a comfort to the Bertrams for his "continued good conduct, and rising fame" (MP, 473). Portsmouth may be "Limbo," but out of it come a few Prices whose sound moral principles give Sir Thomas "repeated reason to rejoice in what he had done for them..." (MP, 473).

The physical evil of Portsmouth, the evil of neglect of moral principle which leads to human degradation, is a form of physical evil that can be overcome if its victims have an inner moral sense that allows them to respect other people's feelings and to try to be selfless. The third world in Mansfield Park, London, contains a type of physical evil which Austen shows us apparently cannot be overcome by lessons in moral principle or examples of selfless behavior. Her London characters seem to have had no chance to learn proper morality. London is Austen's breeding-ground of cosmopolitan, money-oriented tastes. As Mary Crawford, a Londoner, tells Edmund, "every thing is to be got with money" in London (MP, 58). The city life, unlike the integrity of country life in Mansfield, controlled by traditional propriety, is a life of wealthy appearances and novelty. Propriety is not important in a world of constant change, where fashionable ladies and gentlemen leave the city for country homes in the summer, then, when the quiet country life bores them, return to the city for a 'season'
of balls and parties. Mary Crawford voices this philosophy of transient pleasures when she tells Fanny, "'I can even suppose it pleasant to spend half the year in the country, under certain circumstances . . . .'" (MP, 210). She then describes these "circumstances" as a life of playing social leader for all the neighborhood parties. She cites as an example Maria Rushworth, whose marriage she calls "'a public blessing, for the first pleasures of Mr. Rushworth's wife must be to fill her house, and give the best balls in the country'" (MP, 210). Devotion to amusements, not to loving one's spouse, is Mary's idea of a wife's "'first pleasures.'" Mary Crawford is London, and London is, to Austen, a world where money and selfish amusements replace selfless devotion to other people and a respect for traditions and propriety.

"London," as Tony Tanner writes, "'... the world of liberty, amusement and fashion, has no redeeming virtues."15 He also claims that "London, at its worst, perverts [its inhabitants]."16 Austen's representation of London lifestyles supports this statement, for her London is a world where people's minds and moral principles are often irredeemably harmed. Her clearest picture of this physical evil we see in Mary and Henry Crawford. Trilling says, "In Mary Crawford we have the first brilliant example of a distinc­tively modern type, the person who cultivates the style of sensitivity, virtue, and intelligence."17 Mary, as we shall see, is all "style" with little heart. The Crawfords, who
bring their "style" to Mansfield, are as Butler writes, "infinitely more dangerous than the Bertrams."18

The cosmopolitan love of money and social consequence that the Crawfords proselytize at Mansfield is more virulent than the passive pride and loveless emphasis on prestige that the Bertrams have. Maria and Julia Bertram, diverted from absorbing their father's hidden moral principles by the flattery and coddling of their aunt Norris, are open to any new amusement that comes their way. They are proud, but they only demand admiration from those around them, such as Mrs. Norris and Fanny. The Crawfords want more than admiration; they want disciples and 'playmates' who will amuse them according to their rules. R. F. Brissenden claims that "... although the Crawfords are dangerous and irresponsible it is difficult to see them as deliberately evil."19 Yet Austen does seem to see them as evil in their opposition to Mansfield, which harbors her "good" principles in this novel. The Crawfords are victims of London's moral atmosphere which produces physical evil and they bring that physical evil to Mansfield, where they threaten the country integrity and selfless morality of Edmund and Fanny.

Mary and Henry Crawford's exposure to the causes of physical evil started during their childhood at the home of their aunt and uncle. Their guardians had a marriage in which they agreed "in nothing else" except affection for Mary and Henry (MP, 40). After the death of the aunt, the uncle, Admiral Crawford, who "was a man of vicious conduct,
... chose, instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his own roof..." (MP, 41). Life in such an atmosphere of lovelessness has made the Crawfords think marriage not a pact of love and devotion, but a farce. Mary says of marriage:

there is not one in a hundred of either sex, who is not taken in when they marry. Look where I will, I see that it is so; and I feel that it must be so, when I consider that it is, of all transactions, the one in which people expect most from others, and are least honest themselves (MP, 46).

Mary's opinion of the falseness of marriage typifies her cosmopolitan cynicism about the devotions of the heart. Love means nothing in the real world, which to Mary is London. Men are guided by avarice and greed, in her eyes. Selfish desires bring the most pleasureable rewards. She has grown up in a household where adults had no respect for one another; and the only happiness they had was in parties, clothes, and matching up wealthy suitors with acquisitive, ambitious women.

When Mary speaks cynically of marriage or of human motives in general, Edmund agrees with Fanny that "... that uncle and aunt! They have injured the finest mind!--for sometimes, Fanny, I own to you, it does appear more than manner; it appears as if the mind itself was tainted" (MP, 269). Later in the novel, Edmund meets Mary's two closest
friends in London, sisters who married for money and have never accepted the spiritual dissatisfaction they brought on themselves. "'I look upon her intimacy with those two sisters,'" says Edmund, "'as the greatest misfortune of her life and mine. They have been leading her astray for years'" (MP, 421).

