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Coming upon the town: whores and fallen women in the works of Jane Austen

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Green, Jacqueline. 2019. “Coming Upon the Town: Whores and Fallen Women in the Works of Jane Austen”. figshare. https://doi.org/10.26174/thesis.lboro.8256200.v1.

Coming Upon the Town: Whores and Fallen Women in the Works of Jane Austen

by

Jacqueline Green

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

December 2018

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Abstract

Coming Upon the Town: Whores and Fallen Women in the Works of Jane Austen

This thesis contributes to the body of recent critical works which have sought to reinterpret the novels of Jane Austen, by restoring their historical context to reveal the breadth of her achievement. Demonstrating her awareness of illicit sexual behaviour during the Georgian era and showing that she weaves allusions to this pervasive aspect of her society throughout her works, it debunks claims that her novels are a product of rural isolation and that she was disengaged from the wider currents of her turbulent world. This thesis argues that Austen employs these references to engage with contemporary gender debates on the position of females within Georgian society, by showing that courtship could be a threatening arena within a hostile social structure that can lead a naïve, vulnerable woman to her downfall.

Drawing on references to high-profile contemporary scandals and popular fictional works, this thesis contends that Austen engages with her era's fascination with licentious behaviour throughout her novels. These references serve as a foil within her works to highlight the dangers that women are exposed to as they negotiate the marriage market. Furthermore, Austen uses allusions to the Georgian *demimonde* to lament the limited opportunities available to women within the upper-gentry to secure their futures outside of matrimony.

This thesis adds new and original lines of enquiry through the close reading of hitherto overlooked scenes and chapters in Austen's work. It argues that within Austen's novels, her depictions of characters such as Lydia Bennet, Maria Rushworth and Mrs Clay, draw on her own direct exposure to this aspect of Georgian society, as well as her knowledge of literary sources and public scandals in the wider world. These women are drawn into the Georgian *demimonde*, on the fashionable outskirts of the criminal world, through their engagement in illicit sexual activity. Furthermore, innocent and naïve characters, such as Harriet Smith and Marianne Dashwood, are threatened by this world because of their social vulnerability and romantic susceptibility. Their association with individuals known to be implicated in illicit liaisons exposes them to prevailing patriarchal structures within which women are exploited by unscrupulous men such as George Wickham, Mr

Willoughby and Frank Churchill. Allusions to the sex trade and high-profile scandals highlight the potential fate of such women. Their inevitable slide into the lowest category of prostitution, a life ‘on the town’, can only be halted by the intervention of sympathetic patriarchal authority figures or by removing them from the temptations of corrupt Georgian society into rural seclusion. Recovering these contemporary references to illicit sexuality within Austen’s work allows us to appreciate her significance more thoroughly, by revisioning her engagement with contemporary debates on the vulnerability of women within society. This thesis shows that Austen employs allusions to this contemporary social issue to lament the inequality of women’s treatment and expose how the dangers represented by this aspect of her world were present even in the decorous drawing-rooms of Georgian society.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank Loughborough University for continuing to offer me opportunities to develop both academically and professionally. The resources and support available at the University have enabled me to pursue this course of study and to continue to develop my personal abilities since my time here as an undergraduate.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Carol Bolton, for her support and valuable advice, particularly in finding my own voice to communicate my research. Her guidance in steering me to valuable resources and copious feedback have been appreciated.

I would especially like to thank my family, work colleagues and friends for their support and tolerance. Thank you for taking an interest and for your forbearance when I haven't wanted to talk about it. In particular, my theatre companions for their amenability in attending every Austen related event available over these many years. Special thanks to my wonderful Mum and brother, Neil. Also, to my Dad, who is much missed.

It would be remiss if I did not also record my love and thanks to Daxter and Molly.

Mostly importantly to my partner Dave. Thanks for putting up with the increasingly enormous piles of books and the disruption to our home and lives. My apologies that this has taken so long and thanks for keeping me going.

List of Illustrations

Illustration 1: *The Harlot's Progress, Plate 1: Moll Hackabout arrives in London at the Bell Inn, Cheapside*, William Hogarth (1732) …….. 42

Illustration 2: *The Harlot's Progress, Plate 5: Moll dying of syphilis*, William Hogarth (1732) …….. 66

Illustration 3: *Drawings faithfully copied from nature at Naples*, Friedrich Rehberg (1794) ……196

Illustration 4: *Jane Austen*, by Cassandra Austen, pencil and watercolour (circa 1810) …….. 201

Illustration 5: *Jane Austen*, published by Richard Bentley, after Cassandra Austen, stipple engraving (1870) ……. 202

Illustration 6: *Watercolour of Jane Austen*, by Cassandra Austen (1804) …….203

Illustration 7: *The Harlot's Progress, Plate 3: Moll has gone from kept woman to common prostitute,* William Hogarth (1732) ……239

Table of Contents

Abstract ..... **i**

Acknowledgements ..... **iii**

List of Illustrations ..... **iv**

Chapter One: Introduction **1**

‘A hint of it, with Initials’ 4

‘The little flaw of having a Mistress’ 19

‘Her reading was very extensive’ 33

Chapter Two: *Sense and Sensibility*: ‘We always know when we are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure’ **49**

‘Known all over the town’ 51

‘Only to sink deeper’ 63

‘As good a kind of fellow as ever lived’ 71

Chapter Three: *Pride and Prejudice*: ‘To be sure it would have been more for the advantage of conversation, had Miss Lydia Bennet come upon the town’ **80**

‘A *scheme* of infamy’ 81

‘The most determined flirt’ 93

‘We were most unhappily deceived’ 102

‘A truth universally acknowledged’ 107

Chapter Four: *Mansfield Park*: 'A mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so; darkened, yet fancying itself light' **123**

'Considering who and what she is' 124

'This is what the world does'..... 134

'So totally improper for home representation' 151

'A matrimonial *fracas* in the family of Mr. R.' 163

Chapter Five: *Emma*: 'Most prudent men would be afraid of the inconvenience and disgrace they might be involved in, when the mystery of her parentage came to be revealed' **172**

'The natural daughter of nobody knows whom' 174

'It always ended in "Kitty, a fair but frozen maid"' 185

'She had been fortunate in the attitude' 191

'Tempted by every thing' 204

Chapter Six: *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*: 'She was a clever young woman, who understood the art of pleasing' **213**

'Only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them' 215

'In all the white glare of Bath'..... 224

'A very dangerous companion' 232

'There was nothing else to be done' 241

Conclusion..... **253**

Bibliography **259**

Coming Upon the Town: Whores and Fallen Women in the Works of Jane Austen

Chapter One

Introduction

Jane Austen (1775-1817) has traditionally been regarded as a writer of polite, drawing-room fiction, which is detached from the turbulent period within which she lived. She is also seen as shrinking from writing about physical desire, repressing sexual attraction behind a veneer of manners and respectability. This thesis will contradict this view, to show that Austen's work has been misrepresented and that a more careful reading can uncover the full social and literary context of her writing. Much recent critical work on Austen has been focused on relocating her novels within their historical and literary contexts and thereby re-establishing the importance of references which are lost to the modern reader. My thesis will draw on this research, to show that Austen was concerned with how the position of women within society was influenced by contemporary attitudes towards, and fear of, illicit sexuality. I will uncover the social context of her works and their literary heritage to demonstrate that Austen uses references to illicit sexual relationships within her novels to highlight the gender inequality and double-standards which characterised Georgian society.

Austen's novels are often divided into two groups, reflecting the dates of their composition, rather than their publication. The first group were initially composed during the 1790s, while Austen lived in Steventon, clearly reflecting the style of contemporary literature, and were later revised before their eventual publication. These are the 'light & bright & sparkling'[1] novels *Northanger Abbey* (1817),[2] *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) - which was originally an epistolary work - and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), which Austen claimed to have 'lopt & cropted'[3] from its

[1] Austen uses the phrase to describe *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813. See Deirdre Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Letter 80: 4 February 1813, pp. 203-204, p. 203.
[2] Although dated 1818 in the frontispiece, it first appeared along with *Persuasion*, in December 1817, Deirdre Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 590.
[3] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 79: 29 January 1813, pp. 201-202, p. 202.

original form titled *First Impressions*.[4] After a seemingly inactive period whilst Austen lived in Bath and Southampton, these were followed by the works composed once she settled in the Hampshire village of Chawton in 1809: *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815)[5] and *Persuasion* (1817), which are more complex in tone and are viewed as the output of the mature and settled Austen. However, an alternative view is given by Kathryn Sutherland who believes that all the novels 'were the products of the mature Chawton years […] the culmination of some twenty years of uninterrupted fictional experimentation', with the older works being extensively revised before publication.[6]

Published during the Regency period,[7] between 1811 and 1818, Austen's works were initially viewed as conservative in nature, supporting the social hierarchy against the revolutionary currents of the era.[8] However, during the late 1980s critics began to question the assumption of Austen's conservatism and connected her with a more radical agenda, particularly with regard to gender representations in her novels. Critical works by Margaret Kirkham,[9] Alison Sulloway[10] and Claudia Johnson[11] explored Austen's novels within the context of debates about sexuality and gender inequality during the period. Sulloway, for example, suggests that 'when [Austen] satirized male privileges and female disenfranchisements, her purposes were as insurrectionary as those of Mary Wollstonecraft and Wollstonecraft's feminist colleagues',[12] connecting Austen's works to this early feminist, or proto-feminist writer, who famously called for 'a revolution in female manners – […] to

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[4] For the first mention of the title, see Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 17: 8-9 January 1799, pp. 33-36, p. 35.
[5] Although dated 1816, *Emma* first appeared in December 1815. See Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, p. 525.
[6] Kathryn Sutherland, 'Introduction', in *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), pp. xiii-xlviii, p. xli.
[7] In 1811 King George III was judged to be unfit to rule and his son, the Prince of Wales, became Prince Regent. It was a further nine years before the Regent became King George IV. See Claire Tomalin, *Mrs Jordan's Profession: The Story of a Great Actress and a Future King* (London: Viking, 1994), p. 239.
[8] See for instance Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) and Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1971, repr. 1994).
[9] Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983).
[10] Alison G. Sulloway, *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).
[11] Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
[12] Sulloway, *Province of Womanhood*, p. xvi.

restore to them their lost dignity'.[13] The arguments of these critics resulted in a renewed critical focus through works which aim to recover the wider social and historical context of Austen's novels, including recent publications by Jillian Heydt-Stevenson,[14] John Wiltshire[15] and Janine Barchas.[16] Through these works:

> Austen is thus re-created as a novelist who is intellectually abreast of her literary and philosophical inheritance and well aware of contemporary context, but who, having chosen merely to allude to this material, to imply her knowledge rather than to display it, requires modern scholarship to recover what might have been taken for granted by her first readers.[17]

Barchas claims that recent critical interventions have revealed 'a historical specificity to Austen's work that sits uneasily astride her long-standing reputation for timelessness'.[18] She believes this, in part, resulted from a delay in her novels becoming popular, leaving 'her Victorian audience unable or unwilling to decipher her allusions to the celebrity gossip and political history' of the earlier period.[19] Similarly, Amanda Vickery, in the BBC television production *Pride and Prejudice: Having a Ball* (2013), which sought to recreate the Netherfield Ball, notes that:

> there's a whole layer of Austen's nuance which is lost to modern readers. Austen's world was taken for granted by her contemporaries but it's surprisingly distant from us. To understand her novel[s] fully we need to re-imagine the time in which she lived.[20]

This thesis builds incrementally on recent historical criticism of Austen's novels whilst also offering new and original lines of enquiry through the close reading of hitherto overlooked scenes and chapters in her works. This work adds new insights into the ways in which Austen draws attention to the sexual and reputational threats facing vulnerable women through the careful handling of sub-plots and minor characters that evoke contemporary scandal. I will employ an historical and contextual

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[13] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ed. Miriam Brody (London: Penguin, 1975, repr. 1985), p. 132.
[14] Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, '"Slipping into the Ha-Ha": Bawdy Humor and Body Politics in Jane Austen's Novels', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 55:3 (2000), 309-339; Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, repr. 2008).
[15] John Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[16] Janine Barchas, *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location, and Celebrity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).
[17] Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen*, p. 4.
[18] Barchas, *Matters of Fact*, p. 1.
[19] Barchas, *Matters of Fact*, p. 2.
[20] Amanda Vickery, *Pride and Prejudice: Having a Ball*, *BBC One Television*, (26 December 2013).

approach to the social and literary influences that shaped Austen's work, with the aim of contributing to this recent criticism which focuses on:

> the political, legal and social setting in which she wrote, with the result that the earlier assumption that the novels are isolated or sequestered from the historical circumstances of Austen's time has been thoroughly displaced.[21]

I will argue that her engagement with debates regarding gender inequalities, especially with reference to the 'marriage market', is accentuated through the use of references to fallen women and prostitution, which have been largely overlooked by critics. References to literary sources and high-profile scandals are subtly woven throughout her novels, but have been obscured both by the passage of time and the image of Austen's work as refined, polite, romantic drama. This subtlety in her use of allusion and inference was necessary in order for her to avoid being associated with writing improper material. Nevertheless, this thesis argues that she knowingly uses references to high profile scandals and employs imagery relating to fallen women to engage with the gender debates of the period. Published at a turning point, when the licentious Georgian era gave way to Victorian sensibilities,[22] Austen's meanings have been masked by the interpretation given to her work and the established image of the author as unworldly. By highlighting references to sexual scandals and popular literary works which feature illicit sexual relationships and prostitution, this thesis aims to restore the full depth of Austen's meanings and demonstrate the complexity of her achievement.

'A hint of it, with Initials'[23]

In this thesis, I will argue that Austen's works reflect both their literary heritage and Georgian society's fascination with illicit sexual behaviour, but this is easily overlooked by readers who accept her relatives' representation of the author as the

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[21] Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen*, p. 3.

[22] As Karen Harvey suggests, this was 'The key moment […], when the desiring, appetitive early-modern woman was replaced by her prudish, passive and constrained nineteenth-century successor'; *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 4. Furthermore, Dan Cruickshank notes that 'In the eighteenth century London's sex industry had been conducted openly as part of daily life, but by the mid-nineteenth century it existed covertly, a secret parallel world enjoyed in guilt and shame […] The myriad of lies that were the result of this still thriving but almost manically concealed sex industry were the most dramatic expression of the great social change that had overtaken Britain', *The Secret History of Georgian London: How the Wages of Sin Shaped the Capital* (London: Windmill Books, 2009), p. 35.

[23] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 53: 20-22 June 1808, pp. 128-132, p. 131.

kind, clever, but unworldly 'dear Aunt Jane'. The inaccuracy of this image fostered by her family is revealed in their claim that she 'was always very careful not to meddle with matters which she did not thoroughly understand. She never touched upon politics, law, or medicine'.[24] However, as with many of their protestations, Austen's novels belie this contention, as I will demonstrate in this thesis. Of the limited biographical sources available, Henry Austen's original *Biographical Notice of the Author* (1818) is the only one written by one of Austen's siblings. It appeared shortly after her death, alongside the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. However, most of the family's reminiscences were written many years after Austen's death in 1817 and consequently they are vague and unreliable sources. For instance, Austen's niece, Anna Lefroy, in her *Recollections of Aunt Jane*, written in 1864, when asked to recall her aunt, acknowledges 'it seems now all so shadowy!'.[25] Alongside this obscurity caused by the passage of time, the later works by Austen's extended family were also filtered through the Victorian sensibilities of the writers. Therefore, it is appropriate for them to include the image of Aunt Jane 'busily stitching away at a work of charity',[26] while concealing the existence of her disabled second brother, George Austen,[27] and obfuscating details about her potential romantic attachments. Caroline Austen describes 'a very private and rather uneventful life',[28] echoing Henry Austen's *Biographical Notice* which suggests that 'a life of usefulness, literature, and religion, was not by any means a life of event'.[29] Austen's nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, would reiterate this in his work, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1871), claiming that 'of events her life was singularly barren: few changes and no great crisis ever broke the smooth current of its course'.[30] The use of the word 'barren' seems to link this supposed uneventfulness, at least in the judgement of her male relatives, to her 'failure' to

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[24] James Edward Austen-Leigh, 'A Memoir of Jane Austen' (1871), in Sutherland (ed.), *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, pp. 1-134, p. 18.
[25] Anna Lefroy, 'Recollections of Aunt Jane' (1864), in Sutherland (ed.), *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, pp. 155-162, p. 157.
[26] Lefroy, 'Recollections', p. 159.
[27] Sutherland, 'Introduction', p. xxxiii.
[28] Caroline Austen, 'My Aunt Jane Austen: A Memoir' (1867), in Sutherland (ed.), *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, pp. 163-182, p. 165.
[29] Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice of the Author' (1818), in Sutherland (ed.), *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, pp. 135-143, p. 137.
[30] Austen-Leigh, 'A Memoir of Jane Austen', p. 9.

marry and produce children.[31] Many of the contributors of these later reminiscences were young children when Austen died, which further contributes to making these memoirs unreliable. Sutherland has also noted perceptively that the different branches of the Austen family appear to be competing to establish their 'particular family view of Jane Austen, and against it might be set other, different family recollections'.[32] These family memoirs have resulted in 'the long-standing myth of Austen as a genteel amateur, the spinster lady author who sketched her novels in moments of leisure'.[33]

This established image of kindly 'dear Aunt Jane', leading an uneventful life, has proven to be remarkably resilient, despite evidence to the contrary in her letters, *Juvenilia* and recent biographical accounts. Claire Tomalin argues that on the contrary, Austen's life 'was in fact, full of events, of distress and even trauma, which left marks upon her as permanent as those of any blacking factory'[34] (a reference to the well documented life of Charles Dickens). Similarly, Lucy Worsley suggests that in fact Austen's life 'contained bitterness and regret, financial deprivation and anxiety'.[35] Indeed, there were a number of family traumas which impacted on Austen. Most dramatically the first husband of her flamboyant cousin, Eliza de Feuillide, was executed during the French Revolution, proving that Austen could not have been unaware of, or unaffected by, the events happening in France.[36] On Austen's twenty-ninth birthday, her close friend Mrs Lefroy died after a fall from her horse, and within a few days of this her father died suddenly after a short illness.[37] She would also suffer the loss of sister-in-laws who died during childbirth, and her cousin and friend, Jane Williams (née Cooper), was killed in an accident in 1798, demonstrating that Austen's life was not untroubled by tragedy. Arguably the most significant loss was that of her sister Cassandra's fiancé, Thomas Fowle, who died in

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[31] Of course, for Austen her novels represented her offspring. For instance, she referred to *Pride and Prejudice* as 'my own darling Child' and of *Sense and Sensibility* she noted 'I can no more forget it, than a mother can forget her sucking child'; respectively, Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 79: 29 January 1813, pp. 201-202, p. 201 and Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 71: 25 April 1811, pp. 182-185, p. 182.
[32] Sutherland, 'Introduction', p. xxv.
[33] Jan Fergus, 'The Professional Woman Writer', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, eds Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, repr. 2006), pp. 12-31, p. 12.
[34] Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Penguin, 1997, repr. 2000), p. 4.
[35] Lucy Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home: A Biography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2017), p. 3. Worsley notes that the Austens 'belonged to what's been called the "pseudo-gentry", aspiring to a genteel lifestyle without having quite enough cash to pay for it', *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 28.
[36] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 84.
[37] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 189.

1797, an event which seems to have propelled both siblings into early spinsterhood.[38] Furthermore, the failure of Henry Austen's bank in 1816 had an impact on the wider family who consequently lost their investments, including Austen herself who lost £25 of the treasured profit from her publications.[39] In her own romantic life, meanwhile, Austen's youthful infatuation with Tom Lefroy is poignantly revealed through her letters to Cassandra in January 1796,[40] which reveal her thoughts to be continually returning to him. The influence of this fleeting relationship was sufficiently significant for her to refer to it again several years later:

> [Mrs Lefroy] did not once mention the name of the former [Tom Lefroy] to *me*, and I was too proud to make any enquiries; but my father's afterwards asking where he was, I learnt he was gone back to London.[41]

The use of the phrase 'too proud' in this letter, suggests that her feelings were injured by this brief romance. However, Helena Kelly has noted the need to be cautious in our interpretation of this story, as these letters are now missing and 'our only authority for what they say – or indeed, for the fact they existed at all – is the volume of *Letters* published in 1884 by Lord Bradbourne'.[42] The brief holiday romance noted by Cassandra, with 'a mysterious gentleman met during [their] summer holidays', and who subsequently died before he could resume their relationship, may have been the true love of her life.[43]

The surviving documents written by Austen offer only a limited insight into her response to these critical events of her life. Very few original sources have survived, and, as Tomalin states:

> She herself wrote no autobiographical notes, and if she kept diaries they did not survive her. Her sister destroyed the bulk of the letters in her possession, a niece did the same for those preserved by one of her brothers.[44]

Consequently, the remaining documents also offer little conclusive evidence about her attitude to important contemporary issues of the day, such as the anti-slavery

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[38] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 127.
[39] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, pp. 295-296.
[40] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 1: 9-10 January 1796, pp. 1-3; Letter 2: 14-15 January 1796, pp. 3-4.
[41] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 11: 17-18 November 1798, pp. 19-21, p. 19.
[42] Helena Kelly, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical* (London: Icon Books Ltd, 2016), pp. 28-29. Bradbourne, Austen's great nephew, was also 'troubled by Regency coarseness and edits out what he takes to be its worst excesses' from her letters, Roger Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 9.
[43] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 168.
[44] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 4.

campaign or the political implications of the French Revolution. The surviving letters predominantly provide trivial gossip about her acquaintances and details of her own daily activities. However, those letters that remain do offer some evidence to contradict the established image of 'dear Aunt Jane'. Their tone ranges from the lively optimism of Austen's early flirtation with Lefroy, to the occasionally acerbic wit with which she assesses her neighbours, revealing Austen and her sister 'laughing together at the absurdity of their social world'.[45] For example, she notes that her neighbour's wife is 'discovered to be everything that the Neighbourhood could wish her, silly & cross as well as extravagant'.[46] This comment encompasses the characteristics of both the 'extravagant' wife and the gossiping neighbourhood in Austen's critique.[47] Similarly, in a letter from 1811, she writes 'I give you joy of our new nephew, & hope if he ever comes to be hanged, it will not be till we are too old to care about it',[48] an unusual sentiment to express at the birth of a child, which reveals her strain of dark humour. This comment shows that the comedic violence of her *Juvenilia*, three hand-written volumes which represent her early literary experiments, in which her characters are 'loose women, drunkards, thieves and murderers',[49] is not confined to her early years but is still retained in her mature writing. Despite this evidence, the image of 'dear Aunt Jane' still retains its influence and, as Heydt-Stevenson notes, 'the myth persists that Austen's world was limited to the cerebral and refined, an elegant, ahistorical zone remote from her uncouth and politically turbulent era'.[50] This in turn has contributed to the widespread belief that Austen's novels are merely sexless romances focused on the narrow, privileged sphere of the middle gentry.[51]

Donald A. Low, for example, writing in the early eighties, identified that:

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[45] Jan Fergus, '"The Whinnying of Harpies?": Humor in Jane Austen's Letters', *Persuasions*, 27 (2005), 13-30, 28.
[46] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 14: 18-19 December 1798, pp. 25-28, p. 26.
[47] It also undermines the family's claims that 'Faultless herself, as nearly as human nature can be, […] she never uttered either a hasty, a silly, or a severe expression', Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice', p. 139.
[48] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 71: 25 April 1811, pp. 182-185, p. 182.
[49] Paula Byrne, *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things* (London: Harper Press, 2013), p. 59.
[50] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 1.
[51] For example, Charlotte Brontë famously claimed of Austen, 'the Passions are perfectly unknown to her […] even to the Feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition; too frequent converse with them would ruffle the smooth elegance of her progress', in Margaret Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë, Volume Two: 1848-1851* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12 April 1850, pp. 382-383, p. 383.

> The Regency is associated, to a greater degree possibly than any other period in English history, with social poise and distinguished cultural achievements. Jane Austen's England: the words call to mind an ideal of elegance and moral alertness typified not only by the shrewdly observed, eminently proper novels of Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott [...] It was a period, too, of lovely dresses which flowed with the natural line of Grecian taste, of carefully groomed horses and light, skilfully designed phaetons and landau. […] The brilliance of this extraordinary flowering of cultural life makes it easy to overlook a very different facet of early nineteenth-century Britain. For alongside the world of *Pride and Prejudice* and the Nature poets there existed a pulsating undisciplined urban underworld.[52]

Nevertheless, while Low's comment suggests a distance between this 'pulsating […] underworld' and Austen's 'proper novels' of 'social poise' and 'lovely dresses', other writers have acknowledged that this aspect of her era has a presence in her work. Bradford K. Mudge, for example, states that whores 'made brief appearances in novels by Sarah Scott, Fanny Burney, and Jane Austen, before being asked, rather rudely, to leave'.[53] Katie Hickman similarly describes it as 'that nebulous, unmentionable world which is so often hinted at and alluded to in the works of Jane Austen, but which always slides just out of our curious reach'.[54] However, these comments reveal the perception that Austen's engagement with this aspect of Georgian society is no more than a fleeting glimpse.

Indeed, many of Austen's references to this 'unmentionable world' are oblique and transient, such as in her novel *Pride and Prejudice*, when it is noted that:

> Mr Bennet was not of a disposition to seek comfort for the disappointment which his own imprudence had brought on, in any of those pleasures which too often console the unfortunate for their folly or their vice.[55]

Despite the failure of his marriage – a result of his 'folly' at being tempted into an imprudent match by a pretty face – Mr Bennet has not engaged in the dissipated activities, such as gambling, taking a mistress, or visiting prostitutes, which were the conventional eighteenth-century escapes from such marital disappointments. Indeed, the nature of these 'pleasures' is clarified in Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814)

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[52] Donald. A. Low, *Thieves' Kitchen: The Regency Underworld* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1982), p. 1.
[53] Bradford K. Mudge, *The Whore's Story: Women, Pornography, and the British Novel, 1684-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 251.
[54] Katie Hickman, *Courtesans* (London: Harper Perennial, 2003), p. 153.
[55] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), ed. Tony Tanner (London: Penguin, 1972, repr. 1985), p. 262. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses immediately following the reference.

through the character of Admiral Crawford, who has sought 'comfort' from his own unhappy marriage by keeping a mistress.

However, while the pleasures of this pulsating 'underworld' initially appear remote from the works of Jane Austen, I will argue that her engagement with the subject of prostitution is not as fleeting as Mudge's observation implies. Indeed, this aspect of Georgian society plays a significant role within her work. As Johnson suggests, 'Austen's fiction is exceedingly discreet. Though she never excludes the illicit entirely, she displaces it onto the periphery of her plots. But from there it exercises considerable influence'.[56] A closer examination of Austen's work, along with that of other popular novelists during the Georgian period, such as Frances Burney (1752-1840), Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) and Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), reveals numerous references to this aspect of society. In the light of such evidence, and despite the contentious nature of such a claim, I will argue that the Regency 'underworld' is represented within Austen's novels through her engagement with contemporary concerns about prostitution and its impact on women.

It is also worth noting that it is, to some degree, misleading to refer to criminality in Georgian society as an 'underworld', as this implies that it was hidden and separated from other aspects of society. This is not the case. It was a period, as Vickery notes, in which criminal trials and executions were treated as a highly popular form of entertainment, as 'through print, letters and hearsay the polite could take a horrid pleasure in the sensational details'.[57] Susannah Fullerton notes that 'one of the most striking aspects of Georgian law is the vast number of its capital offenses', which even included seemingly trivial acts such as 'cutting down an ornamental shrub'.[58] Austen would experience this harsh justice system directly when her respectable Aunt Leigh-Perrot was accused of shop-lifting in 1799 and threatened with transportation,[59] before eventually being acquitted.[60] Austen's *Juvenilia* reveals her awareness of this vicious criminal arena, as in these early

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[56] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 43.
[57] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 237-239.
[58] Susannah Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime* (Madison, Wisconsin: Jones Books, 2006), p. 39.
[59] The horrors of transportation, particularly for female convicts, are revealed in Siân Rees, *The Floating Brothel: The Extraordinary True Story of an 18th Century Ship and its Cargo of Female Convicts* (London: Headline, 2001).
[60] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, pp. 179-181.

works she 'succeeds in using [her heroines'] criminality to explore the violence of normative social relations during her era'.[61] Indeed, as well as the comments already noted regarding her new nephew, 'hanging is the "comic" punishment which Jane Austen reserved for one of the worst characters she ever created, Sukey Simpson, in the youthful *Jack and Alice*'.[62] Austen's early works, as Emily Auerbach notes, are 'saucy adolescent burlesques filled with outrageous heroines who murder their parents and poison their rivals'.[63] Furthermore, Austen represents the corrupting tendency of this domesticated violence within her mature novels, revealing its desensitising impact on the youngest Bennet sisters, who report, 'several of the officers had dined lately with their uncle, a private had been flogged, and it had actually been hinted that Colonel Forster was going to be married' (p. 105). For these young women, as Tim Fulford notes, 'brutal punishment seems just another amusing and ordinary event in the social round'.[64]

During this period illicit criminal and sexual activity existed side-by-side with 'polite' society and was highly visible both during everyday activities, such as visiting the theatre, and in printed sources such as newspapers and pamphlets. As Julie Peakman notes, 'newspapers and pamphlets [were] pumped out to supply erotic entertainment [as] more advanced printing methods brought with them greater choice and cheaper publications on sex'.[65] Indeed, a wide range of sexually explicit literature was available, including 'texts such as *Aristotle's Master-Piece*, a longtime best-selling manual intended for couples on the verge of marriage, newlyweds, nurses, and midwives',[66] plebeian chapbooks aimed at the labouring classes, and 'French language pornography' accessible to the social elite.[67] I will contend that references to these illicit aspects of society are extensively woven into popular novels during the period, as well as Austen's own works, and feature as a significant

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[61] Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, '"Pleasure is now, and ought to be, your business": Stealing Sexuality in Jane Austen's Juvenilia', *Historicizing Romantic Sexuality*, *Romantic Circles* (2006), section 27, http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/sexuality/heydt/heydt.html (accessed November 2012).
[62] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 201.
[63] Emily Auerbach, 'Searching for Jane Austen: Restoring the "Fleas" and "Bad Breath"', *Persuasions*, 27 (2005), 31-38, 31.
[64] Tim Fulford, 'Sighing for a Soldier: Jane Austen and Military Pride and Prejudice', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 57:2 (2002), 153-178, 165.
[65] Julie Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies: A Sexual History of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), p. 25.
[66] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 6.
[67] Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 8.

element within the development of storylines in her novels; particularly as they relate to the position of women within society and their search to secure suitable marriage unions.