Henry Crawford has also sustained damage to his moral development while in Admiral Crawford's household, though he is unaware of it. Mary mentions this physical evil to him when she talks of his leaving that household: "'My dearest Henry, the advantage to you of getting away from the Admiral before your manners are hurt by the contagion of his, before you have contracted any of his foolish opinion, . . . .'") (MP, 295). She also tells Henry that his "'regard for the Admiral has blinded you,'" and Henry argues: "'. . . . we do not think quite alike here. The Admiral . . . is a very good man, and has been more than a father to me. Few fathers would have let me have my own way half so much'" (MP, 296). That is precisely Henry's problem. As Austen says, he has been "ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long" (MP, 467). Henry has always given his selfishness full rein, and his money and a lack of lessons in or example of self-control from the Admiral have merely urged him on. He tells Rushworth that only three months after coming of age, he had made all the alterations to his estate that he felt it needed. "'I am inclined to
envy Mr. Rushworth for having so much happiness yet before him," says Henry: "'I have been a devourer of my own'" (MP, 61).

Mary admits to Fanny that satisfying his artistic whims at his estate has not been Henry's only pursuit of pleasure: "'He has now and then been a sad flirt, and cared very little for the havock [sic] he might be making in young ladies' affections'" (MP, 363). His flirtation with the Bertram sisters shows his vain determination to capture women's hearts. When Austen says Henry looks forward to acting in a play at Mansfield because "in all the riot of his gratifications, it was yet an untasted pleasure," we can see why he "was quite alive at the idea" (MP, 123). Henry has worn out all the paths to pleasure before his youth has ended. His lack of self-control and an ignorance of the rewards that devotion to the duties of his estate or to any one woman could bring him have left him an empty man. In London he never learned of love or selflessness, so he has exhausted the usual urbane pleasures and now looks about him at Mansfield for new gratification.

The physical evil Henry brings to Mansfield—the cosmopolitan belief in selfish pursuits, vanity, and insincerity in life—hurts some members of "Heaven" and destroys others. Julia Bertram is the first person Henry hurts. He courts and then drops her for Maria, leaving Julia to sulk and detest Henry. A few days later he stops his flirtation with Maria when Sir Thomas returns home to
oversee Maria's marriage to Rushworth. His way of breaking off his flirtation is to tell Tom Bertram, in front of Maria, that he is leaving Mansfield for other engagements which Maria knows "were all self-imposed" (MP, 193). Maria's "agony of her mind was severe," but she is too proud to say anything to Henry (MP, 193). By the next week, Austen tells us: "Henry Crawford had destroyed . . . [Maria's] happiness," and Maria rushes into the life of wealth and self-love that marriage to Rushworth offers (MP, 202). Henry's vanity, grown out of his physical evil, effectively destroys the happiness of Julia and Maria, and his next target is Fanny.

Susan Morgan tells us that "Henry is a flirt not because he has been subject to feelings but because he has not. He is, in fact, cold-hearted, and would warm himself upon other people's feelings, . . . ." Henry cannot love; therefore he cannot form lasting attachments. His first mention of courting Fanny contains no reference to love, only to the vain pleasure of conquest: "' . . . I cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart'" (MP, 229). The reason for his attraction he claims is that Fanny "is now absolutely pretty . . . . Her air, her manner, her tout ensemble is so indescribably improved!'" (MP, 229-30). When he sees her with her favorite brother, William, all he can appreciate in her fraternal love is that "the sensibility which beautified her complexion and illumined her countenance, was an
attraction in itself . . . . It would be something to be loved by such a girl . . . . " (MP, 235). Henry evaluates Fanny's beauty and her heart as prizes to be won. Fanny's spiritual love does not interest him, but her looks and moral reputation would be precious assets to his self-image. As a prized thoroughbred could increase the value of his stable, Fanny Price as a wife could enhance Henry Crawford's reputation for "moral taste" (MP, 235).

Austen shows us that Henry can put as much energy into his role as Fanny's suitor as he put into his flirtation with the Bertram sisters. Fanny rejects him, but, "A little difficulty to be overcome, was no evil to Henry Crawford . . . . His situation was new and animating" (MP, 327). Henry wants "to have the glory, as well as the felicity, of forcing . . . [Fanny] to love him" (MP, 326). Fanny's happiness never concerns Henry in his pursuit. She begs him to leave her alone. Austen tells us Fanny resents "a perseverance so selfish and ungenerous. Here was again a want of delicacy and regard for others . . . . How evidently was there a gross want of feeling and humanity where his own pleasure was concerned . . . ." (MP, 328-29). Fanny can see that Henry is pursuing her as he does foxes in his weekly hunting. She has seen what he did to the Bertram sisters. She knows he cannot love anyone. After his first proposal, she thinks about Henry, ". . . who thought so slightingly, so carelessly, so unfeelingly . . . who was every thing to every body, and seemed to find no one

As much as Henry's pursuit of Fanny disturbs her, it is not nearly as frightening to her as Mary Crawford's flirtation with Edmund. Edmund, the true object of Fanny's love, is smitten by Mary, and Fanny's greatest fear is that she will lose him. Austen tells us, after Henry has proposed to Fanny and he and his sister have left Mansfield, that "... it was this sister, . . . who was now the chief bane of Fanny's comfort . . . ." (MP, 366). Even when Henry pesters her, Fanny is most afraid of Mary. When in Portsmouth, she receives a letter from Edmund expressing his hopes to marry Mary. This letter, Austen tells us, is a "terror" to Fanny.

Fanny becomes an unwilling companion to Mary after Edmund's brother and sisters leave Mansfield. The loss of friends who share her London ideals of lively cynicism and pleasure leaves Mary lonely. When she invites Fanny to take shelter at the parsonage during a storm, she starts with Fanny "an intimacy resulting principally from Mary's desire of something new, and which had little reality in Fanny's feelings" (MP, 208). Mary shows how little she understands or cares for Fanny's feelings when Henry tells her of his scheme to play with Fanny's heart to make her "feel when I go away that she shall never be happy again," and Mary carelessly leaves Fanny to "her fate" (MP, 231). Fanny amuses Mary and Mary knows that her seeming regard for Fanny cannot fail to impress Edmund. But not caring how her brother hurts Fanny shows Mary's disregard not only for her
new friend, but for the sensibilities of a heart that is vulnerable enough to feel love.

Mary's solicitude for Fanny is all show. When she cannot impress Edmund with her concern, she shows it off to another Bertram. At the ball Sir Thomas gives for Fanny, Mary, out of "a general prevailing desire of recommending herself to . . . [Sir Thomas], took an opportunity of stepping aside to say something agreeable of Fanny" (MP, 276). She then, in her London ways of believing that Fanny would be made most happy by "filling her with sensations of delightful self-consequence," asks Fanny if she is privy to Henry's reasons for leaving Mansfield the next day (MP, 277). It is beyond her understanding that Henry's insincere flirtations only offend and confuse Fanny. Mary is not capable of understanding a selfless heart interested only in sincere love and impervious to flattery. The "confusion of discontent" she causes to Fanny only impresses Mary enough to think Fanny "odd" (MP, 277-78).

As Mary fails to understand Fanny, so Fanny is incapable of seeing society from Mary's viewpoint. The two young women can never be true friends because they can never share common beliefs. After their season of intimacy, Fanny still sees Mary as having "a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so; darkened, yet fancying itself light" (MP, 367). Mary is still afflicted with the same faults in her soul that she had when she came to Mansfield. Mary's selfishness and cynicism, which have
caused her physical evil, frighten Fanny as she watches Edmund lured by Mary's urbane charm. Austen seems to see the attraction as the immoral lifestyle of London (which produces physical evil) threatening to seduce the selfless code of duty and love that is Mansfield's redeeming virtue. Austen has given us Fanny as our heroine and as Fanny fears, so should we.

As Austen tells us, "Fanny was disposed to think the influence of London very much at war with all respectable attachments. She saw the proof of it in Miss Crawford . . . ." (MP, 433). Mary Crawford is attracted to Edmund, but she can never truly love him. When he first accepts her invitation to listen to her play her harp, she feels: "There was a charm, perhaps, in his sincerity, his steadiness, his integrity, which she might be equal to feel, though not equal to discuss with herself. . . . he pleased her for the present; . . . it was enough" (MP, 65). This initial impression Mary has of Edmund eventually gives her an acquisitive desire for him, like the desire Henry has for Fanny; but she never really develops a selfless love for him. She is never willing to alter her lifestyle to fit his chosen life as a clergyman. Mary tells Edmund: "'A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of'" (MP, 213). And she knows clergymen are neither wealthy nor leaders of London society. Religion, which promises no quick self-gratification, has no importance in Mary's life. It requires selfless devotion, which Edmund has learned from
his father at Mansfield, but which Mary never saw or heard of during her formative years in London. Her opinions are now too set on pleasing herself to allow any room for change. Her physical evil is not reversible; the faults in her soul are too deep. When she says "'A clergyman is nothing,'" and begs Edmund to change his mind, despite his fervent assurance to her that the clergyman's life "'is of the first importance to mankind,'" she shows whose needs and feelings she values most (MP, 92). Mary knows how Edmund values his future profession, yet she continues to cut him with comments such as "'It is ... Independence and love of ease--a want of all laudable ambition, of taste for good company, or of inclination to take the trouble of being agreeable, which make men clergymen'" (MP, 110).

Mary's values are the selfish, cold-hearted ones she learned from London's lifestyle which produces physical evil. She values Edmund not for his moral principles reflected in his future plans, but for the pleasure she feels in trying to change them. One of her fondest memories of Edmund is of him capitulating, against his better decision, to his family's demands to act in their presentation of "Lover's Vows." Mary tells Fanny: "'His sturdy spirit to bend as it did! Oh! it was sweet beyond expression'" (MP, 358). She cannot appreciate Edmund's dedication to the clerical life. When she realizes he will soon take religious orders, she thinks:

It was plain that he could have no serious views,
no true attachment, by fixing himself in a situation which he must know she would never stoop to. . . . She would henceforth admit his attentions without any idea beyond immediate amusement. (MP, 288)

This determination of Mary's to "never stoop to" the profession for which Mansfield's virtues prepared Edmund never breaks, but it does waver. It is weakened once by the news of Tom's near-fatal illness, which gives Mary hope that Edmund may yet become a baronet. Mary, hoping for an accurate report on Tom's condition, writes Fanny and mentions her regret at snubbing the future clergyman who may soon be a future nobleman: "It was a foolish precipitation last Christmas, but the evil of a few days may be blotted out in part. Varnish and gilding hide many stains. It will be but the loss of the Esquire after his name" (MP, 434). Such is Mary's concern for Tom's health. Her London ambitions cannot be distracted by sympathy for the stricken family. Mary calls her feelings "philanthropic and virtuous," even if she is hoping for the death of a former friend and possible brother-in-law (MP, 434). Fanny feels only "disgust" at Mary's cold-heartedness (MP, 435). Austen shows the reader with this letter that Mary never loses her resolve, supported by her own selfishness, to value "her decided preference of a London life" and reject that of Edmund and Mansfield (MP, 255).