Concerns about the 'marriage market', and the identification of appropriate marriage partners, were a topical issue within Georgian literature, featuring in novels such as Hannah More's (1745-1833) conservative *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809)[68] – in which the hero judges a variety of potential wives before finding his ideal partner – and Amelia Opie's (1769-1853) *Adeline Mowbray, Or the Mother and Daughter* (1804) – where the heroine rejects marriage as an unnecessary social construct and ultimately pays the price for this presumption. This literary preoccupation with marriage stems, at least partly, from the 1753 'Act intended for the better preventing of clandestine Marriages', commonly known as Hardwicke's Marriage Act. Wendy Moore notes that the Marriage Act was ostensibly prompted by 'concern over thwarted young lovers absconding to marry secretly'.[69] However, Tim Hitchcock argues that it had 'much more to do with the seduction of the daughters of the middling sort and gentry'.[70] He contends that much of the legislation concerning 'the regulation of sexuality through social policy', which was introduced during the middle of the eighteenth century, was 'a profound over-reaction to a largely non-existent problem [and] the product of the paranoid imaginations of the social-policy reformers'.[71] The Marriage Act tightened up the requirements for parental consent for those under 21 and required marriages to be performed in church.[72] Katherine Binhammer points out that 'before 1753, a promise of marriage plus sexual intercourse legally constituted marriage; the act rendered legal only those marriages performed with banns or a license'.[73] Therefore, it is claimed that this Act 'had the effect of turning those women who believed their suitor's promise to marry and consented to sex into fallen women and whores,

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[68] Austen's disapproval of this conservative text is indicated by her revision of a reference in her short story, *Catherine, or the Bower*. She updated her manuscript to include this novel in the repressive Mrs Pervical's recommended reading for the heroine. See Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 173.
[69] Wendy Moore, *Wedlock: How Georgian Britain's Worst Husband Met His Match* (London: Phoenix, 2009), p. 47.
[70] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 106.
[71] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 107.
[72] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 33.
[73] Katherine Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 50.

where previously they could claim to be legitimate wives'.[74] It also resulted in a surge of elopements across the Scottish border, where the law did not apply, and gave rise to the increasing popularity of marriages at Gretna Green, the first place across the border that offered an opportunity to marry.[75] This popular method for circumventing the law was widely reflected in literature of the period. Burney's *Camilla: Or a Picture of Youth* (1796), for example, which lists 'Miss J Austen, Steventon' as a subscriber, sees the heiress, Eugenia, abducted and carried away to Gretna Green where she is forced into marriage. Similarly, the eponymous heroine of Charlotte Turner Smith's (1749-1806) *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788) is abducted by her persistent lover, Delamere, 'with the intention of carrying her off to Scotland [although] he repents before they reach Barnet'.[76]

Another reason for the focus on courtship and marriage within literature of the period was the fact that matrimony was considered irrevocable, and the consequences of failed unions could be dire for women. Divorce remained virtually inaccessible for wives and anyone within the lower social classes, because it required an Act of Parliament.[77] Vickery suggests:

> divorce by act of parliament was prohibitively expensive and exceptionally rare; between 1670-1857 there were only 325 divorces in England, all but four of these obtained by men. Annulments were always staggeringly unusual, and to gain a legal separation in the church courts […] a female petitioner had to prove adultery as well as life-threatening cruelty.[78]

As Peakman notes, 'divorce […] was usually granted to men with adulterous wives but rarely vice versa. The adultery laws were heavily biased against women [who] had to prove other mitigating circumstances, such as severe cruelty or sodomy'.[79] This meant that divorce was only a realistic option for wealthy men. Furthermore, public scandal was unavoidable, with the publication of pamphlets and caricatures detailing divorce proceedings, and the associated 'Criminal Conversation' actions,

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[74] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 50.
[75] Martha Bailey, 'The Marriage Law of Jane Austen's World', *Persuasions On-Line*, 36:1, (Winter 2015).
[76] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 70.
[77] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 44.
[78] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 73.
[79] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 44.

ensuring the public could enjoy the salacious details.[80] 'Criminal Conversation' was based on the fact that a woman was entirely dependent on her husband, indeed she became on marriage, in effect, her husband's legal property.[81] As a result it was possible for a husband to demand compensation from an unfaithful wife's lover in criminal conversation or Crim. Con. Actions.[82] As Fullerton notes:

> as a wife's body was legally considered to be her husband's property, he therefore had a right to claim damages if her body were 'used' by another man, and thereby lessened in value.[83]

Within this environment, Vickery believes that 'informal "divorce" through desertion or mutual agreement must have been widespread'.[84] This was the fate that precipitated the heroine of Daniel Defoe's (1660-1731) *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* (1724) into her life of disrepute.[85] Alternatively, rather than pursuing a Parliamentary divorce, spurned husbands, such as Sir Richard Worsley, whose wife eloped with her lover, could opt instead to obtain 'Separation from Bed and Board' through the ecclesiastical courts.[86] This was an action by which 'spouses could achieve a form of divorce through a legal separation but remarriage for either husband or wife was forbidden'.[87] Amanda Foreman notes the cautionary tale of Lady Derby, who fled from her husband in 1778 to elope with the Duke of Dorset. In response:

> Lord Derby announced that he would not be divorcing her. It was a terrible revenge; by his refusal – it was almost impossible for a wife to divorce her husband except on the grounds of non-consummation – he consigned his wife to social limbo, disgraced, separated and unprotected.[88]

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[80] Hitchcock notes that 'throughout most of the first three quarters of the century these reports were printed as one-off pamphlets, but by the 1780s whole sets of crim.con. accounts were becoming available', *English Sexualities*, p. 16.

[81] Bailey notes that 'the cost of obtaining protection from want through marriage was that the wife lost her legal personality. At common law, husband and wife are one person, and that person is the man', 'The Marriage Law of Jane Austen's World'.

[82] Susannah Fullerton, 'Jane Austen and Adultery', *Persuasions*, 24 (2002), 143-163, 151.

[83] Fullerton, 'Jane Austen and Adultery', 151.

[84] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 73.

[85] Although commonly referred to as *Roxana* the full title is: *The Fortunate Mistress: Or, A History of the Life and Vast Variety of Fortunes of Mademoiselle de Beleau, afterwards call'd the Countess de Wintselsheim, in Germany. Being the Person known by the Name of the Lady Roxana, in the Time of King Charles II*.

[86] Hallie Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim: An Eighteenth-Century Tale of Sex, Scandal and Divorce* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2008), p. 56.

[87] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 56.

[88] Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), p. 69.

Lady Derby was indeed consigned to 'social limbo' by his decision, and because she was unable to remarry, never recovered her social position.[89]

With marriage viewed as binding, the choice of an appropriate marriage-partner was crucially important for the physical and financial security of a woman. Given scant opportunities for social interaction with potential partners, the Rushworths' failed marriage in *Mansfield Park*, for example, is agreed on the limited basis of 'dancing with each other at a proper number of balls'.[90] This concern regarding the ability to assess the suitability of potential marriage partners features widely in literature of the period. In *Pride and Prejudice* the pragmatic Charlotte Lucas addresses this concern when she stresses that:

> though Bingley and Jane meet tolerably often, it is never for many hours together; and as they always see each other in large mixed parties, it is impossible that every moment should be employed in conversing together. Jane should therefore make the most of every half hour in which she can command his attention (p. 69).

In addition, it was also a period in which there was 'a general drought of marriageable men, as the Napoleonic Wars would see military casualties at an average of 20,000 a year'.[91] Austen's works reflect this issue by representing societies, such as Highbury and Meryton, within which single females outnumber available men. Throughout her work she shows a consciousness that 'there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them' (*Mansfield Park*, p. 5). Austen's recognition of the importance of selecting a suitable companion within this context is shown throughout her novels. Furthermore, Paula Byrne suggests that Austen's reluctance to take this risk herself, explains her decision to turn down the opportunity to marry for financial security rather than affection, when she declined a proposal from a wealthy family friend, Harris Bigg-Wither.[92] Austen recognises the dangers for women who are the victims of unsuccessful marriages without access to divorce, and the consequent risk of losing their reputations by becoming 'fallen women'. As Fullerton notes, Austen's novels show that 'she was well aware of how easily women with no incomes or

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[89] Foreman, *Georgiana*, p. 69.
[90] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1814), ed. Kathryn Sutherland (London: Penguin, 1996, repr. 2003), p. 38. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses immediately following the reference.
[91] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 72.
[92] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, pp. 181-183.

women trying to escape unhappy marriages, could take the first step to prostitution'.[93]

Throughout her works, Austen shows her female readers positive representations of marriage in contrast to failed unions that lead to vice, so that they can seek to achieve this ideal for themselves and escape the dangers of sexual exploitation. During this period most women within the gentility had no choice but to make a 'career' out of marriage, in the absence of any alternative prospects of a working life, and with limited access to intellectual occupations. Therefore, as Heydt-Stevenson notes:

> Austen's multiple iteration of the courtship plot has drawn criticism from feminist critics who interpret her as endorsing only one possible outcome for her heroines: marriage. Her novels do end in marriage; however, the way that Austen demonstrates a shift of power […] suggests a strong assertion that the basis of a happy marriage arises from the affirmation of a woman's physicality and mind.[94]

The marriages which provide resolutions for the heroines of Austen's novels reflect changes in the nature of marriage that occurred over the course of the Georgian period, which saw an increasing emphasis on romantic compatibility rather than prioritising dynastic considerations. Lawrence Stone is credited with first suggesting this development in 'companionate marriage', in his work *Family, Sex and Marriage* (1977).[95] It is argued that companionate marriage became the ideal, as 'there was a noticeable shift towards thinking that social and financial status, still important, were *less* important than compatibility'.[96] However, Binhammer notes that 'historians query the practical effects of the new discourse of love in the eighteenth century, interrogating the extent to which choice and love actually overtook familial networks and economic interests as deciding factors in marriage'.[97] For instance, Vickery contends that this was not simply 'the substitution of the arranged marriage with the romantic betrothal',[98] but a recognition that 'mutual affection which crowned an advantageous match was a welcome blessing'.[99] Austen's own views on marriage stress the importance of this 'mutual affection'. In a letter to her niece, Fanny, she

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[93] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 104.
[94] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 203-204.
[95] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 3.
[96] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 77.
[97] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 168.
[98] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 40.
[99] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 41.

says 'anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection',[100] and adds that, 'nothing can be compared to the misery of being bound *without* Love'.[101] As Fullerton contends, women were no longer expected to 'marry a man selected by their father […] and to force a young girl into an uncongenial partnership was seem as contemptible'.[102] These changes espoused a form of marriage that involved a measure of equality between a couple, similar to that advocated by proto-feminist writers such as Mary Robinson (1757-1800),[103] former actress and mistress to the Prince of Wales (1762-1830), and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), who argued that 'the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband'.[104] It is not known whether Austen was familiar with the works of these writers, but Tomalin contends that 'the way in which her books insist on the moral and intellectual parity of the sexes' suggests her awareness of the issues they raised.[105] Wives were encouraged to be useful companions and helpmates to their husbands in a marriage based on mutual affection, not simply 'the mere dynastic building blocks they had once been'.[106] The ideal companionate wife, it was argued, while not expected to have the same level of education as their husbands, should be sufficiently well educated to be able to converse with them and offer practical assistance in managing their households; a considerable undertaking in large country estates.[107]

Proto-feminists, such as Wollstonecraft and Robinson, argued that the type of trivial 'education' traditionally given to women was inadequate for their role within a companionate marriage. They dismiss the idea 'that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point – to render them pleasing',[108] contending that this gave women only superficial accomplishments and did not provide them

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[100] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 109: 18-20 November 1814, pp. 278-282, p. 280.
[101] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 114: 30 November 1814, pp. 285-287, p. 286.
[102] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 93.
[103] There is some confusion over her date of birth, but Byrne suggests 1757 is most likely. Paula Byrne, *Perdita: The Life of Mary Robinson* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 429-430.
[104] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 113.
[105] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 141.
[106] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 187.
[107] For a description of the tasks women undertook within the household, see Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, pp. 127-160. Furthermore, Vickery notes that 'management of the country estate was often left to the mistress for months at a time, while the master was away at court, or at war', *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 132.
[108] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 110.

with the qualities required to be useful wives and mothers. Indeed, Wollstonecraft notes 'till women are more rationally educated, the progress of human virtue and improvement in knowledge must receive continual checks'.[109] This is echoed by Mr Knightley's comments in *Emma*, when he remarks on the heroine's aim to improve her friend:

> I am much mistaken if Emma's doctrines give any strength of mind, or tend at all to make a girl adapt herself rationally to the varieties of her situation in life. – They only give a little polish.[110]

Similarly, Wollstonecraft suggests that:

> [women] spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves – the only way women can rise in the world – by marriage.[111]

Austen appears to support this critique of female education in her works, rejecting the frivolous attainment of 'a little polish' by mocking it in her novels, and showing that typical 'accomplishments' are not useful attributes for a marriage partner or for the development of a moral character. For instance, the education of Maria and Julia Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, which is described as listing 'the principal rivers in Russia' and knowing 'the chronological order of the kings of England, with the dates of their accession' (pp. 18-19), does not give them the moral qualities or practical abilities to become useful 'helpmates' or dependable companions for their husbands. This type of trivial education, espoused by the conduct books of the period such as John Gregory's (1724-1773) *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), a particular target of Wollstonecraft in her treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and James Fordyce's (1720-1796) *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), which Austen mocks in *Pride and Prejudice*, does not produce a wife who would be capable of contributing as a partner in the running of complex estates such as Pemberley or Sotherton.

In Austen's work the ideal companionate marriage is exemplified by the Gardiners in *Pride and Prejudice* and the Crofts in *Persuasion*, and this is the type of

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[109] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 126.
[110] Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816), ed. Ronald Blythe (London: Penguin, 1966, repr. 1985), p. 67. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses immediately following the reference.
[111] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 83.

marriage that her heroines attain in the resolution of her novels.[112] Austen's positive representation of these couples is contrasted with marriage for social position and financial benefit (Charlotte Lucas and Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Maria Bertram and Mr Rushworth in *Mansfield Park*) and for physical attraction (Mr and Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park*). These marriages are shown as failures which lead to the couples retreating into separate lives, rather than working together for the benefit of their families. It is also worth noting the contemporary debate about whether marriage for social position and security, without love or affection, constituted a form of prostitution. Wollstonecraft suggests that:

> to rise in the world, and have the liberty of running from pleasure to pleasure, [women] must marry advantageously, and to this object their time is sacrificed, and their persons often legally prostituted.[113]

As I will discuss, this is an aspect of the debate that Austen explores through the prudent marriage of Charlotte Lucas to the obnoxious Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*. Furthermore, Austen uses allusions to sexual relationships outside of marriage as a contrast to the ideal companionate union. This is shown through characters like the illegitimate Harriet Smith in *Emma*, whose indeterminate social status, resulting from her parents' indiscretions, limits her ability to secure an advantageous marriage. Furthermore, the disreputable behaviour of Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, when she elopes and lives with Wickham before they marry, threatens her sisters' ability to secure their desired partners. By reflecting on the undesirable consequences of illicit sexual relationships, in contrast to the benefits of successful marriages, Austen shows that they threaten the social status and respectability of women, even extending to those not directly involved such as Lydia's sisters.

'The little flaw of having a Mistress'[114]

As well as changes to the law and the social nature of marriage, it is also significant that the period within which Austen wrote her novels was one that witnessed a fundamental shift in attitudes towards women's sexuality, 'from considering women as strongly sexual in nature to envisioning them as quiescent and erotically

[112] Perhaps with the exception of *Sense and Sensibility* as I will discuss in Chapter Two, p. 62, of this thesis.
[113] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 151.
[114] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 30: 8-9 January 1801, pp. 69-72, p. 71.

anesthetized'.[115] As Binhammer notes, 'female sexuality over the course of the eighteenth century was re-imagined as essentially passive against an earlier image as innately active'.[116] Ultimately women exhibiting sexual feelings would be viewed as 'essentially aberrant creatures, nymphomaniacs, either potential, or actual, inmates of insane asylums'.[117] Implicit within this was the view of sexual impropriety as a threat to the political stability of the nation, particularly as it related to ideas propagated by the French Revolution. As Amy Wolf notes 'in the post-revolutionary years, associating adultery and sexual licentiousness with the French and with revolution was not uncommon, [while] virtue and marital faithfulness become ideally English and thus patriotic qualities'.[118] In Austen's *Juvenilia* this debate on sexuality is reflected, as Byrne has noted, in the short unfinished story *Catherine*, *or the Bower*. In this work, Mrs Percival, the aunt of the eponymous heroine, believes that 'the stability of the state […] depends on proper behaviour between the sexes'.[119] Such comical representations of Mrs Percival's over-reactions to her niece's interactions with men, suggest that Austen does not subscribe to the view that Catherine's flirtations constitute a national threat. It was, however, common to link licentious behaviour with political instability, and as a result, the radical ideas of women writers like Wollstonecraft and Robinson could be repudiated based on their publicly-noted sexual indiscretions.[120] It became increasingly important as the period progressed for women to avoid being linked to this radical agenda in order to protect their reputations. This explains the subtlety of Austen's own engagement with this issue and why her family is insistent that she was always appropriately modest and demure.[121]

Furthermore, the shift in attitudes towards women's sexuality over this period resulted in a similar re-imaging of prostitution. Increasingly the image of the

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[115] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 5.
[116] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 3.
[117] William Acton, quoted in Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 227.
[118] Amy Wolf, 'Epistolarity, Narrative, and the Fallen Woman in *Mansfield Park*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 16:2 (2004), 6, 265-285, 279-280.
[119] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 48.
[120] Robinson published her feminist treatise, *A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799), under a pseudonym 'in order to avoid having her ideas discredited by means of personal attacks on her past conduct', Byrne, *Perdita*, pp. 368-369.
[121] For instance, Henry Austen stresses that 'She was thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature. On serious subjects she was well-instructed, both by reading and meditation, and her opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church', 'Biographical Notice', p. 141.

prostitute changed, as 'from being an uppity servant, she became either the tragic daughter of a middle-class man or […] the victim of the incompetence of the male head of household'.[122] Tony Henderson notes the conflicting representations of prostitution during the period, with one common image representing:

> the prostitute as an agent of destruction. She had chosen her calling and through her actions she fouled society, spreading physical ruin and moral disintegration […] resolutely vicious and beyond redemption, she was the woman as predator.[123]

In contrast, the alternative and increasingly influential view suggested a prostitute was victimised, with 'both her entry into vice and her remaining within it […] represented as involuntary'.[124] As Peakman notes, 'the wide range of images of the prostitute which ran simultaneously through this period show just how mixed were the public's attitudes towards them'.[125] She suggests three broad categories:

> the Brazen Whore was seen as the personification of unbridled lust and sin; the Seduced Maiden represented the naive maid corrupted by promises of marriage; and the Penniless Profligate was seen as a victim of poverty.[126]

Despite these images existing concurrently, increasingly the so called 'happy, or brazen whore', exemplified in earlier works like Defoe's *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722) and John Cleland's (1709-1789) *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748), who was complicit in her fall and unapologetic about her behaviour, was replaced in literature by middle-class victims of seduction or the evil machinations of disreputable men.[127] As Hitchcock notes, this changed perception influenced the representation of fallen women in literature, with them:

> beginning life either as an innocent servant […] or else as the impoverished, but middle-class, daughter of a half-pay officer or

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[122] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 100.
[123] Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 1999), pp. 166-167.
[124] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 167.
[125] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 19.
[126] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 19.
[127] It has been noted that 'as eighteenth-century society became increasingly obsessed with gentility and politeness, its authors attempted to "prettify" not only the prose used in descriptions but the stories of the ladies themselves. Editions [of *Harris's Lists*] from the 1770s through the 1790s feature more daughters of lawyers, clergymen, half-pay officers, schoolmasters, physicians and shopkeepers […]. As a […] daughter of a country parson, [a prostitute's] attraction was much greater', Hallie Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies: Pimp General Jack & the Extraordinary Story of Harris's List* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), p. 137.

> clergyman, the prostitute of the mid-century and beyond was inevitably the victim of the honeyed words of a young rake who seduced and then abandoned the now ruined object of his attentions. The story is familiar from countless novels.[128]

Debauched women, such as Richardson's eponymous heroine in *Clarissa: Or, The History of a Young Lady* (1748) and Antonia in Matthew Gregory Lewis's (1775-1818) *The Monk: A Romance* (1796), had little recourse but to conveniently die after being raped and so avoid living in a fallen state. Therefore, while women who conformed to the image of the victim were redeemable, their early death contributing to their redemption, those who were complicit in their downfall could be vilified as unnatural. These debates about the nature of women's sexuality feature within Austen's novels. Their depiction of contemporary attitudes towards, and fear of, illicit sexual behaviour is fundamental to her portrayal of Georgian society, and specifically as this affected women's position within that society and their fate within the marriage market.

It may seem surprising to suggest that Austen's works are engaged with this debate on sexuality and fallen women. However, this is partly due to the fact that the terminology relating to prostitution or illicit sexual activity during the Regency period is different from that in current use. Heydt-Stevenson has noted that in Austen's works references have become obscured by changes in terminology over time, suggesting that 'words that are familiar to modern readers do not necessarily signify just what they might think, and so Austen's meanings, like Shakespeare's, have often been lost'.[129] She gives the example that:

> when a student reads that Emma, shut up in a carriage with Elton, finds the clergyman 'making violent love to her,' he or she must be instructed that, no, Jane Austen, in this example at least, did not mean *that*.[130]

The phrase 'making violent love' in this context refers only to Mr Elton's over-effusive declaration of affection, not sexual assault. This shift in vocabulary makes it more challenging to identify references to the sex trade in contemporary literature, and within Austen's six major works. In order to investigate allusions to illicit sexual relationships in Austen's novels, it is necessary to clarify the language used to

[128] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 100.
[129] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 209.
[130] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 208.

describe women who would have been considered as prostitutes during the period in which she produced her works.

During this period, Arnold D. Harvey suggests that 'the consciously virtuous were ready to apply the term prostitute and its synonyms to any unmarried woman who had mislaid her virginity'.[131] However, the category of those considered to be prostitutes, or 'whores', was broader than this implies and much wider than is currently the case. From the desperate gin-sodden street-walker[132] to the most exotic courtesan or high-society mistress, as Hallie Rubenhold notes, 'convention branded all women who had broken the prescribed sexual norms as whores'.[133] Indeed, as Rubenhold suggests:

> the era's definition of a 'whore' was a broad and convoluted one. Along with visible streetwalking prostitutes and those who plied their trade in the theatres, taverns, brothels and bagnios, there existed an entire stratum of 'invisible' whores, from the outwardly respectable woman who conducted secret affairs to the labourer who offered sexual favours from time to time.[134]

Many of the terms commonly used to describe those involved with the sex trade, such as 'courtesan',[135] 'demi-rep'[136] and 'bunters',[137] have almost entirely vanished from use, except within studies of the eighteenth century. Indeed, within the British legal system, the term 'prostitute' was not used until 1822.[138] Henderson notes that 'the lack of clarity in the laws regarding prostitution (not least in their failure to mention the trade by name) created confusion' within the legal system.[139] Streetwalkers or whores were typically accused of other acts, such as 'disorderly

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[131] Arnold D. Harvey, *Sex in Georgian England: Attitudes and Prejudices from the 1720s to the 1820s* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 1994), p. 89.
[132] Cruickshank notes that, 'Alcohol – particularly cheap, strong and health-destroying gin – was popular and with good reason seen as the beverage that fuelled the sex industry and led to "lewd" behaviour', *Georgian London*, p. 474.
[133] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 179.
[134] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 133.
[135] This term 'Derives from the female version of the Italian 'cortegiano' or courtier, [and] was coined to describe the women associated with the luxurious and dissolute world of the Papal Court in Rome' during the Renaissance, Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 15.
[136] 'Originally used to describe upper-class or aristocratic women who, under the guise of married respectability, were known to intrigue and take lovers [this term was later] expanded to include sexually available women of the bourgeois classes', Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 160.
[137] 'The lowest, rudest and lewdest of the streetwalking class – frequently diseased', Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 336.
[138] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 194; Henderson notes that 'almost none of the laws under which prostitutes were most commonly arrested in the eighteenth century referred to their offence by name', *Disorderly Women*, p. 76.
[139] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 90.

conduct',[140] and most prosecutions of those engaged in selling sex for material benefit related to theft from clients, rather than the act of accepting financial remuneration for sexual acts.[141]

Although Austen never uses the terms 'prostitute', 'whore' or 'fallen woman' within her novels, recognising the era's broader definitions clarifies Austen's engagement with the issue. For instance, in *Mansfield Park* she describes the Prices' maid as 'trollopy-looking' (p. 350), a phrase suggestive of moral laxity. The same maid is later seen with a flower in her hair, confirming that she is engaged with some type of flirtation, much to the disgust of her mistress. Furthermore, these broader categories also implicate characters such as Admiral Crawford's mistress in *Mansfield Park*, and Mrs Clay, the widowed companion of Elizabeth Elliot, who elopes with the heir to Kellynch Hall in *Persuasion*. The comments of the eponymous anti-heroine in Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, clarifies this association when she asks her lover 'shall I now […] call myself your Whore, or Mistress, which is the same thing?'.[142] To the modern reader these characters would not be considered part of the sex trade, but in the Georgian era they existed on the boundaries of respectable society within the *demimonde*, and their behaviour would have resulted in them being considered as whores or prostitutes.[143]

While it may seem an iconoclastic juxtaposition to link Austen with prostitution or illicit sexual behaviour, this is due to the persistent misconception of her as an unworldly and secluded spinster. Nevertheless, it has long been argued that sex and physical attraction are significant components within Austen's novels. Alice Chandler was amongst the first to highlight this aspect, suggesting that:

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[140] Henderson notes that 'streetwalking prostitutes were almost invariably referred to within the policing system as "disorderly women"', *Disorderly Women*, p. 63.

[141] Henderson notes that 'the majority of prostitutes […] stood accused of stealing privately from the person, although some found assault included in the changes laid against them', *Disorderly Women*, p. 9.

[142] Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722), ed. G. A. Starr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, repr. 1998), p. 39.

[143] The *demimonde*, or 'half-world […] existed as an alternative society, the establishment's polar opposite. Comprised of enchanting courtesans, coquettish actresses and divorced wives, it teased, intrigued and infuriated the virtuous world by mirroring everything that was celebrated in it. It rivalled its respectable counterparts, with its own beauties and fashion icons', Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 172.

> It is a truth universally acknowledged that Jane Austen's novels are about courtship and marriage. But it is a truth almost as universally ignored that they are also very much about sex.[144]

Her paper has led the way for further works such as those by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick[145] and Heydt-Stevenson. Indeed, Heydt-Stevenson's thought-provoking work, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (2008), draws attention to the importance of sexuality and illicit sexual activity within Austen's work (although I would not subscribe to all of her inferences), as will be examined in later chapters.

This thesis will contribute to the argument that Austen's novels engage with contemporary debates on illicit sexual behaviour. I will contend that Austen would have been directly exposed to knowledge of illicit activity within Georgian society, and specifically to that of prostitution, not only through references in literature and popular culture but by direct exposure. She spent considerable periods of time in London, where Low notes that a 'pattern of stark contrast between prosperous and mean streets within a stone's throw of each other was repeated many times'.[146] As Hickman notes, in London 'the fashionable world and its seamier underbelly, the world of gallantry, were swept along in the same slip-streams, now rubbing shoulders, now merging, now separating again'.[147] Indeed, one often cited contemporary estimate from a police magistrate, Patrick Colquhoun, reveals the extent of the sex trade by suggesting that in the 1790s 50,000 women were working as prostitutes in London out of a population of less than one million.[148] Austen also spent time in Bath, which had a large population of prostitutes and was a popular resort for the *bon ton* and their courtesans. As Rubenhold notes, 'bobbing in the steamy waters, perambulating through the magnificent crescents and fluttering their fans in the assembly rooms […] wherever the respectable world went, the shadow world of the disreputable followed'.[149] Indeed, growing concern about prostitution led

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[144] Alice Chandler, '"A Pair of Fine Eyes": Jane Austen's Treatment of Sex', *Studies in the Novel*, 7:1 (1975), 88-103, 88.
[145] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl', *Critical Inquiry*, 17:4 (1991), 818-837.
[146] Low, *Thieves' Kitchen*, p. 3.
[147] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 59.
[148] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, pp. 134-135. However, half of this figure were 'women living with men on a regular basis while not legally married', Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 136.
[149] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 240.

to the founding of the Female Penitentiary and Lock Hospital in Bath in 1805, whilst Austen was a resident of the city.[150]

It is important to recognise that prostitution was widespread and highly visible during the Regency period. It was frequently represented within popular texts, images and newspapers, and some individuals associated with this licentious activity, such as Mary Robinson and Harriette Wilson (1786-1845), became famous, or infamous, celebrities. At the elite end of the trade, famous courtesans were glamorous and seductive characters who could achieve extraordinary wealth, and the public, both male and female, was fascinated by their lives.[151] Courtesans set fashions and drew crowds of fascinated spectators to watch them.[152] They were 'highly cultured women; rich, famous and, most remarkably, independent females in an era in which this was almost an impossibility' and as a result they 'felt they were worthy of respect and they demanded it'.[153] As Hickman notes:

> Part of the allure of the courtesan, I think, is that she has always been an ambiguous figure. She is not a mere prostitute, although she is unequivocally a 'professional' woman who accepts money in return for sexual favours. Neither is she a mistress, who usually considers herself the lover of just one man – although many courtesans, such as Elizabeth Armistead, were much-beloved mistresses at some point in their careers. Unlike a prostitute, prepared to sell her favours to all-comers, a courtesan always chose her patrons.[154]

Hickman adds that they were 'the choosers, not the chosen, theirs was a rare privilege indeed'.[155] However, they were also notorious and socially destabilising figures who existed outside of normal social mores, as 'the rules of sexual morality gave way first, [and] in their wake fell other, perhaps more far reaching barriers: of class, society and female propriety'.[156] For respectable women, 'the prospect of actually meeting a former courtesan, face to face, was rather like greeting a dangerously exotic animal out of a zoo'.[157] Furthermore:

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[150] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 102.
[151] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 23.
[152] Crowds of sightseers, for example, gathered to watch Kitty Fisher eat her supper, Hickman, *Courtesans*, pp. 7-8.
[153] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 2.
[154] Hickman, *Courtesans*, pp. 3-4.
[155] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 168.
[156] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 23.
[157] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 136.