Susan Morgan claims: "Mary Crawford is a great
creation both because she is an interesting blend of virtues and faults and because Austen has made her a mixed character in which the faults triumph. This is the tragedy in *Mansfield Park*—despite their intelligence, the Crawfords cannot understand any lifestyle that disagrees with their London upbringing. They can fit into the social lifestyle of Mansfield, as long as it includes parties, and they are charming enough to persuade the Bertrams, even Edmund and Sir Thomas, that they feel a real attachment for Mansfield. We can see the degree to which the Bertrams are taken in by the Crawfords when Edmund falls for Mary and when he and his father try to convince Fanny to accept Henry's proposal. The Crawfords can put on the appearance of espousing the Mansfield morality of simple, country integrity and friendship. But even their charm cannot cover up their underlying selfishness and their addiction to London vanities. As Robert A. Colby writes, "... Miss Austen means us to recognize in Mary a creature who is not vicious but erring because she ... lacks 'fixed principles.'" Or as Edmund puts it, "'She does not think evil, but she speaks it--speaks it in playfulness--and ... it grieves me to the soul!'" (MP, 269). Mary and Henry cannot hide their physical evil forever. They are both intelligent enough to notice Edmund and Fanny's moral principles and to know that such moral strengths are considered valuable by some parts of society. Yet they cannot make the sacrifice of social prestige or give up their code of self-gratification long
enough to absorb the Mansfield virtues.

Mary says once "'I do not pretend to set people right, but I do see that they are often wrong'" (MP, 50). Although she is talking of raising young ladies to make their debut, we see that Mary is observant and can discern right and wrong in other people. She can even occasionally see her own mistakes, as when Edmund leaves her at Mansfield and she regrets putting down the clergy in front of him: "It was ill-bred—it was wrong. She wished such words unsaid with all her heart" (MP, 286). But in this case, her regrets spring from her boredom, her need for Edmund's company. Her moralizing is more self-serving than introspective. And Henry is of the same mold. To impress Fanny, he talks to Edmund about the clergy and claims he could be a clergyman if only he could have "'a London audience. I could not preach, but to the educated; to those who were capable of estimating my composition'" (MP, 341). Henry, like Mary, cannot be serious about morality. He shares with his sister her belief that "'Selfishness must always be forgiven you know, because there is no hope of a cure'" (MP, 68).

Austen, by showing us the Crawfords' ruined attitude towards moral principle, duty, religion, and love, seems to be telling us that Mary is indeed correct that "'there is no hope of a cure.'" After Mary tells Edmund that the only fault in Henry's affair with Maria was in the folly that led to their discovery, Edmund admits to Fanny the hopeless depth to which the London lifestyle and its resultant
physical evil have sunk the Crawfords: "'The evil lies yet deeper; in . . . [Mary's] total ignorance, unsuspiciousness of there being such feelings [as moral revulsion], in a perversion of mind which made it natural to her to treat . . . [the affair] as she did'" (MP, 456). The Crawfords cannot cure their physical evil. As R. F. Brissenden says, "... the freedom enjoyed by Mary and Henry Crawford is illusory—they and the people with whom they have been so ruinously associated are trapped . . . ."23 Henry Crawford, after his affair with Maria Rushworth, is assigned by Austen to a life of "vexation and regret—vexation that must rise sometimes to self-reproach, and regret to wretchedness . . . ." (MP, 468-69). Mary "was long in finding . . . any one who could . . . put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head" (MP, 469). Henry ends trapped in unhappiness, Mary trapped in her circle of parties and gossip, still searching for a husband, but now he must have Edmund's goodness as well as the requisite wealth. As Susan Morgan says, "Our final sight of Mary, still unattached, tinged with regret, . . . is a portrait in sterility."24

London prevents the Crawfords from ever reaching their moral potential. Portsmouth does not nurture moral principle, but it does not prevent it from growing, as Austen shows us with the success that Fanny, Susan, and William achieve once they leave their first home. Mansfield contains both the selfishness of personal pride and social prestige and the selflessness of religious belief and
devotion to duty. A physical evil of selfishness makes London a Hell for its inhabitants, who can never escape, while the moral neglect and vulgarity of Portsmouth make it a Limbo, from which some escape to the Heaven of selfless love and integrity at Mansfield. Austen's three worlds in Mansfield Park are very different, but all serve to point out the serious spiritual harm of physical evil and the need to remove that evil before it progresses beyond a cure.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO


10. Nardin, p. 94.

13. Trilling, p. 137.
15. Tanner, p. 141.
17. Trilling, p. 133.
20. Morgan, p. 156.
22. Colby, p. 98.
23. Brissenden, p. 159.
CHAPTER THREE: PERSUASION

Persuasion, Austen's last completed novel, treats the topic of evil as seriously as does Mansfield Park. In this case, the evil which perverts the soul is moral evil, Jenyns' "vice," such as "avarice, selfishness, and ambition," which rise from what the New Catholic Encyclopedia calls "a privation of rectitude . . . affecting a free will, which through its own fault lacks a perfection it ought to have." As she did in Mansfield Park, Austen draws a clear portrait of evil and of the moral qualities needed to eradicate it. Just as physical evil is a serious threat to happiness in Mansfield Park, moral evil threatens happiness in Persuasion. Furthermore, it almost passes through society unnoticed.

In Pride and Prejudice, moral evil, present in the Wickhams, never escapes the notice of society. Elizabeth, Jane, Mr. Bennet, and Darcy always know that Lydia is selfish, and halfway through the novel Elizabeth learns that Wickham is just as bad. At the end of the story, the Wickhams are given their just fate--life with each other. Physical evil in Mansfield Park escapes detection a little longer. The Bertrams' easy acceptance of the Crawfords into their family circle shows us how dangerously insidious the Crawfords' physical evil can be. No one except Fanny
notices the Crawfords' lack of moral principles until the Crawfords have disgraced the Bertrams and have forced Maria into exile. Yet the Bertrams are saved by Fanny. She brings selflessness and devotion to duty back to Mansfield. In *Persuasion*, William Elliot's moral evil goes unnoticed by everyone in the Elliot circle except Anne. And unlike Fanny, Anne never has enough influence with her family to help them recognize and reject William Elliot's moral evil. William Elliot's own greed causes him to run off with Mrs. Clay in order to save his inheritance, but it is unlikely that Anne's family has a moral awakening after this incident. The Elliots never abandon their blinding selfishness. Society is in danger, Austen seems to say, if its members cannot cultivate a perceptive moral sense that can detect and avoid moral evil. The sombre mood of the novel reflects this serious warning.

Susan Morgan writes that "*Persuasion* is above all a love story . . . . "1 It is a romance, but not a romance of witty flirtation and girlish laughter, which made almost comic Austen's treatment of moral evil in *Pride and Prejudice*. *Persuasion* is "a sad love story with a happy ending."2 The romance in this novel is shaded by the heroine's lost youth and the anxiousness of repairing a broken love affair. Anne Elliot, the heroine, ". . . had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older--the natural sequence of an unnatural beginning."3 As Julia Prewitt Brown claims, *Persuasion* "possesses the grace
of despair, the grace of giving way to despair."4 Anne Elliot's chances of happiness at the beginning of the story are not as certain as Elizabeth Bennet's in Pride and Prejudice. Love does not always equal felicity in Persuasion, just as moral evil, which was treated comically in the case of the Wickhams in Pride and Prejudice, is not humorous in Austen's presentation of William Walter Elliot in Persuasion.

Another character in Persuasion who many critics say is as impotent a villain as Lady Catherine is in Pride and Prejudice is William Walter Elliot. Julia Prewitt Brown claims that "Mr. Elliot's part in the plot is relatively insignificant."5 G. B. Stern dismisses Elliot: "... Jane Austen did, I think, so despise him that he fails to be fascinating even before his real character is disclosed."6 Marilyn Butler claims, "... there is very little that is significant for William Walter Elliot to represent" in Persuasion.7 Rachel Trickett, discussing Elliot's rivalry with Captain Wentworth over Anne, claims: "Mr. Elliot does not convince us as a rival since Anne is never moved by him."8 Trickett is not alone in her opinion; many critics and readers see Anne's hesitation to accept Elliot as a friend, her lack of interest in him as a suitor before Mrs. Smith's revelations, her assurance to Lady Russell early in her relationship with her cousin that "... we should not suit" (P, 159), as proof that Elliot never threatens Anne's attachment to Wentworth.
Yet Elliot does offer Anne the opportunity to continue her family line. Stuart Tave tells us: "Mr. Elliot has been a threat to Anne's family and herself. He holds out to her the possibility of becoming Lady Elliot and the mistress of Kellynch . . ." When Lady Russell tells Anne how delighted she would be to see Anne take up her mother's role as Lady Elliot, Anne has to "try to subdue the feelings this picture excited. For a few moments her imagination and her heart were bewitched. The idea of becoming what her mother had been . . . was a charm which she could not immediately resist" (P, 160). After Anne hears of Elliot's past from Mrs. Smith, she "could just acknowledge within herself such a possibility of having been induced to marry him, as made her shudder at the idea . . . ." (P, 211). Elliot may never win Anne's heart, but he does tempt her momentarily.

Although Anne never loves Elliot, the real object of her affections, Captain Wentworth, does not know this. Wentworth sees Elliot courting Anne in Bath, and his determination to make Anne his wife is shaken:

Jealousy of Mr. Elliot had been the retarding weight, the doubt, the torment. That had begun to operate in the very hour of first meeting her in Bath; that had returned . . . to ruin the concert; and that had influenced him in everything he had said and done, or omitted to say and do . . . . (P, 241).
Besides scaring Wentworth, Elliot seems a real obstacle to Anne's happiness. Anne sees Wentworth's jealousy and feels: "It was misery to think of Mr. Elliot's attentions.--Their evil was incalculable" (P, 191). Elliot seems far from "insignificant" here, and more than a "conventional villain," as Susan Morgan call him. He seems a real, though perhaps not insurmountable, threat to Anne and Wentworth's romance.