> although courtesans were unequivocally morally reprehensible in the eyes of decent women, it did not take any great leap of imagination to see that the independence and sexual expression which they claimed were things of which ordinary women […] could not even dream.[158]

Of course, those involved in the sex trade were not universally celebrated. Various campaigns took place and groups were formed over the course of the eighteenth century that attempted to curb immorality and targeted the sex trade, including the Society for the Reformation of Manners and the Proclamation Society against Vice and Immorality.[159] The first Magdalene Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes was founded in 1758 with the aim of rescuing unfortunate women from vice, however, 'because of the severe restrictions placed on the women and girls, [they] were in fact more like houses of correction'.[160] Furthermore, as Hitchcock notes, 'the Magdalene Hospital […] assumed and created a model of the prostitute largely at odds with reality. […] enforc[ing] a model of the prostitute as victim'.[161] Binhammer suggests that 'Propagandists for the Magdalen Hospital […] represent the prostitute as virtue in distress, and by testifying that her loss of virginity was caused by seduction, not wilful desire, they create the pathetic object for their institution'.[162] Therefore, the institution was influential in fostering the idea of prostitutes as victims, and it is possible that women learned to adopt 'some version of the story in order to gain admittance'.[163] Despite these attempts to prevent prostitution, 'no remedy was successful – women continued to make a living from their sexual activities'.[164]

Furthermore, as the eighteenth century gave way to the starched attitudes that would characterise the Victorian period, the focus shifted to dwell on the lives of courtesans and prostitutes as cautionary tales ending in obscurity and poverty whereby 'their biographers delighted in giving them the most grisly possible end'.[165] The death of the actress-courtesan Sophia Baddeley, for example, was 'seized on as a warning to other women of the consequences of a life of vice'.[166] Baddeley

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[158] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 26.
[159] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 15.
[160] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 16.
[161] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 105.
[162] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 41.
[163] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 70.
[164] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 19.
[165] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 334.
[166] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 80.

achieved fame and fortune as 'one of the most famous players of her day'[167] during the 1770s, but died fifteen years later 'a hopeless laudanum addict, the fabulous riches bestowed upon her by her many lovers blown, the jewels, the diamonds, the silks, the carriages, squandered or sold'.[168] Similarly cautionary was the tale of Martha Reay, mistress to the Earl of Sandwich, who was shot and killed by a jealous young army officer, James Hackman, who fell in love with her.[169] He was subsequently hanged for her murder.[170] However, not all stories of courtesan's fates were as bleak as these suggest. As Dan Cruickshank notes, 'it was possible for a woman to harness the commercial power of prostitution in order to liberate herself, establish her own place in society and create an independent life'.[171] For instance, Elizabeth Armistead (1750-1842) 'was already a woman of substantial independent means' before she married the prominent Whig politician Charles James Fox (1749-1806).[172] Similarly, the Duke of Bolton had married his mistress, Lavinia Fenton, in 1751 (Austen knew their grandson Charles Powlett),[173] and the actress Elizabeth Farren (1759-1829) became Countess of Derby when she married the Earl of Derby in 1797.[174]

Furthermore, while these mistresses and courtesans represented the pinnacle of the highly visible Georgian sex trade, with their exploits being reported in newspapers and pamphlets, this was not the only aspect of the trade which appeared in print. As Frances Wilson notes:

> courtesans belonged to a massive sex industry that was so much an accepted part of the culture that since the middle of the eighteenth century Jack Harris […] had published *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies*, a kind of *Which?* Guide to the flesh of the town. *Harris's List* continued to run for thirty years.[175]

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[167] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 33.
[168] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. xix.
[169] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, pp. 126-127.
[170] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 127.
[171] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 362.
[172] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 84.
[173] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 88.
[174] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 118.
[175] Frances Wilson, *The Courtesan's Revenge: Harriette Wilson, the Woman who Blackmailed the King* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2003), p. 24.

The notorious *Harris's List of Covent-Garden Ladies or Man of Pleasure's Kalendar* (published annually from 1757 to 1795), has an obscure background.[176] Rubenhold claims that it was written originally by Sam Derrick, based on the ledger used by the real Jack Harris, chief waiter at the Shakespear's Head, whose name he adopted as a pseudonym.[177] It is not known who continued to write it after Derrick's death.[178] It contained the names of approximately one hundred and fifty prostitutes, along with a description of their services and prices,[179] and is believed to have sold approximately 8000 copies each year.[180] It contains a wide variety of tales that are indicative of the breadth of attitudes towards prostitution during the period. For instance, the description of Lucy Bradley, Silver Street, Cheapside, subscribes to the seduction narrative of betrayed innocence. She is portrayed as having been forced into prostitution through male exploitation and financial need, claiming to have been raped by her employer:

> She lived as a nursery maid with a foreign practitioner of physic [sic], near Soho, who took first possession of her, not without some force. She gets up small linen and works well with her needle; has some good sense, and honest principles. Necessity first compelled her to see company, and she seems conscious of its not being right.[181]

In contrast, other descriptions reflect the image of the fallen woman as complicit in her degradation, as in the comical entry for Pol Forrester, Bow Street:

> The very opposite of her namesake, being disagreeable, ugly, and ill-behaved. She has an entrance to the palace of pleasure as wide as a church door; and breath worse than a Welch bagpipe. She drinks like a fish, eats like a horse, and swears like a trooper. – An errant drab.[182]

Although this directory may have been written primarily 'as a practical catalogue to the sexual goods on offer in Covent Garden'[183] and 'to guide the desirous to the

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[176] Hallie Rubenhold, *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies: Sex in the City in Georgian Britain* (Stroud: Tempus, 2005), p. 13.
[177] Rubenhold, *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies*, pp. 15-17.
[178] Rubenhold, *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 21.
[179] Wilson, *The Courtesan's Revenge*, p. 24.
[180] Rubenhold, *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 19.
[181] *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies or Man of Pleasure's Kalendar for the Year* 1761, in Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 186.
[182] *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies or Man of Pleasure's Kalendar for the Year* 1761, in Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, pp. 151-152.
[183] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 124.

desirable', it was also intended for titillation and amusement.[184] There were many similar publications, which were 'blatant advertisements of available whores'.[185]

The Covent Garden area covered by *Harris's List* was notorious for its prostitutes, and Austen's brother Henry lived for a time at 10 Henrietta Street, within this area.[186] Dora Jordan (1761-1816), the celebrated actress and renowned mistress of the Duke of Clarence (1765-1837), also lived briefly in Henrietta Street.[187] Therefore, when visiting at the home of her brother, Austen was in close proximity to the Covent Garden Piazza, which housed inns and bawdy houses that were closely associated with prostitution,[188] although during the period of Austen's visits the fashionable centre of this business had shifted towards St James's and Piccadilly.[189] Nevertheless, within the capital, as Henderson suggests, 'on the streets, in the parks, the theatres and public gardens of the city, prostitution was a visible, material presence'.[190] Similarly, Peakman notes, 'pleasure gardens, parks and theatres were natural places for merrymaking to which people gravitated, including celebrated women of the day'.[191] These 'celebrated' women would have included courtesans and prostitutes, as these arenas 'were some of the prized haunts of the great impures. Here they could display their plumage to the most artful effect'.[192] Indeed, they were such an accepted part of this world that when the Pantheon tried to exclude the popular actress and courtesan, Sophia Baddeley, as a woman of ill repute, 'an outraged group of some fifty of her most ardent admirers' drew arms on those preventing her entry, forcing them to relent.[193] Indeed, Fullerton notes that: '[Austen] could hardly have avoided seeing these 'women of the town' almost every time she went outdoors', and especially when visiting the capital's theatres.[194]

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[184] Rubenhold, *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 18.
[185] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 13.
[186] Henderson notes contemporary reports that 'the area around Covent Garden and Drury Lane was nightly witness to the greatest debaucheries', *Disorderly Women*, p. 59.
[187] Dora Jordan had lived briefly in Henrietta Street when she arrived in London in 1785. See Tomalin, *Mrs Jordan's Profession*, p. 41. Tomalin has also noted that Jordan moved to Cadogan Street, 'just round the corner from the Henry Austens' after she separated from the Duke in 1811, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 227.
[188] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, pp. 12-13.
[189] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, pp. 219 and 292.
[190] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 174.
[191] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 6.
[192] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 240.
[193] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 32.
[194] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 99.

Austen is known to have visited the theatre on numerous occasions, particularly whilst in London and Bath. Indeed, Penny Gay suggests that 'Austen was fascinated by theatre […] As an adult she went to the theatre whenever opportunity arose'.[195] During the Regency period theatres were popular meeting places, where courtesans and prostitutes went to display themselves and pursue their trade whilst mingling with the general public.[196] As Henderson notes, 'the frequent presence of procuresses and prostitutes in the lobbies and auditoria of theatres was felt to be particularly objectionable'.[197] Indeed, 'frequent trips to the theatre were part of the working life of courtesans – to see and be seen was an important part of their advertising'.[198] Furthermore, many well-known actresses of the period were also courtesans or mistresses, including Mary Robinson and Dora Jordan. Despite being perceived as immoral in their personal lives, they were public figures through their roles on the stage and their high-profile relationships with notable Regency figures, such as the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Clarence. It is known that Austen saw Jordan, mother to ten of the Duke of Clarence's illegitimate children, at least once, in a play called *The Devil to Pay* at Covent Garden in March 1814.[199] Gay suggests that a letter from Austen written in January 1801 'condoling with Cassandra on her not seeing the most famous Shakespearean comedienne of her day, the forty-year-old Dora Jordan, suggests that she knew what her sister was missing', so intimating that Austen had already seen Jordan by this earlier time too.[200]

As well as detailing her theatrical excursions, Austen's letters also offer some evidence that she was aware of, and interested in, illicit sexual relationships among her neighbours and acquaintances. In a letter dated 1801, Austen mentions a mistress of Lord Craven,[201] noting that 'the little flaw of having a Mistress now living with him at Ashdowne Park, seems to be the only unpleasing circumstance about

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[195] Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. ix.
[196] As Henderson notes 'entertainment centres often attracted prostitutes to districts where male customers could be found. […] theatres tended to draw crowds of prostitutes to them', *Disorderly Women*, pp. 58-59.
[197] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 173.
[198] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 93.
[199] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 10.
[200] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 10.
[201] Cassandra's fiancé, Tom Fowle, who died from yellow fever, was chaplain to Lord Craven's regiment, to whom he was 'connected […] by birth', Austen-Leigh, 'A Memoir of Jane Austen', p. 28.

him'.[202] It has been suggested that this is a reference to Harriette Wilson, one of the most notorious courtesans of the Regency period.[203] She would go on to become 'the most desired, and then the most dangerous, woman in Regency London' after writing an autobiography and blackmailing her lovers over their inclusion in her work.[204] *Harriette Wilson's Memoirs*, first published in 1825 and an early version of revenge pornography, were 'exaggerated, partial, and frequently mischievous' and written with the purpose of blackmailing her associates.[205] Those who paid were removed from the *Memoirs*, while those who did not were deliberately humiliated. For example, the Duke of Wellington, a national war-hero by this time, is presented as a foolish old man in a ludicrous story recounted by Wilson.[206] Because of Wilson's monetary motivation for publishing the *Memoirs* they cannot be considered a reliable source of information. Despite this the *Memoirs* created a sensation when they were first published, with people queuing outside the publisher's shop to buy instalments, demonstrating the public interest in the scandalous lives of these women and their lovers.[207] Although this work was published after Austen's death, it illustrates the public's continuing appetite for details about courtesans' lives.

As well as this reference to Harriette Wilson, Austen also comments, in a letter written while visiting Bath, on seeing an 'adulteress' who was one of her own distant relatives, noting:

> I am proud to say that I have a very good eye at an Adultress, for tho' repeatedly assured that another in the same party was the *She*, I fixed upon the right one from the first [...] she was highly rouged, & looked rather quietly & contentedly silly than anything else.[208]

Gillian Russell explains that Austen was the first cousin once removed of Thomas Twisleton and Cassandra Ricketts, who were both involved in high profile divorce cases during the 1790s.[209] The 'adultress' mentioned in Austen's correspondence was Cassandra Ricketts, and Russell believes the tone of this letter suggests that

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[202] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 30: 8-9 January 1801, pp. 69-72, p. 71.
[203] Fullerton, 'Jane Austen and Adultery', 147.
[204] Wilson, *The Courtesan's Revenge*, p. xiii.
[205] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 25.
[206] Wilson includes a tale of the Duke of Argyll in her dressing-gown and nightcap, pretending to be her maid and shouting down to Wellington in the street, refusing him access to the house, *Harriette Wilson's Memoirs: The Greatest Courtesan of her Age* (1825), ed. Lesley Blanch (London: Phoenix Press, 1957, repr. 2003), p. 204.
[207] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 209.
[208] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 36: 12-13 May 1801, pp. 84-86, p. 85.
[209] Gillian Russell, '"A Hint of it, With Initials": Adultery, Textuality and Publicity in Jane Austen's *Lady Susan*', *Women's Writing*, 17:3 (2010), 469-486, 470.

'Austen relished her own bit part in their minor notoriety'.[210] Austen does not seem judgemental or prudish when she comments on the sexual misdemeanours of her acquaintances. There are numerous references in her letters to sexual scandals within her neighbourhood or involving her acquaintances. Worsley suggests that Austen 'always mentioned elopements or adultery with censure'.[211] However, I believe that while Austen's comments criticise individual immorality, her main target remains the hypocrisy of society in countenancing such behaviour, particularly when it is conducted under the guise of legitimate marriage. For example, as Worsley notes, she jokes about a 'buxom mistress' of the Prince of Wales in one of her letters[212] when suggesting that her altered apparel 'makes me look more like Lady Conyngham [the 'mistress'] which is all that one lives for now'.[213] While the disreputable behaviour of the individuals is noted, it is society's desire to emulate these infamous figures that delivers the punchline. Moreover, even in her adult years, she retains the attitude of amusement to the sexual indiscretions of others revealed in her *Juvenilia.* Indeed, Heydt-Stevenson notes that in *Mansfield Park*, Austen 'offers a worldly and unfazed account of adultery – one in stark contrast to her heroine's scandalised description of the crime'.[214] These instances, along with representations of adultery in her novels, her *Juvenilia* and her unpublished works, demonstrate Austen's 'worldly and unfazed' attitude towards illicit sexual relationships.

'Her reading was very extensive'[215]

Despite these references to prostitution and sexual promiscuity in her letters, and the time that she spent in London and Bath, Austen's main exposure to the subject of illicit sexual relationships would have been through literature and particularly novels. It is important to recognise that the reality of prostitution within the Georgian era, and the depiction of it within literature of the period, was different. In reality, as Hitchcock notes, 'most prostitutes were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. They came from poverty stricken homes and were most likely to intersperse periods of life

[210] Russell, 'A Hint of it, With Initials', 470.
[211] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 287.
[212] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 285.
[213] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 14: 18-19 December 1798, pp. 25-28, p. 27.
[214] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 137-138.
[215] Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice', p. 141.

in service or in the largely female occupations […] with time spent on the streets'.[216] Prostitutes were 'recruited from the poorest members of the female working class; driven by poverty and the need to sell the one commodity for which they could get a reasonable price, their bodies'.[217] Rubenhold also suggests that:

> An absence of well-paid employment for women made it necessary for those who laboured in traditional female occupations, trades dedicated to the laundering, mending or creation of clothes, to occasionally supplement their earnings by offering access to their bodies.[218]

It is likely, therefore, that for most women involvement with the sex industry was transitory and occasional, rather than the irrevocable and permanent fall depicted within the literature – and in particular novels and conduct books – of the period. Indeed, Hitchcock suggests that prostitution in the Georgian period is 'better conceptualised as one outpost of female sexual and economic experience [rather] than as the separate and well-defined status of the sort created […] by the writings of social reformers'.[219] Indeed, 'most women whom moral reformers labelled prostitutes probably went on to marry and set up households'.[220] Furthermore, 'there is very little evidence that the content of most prostitutes lives changed' during this period.[221]

Nevertheless, over the course of the eighteenth century, as noted earlier in this chapter, the 'literary and sociological depictions of prostitutes changed. Explanations for why women might become prostitutes were transformed'.[222] As Siân Rees notes, 'one of the most popular characters in late-eighteenth-century literature was the fallen woman. The girl of good family seduced and betrayed by a plausible villain was particularly fascinating'.[223] This 'contributed to the creation of a new image of the "fallen" woman'.[224] However, this increasingly influential image of the fallen woman from a genteel family background was mostly a literary construct, resulting from 'the rise of the cult of seduction, changing understandings of female

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[216] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, pp. 95-96.
[217] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, pp. 107-108.
[218] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 135.
[219] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 96.
[220] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 96. Henderson suggests that prostitutes 'on leaving the trade […] seem to have experienced little difficulty in reintegrating into a part of society', *Disorderly Women*, p. 51.
[221] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 98.
[222] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 98.
[223] Rees, *The Floating Brothel*, p. 24.
[224] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 99.

and male sexuality and a growing belief in the middle-class origins of many prostitutes'.[225] Austen responds in her novels to social and literary conventions in depictions of prostitution rather than reflecting social realism, as her understanding of the issue would have been formed by her cultural exposure rather than her limited direct knowledge. Therefore, as well as looking at the historical background, a significant proportion of this study will focus on recovering the literary contexts of Austen's novels to demonstrate how her works are related to contemporary literary debates on women's position within society, specifically through the theme of illicit sexual relationships.

Austen's *Juvenilia* exposes the literary heritage of her later novels, revealing her experiments with different styles of literature and how these could be used to comment on patriarchal social structures. As Jan Fergus notes, the *Juvenilia* reveal that 'Austen very early chose to burlesque both the rules of fiction and the rules of her social world – particularly the rules governing women's behaviour'.[226] In the *Juvenila*, as well as experimenting with different literary forms, we also see Austen mocking their conventions. For example, *Amelia Webster*, 'an interesting & well written Tale',[227] uses the epistolary form and emphasises the limitations of this type of work by excluding key scenes, which presumably took place when the characters were together and, therefore, did not need to be communicated by letter. In *The Beautifull Cassandra*, 'a novel in twelve Chapters',[228] each chapter describes a short 'adventure' of no more than a few lines, and *The Mystery: An Unfinished Comedy* is a short play in which characters discuss a secret which is never revealed.[229] There are also fictional letters, poems, songs, and a brief, comical, travel journal of *A Tour through Wales —— in a Letter from a young Lady——*.[230] Byrne notes that Austen's collected juvenilia are 'so knowing and so uninhibited'.[231] As previously stated, illicit activity and violence are never far from the surface of the world that

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[225] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 99.
[226] Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p. 50.
[227] Jane Austen, 'Amelia Webster' (1793), ed. Kathryn Sutherland, *Volume the First, Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts: A Digital Edition*, (2010), pp. 120-125, p. 120, https://janeausten.ac.uk/manuscripts/blvolfirst/Front_(left)_board.html (accessed July 2018).
[228] Jane Austen, 'The Beautifull Cassandra' (1793), in Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts,* pp. 115-119, p. 115.
[229] Jane Austen, 'The Mystery' (1793), in Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*, pp. 140-146.
[230] Jane Austen, 'A Tour through Wales' (1793), in Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*, pp. 247-249.
[231] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 57.

Austen inhabits in these youthful experiments and are often connected to courtship.[232] For instance, in *Frederic & Elfrida*, the obliging Charlotte is '[un]able to resolve to make anyone miserable'.[233] Consequently she promises to marry two strangers and in her remorse at her folly 'threw herself into a deep stream'.[234]

As well as this early interest in literary form, we also know that Austen had some personal connections with the publishing community, despite James Edward Austen-Leigh's claims that:

> [Austen's] talents did not introduce her to the notice of other writers, or connect her with the literary world, or in any degree pierce through the obscurity of her domestic retirement.[235]

However, Austen was not, as her family would have us believe, entirely disconnected from this 'literary world'. Her brother, James, published a short-lived periodical *The Loiterer*, which ran for fourteen months from January 1789.[236] There were also family connections with some of the high-profile writers of the period. Austen's aunt and uncle, Mr and Mrs James Leigh-Perrot, knew Maria Edgeworth, having been her neighbour,[237] and Austen's godfather Samuel Cooke 'was a close friend of [Frances] Burney', living opposite her home in Great Bookham.[238] Byrne speculates that this connection explains how Austen became a subscriber to her novel *Camilla*.[239] Furthermore, Byrne suggests that Burney was fond of Cassandra Cooke, who was Austen's mother's cousin and who published her own gothic novel, *Battleridge: An Historical Tale, Founded on Facts* (1799).[240] Austen shows her interest in this work, and the publishing process, when she reports that Mrs Cooke has informed them 'that *Battleridge* is not to come out before January; & she is so little satisfied with Cawthorn's dilatoriness that she never means to employ him again'.[241] In addition, another female relative, Lady Cassandra Hawke, had

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[232] See Chapter One, pp. 10-11, of this thesis.
[233] Jane Austen, 'Frederic & Elfrida' (1793), in Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts* pp. 1-21, p. 12.
[234] Austen, 'Frederic & Elfrida', p. 14.
[235] Austen-Leigh, 'A Memoir of Jane Austen', p. 9.
[236] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 64.
[237] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 86
[238] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 83.
[239] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 83.
[240] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 83.
[241] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 10: 27-28 October 1798, pp. 15-18, p. 17.

published a sentimental novel, *Julia de Gramont*, in 1788.[242] This contradicts Edward-Austen's claim that Austen lived 'far apart from the gossip of the literary world'.[243] Publishing was not an unusual or unattainable goal within Austen's social circle.

Furthermore, Austen was part of a literary tradition of women writers producing novels throughout the long eighteenth century. She was not, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim, an isolated female writer seizing the metaphorically phallic pen from male domination.[244] In fact, many women successfully engaged in writing activities, as Anne K. Mellor notes, stating that between 1780-1830:

> more than 900 women published at least one volume of poetry; more than 500 women published at least one novel; many others published plays, essays, histories, religious, philosophical, and political tracts, travel accounts, children's books, diaries, and letters [...] Ten of the twelve most popular novelists of the period were women.[245]

However, despite the large number of female writers during this period, it was still considered a controversial activity that could reflect badly on a woman's reputation, as proper women were modest and retiring while authorship was considered 'thrusting oneself before the public eye – thus loss of femininity'.[246] As Fergus suggests:

> Publishing her own writing could threaten a woman's reputation as well as her social position. For any woman, the fame of authorship could become infamy, and novels were particularly reprehensible.[247]

This explains why many works, including those published by Austen during her lifetime, were published anonymously. Despite this negative connotation, some female writers found their works lucrative, with Edgeworth being estimated to have earned around £11,000 and Burney over £4,000.[248] Notwithstanding the naïve and condescending claim by Austen's nephew, that 'she wrote for her own amusement. Money, though acceptable, was not necessary for the moderate expenses of her

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[242] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 85.
[243] Austen-Leigh, 'A Memoir of Jane Austen', p. 72.
[244] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1979).
[245] Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 88.
[246] Fergus, *Jane Austen: A Literary Life*, p. 5.
[247] Fergus, 'The Professional Woman Writer', p. 13.
[248] Fergus, 'The Professional Woman Writer', p. 28.

quiet home',[249] it is clear that she took an interest in the profits she made from her publications.[250] She viewed her writing as a professional activity, becoming 'bolder, more professional and more mercenary in her decisions', as she learned about the publishing business.[251] She valued the limited independence that her income provided, commenting on this in her letters and noting that 'tho' I like praise as well as anybody, I like what Edward calls *Pewter* too'.[252] Her letters contain many references to the financial matters concerned with publishing, and she was pragmatic when her identity as an author became known, suggesting that 'I shall rather try to make all the Money than all the Mystery I can of it'.[253] She also left a detailed list of the money she had earned through her writing.[254] As Tomalin notes, following the death of her father Austen 'was penniless, dependent on her brothers, and obliged to accept whatever living arrangements were chosen for her'.[255] It is no wonder, as Worsley notes, that 'she was very, very fond of the money she earned'.[256] Austen's novels repeatedly emphasize the importance of financial security, especially for unmarried women. This is shown, for example, in the difficulties encountered by the orphaned Miss Fairfax in *Emma*, who is forced to consider becoming a governess despite her aversion to the role. There are also numerous references to legal arrangements which disadvantage females, such as the entailing of Mr Bennet's estate to male heirs in *Pride and Prejudice*. The small amount that Austen received from her novels in her lifetime, estimated to be just over £630, gave her a measure of independence and professional pride, though it was not sufficient to 'afford genteel maintenance to a single woman'.[257]

Nevertheless, despite the popularity of novels that could earn their authors significant sums, they remained a controversial literary form. As Nora Nachumi notes 'throughout the period, commentators on the novel - including conduct-book writers and reviewers - manifest a profound anxiety about the novel's effects on

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[249] Austen-Leigh, 'A Memoir of Jane Austen', p. 106.
[250] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 248.
[251] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 248.
[252] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 114: 30 November 1814, pp. 285-287, p. 287.
[253] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 90: 25 September 1813, pp. 229-232, p. 231.
[254] Jane Austen, 'Profits of my Novels, over & above the £600 in the Navy Fives', in Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*.
[255] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 192.
[256] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 248.
[257] Fergus, 'The Professional Woman Writer', p. 28.

impressionable young ladies'.[258] Austen shows her awareness of this reputation in a letter from 1798, in which she discusses the opening of a new library:

> Mrs Martin tells us that her Collection is not to consist only of Novels, but of every kind of Literature &c &c – She might have spared this pretension to *our* family, who are great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so.[259]

She would reiterate this in her famous defence of the novel in *Northanger Abbey*, arguing that this form of literature should not be denigrated and describing it as:

> only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.[260]

Novels, especially romances, had a reputation for corrupting the innocent into 'unthinkingly' exposing themselves and facilitating their fall, in contrast to moralising conduct books that 'expressed a certain moral code based on the presumption that a woman's honour lay in her sexual virtue'.[261] Novels were singled out for criticism because it was believed they could facilitate the seduction of female readers, by opening their minds to licentiousness and 'inspir[ing] the reader to reckless imitation'.[262] As Sarah Raff argues, novels were seen to encourage immoral behaviour in women because:

> once inflamed for the first time by a licentious scene in the novel, the reader, unable to consummate her desire with the text itself, attempts to enact that scene in the real world […] confusing fiction with reality, she imposes the semiotic code of the novel on the whole range of her experience.[263]

This concern was reflected in literature such as Eaton Stannard Barrett's (1786-1820) *The Heroine, Or Adventures of Cherubina* (1813)[264] and Charlotte Lennox's (ca. 1729-1804) *The Female Quixote; or the Adventures of Arabella* (1752). Both novels have heroines who engage in ludicrous behaviour when they 'confus[e] fiction

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[258] Nora Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady: British Women Novelists and the Eighteenth-Century Theater* (New York: AMS Press Inc, 2008), p. 50.
[259] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 14: 18-19 December 1798, pp. 25-28, p. 26.
[260] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818), ed. Anne Henry Ehrenpreis (London: Penguin, 1972, repr. 1987), p. 58. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses immediately following the reference.
[261] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 27.
[262] Sarah Raff, *Jane Austen's Erotic Advice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 13.
[263] Raff, *Jane Austen's Erotic Advice*, p. 13.
[264] In a letter from 1814, Austen notes being 'very much amused' by Barrett's novel, describing it as 'a delightful burlesque, particularly on the Radcliffe style', Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 97: 2-3 March 1814, pp. 255-257, pp. 255-256.

with reality', and base their decision-making on their reading of novels. For instance, 'Cherubina', the name adopted by the heroine in Barrett's novel, interprets her experiences through the romances she reads, causing chaos amongst her family and acquaintances. Austen is known to have been familiar with both these works, and employed a similar strategy to create humour through the character of her naïve heroine, Catherine Morland, in *Northanger Abbey*, who is also an avid novel reader.

It is important to situate Austen's work within the literary context of writers of the period that she was familiar with herself, or had the opportunity to access (although it is difficult to determine exactly which works she read). Wiltshire has noted that:

> Increasingly it has been understood that Austen's writing engages in a form of conversation, if not debate, not only with some of the canonical novelists she knew, but with the fictions pumped out by the circulating libraries.[265]

It was not only scandalous novels, like John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, that featured the issue of whores and prostitutes or represented the turbulence, and threatening instability, of the licentious Georgian period. Austen was familiar with popular novels which included storylines featuring illegitimacy, suicide, abductions, mistresses, rape, murder and incest.[266] Within such eighteenth-century novels, seduction and its results featured frequently as an aspect of debates about courtship and marriage. Indeed, the Georgian period had a preoccupation with seduction, as Harvey notes:

> The threat to female chastity was seen as having two related forms: an innocent woman might unthinkingly expose herself, without suspecting the sexual implications of a particular situation, or she might be seduced, i.e. somehow persuaded against her real wishes to yield to the sexual importunities of an unscrupulous adventurer.[267]

Thus, readers were warned against the potential consequences of illicit sexual relationships, and the immorality of male characters could be revealed. It also provided an opportunity to debate the double standard that encouraged illicit sexual behaviour in men, whilst punishing women who lost their virtue. For instance, in

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[265] Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen*, p. 3.