What those who dismiss Elliot because he does not win Anne fail to think of is Anne's future if Elliot had been successful. What if Wentworth had given up when he repeatedly saw Anne and Elliot together and heard of her family's approval of the connection? We have seen how Anne reveres her mother's memory and how she would like to restore Kellynch's reputation. If Anne had no Wentworth and were to become Lady Elliot, how would her moral values change, surrounded as she would be by his vices? D. W. Harding alludes to this possibility when he differentiates between Austen's caricatures and her characters: "[Caricature] assures us that although the heroine may be distressed . . . by the caricatured figure the danger and trouble will always remain external, the threat will not be to the values which make her the heroine." He adds that "fully portrayed characters" do threaten their intended victim's values, and he cites "Mr. Elliot's wooing of Anne" as one of his examples. Evidently Elliot is not universally discounted as a figure who has no moral significance in *Persuasion*. 
Alistair M. Duckworth calls Elliot "as insidious a character as is to be seen in Jane Austen's gallery." He also refers to Austen's "most amoral characters--Wickham, Mary Crawford, Mr. Elliot . . . ." Elliot is both insidious and amoral. Elliot is accepted into Sir Walter Elliot's social circle because he is "a truly conscious hypocrite," changing his opinions to suit each listener and flattering everyone. As Anne sees, "Mr. Elliot was too generally agreeable . . . . He endured too well,--stood too well with everybody" (P, 161). This chameleon quality enables Elliot to pursue his own selfish desires without arousing the curiosity of anyone except Anne. He is selfish enough to covet Sir Walter's title after years of deliberately avoiding his cousins. He writes to Mrs. Smith's husband: "'I wish I had any name but Elliot. I am sick of it'" (P, 203). Yet ten years later, after he has made more money than Kellynch will ever be worth, he courts the Elliots at Bath and is "indignant" at the rumors that he once rejected the family name: "He, who had ever boasted of being an Elliot, and whose feelings, as to connection, were only too strict to suit the unfeudal tone of the present day!" (P, 139). Elliot works his way into Sir Walter's family to make sure that Mrs. Clay does not marry Sir Walter and cut him out of his title. As Mrs. Smith says: "'To do the best for himself, passed as a duty'" (P, 202).

Elliot is too selfish to worry about the feelings of others. He made no effort to hide his disdain for the
Elliot when he first reached maturity, Mrs. Smith tells us (P, 202). "... Mr. Elliot sees everyone as a possible tool," claims Marvin Mudrick, and Elliot's own words support this. He encourages Anne to join her father and sister in paying court to their unresponsive, insipid cousins, the Dalrymples, and "enjoy all the advantages of the connexion as far as possible ... as rank is rank, you being known to be related to them will have its use in fixing your family ... in that degree of consideration which we must all wish for" (P, 150). Status and money are Elliot's mental yardsticks for measuring people; he cannot appreciate the open-hearted kindness Anne exhibits and values in her friends. As he tells Anne, "'Good company requires only birth, education and manners ...'" (P, 150). When an acquaintance of his loses the gloss of money and status, Elliot is quick to drop him. The Smiths, who treated Elliot as a brother and supported him when he was young and poor, are bankrupted by Elliot, who "seemed to have had no concern at all for ... [Mr. Smith's] probable finances, but, on the contrary, had been prompting and encouraging expenses, which could end only in ruin" (P, 209). After he has had his fun with the Smiths, he ignores Mrs. Smith's pleas to fulfill his duties as executor of her husband's estate, showing his "hard-hearted indifference to any of the evils ... [his inaction] might bring on her" (P, 209-10). Anne sees the "inhumanity" (P, 210) in Elliot and sums him up: "Mr. Elliot is evidently a disingenuous, artificial, worldly
man, who has never had any better principle to guide him than selfishness" (P, 208).

Elliot's soul is flawed by moral evil. He is not merely misguided by physical evil, like the Crawfords in Mansfield Park, who can see the good in Fanny and Edmund but cannot emulate it. Elliot does not seem to want to emulate Anne. He flatters what he calls her "fastidious" taste in companions when he discusses the Dalrymples with her, but he claims that acquaintances need not scruple about mutual desire. To him, a relationship can be based on "birth and good manners"—meaning social status and civil bearing—and open-hearted politeness is unnecessary. The capacity to love is missing from Elliot's spirit—how can he love Anne when he seems equally agreeable to her and to Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Mrs. Clay, her spiritual opposites? Anne is his opportunity to further strengthen his family ties and gain a tractable wife in the bargain. Anne observes that "Mr. Elliot was rational, discreet, polished,—but he was not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others" (P, 161). Elliot is not "open" because he has no selfless feelings. His soul cannot love; he cannot feel disinterested admiration or moral indignation. All Elliot's cares are for himself; his only interest is in pleasing himself, so the affairs of others cannot touch his emotions.