[266] These storylines feature in novels Austen is known to have read or refers to in her own works such as Opie's *Adeline Mowbray, Or the Mother and Daughter* (1804); Smith's *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788); Burney's *Cecilia: Or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782) and *Camilla: Or A Picture of Youth* (1796); Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1754); Lewis's *The Monk* (1796); Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801).

[267] Harvey, *Sex in Georgian England*, p. 54.

Austen's defence of the novel in *Northanger Abbey*, one of the three novels mentioned is Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801). In this work the hero, Clarence Hervey, has sought to educate an innocent girl, Virginia, to become his ideal wife, only to find that his experiment has failed. He feels obligated to Virginia because his behaviour has made his associates believe her to be his mistress. Furthermore, the other two novels Austen describes as works 'in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed' (p. 58) are *Cecilia: Or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782) and *Camilla: Or A Picture of Youth*, both by Burney.[268] In *Camilla* we see the virtuous heroine mistaken for a disreputable woman when she goes shopping in Southampton without a 'fitting protectress'.[269] Similarly Burney's earlier novel, *Evelina: Or The History of A Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), which Austen refers to in her letters,[270] features a scene in which the heroine, whose social standing is threatened throughout the novel because of doubts about her legitimacy, is discovered in the company of two disreputable women, after she 'mistakes the Ranelagh prostitutes for ladies of fashion'.[271] Furthermore, in Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1754), reputedly one of Austen's favourite novels,[272] part of the storyline involves Sir Thomas Grandison's illicit relationship with the widow, Mrs Oldham, and it also features a scene in which the heroic paragon, Sir Charles, frees his uncle from an inconvenient mistress. These works informed Austen's own novels, which reflect this literary heritage. Prostitutes and fallen women are also alluded to in Austen's novels and are part of the literary landscape that shaped her own inventions. She used allusions to these denizens of the Georgian *demimonde* to comment on social mores in the polite world of her novels.

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[268] The title *Pride and Prejudice* appears to have been taken from the final chapter of *Cecilia*, according to John Mullen, 'Psychology', in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 377-386, pp. 378-379.

[269] Fanny Burney, *Camilla: Or A Picture of Youth* (1796), ed. Edward Bloom & Lillian Bloom, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford World Press, 1972, repr. 1883), IV, p. 610.

[270] For instance, Austen mentions the hero, Lord Orville, in a letter to her niece in 1814. See Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 103: circa July 1814, pp. 266-267, p. 267. Additionally, she also refers to the characters Captain Mirvan and Madam Duval, in a letter in 1815, Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 128: 26 November 1815, pp. 300-302, p. 302.

[271] Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 48.

[272] Henry Austen and Austen-Leigh both mention *Sir Charles Grandison* as one of Austen's favourite novels. See Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice', p. 141 and Austen-Leigh, 'A Memoir of Jane Austen', p. 71. Dow and Halsey have noted that these family memoirs 'focus firmly on authors considered in the nineteenth century to be "useful and entertaining"', Gillian Dow and Katie Halsey, 'Jane Austen's Reading: The Chawton Years', *Persuasions On-line*, 30:2 (2010), 1-16, 1. But Kirkham contends that 'The evidence of Austen's own writings suggest a highly critical attitude to *Grandison* […]. The two references to *Grandison* in Austen's letters do not suggest admiration of either the work or its heroine', *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 30.

In addition, Austen's letters provide evidence that she was aware of other forms of literature and art that featured prostitution. For example, according to Deirdre Le Faye, Austen makes reference in a letter to William Hogarth's (1697-1764) series of engravings *The Harlot's Progress* (1732).[273] Austen jokes that she 'should inevitably fall a Sacrifice to the arts of some fat Woman who would make me drunk with Small Beer',[274] which Le Faye claims is an allusion to Plate 1 of Hogarth's work, *Moll Hackabout arrives in London at the Bell Inn, Cheapside* (see Illustration 1 below):[275]

Illustration 1: The Harlot's Progress, Plate 1: Moll Hackabout arrives in London at the Bell Inn, Cheapside, William Hogarth (1732), British Library[276]

Hogarth's image initially seems innocuous, but is full of suggestive references.[277] It becomes more sinister when you note the leering presence of the man in the doorway surveying his next victim. He is believed to represent the notorious Colonel

[273] William Hogarth was a popular artist best known for his series of paintings on moral subjects satirising contemporary customs, including *The Harlot's Progress* and *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1743), which were also sold as engravings. See: http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/william-hogarth (accessed July 2012).
[274] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 7: 18 September 1796, pp. 11-13, p. 12.
[275] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, p. 359.
[276] British Library, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-harlots-progress (accessed July 2018).
[277] For a discussion of the imagery see Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, pp. 6-9.

Francis Charteris, as indicated by the text added below this print.[278] In a sensational case, Charteris was convicted of raping his servant in 1729.[279] Austen's awareness of Hogarth's prints is not surprising, as they were widely available, and are referred to in works which Austen is known to have been familiar with, such as Henry Fielding's (1707-1754) *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749).[280]

The plate Austen refers to in *The Harlot's Progress* shows a typical image of an innocent girl betrayed into prostitution. It is believed to be partly based on *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* in its notorious depiction of a naïve country girl arriving in London and being drawn into a life of prostitution.[281] As previously noted, it is a scenario which probably owes more to social anxieties and literary convention than reality.[282] It may seem surprising to link Austen's writings about polite drawing-room society with Cleland's novel about the Regency sex trade, yet we should remember that Austen grew up surrounded by the young male students tutored by her father, and boarding-schools had a reputation for circulating explicit literature.[283] Tomalin has also noted a curious family connection with Cleland's novel, when the heroine is taken in by a Mrs Cole of Covent Garden, 'ostensibly a milliner, actually a bawd'.[284] Austen's aunt, Philadelphia, was working as a milliner for a Mrs Cole in Covent Garden at the time the novel was published.[285] As Tomalin states, the similarity of names and professions may be 'no more than a striking coincidence', but it 'seems unlikely Cleland was unaware of the existence of the real Mrs Cole –

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[278] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 8.

[279] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 15.

[280] Fielding describes several of his characters by referring to Hogarth's work. For instance, Mrs Partridge, the Schoolmaster's wife, is described as 'not very amiable in her person. Whether she sat to my friend Hogarth, or no, I will not determine; but she exactly resembled the young woman who is pouring out her mistress's tea in the third picture of the Harlot's Progress', Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749), ed. R. P. C. Mutter (London: Penguin Books, 1966, repr. 1988), p. 91.

[281] *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, commonly known as *Fanny Hill*, was notorious for its graphic descriptions of sexual encounters, and Cleland and his publisher were prosecuted for 'the publication of an obscene work' soon after it appeared in 1748. It did, however, remain in circulation throughout the eighteenth century due to the publication of pirated copies. See John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748), ed. Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. x.

[282] Henderson's study of eighteenth century court proceedings suggests most prostitutes were from the lower classes. He notes that 'most of the capital's prostitutes were born into relative poverty', *Disorderly Women*, p. 25.

[283] Peakman notes that 'the Society for the Suppression of Vice went so far as to state that boarding schools represented a substantial part of the market for indecent literature', *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 30. Tomalin suggests that 'growing up in a school meant that Jane knew exactly what to expect of boys, and was always at ease with them; boys were her natural environment, and boys' jokes and boys' interests were the first she learnt about', *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 31.

[284] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 15.

[285] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 14.

Covent Garden was not a vast area'.[286] There is no evidence that Philadelphia's employer 'was anything less than respectable, but in London's red light district, Covent Garden, a milliner was often a front for other businesses' and was considered to be 'synonymous with sex work'.[287] However, stronger evidence of the likelihood that Austen was aware of some of the contents of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* can be seen in an allusion she makes to it in one of her letters. One of her most biting, satirical comments, which has achieved notoriety as a result, is her observation that:

> Mrs Hall of Sherbourn was brought to bed yesterday of a dead child, some weeks before she expected, oweing to a fright. – I suppose she happened unawares to look at her husband.[288]

Austen habitually made oblique references to literature and popular culture in her letters, which her reader, usually her sister Cassandra, would have been expected to recognise. I believe this comment is a literary allusion to a line in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* which uses identical imagery to describe a character, when the heroine, Fanny Hill, describes a potential client as having 'a peculiar ghastliness in his grin, that made him perfectly frightful, if not dangerous to women with child'.[289] This suggests that in her own use of such an observation Austen was drawing on Cleland's infamous novel and was familiar with the events in it, although we cannot be sure whether she had actually read the work. Cleland's novel had clearly entered into the public consciousness, as can be seen by the name of the heroine, Fanny, being the source for this common designation to describe female genitalia.[290]

Similarly, there is some evidence that Austen was aware of other explicit works. For instance, Heydt-Stevenson believes that 'the significant intertextual relations' between Samuel Johnson's (1709-1784) two narratives 'The History of Misella Debauched by Her Relation' and 'Misella's Description of the Life of a Prostitute' (published in *The Rambler* during 1751) and Fanny Price's story in *Mansfield Park*, indicate that Austen was familiar with these short stories about a

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[286] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 15.
[287] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 56; Rubenhold notes that 'No one profession was considered more notorious than the milliner's trade', *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 135.
[288] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 10: 27-28 October 1798, pp. 15-18, p. 17.
[289] Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, p. 15.
[290] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 144. See Chapter Four, pp. 126-128, of this thesis for a discussion of Austen's use of this name for her heroine in *Mansfield Park*.

young girl seduced and abandoned to a life of prostitution by a relative.[291] It has also been pointed out that there are striking similarities between Austen's short novel, *Lady Susan*, and Choderlos de Laclos's (1741-1803) scandalous novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782).[292] Lady Susan is 'a female predator who holds centre-stage throughout, and wittily tells her own story; her wickedness is real, but she is also attractive'.[293] Tomalin notes the 'considerable points of resemblance' and speculates that Austen may have had access to Laclos's novel, or at least been told of its contents, through her sophisticated cousin, Eliza.[294]

Gillian Dow and Katie Halsey have described the breadth of the works that Austen refers to in her own novels, juvenilia and letters.[295] This can give only an indication of the extent of her literary consumption, as 'it is hard to make any very systematic account of her early reading'.[296] Even this limited list shows a wide range of genres, and Austen's own novels reflect this broad literary heritage. This thesis will explore allusions within her works to contemporary novels and high-profile scandals to show her awareness of the lascivious nature of the Georgian era. This is not, as Brian Southam feared, part of 'a wider campaign to promote the idea of a bawdy or dirty-joke Jane Austen'.[297] It is intended to restore the context of her novels, in order to reveal the full meaning of her allusions and the extent of her engagement with contemporary debates on the position of women within patriarchal Georgian society. Rubenhold suggests that the Georgian criminal world has 'nothing to do with the gilded, safe and privileged Georgian era of Jane Austen. She and others like her are on the inside of society looking out, and their sight does not extend as far as these dark corners'.[298] On the contrary, I believe this was an issue which influenced the lives of all women during this era. Through references to literature which she knew, or may have been able to access, as well as contemporary scandals and controversial high-profile figures, I will contend that Austen's novels reveal her own knowledge of 'these dark corners' within which the illicit Georgian sex trade existed. Austen evokes this world in order to expose the

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[291] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 144.
[292] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 84.
[293] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 84.
[294] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 84.
[295] Dow and Halsey, 'Jane Austen's Reading: The Chawton Years', 1-16.
[296] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 69.
[297] Brian Southam, '"Rears" and "Vices" in *Mansfield Park'*, *Essays in Criticism*, 52:1 (2002), 23-35, 30.
[298] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 18.

danger it represented to naïve and vulnerable women, and to expose the hypocrisy and corruption which allowed unscrupulous men to exploit them.

Each chapter of this thesis will examine elements within the novels that demonstrate Austen's engagement with the theme of prostitution and fallen women. It will explore both literary sources and high-profile public scandals to highlight allusions which a contemporary audience would have recognised, but which are now obscure to modern readers. Each chapter will focus primarily on one of Austen's novels, while making connections between her other works. However, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* are considered together in the last chapter, due to the similarities between them and the useful contrasts to be made by examining them in conjunction.

In Chapter Two, *Sense and Sensibility*, I will address the importance of reputation and how its loss damaged a woman's prospects within the marriage market. I will argue that Marianne Dashwood's unguarded behaviour exposes her to public scrutiny within a gossip-ridden social structure, casting doubts in the minds of her acquaintances regarding her 'virtue'. This chapter will also look at the double seduction narrative employed within the novel, concerning Eliza Williams and her mother, which critiques the exploitation of vulnerable females within patriarchal society. Finally, I will look at Austen's presentation of men in her works and how, throughout her novels, she rejects literary representations that categorize characters as either villains or idealised heroes to present realistic mixed characters. Through her portrayal of male characters, Austen reveals the difficulties faced by women in assessing the suitability of potential husbands where behaviour is conducted according to prescribed codes of etiquette.

Chapter Three focuses on *Pride and Prejudice* and examines Lydia Bennet's elopement as part of the novel's debate on the nature of marriage, by contrasting her rash actions with the secure, companionate union achieved by the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet. I will argue that references to Lydia's potential fate 'on the town', are used to highlight the potential cost to women who fail to conform to societal expectations and engage in illicit sexual relationships. I will discuss how Austen's portrayal of Lydia relates to contemporary debates about women's sexuality, implicating her negligent parents and her own personal immorality in her downfall. I will also

discuss Austen's portrayal of Mrs Younge and her role within the novel, to examine the image of the bawd in contemporary literature.

My next chapter will focus on *Mansfield Park* and its prim heroine, Fanny Price. I will discuss Austen's use of the name of her heroine to engage with contemporary debates that relate to slavery and prostitution. In representing the vulnerabilities of her heroine, Austen critiques the patriarchal social structure within which Fanny is treated as a pawn to further male aims. I will argue that Fanny is contrasted to the attractive, but morally deficit Mary Crawford, who has been corrupted by her exposure to fashionable London society. Furthermore, I will look at the foreshadowing of the novel's denouement through the theatrical scenes that take place at Mansfield Park and the visit to Sotherton, which result in Maria Rushwood's subsequent elopement with Henry Crawford. Finally, I will contend in Chapter Four that Austen's representation of adultery, and the consequent divorce proceedings that arise from it, demonstrate her own awareness of this scandalous topic.

My analysis of *Emma* in Chapter Five focuses on the illegitimacy of Harriet Smith. I will argue that Austen uses Harriet's vulnerable position to critique Georgian society's treatment of young women in her predicament. Additionally, I will argue that Austen uses allusions to prostitution within the novel to highlight Harriet's disreputable maternal heritage, linking her to the notorious Lady Emma Hamilton (1765-1815) through the portrait scene, and evoking debates on how female personal characteristics can be exploited by unscrupulous men to lead them into prostitution.

My final chapter will consider *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* by drawing comparisons between these two texts and the literary references they contain. I will aver in Chapter Six that Austen uses allusions to the Georgian sex trade to raise her readers' suspicions about Mrs Clay's intentions and foreshadow her fate in becoming Mr Elliot's mistress. Finally, I will argue that Austen's portrayal of the widows Mrs Smith and Mrs Clay in *Persuasion*, and the husband-hunting Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*, demonstrates how patriarchal pressures induce destructive sexual behaviour in women and corrupt female relationships.

In exploring these themes and issues in Austen's novels, this thesis will argue that allusions to high profile scandals, and imagery that evokes whores and fallen

women, are subtly incorporated into her works. This subtlety allows Austen to invoke the threat of the *demimonde* whilst maintaining her own claims to respectability without overtly engaging in indecorous subjects. It will be demonstrated that references to illicit sexual behaviour in Georgian society are not only present within her fiction, but are used as a method for exposing the dangers that women at any social level are subject to in a world where they have little autonomy to control their own lives.

Chapter Two

Sense and Sensibility: 'We always know when we are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure'.[299]

Sense and Sensibility (1811) was Austen's first published novel. The work focuses on the impecunious Dashwood family, comprising of a mother and three daughters, and particularly on the travails of the two marriageable-aged daughters, Marianne and Elinor. It has traditionally been viewed as a didactic story that contrasts the personalities and behaviour of two sisters, with Elinor representing 'sense' and Marianne as 'sensibility'. According to this reading, Elinor's behaviour is rewarded and the chastened Marianne is punished and ultimately reformed. However, this interpretation of the novel is now felt to be too simplistic.[300] As Marie E. McAllister argues, 'Austen has no intention of setting up a good sister and a bad, one all sense and one all sensibility. Rather, she creates a far more complex look at how Marianne, Elinor, or any other woman must negotiate between passion and prudence'.[301] Indeed, both sisters suffer equally through the behaviour of their suitors, and neither Elinor's prudence nor Marianne's openness are fully endorsed by the resolution of the story.

Within this chapter, I will argue that Austen presents the two elder Dashwood sisters as exposed to a gossip-ridden social structure, within which their behaviour is subject to conjecture and innuendo. Throughout this work, Austen shows the young women existing within a threatening environment where they are judged by their behaviour and their actions are open to speculation and misinterpretation. This misreading can be innocent or malicious, but regardless of the intent, it is shown to have potentially harmful consequences for the subjects. The social network which spreads this gossip is shown to involve acquaintances, servants, tradespeople and

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[299] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), ed. Ros Ballaster (London: Penguin, 1995, repr. 2003), p. 69. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses immediately following the reference.
[300] For instance, Johnson notes that '*Sense and Sensibility* is not, as it is often assumed to be, a dramatized conduct book patly favoring female prudence over female impetuosity', *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 50.
[301] Marie E. McAllister, '"Only to Sink Deeper": Venereal Disease in *Sense and Sensibility*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 17:1 (October 2004), 87-110, 104.

the nebulous, wider social 'world'. Austen reveals that Marianne's public display of affection during her flirtation with Mr Willoughby, followed by her demonstrative grief at his subsequent rejection of her, causes damage to her reputation within wider society due to the gossip that is thereby circulated through this network.

In addition, through her representation of Marianne's behaviour, Austen critiques the 'cult of sensibility' which was popular during the period when her novel was written, by invoking Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749-1832) sentimental novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). Marianne's damaged reputation, which results from her involvement with Willoughby, is exacerbated by her own clichéd, sentimental performance of the role of the fallen woman, so reflecting the influence of this ideology. Marianne's determination to enact her broken heart in public after her open flirtation with Willoughby, leads to a perception within her social 'world' that she must have been seduced and betrayed. Furthermore, the possible implications of Marianne's vulnerability to seduction, due to her unguarded behaviour, are highlighted by the inclusion within the novel of the embedded narrative concerning the fate of Colonel Brandon's first love, Eliza, and her child. This story shows Austen engaging with traditional representations of fallen women, such as the unhappy wife seduced into betraying her marriage vows and the naïve, vulnerable young girl defiled by a persuasive rake. Colonel Brandon's tale is used within the novel to indicate the ultimate fate of women who fail to conform to social expectations and to evoke the risks that Marianne has been exposed to by her imprudent conduct. Furthermore, Austen's narrative techniques in presenting the story of these betrayed women advances her critique of the failure of patriarchal society to protect such vulnerable females.

Additionally, in this chapter, I will discuss Austen's portrayal of men within her novels, with particular reference to Willoughby and Edward Ferrars and the marriages which end this novel. Austen famously presents her reader with realistic, mixed characters, rather than the stereotypical irredeemable villains and faultless heroes that were common in literature of the period, especially in Gothic romance, but also in highly regarded works such as Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* and Burney's *Evelina*. Through her presentation of men, Austen highlights the difficulties faced by women who must identify worthy partners within a highly prescribed social structure. The rules of polite social interaction make gaining accurate knowledge of

a man's character challenging for her heroines, hence the prevalence within Austen's works of unions which seem almost incestuous, as relationships within the close family network enable greater familiarity.[302] Austen reflects on the social mores of her era by revealing the difficulties faced by the Dashwood women as they try to interpret the behaviour of their suitors in order to know their true nature and their suitability as marriage partners.

'Known all over the town'[303]

Throughout *Sense and Sensibility* Austen presents her readers with a threatening social environment within which a woman's actions and behaviour are subject to intense scrutiny. One of the ways that Austen evokes this hostile social structure is through the name she chooses for her heroines in this novel. Barchas has argued that by selecting the surname of her two female protagonists, Austen may be alluding to 'one of England's most notorious families in [her] time —the Dashwoods of West Wycombe Park'.[304] The infamous Sir Francis Dashwood 'formed a club variously known as the Monks of Medmenham, the Order of St. Francis of Wycombe, and, somewhat later, the Hell-Fire Club'.[305] Peakman notes the difficulties 'in separating fact from fiction'[306] with regards to these groups, but suggests, 'much of their time was spent reading, drinking and enjoying sexual frolics' sometimes involving 'mock anti-religious ceremonies at which the members dressed up as monks and nuns'.[307] As a result, 'the infamous name of Dashwood remained synonymous with diabolism, sexual lewdness, and the dubious privileges of wealth'.[308] Barchas suggests that:

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[302] It has been suggested that 'three of Austen's novels [*Emma*, *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility*] end with marriages which have incestuous overtones', Glenda A. Hudson, *Sibling Love and Incest in Jane Austen's Fiction* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 9; Kelly notes that one solution to the problem of identifying potential marriage partners was to 'seek safety in quasi-incestuous marriages with men who are closely connected to their families, and who they have known for years', *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, p. 116.
[303] Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 173.
[304] Janine Barchas, 'Hell-Fire Jane: Austen and the Dashwoods of West Wycombe', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 33:3 (Fall 2009), 1-36, 1. These clubs were famed for their illicit activities, and 'the bacchanals that took place in West Wycombe's ornate garden temples and a nearby catacomb of caves became the stuff of legend', Barchas, 'Hell-Fire Jane', 8.
[305] Barchas, 'Hell-Fire Jane', 7.
[306] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 106.
[307] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, pp. 105-106.
[308] Barchas, 'Hell-Fire Jane', 1.

> even a general familiarity with West Wycombe's reputation, which was so widespread as to have been accessible to all of Austen's contemporary readers, would lend any story about a Dashwood family an air of scandal and libertinism.[309]

Furthermore, Barchas notes distant family connections through marriage between the Austens and the Dashwoods, suggesting that this 'help[s] explain why Jane Austen, in particular, may have had personal reasons to attend to their history'.[310] The use of the name therefore is 'recognizable enough to generate an uneasy atmosphere of wealth, infamy, and illicit sexuality'.[311] Consequently, the selection of this surname, 'allowed Austen to surround her character [Marianne] with an aura of alleged impropriety, domestic tension, and sentimental tragedy'.[312]

This 'uneasy atmosphere' surrounding the Dashwood family emphasises their position within a threatening social structure, which scrutinises them and speculates on their behaviour. As Wiltshire notes:

> the social milieu depicted in *Sense and Sensibility* is harsher, more cruel, than in any of Jane Austen's other published work, and not only because alone of the novels much of it is set in Regency London.[313]

The operation of gossip within society and its consequent impact on vulnerable women, is a common theme within Austen's novels, and more widely within literature of the period. This was an important issue during this era, because according to Rubenhold, 'virginity among unmarried women of the wealthy classes was an essential possession, a mere hint of the reprehensible about a girl's character might render her damaged goods in the eyes of companions and suitors'.[314] For instance, the guardian of Burney's exemplary heroine, Evelina, warns that 'nothing is so delicate as the reputation of a woman: it is, at once, the most beautiful and most brittle of all human things'.[315] As Rubenhold's quote reveals, maintaining their reputation, or 'character', was crucial for all women, and especially young women seeking marriage partners, as loss of repute would damage their prospects and social standing. For instance, in another of Burney's works, *Cecilia*, the eponymous

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[309] Barchas, 'Hell-Fire Jane', 4.
[310] Barchas, 'Hell-Fire Jane', 3-4.
[311] Barchas, 'Hell-Fire Jane', 3.
[312] Barchas, 'Hell-Fire Jane', 12.
[313] Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen*, p. 32.
[314] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 274.
[315] Fanny Burney, *Evelina: Or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), ed. Edward Bloom (Oxford: Oxford World Press, 1968, repr. 1990), p. 164.

heroine is defamed by her supposed friend, Mr Monckton, in order to prevent her marriage. Cecilia is distressed to find, 'the explanation of all her difficulties, in the full and irrefragable discovery of the perfidy of her oldest friend and confidant'.[316] Similarly in Austen's novels, gossip spread by the likes of Henry Tilney's 'neighbourhood of voluntary spies' (p. 199) in *Northanger Abbey*, or 'all the spiteful old ladies in Meryton' (p. 323) in *Pride and Prejudice*, represent a danger to a woman's marital aspirations and her long-term security. In *Northanger Abbey*, the heroine, Catherine, is the subject of gossip which misrepresents her as an heiress to a substantial fortune. This threatens her safety when the ingenuous teenager is forced to travel home unaccompanied, following her expulsion from the Abbey after her modest prospects are revealed. As Johnson notes, 'it is only because that larger world around them is so menacing in the first place that the manners of young ladies are of such consequence'.[317] However, it is within *Sense and Sensibility* that this theme is most explicit.

Following the death of their father and their removal from the family home, Norland Park, which is inherited by their unsympathetic brother, the female Dashwood family relocate to a cottage in Devonshire. In their new environment the Dashwood women find a lively social scene, as their relative, Sir John Middleton, avoids his marital boredom by entertaining the local inhabitants. It is common practice within this circle to tease young people about their romantic attachments. For instance, Sir John's mother-in-law, Mrs Jennings, expresses:

> many witty things on the subjects of lovers and husbands; hoped they had not left their hearts behind them in Sussex, and pretended to see them blush whether they did or not (p. 36).

There is generally nothing malicious in such behaviour from the Dashwood's gossipy neighbours. They are shown to be good humoured and even caring. It is noted that Sir John, 'in shewing kindness to his cousins […] had the real satisfaction of a good heart' (p. 35). Nevertheless, although their behaviour is typically good natured, Austen shows that it still has the potential to cause harm and reputational damage to the sisters. Elinor is concerned that the inability of her family to conceal their feelings makes them vulnerable to such gossip and innuendo. While she tries to

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[316] Fanny Burney, *Cecilia: Or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), ed. Judy Simons (London: Virago Press, 1986), p. 817.
[317] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 50.

suppress her feelings to avoid giving any grounds for speculation, and to spare her relatives from concern, her sibling Marianne exposes herself, and inadvertently her family, by her unguarded behaviour. Marianne is tellingly described as 'eager in every thing; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was every thing but prudent' (p. 8). This lack of prudence is revealed in Marianne's response to teasing from Mrs Jennings about whether Elinor has a suitor. It is noted that Marianne, 'turned her eyes towards Elinor to see how she bore these attacks, with an earnestness which gave Elinor far more pain than could arise from such common-place raillery' (p. 36). Marianne's 'earnestness' betrays Elinor by implying that the teasing is warranted and confirming the existence of a favourite in her affections. Marianne's lack of prudence in this instance gives Elinor 'pain' because it undermines her own efforts to maintain her propriety and highlights her perception of being situated within a community that speculates on and judges their conduct. Furthermore, the teasing directed towards Elinor when her youngest sister, Margaret, reveals the first letter of the name of her 'particular favourite' (p. 61), has serious consequences as it exposes her to the scrutiny of her rival Lucy Steele. It is noted that:

> the letter F – had been likewise invariably brought forward, and found productive of such countless jokes, that its character as the wittiest letter in the alphabet had been long established (p. 120).

The conjecture that Margaret's intelligence refers to Edward Ferrars is therefore passed on to Lucy, his secret fiancée, who has sought out her rival to ascertain Elinor's degree of influence and to warn her off. Furthermore, some of the gossip directed at the sisters is risqué and sexually suggestive. For instance, Heydt-Stevenson suggests that these recurring jokes about the 'letter F' may be a 'play on this letter's sexual associations'.[318] Chandler similarly wonders whether it is 'simply an accident that the broad-humoured Middletons […] find the first initial of Elinor's lover so conducive to constant hilarity'.[319] It seems unlikely that Austen's choice of this letter was accidental.[320] In addition, Sir John's comments on Marianne's fall, which brings about her dramatic first meeting with Willoughby, are similarly

[318] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 62.
[319] Chandler, 'A Pair of Fine Eyes', 92.
[320] There is some evidence of Austen using similarly lewd word play in her Juvenilia. Byrne notes Austen's use of the name Captain Roger for a suitor in one of the short stories and suggests that because of the knowing and uninhibited nature of the juvenilia 'one cannot be entirely confident that the young Austen was blissfully unaware of the Georgian slang meaning of the verb "to roger"', *A Life in Small Things*, p. 57.

suggestive. He teases her about 'all this tumbling about and spraining of ancles' (p. 47). Heydt-Stevenson has noted that 'to "do a tumble" meant to "lie down to a man"'[321] and she further contends that 'the tittering allusion to a sprained ankle' is an allusion to pregnancy.[322] Marianne's interactions with Willoughby are subject to sexual innuendo from the commencement of their acquaintance.

Additionally, many of Austen's novels reveal the role of servants and tradespeople within this community of gossips. For instance, in *Persuasion*, 'Mrs Smith reveals to Anne the hidden spy network of servants, nurses and maids that brings her all the Bath gossip'.[323] As Worsley notes, 'Georgian ladies would be accustomed to have servants witnessing their most vulnerable states; undressed, unhappy'.[324] The intimate knowledge these employees held about their employers' personal business gave them access to potentially damaging information.[325] For instance, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth is concerned at her mother's hysteria over Lydia's elopement, wondering 'was there a servant belonging to [the household], who did not know the whole story before the end of the day?' (p. 308). Her fears about the wider circulation of Lydia's dishonour are justified by the story rapidly circulating as far as her own suitor's family, located fifty miles away in Kent.[326] In *Sense and Sensibility*, the activities of this web of 'voluntary spies' are revealed when servants and tradespeople are shown to have a significant role in propagating and confirming rumours. The operation of this network is shown when Marianne's unchaperoned visit with Willoughby to the home he will inherit, is revealed by Mrs Jennings. We are told that:

> in her resolution to know where they had been, she had actually made her own woman enquire of Mr. Willoughby's groom, and that she had by that method been informed that they had gone to Allenham (p. 68).