Elliot's moral evil is deep and its consequences are serious. His first marriage, based solely on money, is
unhappy. Unlike the Wickhams' marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elliot's liaison is not presented comically. We do not laugh at his former wife; we feel sorry for her. Mrs. Smith tells us the first Mrs. Elliot "fell in love" with her future husband, while "All his caution was spent in being secured of the real amount of her fortune, before he committed himself" (P, 202). Just as we cannot laugh at Elliot's marriage, we cannot laugh at Elliot's treatment of Mrs. Smith. Moral evil in *Persuasion* is not impotent, and it is not glossed over with comedy, as it is in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Yet Elliot's moral evil escapes the notice of his most frequent companions in Bath, the Elliots and Lady Russell. As Susan Morgan tells us, Jane Austen's villains reveal their moral faults to anyone who wants to see them. The only characters they fool are those who refuse to be perceptive.17 Stuart Tave claims that Elliot has "more sense than Sir Walter and Elizabeth,"18 which accounts for their blindness to his faults. Sir Walter and Elizabeth, pompous eccentrics, are not humorous characters with an amusing weakness of pride, as are Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*. The latter characters never harmed Elizabeth Bennet. Sir Walter's and Elizabeth's pride and selfishness do real harm to Anne, keeping her spirits low and robbing her of friendship for most of her youth. They do not have the "real understanding" to appreciate Anne's "elegance of mind and sweetness of
character" (P, 5). Lack of intelligence and an overabund-
dance of pride also keep Sir Walter and Elizabeth from
questioning Elliot's sudden reappearance in their lives.
Since they feel that their society must be desired by
everyone in Bath, they see no reason why Elliot should not
court their favor.

Lady Russell is just as blind, but for slightly
different reasons. She feels: "If . . . [Elliot] really
sought to reconcile himself like a dutiful branch, he must
be forgiven for having dismembered himself from the paternal
tree" (P, 136). Her "prejudices on the side of ancestry"
have given Lady Russell "a value for rank and consequence"
(P, 11). These prejudices make her over-value the attrac-
tions of the Elliots, and she sees nothing wrong in Elliot's
renewed attentions. But ancestral reverence alone does not
define her interests. She feels like a mother to Anne,
whose selflessness and good heart she has the intelligence
to admire. When she sees Elliot's attraction to Anne, she
is "as much convinced of his meaning to gain Anne in time,
as of his deserving her . . . ." (P, 159). For Lady
Russell, Elliot's attraction to Anne defines his character.
Lady Russell neversuspects that Elliot is using her to
influence Anne into marriage. When Elliot is able to "meet
even Lady Russell in a discussion of [Anne's] merits," Lady
Russell sees deep feelings in Elliot where there is only a
canny use of her emotions and influence. Lady Russell's
value for rank and her partiality for Anne are summed up in
her claim about Elliot's possible marriage to Anne: "A most suitable connection every body must consider it--but I think it might be a very happy one" (P, 159).

The fact that not even Lady Russell, the most intelligent (next to Anne) of the Elliot family circle at Bath, can see through Elliot's polished manners is frightening. Lady Russell "could not seriously picture to herself a more agreeable or estimable man" than Elliot (P, 146). Not only is Lady Russell's judgement wrong, but Elliot's smooth manners are evidently dangerously convincing. Only Anne has the ability to detect Elliot's moral evil. Her soul has an "interdependence of lucid vision and deep emotion . . . ."19 She is intelligent enough to put aside the approval her family circle gives Elliot and acknowledge her "sensation of there being something more than immediately appeared, in Mr. Elliot's wishing, after an interval of so many years, to be well received by them." (P, 140). When she talks with Elliot, Anne is the only one of the Elliot circle who does not impose her opinions and desires on to Elliot's words; she analyzes his conversation with a clear mind. She can see that her opinions and Elliot's do not always agree, as in their discussion of the Dalrymples. And she allows herself time to observe Elliot: "Though they had now been acquainted a month, Anne could not be satisfied that she really knew Elliot's character" (P, 160). Anne can see that Elliot is intelligent; she does not translate that into a reverence for status, as do her father and sister, and she
does not think that Elliot's intelligence is enhanced by his attraction to her, as does Lady Russell. Anne simply sees Elliot's intelligence and wonders: "... who could answer for the true sentiments of a clever, cautious man, grown old enough to appreciate a fair character?" (P, 161).

Elliot's feelings, or lack thereof, also come under Anne's scrutiny. Anne prizes "the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others" (P, 161). She is gifted with deep emotions herself. We see them in her scenes with Wentworth, from the time of their first meeting, after eight years, when "a thousand feelings rushed on Anne," (P, 59), to her speechlessness when Wentworth removes one of her boisterous nephews from her back (P, 80), to the "joy, senseless joy" she feels when she hears that Wentworth is not engaged to Louisa Musgrove (P, 168). Finally, we hear her emotions in her assurance to Captain Harville that women are capable "of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone" (P, 235). After these words, "She could not immediately have uttered another sentence; her heart was too full, her breath too much oppressed" (P, 235). Her ability to feel deeply helps Anne to detect and appreciate deep feelings in others. When she sees that Elliot never seems perturbed by those around him, she touches on his selfishness, which keeps him from caring for other people. Although she does not know the extent of this flaw in his character, she detects enough of a moral weakness to keep Elliot at an emotional distance. The thought of becoming
Lady Elliot tempts her momentarily, but she never feels an emotional attraction to her cousin. It is her feelings, her ability to form lasting friendships, which prompt her to visit Mrs. Smith in Bath. And through this old friend, Anne learns that her suspicions of Elliot are correct. When Mrs. Smith tells her story, Anne says "... you tell me nothing which does not accord with what I have known, or could imagine. There is always something offensive in the details of cunning" (P, 207). Anne has "a quickness of perception, ... a nicety in the discernment of character, a natural penetration," which saves her from Elliot's smooth charm (P, 249). She alone detects the symptoms of moral evil in her cousin and rejects him.