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[321] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 57.
[322] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 58.
[323] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 96.
[324] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 96.
[325] In *Mansfield Park*, Maria Rushworth's affair with Henry Crawford is revealed through her mother-in-law's servant who has 'exposure in her power, and, […] was not to be silenced' (p. 419). See Chapter Four, pp. 166-167, of this thesis.
[326] Raff suggests that the source of this gossip is 'mysterious and untraceable', *Jane Austen's Erotic Advice*, p. 55. However, Elizabeth identifies the source as the family's neighbours at Lucas Lodge, Charlotte Collins' relations, noting 'through their communication with the Collinses, the report she concluded had reached lady Catherine [Mr Darcy's aunt]' (p. 369). Austen uses this example to show how the network of gossip operates.

Mrs Jennings laughs ‘heartily’ as she reveals the information she has obtained to expose them. Similarly, Mrs Jennings learns about the exposure of the longstanding, secret engagement of Edward and Lucy Steele when she asks for ‘any news’ (p. 241) from the apothecary, Mr Donavan. He delightedly reports on the ructions occurring in John Dashwood’s household and his wife’s consequent hysteria on learning of her brother’s entanglement. It is noted that he:

> smirked, and simpered, and looked grave, and seemed to know something or other, and at last he said in a whisper, 'For fear any unpleasant report should reach the young ladies under your care as to their sister's indisposition, I think it adviseable to say, that I believe there is no great reason for alarm’ (p. 242).

His enjoyment at being the bearer of such significant gossip is clear from his performance, as he communicates his ‘report’ in a melodramatic ‘whisper’. Mrs Jennings then relays the report to Elinor, ‘with an air of such hurrying importance as prepared her to hear something wonderful’ (p. 241), so revealing how this gossip rapidly circulates through these channels.

Additionally, Austen demonstrates the damaging tendency of such seemingly harmless gossip and innuendo to spread beyond the sisters’ local neighbours. Gossip about the siblings is shown to be widely circulated beyond their immediate acquaintances. For instance, Marianne’s public, unguarded flirtation with Willoughby, is subject to intense scrutiny from her neighbours, with the result that ‘such conduct made them of course most exceedingly laughed at; but ridicule could not shame, and seemed hardly to provoke them’ (p. 55). Marianne’s inability, and unwillingness, to hide her feelings leads to speculation about her status and a misconception that she and Willoughby are engaged. On their arrival in London, Colonel Brandon reports to Elinor that ‘your sister's engagement to Mr. Willoughby is very generally known’ (p. 164) and is mentioned ‘by some of whom you know nothing, by others with whom you are most intimate’ (p. 164). Similarly, Mrs Jennings notes that Marianne’s engagement ‘has been known all over the town this ever so long’, helpfully adding that ‘I tell every body of it, and so does Charlotte’ (p. 173). Indeed, her daughter, Charlotte Palmer, parrots her mother by noting that ‘it is what every body talks of. I assure you I heard of it in my way through town’ (p. 111). This repetition of the words ‘every body’ and ‘town’ is used by Austen to indicate how these stories originate in one source, but are then broadly circulated beyond the

sisters' immediate acquaintances. The idea that this false gossip about Marianne's engagement is being spread 'all over the town' illustrates how widely their behaviour is being scrutinised and reported on.

Indeed, much of Marianne's conduct can only be justified by her family and the local gossips, because they believe that she must be engaged to Willoughby. As Mary Waldron notes, 'the couple's behaviour […] by all ordinary standards would be considered improper for an unengaged couple'.[327] In particular, their engagement appears to be confirmed in the minds of her sister and her wider acquaintances, when Marianne is seen to be writing to Willoughby. The exchange of letters was only acceptable between formally engaged couples.[328] In Austen's later novel, *Emma*, the secret engagement between Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill is nearly exposed when she shares local gossip with him in her letters. Frank's 'blunder', when he refers to knowledge which could only have been relayed to him by a select number of people, almost reveals their correspondence. Indeed, although Elinor retains doubts about the status of her sister's relationship, she suggests to her credulous mother that 'if we find they correspond, every fear of mine will be removed' (p. 81). Similarly, Elinor's doubts about the veracity of Lucy's claims of being engaged to Edward Ferrars are removed when she sees evidence that he writes to her. Elinor concludes that 'a correspondence between them by letter, could subsist only under a positive engagement, could be authorised by nothing else' (p. 128). The fact that Marianne is writing to Willoughby is witnessed, not only by Elinor, but also by Colonel Brandon and Mrs Jennings (as well as the ubiquitous servants dealing with the post). On first arriving in London it is noted that Marianne immediately writes to Willoughby. This is witnessed by Elinor, who 'thought she could distinguish a large W. in the direction, and no sooner was it complete than Marianne, ringing the bell, requested the footman who answered it, to get that letter conveyed for her' (p. 154). Similarly, Colonel Brandon also sees evidence of their correspondence, viewing this as confirmation of their engagement. He notes, 'when the servant let me in to-day, accidentally see[ing] a letter in his hand, directed to Mr. Willoughby in [Marianne's] writing' (p. 164). The gossipy Mrs Jennings also 'saw

[327] Mary Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, repr. 2004), p. 71.
[328] As Hazel Jones notes, 'Unmarried men and women who were not engaged were barred from writing to each other', *Jane Austen and Marriage* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 56.

only that Marianne had received a letter from Willoughby, which appeared to her a very good joke, and which she treated accordingly' (p. 172). The visibility of this correspondence appears to give confirmation of their engagement.

By writing to Willoughby without a positive engagement having been formed Marianne's behaviour breaks the bounds, not only of propriety, but also of virtuous modesty. However, Marianne's unchaperoned visit with Willoughby to the home he expects to inherit is her most blatant breach of propriety. Their subsequent conduct and air of secrecy as, 'they both seemed delighted with their drive, but said only in general terms that they had kept in the lanes' (p. 68), draws further attention to their behaviour, encouraging speculation and spurring Mrs Jennings on in her investigations as to where they have been. Marianne's defence of this incident is to claim that 'we always know when we are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure' (p. 69). In this case, she is using this justification 'to rationalize touring Allenham without its current owner's permission'.[329] However, as Heydt-Stevenson notes, 'this logic could also be used to justify sexual commerce before marriage'.[330] The seductive nature of the language raises the possibility that Marianne is repeating the persuasive arguments used on her by Willoughby to justify the excursion. Elinor's counter-argument stresses this seductive connotation, as she notes 'that the pleasantness of an employment does not always evince its propriety' (p. 69). The impropriety and danger of Marianne's trip alone with Willoughby recalls the many ill-fated coach journeys that feature in novels of the period. For instance, Burney's eponymous heroine, Evelina, places herself under the protection of Sir Clement Willoughby to travel home when she is separated from her party. He is 'an artful, designing man'[331] who uses this opportunity to attempt to seduce her. Evelina laments, 'my own folly and pride, which had put me in his power',[332] although she escapes relatively unmolested. The contemporary reader would have recognised the potential opportunities for sexual misconduct offered by such situations.

In addition, Marianne demonstrates her susceptibility to Willoughby's persuasion when she agrees to give him a lock of her hair. She defends her behaviour by noting, 'had you seen his look, his manner, had you heard his voice at

[329] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 37.
[330] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 37.
[331] Burney, *Evelina*, p. 115.
[332] Burney, *Evelina*, p. 100.

that moment!' (p. 179). Her justification of this event again invokes the language of seduction. Furthermore, Heydt-Stevenson notes that 'the exchange of hair as gifts and the preservation of hair in jewelry was a popular and conventional practice' during this period.[333] However, she also notes that jewellers would 'often randomly substitut[e] individual locks of hair in the manufacturing process',[334] so that 'the cultural associations hair jewelry had with authenticity and sensibility divulge the ironic absence of the genuine in Willoughby's and Marianne's relationship'.[335]

Furthermore, while Marianne believes that 'her displays of emotional spontaneity reflect the depth and authenticity of her feeling, […] her behaviour is actually motivated by the self-conscious desire to adhere to a pre-existing code – the code of "sensibility"'.[336] Marianne's connection to this ideology, which was exemplified by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) in his work *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761), is highlighted by her comments when leaving her home, Norland. She laments the loss of:

> you, ye well-known trees! – but you will continue the same. No leaf will decay because we are removed, nor any branch become motionless although we can observe you no longer! – No; you will continue the same; unconscious of the pleasure or the regret you occasion, and insensible of any change in those who walk under your shade! (p. 29)

These sentiments echo comments in Goethe's famously sentimental novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, when the hero remembers:

> the walnut trees under which I sat with the worthy vicar of S. and Lotte, those magnificent walnut trees which, as God is my witness, always filled my soul with the greatest joy! How cosy they made the vicarage courtyard, and how cool! And how glorious their spreading branches were! [337]

The repetitive use of exclamation marks within both these passages further reinforces the idea that Austen is mocking this style of sentimental writing in her own work. Ironically, Marianne's 'well-known trees' suffer the same fate as Werther's, in being cut down. By linking Marianne's behaviour towards Willoughby with the cult of

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[333] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 34.
[334] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 37.
[335] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 38.
[336] Deborah Weiss, '*Sense and Sensibility*: Uncertain Knowledge and the Ethics of Everyday Life', *Studies in Romanticism*, 52:2 (Summer 2013), 253-273, 258.
[337] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), translated by Michael Hulse (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), pp. 94-95.

sensibility, Austen reveals that 'ideological expectations mediate their courtship, which they perform according to fiction's script for "real" love'.[338] While Marianne claims to 'abhor every common-place phrase by which wit is intended' (p. 46), her own behaviour is a clichéd performance. As Fullerton suggests:

> it is impossible not to suspect in *Sense and Sensibility* that there is an element of role-playing in Marianne's behaviour. The weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth is just what is expected of a heroine with romantic sensibility.[339]

This sentimentalized aspect of their relationship is dramatized by Austen when Marianne is publicly slighted by Willoughby at a Ball. It is noted that, 'Marianne, now looking dreadfully white, and unable to stand, sunk into her chair, and Elinor, expecting every moment to see her faint, tried to screen her from the observation of others' (p. 168). This example highlights the different approaches taken by the two siblings, as the elder tries to shield her sister's undignified conduct from view. Meanwhile, Willoughby is 'determined not to observe [Marianne's] attitude' (p. 167), as he ignores her behaviour due to the presence of his future wife. Indeed, Elinor witnesses Willoughby making a conscious effort to regulate his public behaviour, as she 'watched his countenance and saw its expression becoming more tranquil' (p. 167). Later, as Marianne continues to indulge her grief, it is noted that 'no attitude could give her ease; and in restless pain of mind and body she moved from one posture to another, […] growing more and more hysterical' (p. 181). The repeated use of the words 'attitude' and 'posture' suggest that Marianne is performing her grief to make it legible to her acquaintances. Furthermore, when Willoughby dramatically arrives at Cleveland, where the sisters are visiting, having heard a rumour that Marianne is dying, he assumes the role of performing for an audience. He is described as 'sitting in an attitude of deep meditation' (p. 296), as he plays the part of a penitent to gain Elinor's sympathy. By using the word 'attitude' repeatedly to connect the couple, Austen suggests a theatricality to Marianne and Willoughby's behaviour, which enacts the sentimental, romantic fantasy they are both engaged in projecting.[340]

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[338] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 38.
[339] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 34.
[340] For further discussion of 'attitudes' see Chapter Five, pp. 195-199, of this thesis.

Marianne's unguarded behaviour towards Willoughby may be considered charmingly sincere and admirable in its honesty, but it is shown as naïve within the prevailing social atmosphere. It is noted that:

> Marianne abhorred all concealment where no real disgrace could attend unreserve; and to aim at the restraint of sentiments which were not in themselves illaudable, appeared to her not merely an unnecessary effort, but a disgraceful subjection of reason to commonplace and mistaken notions (p. 54).

Despite Marianne's sentimental rejection of social etiquette in favour of honesty, Austen demonstrates that society is observing and judging her performance of abandoned misery. Within this environment it is not surprising that Marianne initially suspects having been 'been cruelly used' by gossips when rejected by Willoughby. She conjectures that his desertion is motivated by having heard something detrimental to her 'character', suggesting that 'You have perhaps been misinformed, or purposely deceived, in something concerning me, which may have lowered me in your opinion' (p. 178). She feels that 'nothing but the blackest art employed against me' (p. 179) can explain his behaviour. Subsequently, Marianne refuses to conceal her distress at Willoughby's rejection, suggesting that 'misery such as mine has no pride. I care not who knows that I am wretched. The triumph of seeing me so may be open to all the world' (p. 179). Waldron believes that, 'no one ever impugns Marianne's reputation, [she] escapes the traditional censure of the imprudent woman'.[341] However, although Marianne receives only concerned sympathy from her immediate acquaintances, there are hints that her position within the wider marriage market is damaged by her public display as the jilted lover. Several characters indicate that they have heard about her 'misery', and Austen ironically has the principal gossip, Mrs Jennings, state that 'the less that is said about such things, the better, the sooner 'tis blown over and forgot' (p. 185). Mrs Jennings seems unlikely to resist such an inviting opportunity for gossip. Indeed, she has already assured Elinor that she intends to tell all her acquaintances that '[Willoughby] has used a young lady of my acquaintance abominably ill […]. And so I shall always say, my dear, you may depend on it' (p. 182). Even Marianne's inattentive brother notes her altered looks:

[341] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 83.

> At her time of life, any thing of an illness destroys the bloom for ever! Her's has been a very short one! She was as handsome a girl last September, as any I ever saw; and as likely to attract the men. […] I question whether Marianne *now*, will marry a man worth more than five or six hundred a year (pp. 214-215).

His comments indicate his concern that Marianne has less value on the marriage market than previously.[342] Austen shows that Marianne's behaviour leads her acquaintances, and 'the world', to view her as compromised because of her unguarded behaviour with Willoughby once he is proven to be disreputable. His engagement to Miss Grey, following his public behaviour towards Marianne, reveals his lack of scruples and dishonourable intentions, even though his seduction of Colonel Brandon's ward, Eliza Williams, is not yet widely known. Nevertheless, Marianne's virtue becomes questionable because she has put herself under his protection and demonstrated that she is susceptible to his persuasion. As a result, this unguarded behaviour damages her reputation in the view of the wider social world.

Marianne's fate is to be isolated from this hostile, gossiping 'world' into rural seclusion at Delaford following her marriage to Colonel Brandon. This is a destiny she dismisses early in the novel as 'a compact of convenience, and the world would be satisfied. In my eyes it would be no marriage at all, but that would be nothing. To me it would seem only a commercial exchange' (p. 40). Furthermore, Delaford is chillingly described as:

> a nice old fashioned place, full of comforts and conveniences; quite shut in with great garden walls that are covered with the best fruit-trees in the country: and such a mulberry tree in one corner! […] only a quarter of a mile from the turnpike-road, so 'tis never dull, for if you only go and sit up in an old yew arbour behind the house, you may see all the carriages that pass along (p. 186).

While the reference to the 'yew arbour' suggests a timeless quality, as they are famously long lived and often associated with churches, this description also suggests that Marianne has to be 'shut in' and exiled from the social 'world', where she is only able to sit and watch as people and 'carriages […] pass' her by. This provides a stark contrast to her exhilarating carriage ride with Willoughby, who 'drove through the park very fast, [so] they were soon out of sight; and nothing more of them was seen till their return, which did not happen till after the return of all the rest'

[342] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 65.

(pp. 67-68). The reference to a 'mulberry tree' in the passage above is also significant. As Barchas notes, 'mulberry trees became cultural symbols of tragic love', due to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD), in which the colour of the fruit represents the blood of the ill-fated lovers Pyramus and Thisbe.[343] Barchas argues that the tree represents Brandon's unhappy first love.[344] However, I would contend that this reference draws attention to the romantic 'death' of Marianne and Willoughby's love, through their estrangement and entry into passionless marriages of convenience.

'Only to sink deeper'[345]

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen employs two common variations of the seduction narrative that were widely represented in the literature of the period, in order to demonstrate women's vulnerability to male exploitation. Binhammer notes the popularity of seduction narratives in fictional works during the second half of the eighteenth century; a period which 'witnesses the emergence of companionate marriage as a dominant cultural ideal [which] carries with it a new social and cultural imperative for women to know their hearts'.[346] She argues that these narratives could serve many functions within a text, 'but their presence forces the reader to ponder the relationships between marriage and seduction, love inside and outside sanctioned bonds, sexual knowledge and sexual ignorance, and chastity and contamination'.[347] The introduction of these embedded cautionary tales through Colonel Brandon's recitation of his history, underpins Austen's arguments regarding the threatening nature of courtship for young, unprotected women. Thus, 'the elder Eliza's story offers a critique of male libertinism, one which reappears, much amplified, in the younger Eliza's story'.[348] The use of the double storyline featuring the downfall of both mother and daughter allows Austen to comment on wider social issues. As Johnson suggests, this doubling of the seduction narrative highlights that the issues which lead to their mutual 'fall' are societal rather than just relating to the aberrant behaviour of one male seducer:

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[343] Barchas, *Matters of Fact*, p. 156.
[344] Barchas, *Matters of Fact*, p. 156.
[345] Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 195.
[346] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 1.
[347] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 73.
[348] McAllister, 'Only to Sink Deeper', 101.

> One Eliza would have sufficed as far as the immediate narrative purpose is concerned, which is to discredit Willoughby […] But the presence of two unfortunate heroines points to crimes beyond Willoughby's doing, and their common name opens the sinister possibility that plights such as theirs proliferate throughout the kingdom.[349]

In particular, their stories critique the acquisitive nature of the marriage market. The older Eliza is betrayed by her relatives in order to secure her fortune, while the younger is viewed as a target for seduction but not as a worthwhile marriage prospect by Willoughby due to the lack of financial provision made for her. These stories highlight the risks women were exposed to if they failed to successfully negotiate the dangers of the marriage market.

The story related by Colonel Brandon regarding his cousin, Eliza, is a conventional tale of an unhappy wife who commits adultery and, by eloping with her lover, becomes part of the *demimonde*. McAllister notes that by introducing this story, Austen 'offers a brief but pronounced attack on marriage for money, on primogeniture, and on the abuse of paternal authority'.[350] Forced to marry against her inclination so that her inherited wealth would belong to Brandon's elder brother, and treated unkindly by her husband, Eliza 'resigned herself at first to all the misery of her situation' (p. 195). Brandon suggests that 'the consequence of this, upon a mind so young, so lively, so inexperienced as Mrs. Brandon's, was but too natural' (p. 195). Her subsequent fall to her 'first seducer' (p. 195) is therefore presented as the inevitable result of this abuse of patriarchal authority inflicted on a vulnerable woman, who is exploited by her male relatives. Divorced by her husband, she is left without sufficient funds to support herself as her allowance is 'not adequate to her fortune, nor sufficient for her comfortable maintenance' (p. 195). Furthermore, she is forced to sign over this inadequate provision to another person, presumably a creditor, for 'immediate relief' (p. 195). Eliza is inevitably abandoned by her seducer 'only to sink deeper in a life of sin' (p. 195). Unlike Lady Adelina, the fallen wife in Smith's *Emmeline*, who is rescued by her benevolent brother, Austen gives her character a harsher fate in order to highlight the failure of patriarchal authority.[351]

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[349] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 57.
[350] McAllister, 'Only to Sink Deeper', 100.
[351] In Smith's novel the hero, William Godolphin, pretends his sister's illegitimate child is his own offspring, obscuring Adelina's connection to the baby to protect her reputation as he is aware that society will view his supposed indiscretion less harshly than his sister's.

Eliza's descent into prostitution and death, as a result of male exploitation and economic necessity, is presented as inexorable.

The nature of Eliza's death, which is described as being from 'a consumption' (p. 196), is deliberately vague. Nevertheless, Austen gives her reader sufficient information to interpret the nature of her demise, while maintaining adequate ambiguity to avoid the censure of introducing an improper subject. As McAllister clarifies, 'the "consumption" of which Eliza perishes, and which Brandon describes as a mercy, is not, in fact, tubercular; Eliza dies of nothing less than venereal disease'.[352] She argues that 'consumption becomes a novelistic euphemism for venereal disease well before Austen's time',[353] and notes that while direct references are not uncommon in literature during the eighteenth-century, 'the need for euphemisms such as "consumption" creeps in later, in response to changing discourses about venereal disease and sexuality'.[354] As Henderson notes 'prostitutes obviously ran a higher than average risk of contracting venereal disease',[355] with this illness being portrayed as 'the inevitable wages of sin earned by unruly sexual conduct'.[356] For instance, this is the 'inevitable' fate of Moll Hackabout in Plate 5 of Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress* (see Illustration 2 below).[357]

[352] McAllister, 'Only to Sink Deeper', 89.
[353] McAllister, 'Only to Sink Deeper', 90.
[354] McAllister, 'Only to Sink Deeper', 93.
[355] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 41.
[356] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 20.
[357] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 19; Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 20.

Illustration 2: The Harlot's Progress, Plate 5: Moll dying of syphilis, William Hogarth (1732), British Library[358]

Furthermore, 'before the end of the eighteenth century, the consumptive female becomes, in literature and even in medicine, synonymous with purity and peaceful death'.[359] In contrast to this 'peaceful' demise, the unpleasant nature of Eliza's death reflects the distressed fate of Hogarth's subject, who is portrayed as suffering 'the fate of the sexually promiscuous, a lingering, painful death'.[360] Colonel Brandon describes Eliza as:

> So altered – so faded – worn down by acute suffering of every kind! hardly could I believe the melancholy and sickly figure before me, to be the remains of the lovely, blooming, healthful girl (p. 196).

Clearly Eliza's death invokes the dissipation of her existence and the failure of patriarchal authority, rather than sentimentalizing her betrayed 'purity'. This supports the idea of Austen suggesting that Eliza dies from a disease she has contracted because of her sexual exploitation.

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[358] British Library, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-harlots-progress (accessed July 2018).
[359] McAllister, 'Only to Sink Deeper', 96.
[360] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 20.

Meanwhile, the second seduction narrative in *Sense and Sensibility* refers to the fate of her daughter, Eliza Williams, who shares her mother's first name as well as her debauched destiny. The younger Eliza represents the innocent *ingénue* seduced and abandoned by her lover, 'in a situation of the utmost distress, with no creditable home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his address!' (p. 198). The nature of this distressed 'situation' is pregnancy, which was usually referred to obliquely at this time to avoid vulgarity. For instance, Lady Middleton is mortified even by vague references to her sister's pregnancy when their mother notes that travelling 'was wrong in her situation' (p. 105), unnecessarily clarifying that 'she expects to be confined in February' (p. 105). It is noted that when the subject is discussed, 'Lady Middleton could no longer endure such a conversation, and therefore exerted herself to ask Mr. Palmer if there was any news in the paper' (p. 105). Nevertheless, despite this being an indecorous topic, Austen ensures the nature of Eliza's 'situation' is clear to her readers by having Colonel Brandon state that he 'found her near her delivery [and] removed her and her child into the country' (p. 199). This confirms the physical nature of Willoughby's seduction, ensuring that his guilty sexual act is explicit and undeniable.

It is significant that Austen does not allow either of the fallen women to tell their stories of seduction in their own voices. By denying the seduced women a voice within her novel, Austen refutes the sentimentalization of the seduction plot and highlights the failure of patriarchal society to safeguard vulnerable females. Neither woman appears within the work, as the elder Eliza has died before the start of the novel and the younger has been sent away to the country. However, there were literary devices available which would have allowed them a voice, such as the introduction of letters or journals written by them. Binhammer notes that within seduction narratives 'the question of "who speaks?" has serious effects on female affective agency and […] third-person narration provided less authority for the feelings of its female characters'.[361] Within Austen's novel the story of these two seduced women is told from the male perspective. Ostensibly this serves Colonel Brandon's purpose of 'demonstrating his worthiness to become Elinor's dear friend and Marianne's husband'.[362] It is necessary for him to defend his relationship with

[361] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, pp. 108-109.
[362] McAllister, 'Only to Sink Deeper', 89.

the younger Eliza. He realises that she is commonly regarded as his illegitimate daughter, noting that 'I am well aware that I have in general been suspected of a much nearer connection with her' (pp. 196-197). For instance, Mrs Jennings refers to Eliza as 'his natural daughter' (p. 67), a common euphemism of the era for an illegitimate child.[363] Colonel Brandon's 'short account of myself' (p. 193) is intended partly to illuminate Willoughby's character, but also to disprove this conjecture about Eliza's parentage in the hope of being considered a suitor to Marianne in the future. In addition, the younger Eliza's story is also related from Willoughby's perspective as he attempts to justify his behaviour. Whilst acknowledging that 'her affection for me deserved better treatment (p. 301), Willoughby nonetheless blames Eliza for, 'the violence of her passion, the weakness of her understanding' (p. 300). As Johnson notes, Willoughby is 'strikingly unrepentant about debauching Eliza'.[364] Both men use the stories of these fallen women for their own purposes, revealing that even in dishonour and death they are still being exploited to serve male priorities. Furthermore, the fact that these two men fight a duel over the younger woman demonstrates the inability of patriarchal structures to protect vulnerable females.[365] Austen's cursory dismissal of the subject highlights the futility of the contest, which serves no beneficial purpose for the young victim and merely provides a sop to the pride of the men involved. By presenting their stories solely through male narrators, Austen shows the seduced women to be pawns within an abusive patriarchal system and criticises the lack of protection they are afforded from male exploitation, even from those individuals they should have been able to trust.

I am not suggesting that the two Elizas are portrayed as entirely blameless for their respective falls. Clearly the younger Eliza is culpable for her naïve romanticism, and the elder woman fails by giving in to coercion and agreeing to a loveless marriage when her heart is pre-engaged. Colonel Brandon indicates his perception of her moral failure, noting he had 'depended on her fortitude too far' (p. 194). In Austen's later work, *Mansfield Park*, the heroine, Fanny Price, resists the cruelty of her male relations, who try to persuade her to marry against her inclination, and is rewarded by the author with her choice of marriage partner. However, as

[363] For discussion of the term 'natural daughter' see Chapter Five, p. 175, of this thesis.
[364] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 57.
[365] As Fullerton notes 'Colonel Brandon thus becomes the only one of Jane Austen's heroes to engage in a criminal activity', *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 124.

Johnson suggests, the tale of these two women, 'while stopping decidedly short of pardoning failures of female chastity, nevertheless divulge the callousness of the ruling class'.[366] Austen shows that the greater guilt lies with these males, who exploit the vulnerabilities of such females but do not incur the punishments that the women do, so demonstrating how unequal gender positions were within the patriarchal structures of her society. The men involved achieve their ends and suffer little inconvenience as a result, while both women become social outcasts, with the younger banished from society and the elder dying in poverty.

It is commonly understood that the fate of the *ingénue* Eliza Williams offers a cautionary tale to Marianne, revealing her own fate had she been seduced by Willoughby and highlighting his dishonourable intentions. However, it is also true that the story of the elder Eliza's failed marriage contains a warning for Marianne. As Fullerton suggests:

> the misfortunes of [the elder] Eliza are paralleled in the fate of her daughter who is seduced by Willoughby. The same name for both women emphasises the similarities – both are seduced, become pregnant and their lives are ruined. Marianne narrowly avoids a similar fate.[367]

Indeed, Colonel Brandon specifically connects Marianne to the older woman, suggesting she has 'the same warmth of heart, the same eagerness of fancy and spirits' (p. 194) as his cousin. He frequently compares the two women, noting that 'had the natural sweet disposition of the one been guarded by a firmer mind, or an happier marriage, she might have been all that you will live to see the other be' (p. 196). However, this also invokes the idea that Marianne's fate within an unhappy marriage might be the same as Colonel Brandon's first love. Indeed, Elinor views the end of her sister's relationship with Willoughby, 'as an escape from the worst and most irremediable of evils, a connection, for life, with an unprincipled man, as a deliverance the most real, a blessing the most important' (p. 175). Elinor believes that marriage to Willoughby would have been disastrous for her sister, telling her 'your marriage must have involved you in many certain troubles and disappointments in which you would have been poorly supported by an affection, on his side, much less certain' (p. 326). She argues that the couple's financial difficulties would have

[366] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 55.
[367] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 78.

led to an estrangement which, 'would have lessened your own influence on his heart, and made him regret the connection which had involved him in such difficulties' (p. 327). Eliza falls because of 'the misery of her situation, for she experienced great unkindness, [which] overcame all her resolution' (p. 194). Marianne's romantic susceptibility has already been revealed through her behaviour, such as her trip with Willoughby to Allenham and her gift to him of a lock of her hair. Heydt-Stevenson queries whether the episode involving the lock of hair is 'a metonymy of his design to seduce her or […] a metonymy of seduction that occurred but is stated indirectly'.[368] Whether we view this incident as confirmation of her physical fall or not, it certainly suggests her willingness to breach decorum in a physical way. As a result, it is easy to anticipate that she would be similarly vulnerable to seduction under the severe disappointment of her marriage proving to be unprosperous or unhappy.