Austen seems to want us to see the real threat of moral evil to society, by showing us the easy acceptance Elliot receives from Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Lady Russell. Elliot's moral evil has tragic results, as we see in the circumstances of his first marriage and in his treatment of Mrs. Smith. In *Persuasion*, moral evil is not softened by comedy. Elliot is not a harmless bumbler like the Wickhams. Even the minor characters who display Elliot's faults of cold-hearted pride, Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and the Dalrymples, are treated as threats to Anne's happiness, deliberately calculating to snub those who do not share their selfish arrogance. Elliot is not the "insignificant" character many critics claim him to be. He represents an important theme in *Persuasion*, the theme of moral evil and
its insidious threat to society. From the comic treatment of moral evil in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen has advanced to attack what she portrays as a sort of spiritual disease—the lack of moral perception. Only Anne's clear vision and deep feelings give her the ability to perceive moral evil. Austen seems to encourage the reader to cultivate a moral perception like Anne's, in order to eradicate the selfishness and inhumanity of moral evil.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

2. Wright, p. 160.
15. Nardin, p. 133.
17. Morgan, p. 179.
18. Tave, p. 279.
19. Morgan, p. 175.
CONCLUSION

Austen's literary treatment of moral and physical evil is an important component of her fiction and it changes noticeably during her career. *Pride and Prejudice*, one of her early novels, is dominated by comedy, not evil. Although moral evil has permanently flawed the Wickhams' souls, *Pride and Prejudice* is not a tragic story of moral evil. The Wickhams are obviously selfish and they lack moral principles, but they never permanently block the hero and heroine's happiness. Our main attention never shifts from Elizabeth and Darcy's courtship. Austen makes the Wickhams comic by exaggerating Lydia's gay selfishness and Wickham's conceit to make us laugh at the pair's faults. She does the same with the minor characters in the novel whose souls are tinged with moral evil: we cannot help laughing at the proud Lady Catherine's fruitless attempts to stop Elizabeth and Darcy's courtship, and we cannot read Mr. Collins' pompous outpourings of humility without grinning to ourselves. In *Pride and Prejudice* moral evil is always subservient to comedy.

In *Mansfield Park*, however, fifteen years after the original composition of *Pride and Prejudice*, the treatment of evil in the characters is untouched by comedy. By the time Austen composed this novel, her preoccupation with
light-hearted romance seems to have waned and her concern for the tragic spiritual effects of a life ruled by vanity and selfishness has strengthened. Physical evil, the suffering of a soul deprived of moral lessons of selflessness, a soul unable to learn how to love, figures prominently in this novel. Mary and Henry Crawford, who have all the witty charm and social graces their London society can teach them, earn only our pity because they cannot learn to love anyone but themselves.

The main character of the novel, Fanny, is briefly threatened by Henry's acquisitive desire for her, but Mary causes Fanny the most concern. She out-charms Fanny for Edmund's heart, losing it only at the end of the novel when he finally recognizes Mary's lack of moral principle. Only Henry's adultery with Maria Bertram Rushworth alerts the Bertrams to the Crawfords' physical evil hiding under their sophisticated charm. For most of the novel, Fanny is alone in her recognition of the Crawfords' spiritual flaws. In Mansfield Park, Austen seems to be showing us how dangerously imperceptible physical evil can be, and how its attendant lovelessness condemns its victims to spiritual stagnation.

Persuasion, Austen's last completed novel, seems to intensify the warning against ignoring evil. Part of the society in this novel, the Elliot family circle, is as blind to William Walter Elliot's moral evil as the Bertrams are to the Crawfords' physical evil. And the heroine, Anne, like
Fanny in *Mansfield Park*, is the only member of the family who perceives a lack of moral principle in the villain. Lady Russell even encourages Anne to marry Elliot, although Anne's aversion to Elliot's unemotional, indiscriminate behavior to her friends and enemies makes marriage impossible. Since Anne never succumbs to Elliot's charms, critics often dismiss him as an insignificant character. Austen seems to think Elliot is important, though. His successful infiltration of the Elliot family and his easy acceptance into Bath society seem to be Austen's way of warning us that unless we cultivate Anne's deep emotional understanding, moral evil could fool us as easily as Elliot fools his peers and many present-day critics.

Few critics seem to have noticed Austen's attention to the topic of evil. However, a look at Austen's treatment of moral and physical evil shows us that her concern about evil played an increasingly important role in her novels over the years. I believe that recognizing her comic treatment of moral evil in *Pride and Prejudice*, her serious view of physical evil in *Mansfield Park*, and her surprisingly unnoticed warning against moral evil in *Persuasion* all contribute to a thorough understanding of her as a moralist.
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