Nevertheless, it can also be argued that Marianne does not escape the fate of being 'ruined' by Willoughby. For instance, Heydt-Stevenson suggests that 'although Austen gives no absolute proof that Willoughby "ruins" Marianne, the novel everywhere intimates that he has in some way contaminated her'.[369] McAllister argues that there is nothing in the text which suggests 'that Marianne forgets her culture's beliefs about premarital sex and parentally approved marriage'.[370] However, it is also apparent from increases in the number of illegitimate children that the eighteenth century witnessed 'a change in behaviour in favour of penetrative sex during and before courtship'.[371] Peakman notes, 'if a woman felt she was in love, and was confident that the man would marry her, there was little to prevent a couple having sex'.[372] There is no textual evidence to suggest that Marianne is physically seduced by Willoughby. As previously noted, her grief at his rejection is romantic and clichéd rather than representing the genuine mortification that would have been induced had she been seduced. Colonel Brandon compares the fate of the young women, noting that while Eliza has 'a mind tormented by self-reproach, which must attend her through life' (p. 198), in contrast, Marianne's sufferings 'proceed from no

[368] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 39.
[369] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 51.
[370] McAllister, 'Only to Sink Deeper', 103.
[371] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 40; Binhammer notes that 'by 1800, at least half of first-born births were conceived out of wedlock and a growing number of these prenuptial pregnancies did not result in marriage', *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 110.
[372] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 45.

misconduct, and can bring no disgrace' (p. 198). Nevertheless, as Heydt-Stevenson states:

> [while] it would be fruitless to argue that Willoughby literally 'deflowers' Marianne; […] such an event would offer a compelling rationale for her marriage to Brandon, in that he (and apparently only he) can and is willing to 'redeem' her.[373]

Whilst I agree with this 'rationale' for Marianne's marriage, I would contend that the issue is one of perception rather than her having been literally 'deflowered'. By behaving as the 'fallen woman' and making public displays of her rejection, Marianne has raised doubts about her virtue and cast herself as damaged in the eyes of the wider social world. Peakman notes that 'the importance invested in a woman's chastity meant that she was constantly under pressure to maintain her reputation'.[374] The question of whether Marianne has literally fallen or not becomes irrelevant. Indeed, Austen deliberately obfuscates this issue, denying the reader a definitive clarification, in order to reveal how questions about Marianne's behaviour have been raised within the wider world of the novel. This allows Austen to emphasise that Marianne's behaviour has undermined public perception of her claims to 'reputation' and raised questions about her 'chastity'. By presenting herself to the wider world as 'fallen', Marianne reduces her desirability within the marriage market, and unlike the heroines in Austen's other works who form solidly romantic attachments that bind them together in marriage, her union with Colonel Brandon is formed 'with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship' (p. 352).

'As good a kind of fellow as ever lived'[375]

Throughout Austen's novels she reveals the difficulties faced by women trying to secure suitable husbands within a society where social etiquette dictates forms of behaviour. As Kelly notes:

> in a society where unmarried men and women were kept largely separate, and permitted to socialise only when properly chaperoned, how could a woman arrive at any sort of knowledge of a man's character.[376]

Understanding a man's 'character' was essential for a woman considering matrimony, because during this period 'at the moment of marriage […] she was

[373] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 54.
[374] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 45.
[375] Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 45.
[376] Kelly, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, p. 116.

legally merged with her husband and everything she possessed […] was his, to do with as he pleased'.[377] Fullerton argues that because it was no longer acceptable to force a woman to marry a husband selected by her family, 'girls had to be taught to distinguish between a true gentleman and a rascal'.[378] Austen reveals the fraught nature of this task by producing complex male characters, rather than Gothic villains such as Ann Radcliffe's (1764-1823) infamous Signor Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho, A Romance* (1794), or faultless, mentor-heroes like Richardson's eponymous Sir Charles Grandison and Burney's Lord Orville, the exemplary hero of her novel *Evelina*. Indeed, in *Northanger Abbey*, she mocks literary convention by having her heroine reflect that:

> Among the Alps and Pyrenees, perhaps, there were no mixed characters. There, such as were not as spotless as an angel, might have the dispositions of a fiend. But in England it was not so; among the English, she believed, in their hearts and habits, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad (p. 202).

Heydt-Stevenson notes that 'every Austen novel has its share of fakes, frauds, and humbugs'.[379] The issue for her heroines is how to see beyond the prescribed formalities to identify the 'humbugs' from those worthier, though perhaps less socially adept, characters.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, it proves to be impossible for the Dashwood women to gain any useful intelligence about Willoughby that would help them with this task. Sir John calls him, 'as good a kind of fellow as ever lived, I assure you. A very decent shot, and there is not a bolder rider in England' (p. 45). He supports this by irrelevantly noting that 'he is a pleasant, good humoured fellow, and has got the nicest little black bitch of a pointer I ever saw' (p. 45). His claims, which focus on sporting prowess, are frivolously supported by the fact that Willoughby, 'danced from eight o'clock till four, without once sitting down' (p. 46). Elinor also tries to illicit information from Charlotte Palmer, believing 'it probable that as they lived in the same county, Mrs. Palmer might be able to give some more particular account of Willoughby's general character' (p. 110). However, Charlotte's reply is unsubstantiated nonsense, as she states that 'I know him extremely well […] Not that I ever spoke to him indeed; but I have seen him for ever in town' (p. 111). The

[377] Kelly, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, p. 95.
[378] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 94.
[379] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 103.

information provided by both these figures is meaningless, as they have no useful knowledge to offer regarding Willoughby's 'character'. Nevertheless, Mrs Dashwood interprets their comments as evidence 'that he is a respectable young man, and one whose acquaintance will not be ineligible' (p. 46). This lack of authentic knowledge of a man's true character is exacerbated when people in her novels with privileged information choose to withhold this intelligence from those women it would benefit. For instance, Mrs Smith in *Persuasion* withholds her detrimental knowledge of Mr Elliot's dissipated character from Anne Elliot because she believes she may benefit from their marriage. Similarly, Colonel Brandon suppresses his information regarding Willoughby's seduction of Eliza Williams because he believes his rival's marriage to Marianne is inevitable. Without effective patriarchal support the Dashwood family are unable to thoroughly investigate Willoughby's background, and faced with a social miasma they are unable to separate fact from speculation or hyperbole. The fact that men are judged on their social attributes and sporting prowess, rather than their virtue or morality, allows disreputable men to manipulate social interactions and impose on credulous women.

Like Willoughby, many of Austen's most disruptive and threatening characters, such as Frank Churchill in *Emma*, Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, and George Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*, appear attractive to the reader and the novels' respective heroines, at least initially. These characters represent a more serious threat than the socially inept and unattractive individuals, such as Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*'s John Thorpe, who cause social difficulties for the heroines but are easily dismissed. As Gay notes, 'each of her novels presents as a major character one of those plausible actors whose charming performance is a genuine threat to the heroine's peace of mind'.[380] For instance, Wickham is a rake and seducer of young girls, who hides his 'vicious propensities [and] want of principle' (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 230) behind a veneer of manners and charm, so representing contemporary anxieties about the ability of individuals to hide their real character. This is threatening to society because, as Vickery notes, the 'lynchpin' of good breeding and politeness 'was the assumption that outer manners were the reflection of inner civility […] manners were not empty gestures,

[380] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 95.

but the sincere expression of an ethical code'.[381] Indeed, Wollstonecraft contrasts genuine and assumed respectability when she argues that 'Lessons of politeness, and that formulary of decorum, which treads on the heels of falsehood, would be rendered useless by habitual propriety of behaviour'.[382] Wickham is able to impose on the community, and particularly on Elizabeth, because 'he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address' (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 116). Significantly, as Gay suggests, these 'plausible' villains are good 'actors' in a social sense because they are 'chameleon-like in their ability to present an appropriate face (or mask) for every situation'.[383] For instance, in *Mansfield Park*, Henry Crawford is shown to be a consummate actor both socially and literally, during the theatricals and when reading Shakespeare. Even the prudish heroine, Fanny, recognises that 'Mr. Crawford was considerably the best actor of all' (p. 153). Gay suggests 'his versatility marks Henry Crawford even more specifically as the villain of the piece'.[384] Furthermore, Gay notes that 'a good *actor* of "sensibility", as Willoughby will show himself to be, can pick up cues, and respond with immediate conviction'.[385] Marianne says, 'I could not be happy with a man whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own. He must enter into all my feelings; the same books, the same music must charm us both' (p. 19). Willoughby has the skill to flatter her into believing this to be the case, regardless of his real sentiments. This ability is revealed when Austen shows that Willoughby has created the perception that:

> Their taste was strikingly alike. The same books, the same passages were idolized by each – or if any difference appeared, any objection arose, it lasted no longer than till the force of her arguments and the brightness of her eyes could be displayed. He acquiesced in all her decisions, caught all her enthusiasm (p. 49).

However, this perception is false and merely the result of his manipulation of Marianne. Characters who are able to assume the appearance of 'inner civility' without the underpinning 'ethical code', therefore represent a specific danger to the

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[381] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 197.
[382] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 283. In addition, Wollstonecraft argues that 'Manners and morals are so nearly allied that they have often been confounded; but, although the former should only be the natural reflection of the latter, yet, when various causes have produced factitious and corrupt manners, which are very early caught, morality becomes an empty name', *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 86.
[383] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 95.
[384] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 101.
[385] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 36.

security of the heroine who may be misled into a disastrous union. Their deceptions also have wider consequences in the threat they pose to social stability by threatening the security of marriage and family.

In contrast, many of Austen's most worthy characters, such as *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr Darcy, appear unattractive and socially inept. His first pompous act within the novel is to insult the heroine by refusing to dance with her, noting that 'she is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*' (p. 59). Captain Wentworth also insults the heroine on his first appearance in *Persuasion*, disparagingly suggesting that Anne Elliot is 'so altered he should not have known [her] again'.[386] In *Sense and Sensibility* Elinor's suitor, Edward Ferrars, seems similarly deficient. Marianne is particularly damning about his romantic qualities, suggesting that:

> there is a something wanting – his figure is not striking; it has none of that grace which I should expect in the man who could seriously attach my sister. His eyes want all that spirit, that fire, which at once announce virtue and intelligence (p. 19).

Other male characters, such as Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*'s Henry Tilney, view themselves as moral mentors but are shown to be naïve and mistaken in many of their assumptions. For instance, Edmund's belief that Fanny would benefit from living with their cruel aunt, Mrs Norris, is clearly preposterous. As Waldron notes, 'nowhere in the major works do we find a male character who is beyond reproach'.[387]

An interesting example of Austen's exploitation of her readers' conventional expectations is Charles Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*. Some of Bingley's qualities and behaviour would place him as a villain in other contemporary works. The instability of Bingley's character is revealed when he says that, 'Whatever I do is done in a hurry […] and therefore if I should resolve to quit Netherfield, I should probably be off in five minutes' (p. 88). Elizabeth Bennet's assessment highlights the detrimental effects of his thoughtless behaviour, as she reflects that:

> without scheming to do wrong, or to make others unhappy, there may be error, and there may be misery. Thoughtlessness, want of attention to other people's feelings, and want of resolution, will do the business (p. 175)

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[386] Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1818), ed. D. W. Harding (London: Penguin, 1965, repr. 1985), p. 85. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses immediately following the reference.
[387] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 115.

Indeed, initial descriptions of Bingley as 'just what a young man ought to be' (p. 62) mirror those of Willoughby who is 'as good a kind of fellow as ever lived' (p. 45). Bingley's relinquishment of Jane Bennet after raising expectations of an imminent engagement exposes her to the same risk as Willoughby's abandonment of his pursuit of Marianne. Nevertheless, Jane's reserved behaviour saves her from similar exposure, as in contrast to Marianne her preference 'was not likely to be discovered by the world in general, since […] a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner, […] would guard her from the suspicions of the impertinent' (p. 68). However, unlike Willoughby, who is motivated by selfish, financial considerations, Bingley's actions are shown to be the result of diffidence. It is only by understanding his motivation that his actions can be understood. Indeed, this complex character redeems himself, once he becomes aware of the strategies used to separate him from Jane, by returning to secure her as his wife.

This complexity in Austen's portrayal of her male characters means that it is difficult for the reader to interpret the motivations of individual males within the novels. Austen offers few clues to differentiate between worthy and dubious male characters. The reader usually shares the position of the heroine and experiences the same revelations, learning of Frank's duplicity along with Emma, and sharing Elizabeth's shock when she learns of Wickham's dissipated character. However, there are subtle hints that Austen employs to alert her readers to the fact that they should be suspicious of an individual. Austen often associates suspect male characters with making journeys to London and Bath, and especially if these visits are frivolous or sudden. Roger Sales notes that:

> characters are often associated with particular places which may not always be represented directly in the texts themselves. The association is a kind of shorthand that would have been understood by Regency readers but which may remain either unnoticed, or else cryptic, for modern ones.[388]

For instance, the polished, yet corrupt, Mr Elliot in *Persuasion* is first encountered in Lyme 'in his way to Bath and London' (p. 126). Henry Crawford dashes off to Bath 'without delay' (p. 179) to escape his entanglement with the engaged Maria Bertram, and Frank Churchill suddenly travels to London, apparently for a haircut but actually to buy his secret fiancée a piano. Mrs Bennet worries that Bingley 'might be always

[388] Sales, *Representations of Regency England*, p. xviii.

flying about from one place to another, and never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be' (p. 57) and her daughter Lydia's prospects of a happy marriage to Wickham seem questionable when it is noted that she occasionally visits her sister while her husband 'was gone to enjoy himself in London or Bath' (p. 395) without her. This instability of physical location indicates the lack of social responsibility in these male characters, and suggests a frivolousness in their motivations which should alert readers to their potential moral deficiencies.

Another hint which Austen provides to her readers to allow them to identify deficient male characters is their use of the word 'angel' to classify women. Kirkham suggests that in Austen's novels the 'use of the word "angel" of a young woman pinpoints right or mistaken attitudes in men'.[389] Use of this appellation has echoes of the conduct book assessment of women that Austen mocks in *Pride and Prejudice* for having unrealistic expectations of female attributes. Furthermore, in a letter discussing heroines in novels, she writes that 'pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked'.[390] Austen appears to be reflecting the sentiments expressed by Wollstonecraft, who as Audrey Bilger suggests, aimed to replace 'the myths about women as angels […] with honest views of women as rational creatures'.[391] Wollstonecraft questions the appellations applied to women when she asks:

> Why are girls to be told that they resemble angels; but to sink them below women? Or, that a gentle, innocent female is an object that comes nearer to the idea which we have formed of angels than any other. Yet they are told, at the same time, that they are only like angels when they are young and beautiful; consequently, it is their persons, not their virtues, that procure them this homage.
>
> Idle empty words! What can such delusive flattery lead to, but vanity and folly?[392]

This attitude is reflected in a letter that Austen writes in 1800 about the marriage of an acquaintance:

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[389] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 141.
[390] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 155: 23-25 March 1817, pp. 335-337, p. 335.
[391] Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), p. 51.
[392] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 194.

> I was afraid he would oppress me by his felicity & his love for his Wife, but this is not the case; he calls her simply Anna without any angelic embellishments, for which I respect & wish him happy.[393]

Like Wollstonecraft, Austen is critical of the sentimental classification of women as 'angels'. In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen uses the term 'angel' to raise suspicions about Bingley, by having him classify Jane in this sentimental way after only one meeting and to critique his unrealistic gender expectations. Frank Churchill also superficially objectifies his fiancée, Jane Fairfax, noting that 'She is a complete angel. Look at her. Is not she an angel in every gesture?' (p. 459).[394] It is also a phrase that Willoughby uses of Marianne when he reminisces about their relationship. He sentimentally recalls 'Marianne, beautiful as an angel on one side, calling me Willoughby in such a tone!' (p. 305), although he has little difficulty in rejecting her for the financial benefits he obtains through his marriage. Austen criticises this insincere classification of women, showing that readers should view the men who use such conventional terms as morally questionable.

However, it is within *Sense and Sensibility* that Austen's representation of her male characters is most challenging for her readers. Comparing Edward Ferrars and Willoughby is revealing because in some ways their behaviour is similar. Both men are 'weak, duplicitous and selfish, entirely lacking in that rectitude and forthrightness with which Austen is capable of endowing exemplary gentlemen'.[395] (Although, like Waldron, I do not agree that any of Austen's male characters are completely 'exemplary'.) Indeed, Kelly notes that it is 'arguable as to which man behaves worse in this regard', as Willoughby does briefly have honourable intentions, while Edward knows he is 'not in a position to have proper intentions towards Elinor'.[396] As in Willoughby's dalliance with Eliza, Edward also 'forms an early attachment out of the idleness endemic to landed gentlemen', becoming engaged to Lucy whilst waiting for his inheritance.[397] As a result, 'these faults are described as the effects of established and accepted social practices for men of family, not as aberrations from them'.[398] Edward's behaviour towards both Elinor and Lucy is appalling by contemporary standards. Doubts linger about his morality, despite Elinor's defence

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[393] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 25: 8-9 November 1800, pp. 54-58, p. 56.
[394] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 142.
[395] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 58.
[396] Kelly, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, p. 104.
[397] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 57.
[398] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 58.

of his character. His behaviour when he returns to Barton Cottage after being 'released' by Lucy's elopement with his brother causes particular concern. Gay suggests that when Edward cuts up the sheath and destroys the scissors, this is 'a sign of his total failure of gentlemanly decorum [in] destroying the ladies' delicate instrument'.[399] However, Kelly goes further, suggesting that, though Austen 'seldom uses symbolism' this looks like 'symbolism of a deeply disturbing, unhealthy, sexually violent kind'[400] with the sheath representing 'Lucy's private parts'[401] and therefore showing something deviant in Edward's personality.[402] It is certainly a 'violent' act, which suggests that his withdrawn character is more than simply the result of his discontentment at having been fettered to Lucy.

The resolution of *Sense and Sensibility* is particularly damning of patriarchal authority. Although the sisters both form marriages, neither partner seems to represent the ideal companionate union, although Elinor does secure the husband she desires. Both husbands have previously failed to act for the benefit of their female dependents. Colonel Brandon fails to guard either of the two Elizas, his female relatives, from falling into disrepute and Edward Ferrars betrays his fiancée by forming a romantic attachment with another woman. However, the greatest benefit of these marriages to the sisters and their mother, is that they are able to maintain their own female community, as 'between Barton and Delaford, there was that constant communication which strong family affection would naturally dictate (p. 353). The novel ends by reiterating that it is this closeness of female connection that remains their greatest blessing, as:

> among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves' (p. 353).

By ending the novel with this declaration of female solidarity, Austen challenges the importance of patriarchal social structures and shows the significance instead of relationships between women, so undermining the centrality of those males who have sought to exploit them.

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[399] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 49.
[400] Kelly, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, p. 105.
[401] Kelly, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, p. 105.
[402] Kelly, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, p. 103.

Chapter Three

Pride and Prejudice: 'To be sure it would have been more for the advantage of conversation, had Miss Lydia Bennet come upon the town'.[403]

In a letter from 1813, Austen humorously describes *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) as 'rather too light & bright & sparkling'.[404] Despite its 'light' and 'sparkling' tone this novel about the marital prospects of the five Bennet sisters contains a complex debate about the changing nature of marriage during the Georgian period, as well as being Austen's most direct engagement with the issue of prostitution. By engaging with the Georgian period's obsession with the seduction and debauching of respectable young girls, Austen shows that the all-consuming social pressure to marry can lead women to potentially destructive choices, making them vulnerable to sexual exploitation.[405] This is shown to be a consequence of women's lack of alternative careers, poor education, and inadequate financial security resulting from inheritance practices that favoured male heirs.

In her novel, Austen highlights the dangers to women of entering into illicit and immoral sexual liaisons outside the protection of matrimony in the expectation that this will lead to marriage, through her portrayal of Lydia Bennet's elopement with George Wickham. While the marriage of Lydia and Wickham remains in doubt, Austen invokes the Regency sex trade to show the threat it posed to women who allowed their passions to overturn their virtue and gambled on being able to persuade their lover into matrimony after surrendering their chastity. Austen shows the likely consequences of such unguarded behaviour by evoking Lydia's potential future as a fallen woman. References to prostitution link Lydia to this possible fate, illustrating how her lack of virtue and unrestrained behaviour makes her vulnerable to exploitation by the unprincipled Wickham. Additionally, Austen evokes Lydia's potential fate 'upon the town' (p. 323) by linking her to the controversial figure of the

[403] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 323.
[404] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 80: 4 February 1813, pp. 203-204, p. 203.
[405] Heydt-Stevenson notes that 'a culturally determined desperation to compete for and win a husband drives both Lydia and Charlotte to self-destructive choices', *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 99. She argues that this behaviour 'epitomizes the panic induced when a society thinks unwed women are worthless', *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 94.

bawd, represented by the nefarious Mrs Younge. Bawds were central characters in concerns over the sex trade at this time. As despised figures they were believed to prey on the naïve and present a route for young women to be drawn into prostitution.[406] Lydia's elopement, and subsequent failure to marry her seducer, leads her sister, Jane Bennet, to recount that 'the horror of what might possibly happen, almost took from me my faculties' (p. 308). In order to appreciate Jane's 'horror' and the extent of her fears, the modern reader must recognise that the sex trade was a highly visible aspect of Georgian society and was considered a genuine threat to genteel young women who surrendered their chastity outside the security of marriage. This threat was widely reflected in the literature and art of the period as well as being alluded to in Austen's own works.

Austen uses the elopement, and eventual marriage, of the youngest Bennet sister, Lydia, with her unscrupulous seducer Wickham, as part of the debate on marriage contained within the novel, by representing a relationship formed through lust and immorality. Various representations of marriage are presented and contrasted in the novel, as the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, and her proud suitor, Mr Darcy, negotiate their courtship. Austen engages with contemporary debates about the nature of matrimony by presenting her heroine with examples of different types of marriage among her friends, family and acquaintances, some of which are formed during the novel and others that are pre-existing. Elizabeth is presented with examples that include idealistic romantic liaisons, pragmatic relationships based on financial prudence, and the example of modern companionate partnerships, before she identifies an appropriate model for her own union. In contrast, by highlighting the unpropitious nature of Lydia's 'patched-up' (p. 367) union with Wickham, Austen critiques the consuming social pressure on young women to secure marriage, which exposes them to the risk of being exploited and debauched by unprincipled men.

'A *scheme* of infamy'[407]

Jane Austen's exploration of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* involves her most direct consideration of the Georgian period's preoccupation with prostitution. This claim may appear contentious due to Austen's reputation for primness, but the

[406] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 36.
[407] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 308.

scenario of seduction and abandonment that influences this storyline within her novel appears widely in eighteenth century publications. Novels such as Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, as well as Cleland's infamous *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, were part of an established literary tradition of recounting 'the whore's story', which employed seduction and prostitution as subject-matter.[408] Austen avidly read the novels of her well-stocked family library and subscribed to circulating libraries. No doubt she had access to popular works in this vein of literature (as well as more acceptable novels by Richardson and Fielding), that drew on scenes of seduction and illicit sexual liaisons to instruct their readers on morality and also entertain them. This narrative of seduction also influenced the plots of novels by authors Austen is known to have read, such as Burney, Edgeworth and Charlotte Smith. They employed this storyline to imperil their heroines, who are pursued by disreputable men, and to underpin their social vulnerability by raising doubts regarding their legitimacy through embedded seduction narratives concerning the fates of their mothers.[409] Lydia's story reflects this popular theme and represents the potential fate of a young, naïve girl who loses her virtue through surrendering her chastity in the belief that this will lead to marriage.

The prevalence of this seduction narrative is demonstrated through many of the entries featured in *Harris's List of Covent-Garden Ladies*, an annual publication that offered a catalogue of prostitutes and their services. As previously noted, *Harris's List* was probably intended as salacious entertainment as much as actual advertisement.[410] It features many descriptions of women that subscribe to this narrative of betrayed innocence by telling tales which reflect the story of Lydia's downfall. Hickman notes that within the accounts that detail women's routes into prostitution that are presented in *Harris's List*, 'stories of abandonment […] were commonplace. Stories of seduction, elopement and broken promises more frequent still'.[411] This popular narrative is employed to justify their fall and secure sympathy from their customers. For instance, the 1793 version contains a typical example of

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[408] See Mudge's, *The Whore's Story*, for a history of this form of narrative during the long eighteenth century.
[409] For instance, Burney's Evelina is pursued by Sir Clement Willoughby who aims to seduce her. She is also, like Edgeworth's Grace Nugent in *The Absentee* (1812) and Smith's eponymous Emmeline, under the suspicion that her mother was seduced, although subsequently they will all prove to be legitimate. See Chapter Five, p. 205, of this thesis for further discussion of illegitimacy within literature of the period.
[410] Rubenhold, *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 18. See Chapter One, pp. 29-30, of this thesis.
[411] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 87.

this theme in its description of 'Miss Bro–n, No. 4, Princess Street, Cavendish Square':

> The situation of this lady is truly pitiable, for as we understand, her heart was betrayed by a young gentleman in the country, who soon forsook her, which she repeats with a good deal of apparent grief, and does not seem at all calculated for her present way of life.[412]

This entry reflects the increasingly predominate image of prostitution, although Henderson has argued, that this image of fallen virtue within the middle-gentry had little grounding in reality.[413] The sentimental description of Miss Brown's predicament conforms to the increasingly prevalent belief that 'prostitution drew its recruits […] from the respectable families of the impoverished lower middle classes'.[414] It also reveals the perception that there were limited options available to young ladies who lost their virtue. Indeed, Binhammer suggests that, '"seduction" and "prostitution" are often used interchangeably in the later eighteenth century because prostitution was imagined as the invariable fate of the seduced woman'.[415] This prevailing dominant ideology suggested that young girls within the lower and middle gentry who transgressed had little choice in their future except a career as a prostitute, as *Harris's List* makes clear. Of course, I am not suggesting that Austen was familiar with this scandalous publication, but it demonstrates the prevalence of this common narrative of female dishonour within sources from this period.

Austen invokes this well-known narrative of female disgrace in her portrayal of Lydia's seduction. For instance, following her elopement there is an expectation within the Bennet family's community that Lydia's inevitable fate will be to 'come upon the town; or, as the happiest alternative, [be] secluded from the world, in some distant farm house' (p. 323).[416] Being 'secluded from the world' was the conventional fate of unmarried, genteel women who became pregnant,[417] while the expression 'come upon the town' is a commonly used phrase of the period that

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[412] Rubenhold, *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 37.
[413] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 25.
[414] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 13.
[415] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 41.
[416] Mr Bennet hints at an even darker fate for Lydia when he suggests that 'she cannot grow many degrees worse, without authorizing us to lock her up for the rest of her life' (p. 258). Through this comment Austen evokes the possibility of Lydia being banished to an asylum, such as the Bethlem Royal Hospital for the insane, commonly referred to as Bedlam.
[417] This is the fate of Eliza Williams in *Sense and Sensibility*. See Chapter Two, p. 67, of this thesis.

refers to becoming a prostitute.[418] The same phrase is used, for example, in Opie's *Adeline Mowbray*, when characters 'sneeringly' speculate on the deluded heroine's fate following the death of her lover, Mr Glenmurray:

> 'you need not wonder, I think, what her fate is: no doubt Mr. Glenmurray's *interesting companion* has not lost her companionable qualities, and is a companion still.'
>
> 'Yes,' observed Mrs. Wallington; 'or, rather, I dare say that angel of purity is gone upon the town'.[419]

In Opie's novel, Adeline naïvely rejects the marriage rites as an outdated social form, refusing to marry her lover and finding herself accused of immorality as a result. She is widely considered as no better than a prostitute and eventually acknowledges the high individual cost of failing to conform to social norms. The use of this phrase in connection with Lydia, is one of a number of ways that Austen draws attention to her potential fate as a victim of seduction. As Heydt-Stevenson notes, 'allusions to Lydia's alternative career abound'.[420]

Another allusion is provided through the location used as a setting for Lydia's elopement. It is significant that the scene of Lydia's seduction is a military camp at the popular coastal resort of Brighton.[421] Austen's final, uncompleted work, *Sanditon* (1817), would reflect on the growing popularity of seaside resorts, as 'English spa culture reached its zenith in the eighteenth century, before giving way to the seaside resort as premier leisure destination'.[422] Brighton in particular was already a popular haunt of the Prince of Wales and the social elite by the 1790s,[423] when Austen is believed to have completed the draft of her novel, *First Impressions*, which would eventually become *Pride and Prejudice*. By evoking this location, Austen associates Lydia's behaviour with the extravagance and immorality of elite Georgian high-

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[418] The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives a contemporary definition of 'to come upon the town' as 'to enter into a life of prostitution', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, www.oed.com (accessed July 2018). See also Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 88.

[419] Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray, Or the Mother and Daughter* (1804) (London: Pandora Press, 1986), p. 233.

[420] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 88.

[421] In *Mansfield Park* the ill-fated marriage of Maria Rushworth starts with a honeymoon in Brighton, suggesting that this inauspicious beginning has a role in the failure of the union when she elopes with Henry Crawford.

[422] David Wheeler, 'Jane Austen and 18th-Century English Spa Culture', *English Studies*, 85:2 (2004), 120-133, 120.

[423] Byrne notes that 'Brighton was the seaside destination of choice for the Prince Regent', *A Life in Small Things*, p. 321. As a result, 'all the *beau monde* [social elite] went there, many of them as guests of the Prince', Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 198.

society, as following the London season 'all of the beau monde went there, many […] as guests of the Prince',[424] as well as the debauchery that was ascribed to the military during this era. As Fullerton notes:

> Seaside resorts, spa towns and the towns where regiments were quartered saw more than their share of elopements during her lifetime and Brighton can be ticked off on all three counts.[425]

Austen's use of Brighton, which had become 'under the patronage of the Prince of Wales […] the very acme of fashionable retreats',[426] as the scene of Lydia's downfall, exemplifies and exploits this changing fashion and its association with Georgian excess.[427]

As well as being a popular resort, Fulford has noted that Brighton, as the location of a military camp from 1793 to 1795, was a scene of 'immorality, indiscipline, and show […] in which social and gender hierarchies are overturned and promiscuity is in the air', and suggests that Austen reflects this reputation within her own work.[428] Indeed, Elizabeth internally exclaims against the danger of her family visiting Brighton with 'a whole campful of soldiers' when they have been 'overset already by one poor regiment of militia' (p. 247). Unlike her father, she believes that Lydia is 'likely to be hardened in all her folly and assurance, by a situation of such double danger as a watering place and a camp' (p. 263). Consequently, Austen's combination of Brighton and a military camp as her setting presents a 'double danger', because both have reputations as scenes of frivolity and licentiousness. Mr Bennet, justifying his decision to allow Lydia to accompany Mrs Forster to the seaside resort, states that 'at Brighton she will be of less importance even as a common flirt than she has been here. The officers will find women better worth their notice' (p. 258). His comment reflects contemporary views on military camps, revealing his expectation that the easy availability of prostitutes, or 'camp followers', will make pursuing Lydia seem less worthwhile to the officers. However, Elizabeth's fears about the disruption caused by the stationing of the militia near Longbourn reflect Wollstonecraft's comment that:

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[424] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 198.
[425] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 89.
[426] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 198.
[427] It is also notable that the scene of Wickham's failed seduction of Georgiana Darcy is Ramsgate, another seaside resort. As Fullerton suggests, 'Wickham is an old hand at the game and knows all the advantages of such a place', *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 90.
[428] Fulford, 'Sighing for a Soldier', 173-174.

> nothing can be so prejudicial to the morals of the inhabitants of country towns, as the occasional residence of a set of idle superficial young men, whose only occupation is gallantry, and whose polished manners render vice more dangerous, by concealing its deformity under gay ornamental drapery.[429]

Attitudes towards the militia during this period, when the country was at war with France, express more concern 'about the risks it posed to English ladies' virtue than the threat it made to Frenchmen's lives'.[430] Military camps, such as those at Brighton and Coxheath in Kent, were especially notorious as scenes of licentious behaviour and scandal. Indeed, Coxheath became renowned for the ostentatious public display of 'the kind of aristocratic self-indulgence that was normally hidden behind the doors of the great houses'.[431] As well as resulting in a fashion for female attire which reflected men's military uniforms that has been attributed to the Duchess of Devonshire[432] (and can be seen in Lydia's preoccupation with Wickham's uniform), the behaviour of the *bon ton* ensured that the camp became known as a scene of infamy:

> The Duke of Devonshire dallied with Lady Jersey while his wife paraded, Lady Melbourne became pregnant by Lord Egremont, and – in a scandal that fascinated the press – Lady Derby left her husband and children to live with the Duke of Dorset.[433]

In addition, one of the most salacious divorce cases of the era, involving the elopement of Lady Seymour Worsley with her lover, Captain George Bisset, also revolved around the protagonists' conduct while stationed at Coxheath camp. Following the couple's flight, her husband, Sir Richard Worsley, brought a case against her lover for criminal conversation claiming damages of £20,000, which was sufficient to bankrupt his rival.[434] As Fullerton suggests, the courts 'took a materialistic view of the matter, seeing adultery as a question of property, ownership, and the breaking of a contract'.[435] In this instance a wife was considered as property and the claim made by the husband, commonly known as a 'Crim. Con. Action', was aimed at 'extracting reparations for the damage inflicted on a man's property'.[436] As

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[429] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 97.
[430] Fulford, 'Sighing for a Soldier', 156.
[431] Fulford, 'Sighing for a Soldier', 155.
[432] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 47.
[433] Fulford, 'Sighing for a Soldier', 156.
[434] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, pp. 87-88.
[435] Fullerton, 'Jane Austen and Adultery', 151.
[436] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 58.

Rubenhold notes, 'in order for justice to be administered, [his wife's] importance to him, like the worth of a painting or a horse, required appraisal'.[437] Bisset's defence team deliberately destroyed Lady Worsley's reputation by providing evidence of her numerous affairs, so 'proving that the worth of Sir Richard's wife had been seriously compromised long before the Captain made off with the spoiled goods'.[438] One of the most notorious incidents cited during the trial took place at the bathhouse in Maidstone, which the couple visited with Sir Richard while stationed at Coxheath. Rubenhold notes that 'Bisset had peered through a window at Lady Worsley's naked body in the presence of a husband who offered no objection'.[439] As a result, although Sir Richard won the case, he was felt to be 'partially to blame as he had been remiss in shepherding her conduct'.[440] He was awarded only one shilling in compensation, as his damaged wife was felt to hold little value.[441] In the light of such notorious cases, Elizabeth's fears about allowing Lydia access to this environment reflect common anxieties about the corrupting influence of the militia and the immoral behaviour of the social elite.

Elizabeth's concerns about the potential consequences of exposing Lydia to the immorality of Brighton and a camp full of soldiers, are justified by her resulting elopement with Wickham. However, the novel does not entirely denounce this elopement. It is notable that within Austen's novels elopements are not unconditionally condemned either by characters within the works, or by the authorial voice.[442] Apparently retaining a feature from an early epistolary version of the novel, Austen uses the doubling effect from Jane's two letters reporting these events, to emphasise that the family's concern is not the actual elopement, which is viewed merely as an unfortunate step. In her first letter announcing their flight, Jane suggests Wickham's behaviour 'marks nothing bad at heart. His choice is disinterested at least' (p. 291). Her initial reaction to Lydia's elopement is regret and disappointment at an event of 'a most unexpected and serious nature' (p. 291), leading to a marriage which is considered 'so imprudent a match on both sides' (p.

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[437] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 81.
[438] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 148.
[439] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 153.
[440] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 149.
[441] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 157.
[442] In *Mansfield Park* Julia Bertram is also excused for her elopement when it is found that her marriage is not as imprudent as it first appears. See Chapter Four, p. 167, of this thesis.

291). It seems that elopements, whilst recognised as 'imprudent', are excusable when they result in a legitimate marriage.[443] As Fullerton notes, Austen reflects 'an all too common phenomenon, one which touched her own social milieu and which appeared in many of the books and newspapers she read. Elopements […] were a fact of life'.[444]

It is only once the possibility of the couple remaining unmarried is acknowledged that the tone changes, in Jane's second letter, to horror because 'imprudent as a marriage between Mr Wickham and our poor Lydia would be, we are now anxious to be assured it has taken place, for there is but too much reason to fear they are not gone to Scotland' (p. 292). As previously noted in the introduction to this thesis, Hardwicke's Marriage Act had reformed marriage laws in England, and Austen is reflecting this social change by including confusion about whether the couple have gone to Gretna Green, the first opportunity to marry after crossing the Scottish border, where the Act did not apply.[445] The Marriage Act, in particular, required parental consent for couples under twenty-one, giving parents and guardians 'sufficient notice of and opportunity to object to a match' and stipulated that the marriage had to be conducted in church.[446] No longer could heiresses be subjected to the ordeal that features in Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, in which Harriet Byron is kidnapped and assaulted by Sir Hargrave Pollexfen as he tries to force her into a marriage ceremony conducted by a disreputable clergyman. However, this legislation simply resulted in eloping couples travelling to Scotland, where these laws did not apply, with Gretna Green, just over the border becoming popular.[447] Austen's storyline therefore reflects the influence of recent social reforms, by having Wickham and Lydia flee to the capital where they can no longer be clandestinely married, rather than to Scotland which would have confirmed their genuine intention to marry. Fears about Lydia's fate are reinforced by the suspicion that the couple's flight has taken them to London, 'that great centre of dark and

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[443] Austen would repeat this effect in *Mansfield Park* (1814), with the parallel elopements of Maria Rushworth and Julia Bertram. Julia can be forgiven for her elopement to marry Mr Yates, and she is eventually welcomed back into the Bertram family after this transgression, but Maria Rushworth elopes from her marital home, leaving her husband for an illicit relationship with Henry Crawford. As a result, she cannot be redeemed for this action, ending up in exile with her Aunt Norris. See Chapter Four, pp. 167-171, of this thesis.
[444] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 83.
[445] See Chapter One, pp. 12-13, of this thesis.
[446] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 106.
[447] Moore, *Wedlock*, p. 48.

ancient vice',[448] where it was easy to disappear 'with[in] its labyrinthine streets, its swarming crowds and countless hostelries'.[449] By evoking this location, Austen raises the spectre of Lydia being irrecoverable, and the corresponding fear that she could be drawn into the sex industry, which dominated wide areas of the capital.[450]

Nonetheless, Lydia's character is somewhat redeemed by the letter she writes announcing her elopement, which confirms that her intentions are legitimate. It reveals her belief that she is absconding with Wickham in order to be married at Gretna Green, as she suggests that:

> You need not send them word at Longbourn of my going, if you do not like it, for it will make the surprise the greater, when I write to them, and sign my name Lydia Wickham (p. 307).

Lydia's conviction that she will be married to Wickham is clearly an important aspect of her story.[451] It is stressed that when their hiding place is discovered, Lydia 'would not hear of leaving Wickham. She was sure they should be married some time or other, and it did not much signify when' (p. 335). Lydia's apparent belief that penetrative sex guarantees a commitment to marry is naïve, and appears to reflect an outdated plebeian attitude more common to the earlier part of the eighteenth century[452] or a reliance on the 'fad for pregnancy as the inducement for marriage'.[453] However, the eighteenth century, as Binhammer notes, witnessed 'the breakdown in traditional courtship practices […] where marriage followed a promise to wed plus sexual intercourse and pregnancy'.[454] Austen emphasises that Lydia's expectation of marriage is unjustified, as Wickham has no intention of marrying her. It 'had never

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[448] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 35.
[449] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 64.
[450] Indeed, Cruickshank notes that 'profits from the sex industry financed the development of whole sections of the city, so that – quite literally – much of Georgian London was built on the wages of sin', *Georgian London*, p. x.
[451] It appears that Lydia's phraseology announcing her marriage is something Austen had been considering for some time. In the tale *Lesley Castle: an Unfinished Novel in Letters*, within Austen's *Juvenilia*, one of the characters announces her own marriage in a similar way, stating 'you will not be surprised […] when I subscribe myself your Affectionate Susan Lesley', Jane Austen, 'Lesley Castle: an Unfinished Novel in Letters' (1793), in Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*, pp. 67-152, p. 82.
[452] For a description of these earlier attitudes see Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, pp. 24-25. It is not clear how Lydia has formed this conclusion as it is unlikely to be from her mother's influence. There is a cryptic comment by Elizabeth about Mrs Forster, noting the 'little advantage [Lydia] could derive from the friendship of such a woman' (p. 257). Austen claimed to have 'lopt & cropted' the work so it is possible that some background information on Mrs Forster has been lost in the process, Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 79: 29 January 1813, pp. 201-202, p. 202. Elizabeth's comment that she is 'such a woman' could be an indication that she is from the labouring or trade classes and this may be the source of Lydia's belief.
[453] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 96.
[454] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, pp. 109-110.

been *his* design', (p. 335) as he 'still cherished the hope of more effectually making his fortune by marriage' (p. 335). Indeed, Elizabeth recognizes Wickham's acquisitive motives at an early stage of their acquaintance, when he switches his initial attentions from her to a rich heiress. Her assessment of Lydia's situation is that 'she has no money, no connections, nothing that can tempt him to – she is lost for ever' (p. 294). Nevertheless, Lydia's genuine belief that her elopement would conclude in a legal marriage ceremony allows her to be re-admitted into society following her wedding, because, as Elizabeth notes:

> at least it shews, that *she* was serious in the object of her journey. Whatever he might afterwards persuade her to, it was not on her side a *scheme* of infamy (p. 308).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that Lydia's letter also reveals her intention to keep her options open with other men, when she instructs her correspondent to 'Pray make my excuses to Pratt […] and tell him I will dance with him at the next ball we meet' (p. 307). This reference, at such a point, shatters her claim that 'there is but one man in the world I love' (p. 307) and alludes to the possibility that she may have multiple sexual partners in the future, thereby invoking her potential fate as a prostitute. This idea is reinforced by Elizabeth's recollections that 'sometimes one officer, sometimes another had been [Lydia's] favourite, as their attentions raised them in her opinion. Her affections had been continually fluctuating' (p. 297). Rather than referring to her future monogamy, Lydia already appears to be concerned with securing her next conquest (or client).

Furthermore, Lydia's letter also contains a suggestive request for her maid to 'mend a great slit in my worked muslin gown' (p. 307). As Byrne suggests, 'we do not have to be Freudians to recognise a shocking image of her sexual transgression'.[455] This is clearly an image alluding to lost virginity or chastity, which Austen reuses in *Mansfield Park* to foreshadow Maria Bertram's sexual transgressions. During an excursion to Sotherton, the home of Maria's fiancé, the novel's heroine, Fanny, tries to prevent her cousin slipping around a gate to follow Henry Crawford, warning her that 'you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes – you will tear your gown' (p. 93). This imagery clearly alludes to Maria's eventual loss of virtue when she later elopes from her marital home with Henry.

[455] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 185.

Furthermore, Heydt-Stevenson also notes that the phrase 'a bit of muslin' had sexual connotations at this time, when used as a slang term to refer to a young woman.[456] Therefore:

> the laughter that almost prevents her from writing her elopement letter, not to mention the great slit in her worked muslin gown, suggest that Lydia has already lost her virginity.[457]

Furthermore, Heydt-Stevenson suggests that Lydia's letter foreshadows her potential fate as a prostitute, through the use of the phrase 'worked muslin gown'. She notes that as '"muslin" was a common metonymy for "a girl"; the phrase that results, "worked girl", combines sex and labor'.[458] This allusion is one of a number of ways in which the elopement is linked to the sex trade, emphasising the pecuniary implications of this imprudent relationship as well as foreshadowing Lydia's possible fate as a prostitute.

This imagery of lost virginity is particularly striking when compared to the strategies adopted by other contemporary authors to preserve the reputation, and chastity, of their characters. For instance, in her novel, *The Wanderer: Or Female Difficulties* (1814), Burney's heroine, Juliet, is compelled into agreeing to marry the disreputable commissary, in revolutionary France, to save the life of her guardian. Burney makes it clear that Juliet escapes the clutches of her evil husband before her marriage – 'a forced, interrupted, and unfinished lay-ceremony'[459] – has been consummated. Fortunately, her husband is subsequently executed before he can reclaim her and exercise his conjugal rights. Furthermore, in Mary Brunton's (1778-1818) novel *Self-Control* (1810), which an amused Austen noted was 'an excellently-meant, elegantly-written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it',[460] the heroine, Laura Montreville, is abducted and taken to America in an attempt to coerce her into marriage. As a result, the author is forced into ridiculous strategies to bring about a satisfactory conclusion. Despite months in the hands of her lecherous

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[456] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 87.
[457] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 87.
[458] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 88.
[459] Fanny Burney, *The Wanderer: Or Female Difficulties* (1814), ed. Margaret Drabble (London: Pandora, 1988), p. 820.
[460] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 91: 11-12 October 1813, pp. 232-236, p. 234.

abductor, Colonel Hargrave, before her improbable escape,[461] his suicide-note proclaims her still 'purer than heaven's own light'.[462] The veracity of this declaration by the disreputable Colonel is accepted, so that her reputation is restored and she is able to marry the hero, Montague De Courcy. In contrast to Brunton's strategies to preserve the purity of her heroine, Austen makes it clear to the reader that Lydia has surrendered her virginity, and that she is unapologetic about her method of securing Wickham as her husband.

Lydia remains oblivious to the risks she has taken to obtain marriage to Wickham and the implications of losing her reputation, despite this being an era when:

> the loss of a woman's reputation, her 'character', as the eighteenth century termed it, through a perceived sexual misdemeanour (it is one of the unfairnesses of history that for a woman, 'character' depended almost exclusively on sexual conduct) was irreversible.[463]

Former actress and mistress to the Prince of Wales, Mary Robinson, who became a successful author, and courtesan Harriette Wilson, both commented on this inequality. Robinson, in her work *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799), notes that a woman:

> is not allowed to plead the frailty of human nature; she is to have no passions, no affections; and if she chance to overstep the boundaries of chastity, (whatever witcheries and machinations are employed to mislead her;) if she violates that oath, which, perhaps the pride of her kindred, family interest, ambition, or compulsion, extorted from her, CUSTOM, that pliant and convenient friend to man, declares her infamous.[464]

Similarly, Wilson wrote of 'two classes of women', suggesting a woman becomes:

> a bad woman the moment she has committed fornication; be she generous, charitable, just, clever, domestic, affectionate, and ever ready to sacrifice her own good to serve and benefit those she loves, still her rank in society is with the lowest hired prostitute [...] while all are virtuous who are chaste.[465]

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[461] Austen mockingly suggests that 'I do not know whether Laura's passage down the American River, is not the most natural, possible, every-day thing she ever does', Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 91: 11-12 October 1813, pp. 232-236, p. 234.
[462] Mary Brunton, *Self-Control* (1810), (London: Pandora Press, 1986), p. 436.
[463] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 88.
[464] Mary Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination: With Anecdotes* (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), p. 77, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco (accessed July 2018).
[465] Wilson, *Memoirs*, pp. 259-260.

Both women lament the fact that regardless of extenuating circumstances for a woman's loss of virtue, or her exemplary behaviour in other contexts, she is forever judged as 'infamous' by polite society. Peakman, in addition, notes the common double standard in which:

> men who indulged in fornication outside marriage did so with much more ease than women, and with fewer repercussions […] in contrast, a woman would invariably become a target of social outrage if she had sexual experiences outside the bounds of marriage.[466]

The consequences of eloping are therefore far more threatening to Lydia than to Wickham, as she has overstepped 'the boundaries of chastity' that are essential for a woman to remain respectable and be viewed as virtuous. Nonetheless, Lydia has no shame about her actions and seems oblivious to the risks that she has incurred. Lydia remains proud of having married before her older sisters, and in the husband that she has secured through her immorality, showing her failure to appreciate the potential risks she has been exposed to or to learn beneficial moral lessons from her elopement. Lydia's naïve partiality for officers also connects her to other prejudiced characters such as Lady Catherine, who retains her bias in favour of family connections despite the unhealthy child her own union has produced. Their failure to learn contrasts with the emotional development of other characters in the novel as Darcy's pride in his 'real superiority of mind' (p. 102) and Elizabeth's in her sagacity are humbled by their growing self-knowledge as their relationship progresses. Indeed, in contrast to the positive development experienced by her hero and heroine, Austen emphasises that Lydia returns to Longbourn after her marriage unrepentant and unashamed: 'Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless' (p. 328).

'The most determined flirt'[467]

It has been suggested that the Georgian sex trade:

> is the world into which Lydia Bennet, had not Wickham eventually been forced to marry her, would inevitably have been thrown (and in which she would no doubt have done very well).[468]

[466] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 32.
[467] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 258.
[468] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 153.

However, there are features of Lydia's 'untamed' and 'unabashed' character that would not have suited the role of courtesan, the highest stratum of the sex trade. According to Hickman, courtesans were 'the ultimate luxury good […] forces of nature, as rare and scintillating as their fabulous jewels',[469] and 'the equivalent of today's Ferrari or private jet; men desired to display them, as well as have wonderful sex with them'.[470] The most successful courtesans were intelligent and educated women: Elizabeth Armistead married the politician Charles James Fox,[471] Mary Robinson became a celebrated poet and novelist,[472] and Lady Emma Hamilton, the mistress of Admiral Horatio Nelson (1758-1805), was a skilful politician involved in the evacuation of Naples during the Napoleonic wars.[473] Even Harriette Wilson was 'more than a match intellectually for any of the men who sought her company'[474] and claimed to have undertaken a programme of study to make herself more worthy as a companion.[475] This intelligence was part of their allure and is demonstrated by the number of high-profile courtesans who wrote memoires, sometimes to extract remuneration from previous clients who were keen not to be mentioned;[476] although Wilson's blackmail attempts appear to have been the most elaborate and celebrated.[477] As Hickman's comments suggest, these 'rare and scintillating' women were sought as status symbols by their admirers and their appeal was often in the combination of their sexuality and intellect.

Lydia, in contrast, does not exhibit the type of sophistication and intelligence demonstrated by desirable courtesans. Indeed, her 'anarchic energy […] resonates with the ebullience and exuberance of [Austen's] early works, not to mention their characters' violent expressions and powerful appetites'.[478] She is characterised by

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[469] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 12.
[470] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 175.
[471] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 131.
[472] Ironically, for a short period when she was a child, the controversial Robinson attended a School run by the famously conservative Hannah More. According to Byrne, More 'deeply resented her connection with her old pupil', *Perdita*, pp. 11-12.
[473] Kate Williams, *England's Mistress: The Infamous Life of Emma Hamilton* (London: Arrow Books, 2007), p. 213.
[474] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 168.
[475] Wilson, *Memoirs*, p. 143.
[476] Hickman, *Courtesans*, pp. 54-56.
[477] Mary Anne Clarke, who took advantage of her position as mistress of the Duke of York to sell military commissions, had her memoires destroyed after she had secured a financial settlement. 18,000 printed copies of her revelations were destroyed, and only one survived, Wilson, *The Courtesan's Revenge*, p. 96.
[478] Shawn Lisa Maurer, 'Lydia Still: Adolescent Wildness in *Pride and Prejudice*', in *The Future of Feminist Eighteenth-Century Scholarship: Beyond Recovery*, ed. Robin Runia (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 34.

her sister as 'vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrolled!' (p. 258). Elizabeth prophesizes that she will become:

> A flirt too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and from the ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which her rage for admiration will excite (p. 258).

Elizabeth's emphasis on the words 'worst and meanest' evoke the idea that Lydia will be exposed to the lowest form of degradation. We should not glamorise Lydia's potential fate as a fallen woman. While 'courtesans were idolized figures who belonged to the elite […] London was teeming with prostitutes'.[479] For the majority, 'the realities of prostitution were grim: women walking the streets in the hope of a pick-up to pay for their next meal'.[480] Austen portrays Lydia's potential future as inhabiting a place in the criminal reports of streetwalkers, who have 'come upon the town', rather than playing a part in the fashionable *demimonde*.

The behaviour which exposes Lydia to this fate 'upon the town' is shown to be partly due to the lack of effective moral guidance received from her parents; an outcome of the failure of their own marriage. While the obsequious Mr Collins is 'inclined to think that her own disposition must be naturally bad, or she could not be guilty of such an enormity, at so early an age' (p. 312), Austen shows that the source of Lydia's 'wild' conduct can be traced to her mother's influence, as Mrs Bennet is similarly untroubled by her daughter's actions. For Mrs Bennet, 'to know that her daughter would be married was enough. She was disturbed by no fear for her felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of her misconduct' (p. 320). In addition to this maternal indulgence, Lydia also suffers from the lack of strong patriarchal direction, as her father has abdicated responsibility and 'will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits' (p. 258). It is noted that Mr Bennet 'contented with laughing at them, would never exert himself to restrain the wild giddiness of his youngest daughters' (p. 241). When Elizabeth warns Mr Bennet before Lydia's trip to Brighton that 'she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made herself and her family ridiculous' (p. 258), he simply dismisses her fears. This combined neglect of

[479] Wilson, *The Courtesan's Revenge*, p. 21.
[480] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 19.

their parental responsibilities towards their youngest daughter leads to Lydia's disregard of social mores and her subsequent immorality.

Furthermore, in exacerbation of this parental neglect, Lydia is shown to be dismissive of instruction offered from other sources. It is noted that she 'seldom listened to any body for more than half a minute' (p. 249). Indeed, Lydia only hears things that validate her behaviour, such as Mrs Bennet's ill-considered 'injunctions that she would not miss the opportunity of enjoying herself as much as possible' (p. 261) when she leaves for Brighton. She remains immune to the influence of her sensible elder sisters and her Aunt Gardiner. Austen illustrates this by providing the reader with dual perspectives on her aunt's attempts to instil some shame and sense of gravity into Lydia following her elopement. Mrs Gardiner reflects that:

> I talked to her repeatedly in the most serious manner, representing to her all the wickedness of what she had done, and all the unhappiness she had brought on her family. If she heard me, it was by good luck, for I am sure she did not listen (p. 337).

In contrast, Lydia describes the same scene:

> there was my aunt, all the time I was dressing, preaching and talking away just as if she was reading a sermon. However, I did not hear above one word in ten, for I was thinking, you may suppose, of my dear Wickham. I longed to know whether he would be married in his blue coat (p. 331).

This opposition between the moral subject-matter raised by her aunt and Lydia's own thoughts, illustrates her preoccupation with the frivolous and superficial, such as Wickham's 'blue coat', rather than the serious aspects of the marriage ceremony. This reinforces Lydia's attitude towards marriage itself, which reveals her focus to be on the superficial aspects in her ambition to triumph over her siblings by 'be[ing] married before any of you; and then I would chaperon you about to all the balls' (p. 248) and, once married, insisting on taking precedence over her sisters.

The debate contained within the novel regarding the source of Lydia's behaviour shows Austen engaging with issues raised by proto-feminist writers, including Wollstonecraft and Robinson, who argued that women should have sufficient education to make useful companions to their husbands and good mothers to their children:

> To be a good mother, a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Meek wives are, in general, foolish mothers; […] unless the understanding of woman be enlarged, and her character rendered more firm, by being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have sufficient sense or command of temper to manage her children properly.[481]

Their contention, as Wollstonecraft reasons, 'is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue'.[482] The argument that women should be educated to be responsible members of society, good wives and respectable mothers, is set against contemporary ideals that women did not require intellectual development and should focus on attaining superficial acquirements.[483] Caroline Bingley advocates this type of education, whilst trying to ingratiate herself with Darcy, when she suggests that to be considered accomplished:

> A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions (p. 85).

Vickery notes that 'by the 1790s accomplishments had become a hook on which to hang an attack on current female education and femininity for feminist critics and educational reformers, both radical and Tory'.[484] The term had become associated with superficial display, as advocated in Caroline's definition, or the even more vapid assessment given by Mr Bingley that women 'all paint tables, cover skreens and net purses' (p. 84). Political thinkers as disparate as Wollstonecraft and More criticised this form of female education, as 'a contagion that undermined women's usefulness as it fed their pretensions'.[485] No doubt the expression of Caroline Bingley's conventional opinions on these accomplishments earn Darcy's contempt, as he opines that 'to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind' (p. 85). He thereby demonstrates his own more

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[481] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 266.
[482] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 86.
[483] Indeed John Gregory, whose posthumously published work was popular during Austen's lifetime, recommends women should 'Be even cautious in displaying your good sense […] if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men', *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, 2nd edn (London: T Cadell, 1774), p. 31, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco (accessed July 2018).
[484] Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 233.
[485] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 234.

sophisticated notions on women's education. Austen clearly agrees that such superficial acquirements are not an adequate form of education and her heroine, Elizabeth, is unapologetic about lacking them.

Furthermore, Austen demonstrates that familiarity with conventional conduct book morality has not facilitated the studious Mary Bennet's intellectual or moral development. Mr Bennet mocks his daughter by asking:

> 'What say you, Mary? for you are a young lady of deep reflection I know, and read great books, and make extracts.'
>
> Mary wished to say something very sensible, but knew not how (p. 55).

The fact that Mary cannot say anything 'sensible' and can offer only 'some new observations of thread-bare morality' (p. 105), suggests an education in which she has learnt to quote empty platitudes without any intellectual or moral engagement. This type of empty rhetoric is shown to be ineffective in reforming Lydia's behaviour. She is unimpressed by the conduct book morality of her sister, as she 'never attended to Mary at all' (p. 249), or her cousin Mr Collins. When the latter elects to read from Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*, a popular conduct book of the period: 'Lydia gaped as he opened the volume, and before he had, with very monotonous solemnity, read three pages, she interrupted him' (p. 113). Austen shows that an individual's morality should be demonstrated through deeds, not empty intellectual proselytizing. This is reflected in Austen's other novels, such as *Emma*, where we see the heroine's awareness of her social responsibilities through the practical support she gives to the vulnerable in her society. Similarly, in *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot assumes her family's neglected social responsibilities by visiting her father's tenants to take leave of them when they have to give up their home due to his financial extravagance. However, Lydia lacks this underlying morality and has not been educated to prioritise social responsibility, instead making frivolous pursuits of dress, appearance and entertainment, 'the business of her life' (p. 258).[486] Ultimately, Austen suggests that this neglect of effective moral instruction makes women vulnerable to seduction by men like Wickham.

[486] Similarly, Wollstonecraft laments, 'Pleasure is the business of woman's life, according to the present modification of society; and while it continues to be so, little can be expected from such weak beings', *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 145.

Of course, Wickham's first target when he arrives in Meryton is the heroine, Elizabeth, who initially falls for his plausible charms. It has been suggested that there are similarities between the uninhibited conduct of Lydia and the occasionally risqué behaviour of Elizabeth.[487] Indeed, this similarity between the sisters is reflected in the doubts voiced by Mr Bennet when Elizabeth accepts Darcy's proposal:

> I know your disposition, Lizzy. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery (p. 385).

Mr Bennet fears that Elizabeth's 'lively talents' will lead her to a similar moral downfall to that which consumes his youngest daughter, or to an unhappy marriage similar to his own as he is unable to 'esteem' his own partner. Indeed, Elizabeth and Lydia are shown to share a number of similar characteristics. Both women are lively and energetic, often physically active, as in the example of Elizabeth, who 'ran gaily off, rejoicing as she rambled about' (p. 98). In walking unaccompanied to Netherfield, she is described as:

> jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ancles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise (p. 79).

The resulting dirty petticoat, and eyes, that 'were brightened by the exercise' (p. 82) bespeak her 'lively, playful disposition' (p. 59) that Darcy finds so attractive, and which contrasts with the subservience he usually encounters due to his social status. As Gay suggests 'Elizabeth's energy and "playfulness" give her a charm that is more organic than the mask of socially dictated femininity'.[488] In contrast with the meaningless display of 'accomplishments', Elizabeth is represented as an active and autonomous individual and this fascinates Darcy. The fact that she exercises her autonomy to judge characters on merit, rather than fawning over those of rank, is lauded as a positive attribute by her creator, even though she is occasionally wrong in her assessments. However, her occasional wilfulness is tempered by her underlying morality, which underpins her behaviour in contrast to her younger sisters who lack this internal moral guide. As Gay notes, 'when she refuses to "perform"

[487] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 99-101.
[488] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 91.

socially it is because of a higher moral imperative' such as visiting her sister.[489] Nevertheless, Heydt-Stevenson suggests that 'Caroline and Louisa [Bingley] associate that exhilaration with sexual drive, associating [Elizabeth] with profligate women, such as gypsies and prostitutes', thereby equating her liveliness with immorality.[490] Caroline Bingley certainly comments on Elizabeth's behaviour as showing 'an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country town indifference to decorum' (p. 82).

It is true that Elizabeth occasionally crosses the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. For instance, when visiting Netherfield, she tells Darcy and Bingley's sisters that 'You are charmingly group'd, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth' (p. 97). In doing so, she makes a sly and insinuating reference to the ideas of William Gilpin, one of the most influential exponents of the principles of the picturesque. As Alistair Duckworth notes 'the (insulting) joke here depends on the reader's knowledge of Gilpin's theory [...] that three cows form a group'.[491] This witty put-down shows Elizabeth to be knowledgeable in contemporary aesthetic theory, so having educational depths that would appeal to Darcy rather more than the superficial accomplishments advocated by the women themselves, who are so 'charmingly group'd' here. Nevertheless, Elizabeth is also shown to have 'a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous' (p. 59), and in sharing this suspect characteristic with her sister, Lydia, doubt is cast on both girls' behaviour. Furthermore, Heydt-Stevenson notes that 'their expressions of joy also link them', with both sisters frequently engaging in unrestrained laughter.[492] During this period, as Bilger notes, 'female laughter came to represent a threat to the domestic order, an abandonment to pleasure that had revolutionary overtones'.[493] Bilger also adds that conduct books from this period suggest 'that laughter is not compatible with womanly virtue'.[494] This 'abandonment to pleasure' is shown when Lydia inappropriately writes in her letter announcing her elopement:

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[489] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 86.
[490] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 73.
[491] Alastair M. Duckworth, 'Landscape', in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 278-288, p. 285.
[492] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 100.
[493] Bilger, *Laughing Feminism*, p. 24.
[494] Bilger, *Laughing Feminism*, p. 79.

> You will laugh when you know where I am gone, and I cannot help laughing myself at your surprise to-morrow morning, as soon as I am missed. I am going to Gretna Green, […] What a good joke it will be! I can hardly write for laughing (p. 307).

Furthermore, Elizabeth notes, after she and Jane are engaged to their suitors, that she is 'happier even than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh' (p. 390). As Heydt-Stevenson suggests 'Jane's smile […] bespeaks a certain restraint; Elizabeth's laugh, like Lydia's, animates her whole system'.[495]

However, unlike Lydia, Elizabeth is able to restrain her liveliness when necessary, stressing that while 'Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies *do* divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can' (p. 102), she hopes 'never [to] ridicule what is wise or good' (p. 102). To differentiate Elizabeth from her more frivolous, immoral sister, she never behaves in a manner which can seriously damage her reputation, and her virtue is never in doubt despite the malicious insinuations of Bingley's sisters. This restraint is demonstrated when she and Darcy finally reach an understanding of each other, so that despite longing to tease him 'she checked herself. She remembered that he had yet to learn to be laught at' (p. 380).

In fact, despite her similarities to Lydia, Elizabeth is more often associated by family and acquaintances with her elder sister, Jane, whose reputation escapes unsullied due to her modest and decorous behaviour, in spite of Bingley's apparent abandonment of her and the consequences that such a disappointment could have for her reputation. The affinity between Jane and Elizabeth is confirmed by Mr Bennet's reassurance that:

> Whenever you and Jane are known, you must be respected and valued; and you will not appear to less advantage for having a couple of – or I may say, three very silly sisters (p. 258).

The proper conduct of the eldest Bennet daughters is partly attributed to the sensible influence of the Gardiners, as being frequently in their company means the girls escape some ill-effects of their parents' injudicious behaviour. In Lydia's case, however, her liveliness is unrestrained by any moral consideration, and she is described as having:

[495] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 100.

> high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attentions of the officers, to whom her uncle's good dinners and her own easy manners recommended her, had increased into assurance (p. 91).

Lydia's behaviour, in straying beyond the bounds of decorum, exposes her to censure and makes her vulnerable to male exploitation. In this way Austen engages with contemporary debates about the causes of prostitution, in demonstrating the route by which a lively, vulnerable girl who lacks genuine moral principles, may be seduced and have her reputation destroyed. Lydia's fate is only different to that of the women advertised in the *Harris's List*, in being rescued by the money and means of Darcy, who feels responsible for not making Wickham's character known, and wanting to marry into the family, cannot afford the scandal to taint his own aristocratic reputation. The successful resolution of the novel necessitates Lydia's marriage to her seducer to restore her family's social standing and enable her sisters to secure respectable unions. Therefore, in Lydia's case, Austen only hints at the potentially dark outcome for seduced young women that exists in the shadows of the drawing-rooms of *Pride and Prejudice*.

'We were most unhappily deceived'[496]

Austen's knowledge of contemporary fears about how young women were drawn into prostitution, are revealed through her allusions to the Regency sex trade in connection to Lydia. This theme is further developed through the fleeting, yet significant, appearance of Mrs Younge, a nefarious character who could have been taken directly from Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress*; with which we know Austen was familiar.[497] Through her behaviour, Mrs Younge embodies the figure of the bawd, who procures and corrupts innocent virgins for financial gain. Bawds were particularly controversial during the Georgian period, as they 'were accused not merely of facilitating a woman's prostitution but often being the cause of her initial fall'.[498] Bawds were loathed figures, who were seen as 'the key agent for entry into the [sex] trade […] who would charm, decoy or intimidate a vulnerable girl into prostitution'.[499] They were also 'among the great and legendary figures of London's

[496] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 231.
[497] See Chapter One, pp. 42-43, of this thesis.
[498] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 28.
[499] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 36.

sex industry: feared, hated, mocked and – very occasionally – respected or even admired'.[500] Hitchcock notes that:

> the activities of the few procuresses who can be identified were deeply resented, at least by the broader public. Indeed, when Mother Needham, one of the few procuresses who seem to fit the caricature, was exposed in the pillory in 1730 she was pelted to death by an angry crowd.[501]

Nonetheless, the suggestion that they preyed upon decent, naïve young girls from respectable families as they arrived in the city, was largely a social and literary creation, with 'authorities [finding] it difficult […] to locate real – as opposed to fictional – victims of the practice'.[502] The image of the corrupting bawd was fostered by social and moral reformers, with 'elite discourses around prostitution […] at even greater variance with reality than was plebeian culture'.[503] As Hitchcock notes, brothels were common in pornographic works as 'the standard and mythical backdrops to sexual fantasy', yet in reality most prostitutes worked independently 'renting a room or using a quiet back street as and when required'.[504] Despite the frequent appearance within novels of this 'caricature' procuress, responsible for corrupting respectable, innocent young girls, in reality, as Henderson suggests the evidence shows that most prostitutes were 'born into relative poverty', unable to gain stable employment and had lost one or both parents.[505] The story of the future Lady Emma Hamilton is likely to have been far more typical (at least in its early stages). As a young girl she arrived in London to escape her penurious family, and initially undertook a variety of legitimate forms of employment before gradually being drawn into prostitution and going on to become a kept mistress.[506] Vickery has noted the instability in employment for people working as servants, showing that 'a rapid turnover of lower servants was the norm'.[507] This instability in employment was a significant factor in women turning to prostitution and Williams notes that there were 'many maidservants and wives who supplemented their income with casual sex

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[500] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 47.
[501] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 95.
[502] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 28.
[503] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 98.
[504] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, pp. 94-95.
[505] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 25-27.
[506] However, at this point her story departs from the usual. From working as a prostitute and possibly a 'posture moll', she would graduate to working for the famous Dr Graham in his 'Temple of Health', eventually becoming a paid mistress before marrying to become Lady Emma Hamilton and Admiral Nelson's mistress, Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 349.
[507] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 138.

work'.[508] The complex causes of prostitution were therefore social and economic, rather than a result of the evil machinations of individuals.

Nevertheless, unscrupulous women who are happy to profit at the expense of their female brethren abound in literature of the period, from Cleland's presentation in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, of actual bawds, Mrs Brown and Mrs Cole, to the 'novelistic treatments of women betraying women for male desire',[509] typically motivated either by personal gain or jealous malevolence. For example, Lady Pelham in Brunton's *Self-Control*, who colludes with the villainous Hargrave against her niece, and the Marquise de Merteuil in de Laclos's novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* who conspires to corrupt the innocent Cécile de Volanges. In both instances, either of literary representations of bawds or those simply exhibiting the requisite characteristics, it is their femininity that makes these characters particularly dangerous to the naïve and unsuspecting innocents they corrupt. For instance, in a novel attributed to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806), *The Sylph* (1778),[510] a father laments the near seduction of his daughter, due to the interference of a trusted female neighbour:

> it is, I believe, a received opinion, that more women are seduced from the path of virtue by their own sex, than by ours. Whether it is, that the unlimited faith they are apt to put in their own sex weakens the barriers of virtue, and renders them less powerful against the attacks of the men, or that, suspecting no sinister view, they throw off their guard; it is certain that an artful and vicious woman is infinitely a more to be dreaded companion, than the most abandoned libertine.[511]

Austen therefore, like Devonshire, employs this device from literary precedents rather than social reality, in representing the controversial procuress through the unscrupulous character of Mrs Younge.

Austen's introduction of the figure of the bawd in her novel contributes to her examination of popular literary and social conventions for portraying 'fallen women'. This can be particularly seen in the contrast drawn between Georgiana Darcy and Lydia Bennet. As discussed in my introduction to this thesis, at the beginning of the

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[508] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 46.
[509] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 146.
[510] Although dated 1779, according to Amanda Foreman, it appears to have been published in late 1778, *Georgiana*, p. 411.
[511] Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, *The Sylph: A Novel in Two Volumes* (London: T Lowndes, 1778), II, p. 22, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco (accessed August 2016).

eighteenth century it was common to 'lay the blame for prostitution upon the weakness and moral turpitude of women', with the prostitute portrayed as an agent of corruption, and her clients shown as victims.[512] Over the course of the century, attitudes towards women's sexuality changed, so that a prostitute was instead presented as 'the victim of seduction at the hands of a generally upper-class man'.[513] Austen's work reflects this change in emphasis, through the dual seduction storylines involving Georgiana and Lydia. Heydt-Stevenson has noted that:

> Wickham tries to seduce two adolescent girls, both fifteen. One of them, Georgiana Darcy – the innocent, shy, reserved victim of his ambitious, heartless machinations – best resembles the later demure ideal of intrinsic innocence, while Lydia, erotically charged, partakes of the earlier prototype of woman, assumed to be sexual and responsive to amatory texts.[514]

While it is Georgiana's 'affectionate heart' (p. 231) that allows Wickham to manipulate her into agreeing to elope, she is saved from his corrupting influence by her own 'intrinsic' morality when 'unable to support the idea of grieving and offending a brother whom she almost looked up to as a father, [she] acknowledged the whole' (p. 231) to Darcy. However, in Lydia's case, 'from whose disposition greater evil might be apprehended' (p. 263), it is noted that 'neither her virtue nor her understanding would preserve her from falling an easy prey' (p. 297). Through this contrast Austen critiques the late eighteenth-century's increasingly sentimental portrayal of 'fallen women' as the guileless victims of male seducers. Austen shows that Lydia is complicit in her seduction, like her early forerunner, Moll Flanders, who falls because she 'had a most unbounded Stock of Vanity and Pride, and but a very little Stock of Vertue'.[515] Lydia's 'animal spirits' and lack of virtue, along with the faulty indulgence of her parents and her mother's obsession with marriage, are contributory causes to her downfall. In contrast, Georgiana is protected from ruin because she recognises that her proposed elopement with Wickham would grieve her brother. The underlying 'good principles' (p. 377) which she shares with her brother, defend Georgiana against the machinations of Wickham and Mrs Younge. Georgiana's ability to escape seduction therefore attests to the efficacy of an effective moral education.

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[512] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 99.
[513] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 99-100.
[514] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 94.
[515] Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 25.

Mrs Younge is involved with the plots against both these young girls, facilitating Wickham's scheme against Georgiana and assisting him to conceal himself in London when he elopes with Lydia. She first appears within the novel as a trusted governess, given responsibility for Georgiana's establishment during her stay in Ramsgate. However, as Darcy notes, she was one 'in whose character we were most unhappily deceived' (p. 231). At this stage in the novel she appears to be the 'vicious woman' corrupting her young charge, rather than a professional procuress. However, Austen hints at her true nature by underlining the financial aspects of the transaction by showing Georgiana's fortune to be the object of the plot against her, and later by emphasising that Mrs Younge will only reveal Lydia's location once she is bribed. Austen thereby denies the sentimentalisation of the act of seduction, and the resulting fall into prostitution, by removing any suggestion that there is even a transitory emotional or sexual motive in Wickham's actions. This contrasts with the conventional sentimental representation of this type of seduction narrative. Instead of a sexual motive for Wickham's pursuit of Georgiana, her brother notes that Wickham's 'chief object was unquestionably my sister's fortune' (p. 231), as well as desire to get revenge on Darcy for thwarting his efforts to obtain financial support. Both Mrs Younge and Wickham are entirely financially motivated and aim to profit from Georgiana's seduction. They have plotted this sophisticated strategy together in advance, as it is noted that when Georgiana's household moved to Ramsgate, 'thither also went Mr. Wickham, undoubtedly by design; for there proved to have been a prior acquaintance between him and Mrs. Younge' (p. 231). There is no suggestion that Georgiana is being exploited for Wickham's sexual gratification. Austen underlines the pecuniary motive for sexual exploitation within Georgian society, by revealing that the plot formulated against this young woman is purely for monetary gain and revenge on Darcy.

Furthermore, through Mrs Younge's involvement in Wickham's elopement with Lydia, Austen provides the reader with sufficient information to establish that she is not simply the false friend she appeared in Georgiana's case, but actually a procuress. Austen tells us that following Mrs Younge's dismissal from Georgiana's household, 'she then took a large house in Edward-street, and has since maintained herself by letting lodgings' (p. 335). Therefore, Mrs Younge is linked to the stereotypical figure of the bawd by references to her boarding-house establishment

in London. Cruickshank notes that 'a bawd with a house of her own, or at least under her control, was a powerful person with a potentially most profitable asset'.[516] Notably, in a similar exposition of events, the heroine of Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, is introduced to prostitution by her landlady. Indeed, Mrs Younge is shown to exercise her power over the fate of the younger woman and her intention to profit financially by her seduction, when it is noted that she will not reveal Lydia's location 'without bribery and corruption' (p. 335). She is shown to have assisted her 'client', Wickham, to procure a hiding place in which to pursue his illicit activities, and it is noted that Darcy 'procured the wished-for direction' (p. 335) to their hiding place from her, subtly reinforcing her identity as a 'procuress' without being explicit. Additionally, Heydt-Stevenson notes that 'if "letting lodgings" is a euphemism for whoremongering, the house address somewhat corroborates the seedy associations', as it was an area in Soho with numerous bawdy houses.[517] We know from her letters that Austen checked the veracity of details that she incorporated into her novels.[518] Worsley notes that Austen 'got to know London well, and the addresses of her characters reveal precisely calibrated details about their station in life'.[519] She could also easily have asked her cosmopolitan brother Henry, or her worldly cousin Eliza, to provide a disreputable address for Mrs Younge's business. Consequently, the references to Mrs Younge's involvement in the elopement are intended to evoke the notorious character of the bawd, adding an additional allusion that links Lydia's story to prostitution within the mind of the reader.[520]

'A truth universally acknowledged'[521]

Austen's purpose in evoking prostitution within her novel in connection to Lydia's elopement with the rakish Wickham is to emphasise the importance to women of making sound decisions in their choice of marriage partner, showing that behaving in defiance of social mores exposes women to the threat of scandal and degradation.

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[516] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 50.
[517] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 89.
[518] In a letter of 1813, whilst Austen was writing *Mansfield Park*, she asks her sister Cassandra to 'discover whether Northamptonshire is a Country of Hedgerows'. See Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 79: 29 January 1813, pp. 201-202, p. 202.
[519] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 277.
[520] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 88.
[521] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 51.

The first words of *Pride and Prejudice* clearly establish that one of the novel's main preoccupations will be marriage. It is famously declared to be 'a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife' (p. 51). Lydia's licentious relationship with Wickham, which associates them with the Regency sex trade in its illicit nature, is used in the novel's discussion of marriage as a contrast with more socially acceptable relationships. The unpropitious denouement of the 'patched-up' (p. 367) marriage between Lydia and Wickham highlights the necessity for relationships to have rational and morally secure foundations to ensure their long-term success and the stability of society. Within her novel, Austen presents the reader with alternative forms of matrimony, such as Charlotte Lucas's practical choice to marry Mr Collins, and the companionate marriage of Mr and Mrs Gardiner, before establishing the ideal partnership for her heroine, Elizabeth Bennet. Austen, therefore, in examining various kinds of marriage partnerships, intends some to be models for her protagonist, and others to be dismissed due to their comical representation or potential for failure because of the morally questionable basis of the alliance.

There are numerous well-established marriages represented within the novel. One of the most significant is the marriage of the heroine's parents, Mr and Mrs Bennet, of whom it is noted that 'had Elizabeth's opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort' (p. 262). The reason for this discord is clarified when it is stated that Mr Bennet:

> captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour, which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her (p. 262).

The consequent, inevitable failure of this marriage is dramatically represented in the couple's inability to cooperate in raising their daughters, which results in the scandalous elopement of their youngest child, Lydia. This is an event which threatens the prospects and respectability of the whole family and stems directly from the weak foundation of their relationship.

In addition, other questionable marriages, though not directly presented to the reader, are also commented on by Austen through the fate of their resulting

offspring. The marriage of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, for example, is appraised through the issue it produces, as Miss de Bourgh is described as 'sickly and cross' (p. 194). It is also significantly noted of George Wickham's parents that his father was 'always poor from the extravagance of his wife' (p. 230). Wickham's extravagance and profligacy can therefore be traced back to his upbringing and his mother's influence. In contrast, the heroine's uncle and aunt, Mr and Mrs Gardiner, offer the most positive model of marriage presented within the novel, as:

> Mr. Gardiner was a sensible, gentleman-like man, greatly superior to his sister (Mrs Bennet) as well by nature as education. [...] Mrs. Gardiner, who was several years younger than Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Philips, was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces (p. 177).

The Gardiners' marriage is the exemplar of a modern companionate match, as described by Vickery, who notes that during this period 'the genteel sought matches that were as prudent as they were affectionate and the happiness of the outcome for the bride lay in the balance between the two'.[522] However, it is the marriages that take place during the novel that are of particular interest in relating to my argument.

The marriage of Charlotte Lucas, the heroine's friend, to Mr Collins represents the pragmatic decisions that young women within the lower-gentry often had to make because of their limited opportunities for financial independence within Georgian society. Spinsters, like Austen herself, were likely to be entirely dependent on their families for support, and marriage remained their only socially acceptable option to avoid this fate. Despite recognising that Mr Collins is 'neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary' (p. 163), Charlotte reflects that:

> still he would be her husband. – Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it (p. 163).

It is clear that Charlotte's choice of a marriage-partner is entirely motivated by her need to secure social status and financial security. She lacks any genuine affection

[522] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 286.

or respect for Collins, having 'accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment' (p. 163). Charlotte's decision to marry Collins is supported by her parents, who are equally prudent in their assessment of the marriage; particularly as it will give the young couple eventual ownership of the entailed Longbourn estate, the Bennets' home, upon Mr Bennet's death.[523] Indeed it is noted that for Sir William and Lady Lucas, 'Mr. Collins's present circumstances made it a most eligible match for their daughter, to whom they could give little fortune; and his prospects of future wealth were exceedingly fair' (p. 163). The fact that 'Lady Lucas began directly to calculate with more interest than the matter had ever excited before, how many years longer Mr. Bennet was likely to live' (p. 163), shows the acquisitive nature of the Lucas family and their pragmatic approach to marriage, which acknowledges their inability to provide financially for Charlotte. Charlotte's own pragmatism is emphasized in her explanation to Elizabeth:

> I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state (pp. 165-166).

Elizabeth's harsh assessment in response, that Charlotte has 'sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage (p. 166) and that she 'cannot have a proper way of thinking' (p. 174) draws attention to the contemporary debates that suggested marriage for financial gain was simply a form of 'legal prostitution'.[524] Indeed, during this period, as Binhammer notes, 'the belief that affective feelings, not economics, should determine marriage choice provokes the repeated comparison between mercenary marriage and prostitution'.[525] As Tomalin suggests, Charlotte 'escap[es] the humiliations of a dependent daughter at home in exchange for sexual and domestic services' as a wife.[526] Elizabeth's heart-felt belief that 'worldly advantage' in marriage is not enough, reflects the attitudes of the era, where, as Vickery notes, 'the key to a successful match lay in the balancing' of emotional warmth and

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[523] 'Entailed': The settlement of the succession of a landed estate, 'so that it cannot be bequeathed at pleasure by any one possessor', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, www.oed.com (accessed July 2018). In the novel we are told that Longbourn, Mr Bennet's estate, 'was entailed in default of heirs male, on a distant relation [Mr Collins]' (p. 75).

[524] As previously noted, in Chapter One, p. 19, of this thesis, Wollstonecraft laments that for women to marry advantageously for social position, 'their persons [are] often legally prostituted', *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 151.

[525] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 43.

[526] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 163.

economic prudence.[527] Elizabeth feels that Charlotte's behaviour is immoral because she does not love her chosen partner, and that she has effectively sold herself into sexual service without affection or desire, in order to obtain status as a married woman.

However, Elizabeth's scathing response is not representative of Austen's own recognition of society's limited options for women to secure their independence outside marriage. Austen herself is believed to have declined more than one marriage proposal. Comments in a letter from 1808 appear to suggest she declined a proposal from her sister-in-law's brother, Edward Bridges.[528] However, the most documented refusal was to an offer of marriage from a family friend, Harris Bigg-Wither. Struggling herself with this decision, Austen initially accepted Bigg-Wither's proposal before changing her mind.[529] Although Austen argued, as previously noted in the introduction to this thesis, that 'nothing can be compared to the misery of being bound *without* Love',[530] she also recognised that 'Single Women have a dreadful propensity for being poor – which is one very strong argument in favour of Matrimony'.[531] Clearly this conflict played out in her own decision-making and is represented within her works. Furthermore, in Austen's novel, *Emma*, she reinforces the limited opportunities for genteel women through her portrayal of the spinster, Miss Bates, who is poor and unmarried:

> it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! the proper sport of boys and girls (p. 109).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's authorial voice shows some sympathy with the choice Charlotte makes in order to avoid the fate of becoming a poor 'old maid', and once she has recovered from her initial shock Elizabeth is able to acknowledge that 'in a prudential light, it is certainly a very good match for her' (p. 212). When Elizabeth visits her newly-married friend she notes that for Charlotte 'her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms' (p. 244). The repeated use of the word 'her' that is

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[527] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 86.
[528] See Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, p. 392. Austen wrote to her sister saying 'I wish you may be able to accept Lady Bridges's invitation, tho' *I* could not her son Edward's', Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 57: 7-9 October 1808, pp. 142-146, p. 145; Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 126.
[529] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 183.
[530] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 114: 30 November 1814, pp. 285-287, p. 286.
[531] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 153: 13 March 1817, pp. 331-334, p. 332.

attached to ownership in this statement emphasises the measure of independence and satisfaction that Charlotte has achieved in her married status, compared to life as a dependent 'old maid'.

However, despite the comfortable arrangements which Charlotte appears to have in her marital home, the Collins' marriage is far from the companionate ideal, and this comfort is only achieved by separating her living space from her husband's. When Elizabeth visits the Collins' home she notes that Charlotte has opted to occupy a less pleasant room:

> but she soon saw that her friend had an excellent reason for what she did, for Mr. Collins would undoubtedly have been much less in his own apartment, had they sat in one equally lively (p. 202).

This shows the compromises that Charlotte has entered into in order to make her marriage tolerable. Elizabeth is also amused that Charlotte encourages Mr Collins to spend much of his time in the garden, noting that:

> When Mr Collins could be forgotten, there was really an air of great comfort throughout, and by Charlotte's evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten (p. 192).

Nonetheless, although Charlotte is able to make compromises and implement this separation of living arrangements, Austen acknowledges that the lack of sexual attraction between the couple is significant and problematic, showing her own recognition of the importance of this aspect of marriage. Indeed, during the Collins' engagement this lack of physical compatibility is revealed by Charlotte's recognition that 'the stupidity with which he was favoured by nature, must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance' (p. 163). The conventional sentimental language that Austen uses to describe, and simultaneously to mock, their courtship, such as ironically noting their 'professions of love and schemes of felicity' (p. 177), emphasises their adherence to insincere romantic codes of behaviour and the lack of genuine affection in their union. As Heydt-Stevenson notes, 'they employ the mechanical gestures of beings programmed to enact the ideology of romantic love. They ape dynamic sexual energy here in a robotic way'.[532] Furthermore, Austen purposefully draws attention to the uncomfortable fact that Charlotte cannot escape a sexual relationship with her husband. This aspect of the marriage is deliberately emphasized in stating that

[532] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 77.

Charlotte is pregnant at the conclusion of the novel, as Mr Collins refers to 'his dear Charlotte's situation, and his expectation of a young olive-branch' (p. 372).

Pregnancies are always significant in Austen's works, such as *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*. In the former novel, the pregnancy of Eliza Williams is used to reveal the depravity of Willoughby to the unsuspecting Marianne, and also to show the danger she has been exposed to because of her unguarded behaviour in his presence. Childbirth was perilous, and Kate Williams claims that 'as many as one in ten eighteenth-century women died in childbirth, or within a few days of delivery'.[533] Austen would lose several sisters-in-law due to complications after giving birth, and Sales notes that Austen's letters reveal 'strong views on the dangers to which women were exposed as a result of multiple pregnancies'.[534] For instance, on learning that her niece was expecting again, Austen wrote that 'Anna has not a chance of escape […] Poor Animal, she will be worn out before she is thirty […] I am quite tired of so many Children'.[535] In describing her as an 'Animal' Austen makes clear that her biological function to bear children is her primary role at this stage of her life and marriage. Worsley notes that while Austen 'treats the matter of childbirth lightly in her writings [she also] consistently gives the impression that it should be feared'.[536] In Charlotte's case her 'situation', a polite way of referring to pregnancy, is used to emphasise the reality of her practical choice, the high risk that she has taken in order to secure her financial security, and the fact that marriages, despite the individual reasons for the union, require a wife's physical submission to her husband, however repulsive that may be.

In contrast to Charlotte's pragmatism, the union of the eldest Bennet sister, Jane, to Charles Bingley is a romantic match that culminates in 'a marriage of true affection' (p. 140). Their attraction is immediate, formed during their first meeting, after which he declares her to be 'the most beautiful creature I ever beheld' (p. 59) and she believes him to be 'just what a young man ought to be' (p. 62). It is a relationship that is both physical and romantic in nature. Their affection is based on good moral principles and appropriate behaviour which conforms to social mores, rather than the romantic sensibility espoused by Lydia, or Marianne Dashwood in

[533] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 77.
[534] Sales, *Representations of Regency England*, p. 50.
[535] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 155: 23-25 March 1817, pp. 335-337, p. 336.
[536] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 87.

Sense and Sensibility, who both fall for dashing, seductive rakes. Mr Bennet greets the news of their engagement by acknowledging his 'great pleasure in thinking you will be so happily settled' (p. 358), and in Elizabeth's case she:

> really believed all [Mr Bingley's] expectations of felicity, to be rationally founded, because they had for basis the excellent understanding, and super-excellent disposition of Jane, and a general similarity of feeling and taste between her and himself (p. 357).

However, their behaviour, which enacts the perfect conduct book ideal, actually causes difficulties for them and keeps them apart for most of the novel. This is also the case with Richardson's unimpeachable moral couple, Sir Charles Grandison and Harriet Byron, who are kept apart by his principled loyalty to a prior commitment and her adherence to proper feminine behaviour, which asserts that she should hide her preference and passively await his declaration. Austen mocks similarly sentimental romances in her representation of Jane and Bingley, as she shows how their superlative qualities as exemplary romantic figures actually make it difficult for them to reach an understanding without positive intervention from their friends. Bingley's modesty prevents him recognising Jane's affection, while as a self-effacing, virtuous woman, she is under social pressure to hide her feelings until he declares his own. The perfect female, according to authors of conduct books, was expected to be 'modest, passive, restrained, compliant, delicate and, above all, chaste'.[537] The fact that these unrealistic notions are espoused by the obsequious Mr Collins, who is their exponent within the novel, indicates a satirical allusion in the use of such unfeasible terms to describe women. Austen demonstrates that possession of these characteristics makes it impossible for Jane to communicate her feelings to Bingley. Pragmatic Charlotte astutely warns about this danger when she notes that 'if a woman conceals her affection […] from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him' (p. 68).

Austen also shows how the couple's romantic and idealistic approach makes them vulnerable to external manipulation. Mr Bennet perceptively notes this aspect of their characters, in stating that:

> You are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income (p. 358).

[537] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 28.

The suspension of their courtship, before its eventual successful resumption, shows the accuracy of this assessment, as both are shown to be easily manipulated due to their unrealistic, romanticised approach to life. Elizabeth exclaims in despair at Jane's inability to realistically assess individuals such as Bingley's sisters, saying:

> Oh! you are a great deal too apt you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life (p. 62).

Jane's idealism is illustrated by her inability to attribute guilt within disputes, because 'her mild and steady candour always pleaded for allowances, and urged the possibility of mistakes' (p. 176). She is shown to have a trusting, unrealistic attitude towards her acquaintances, and her ingenuousness is further emphasised by Elizabeth, who exclaims 'you are too good. Your sweetness and disinterestedness are really angelic' (p. 173). Furthermore, Bingley also declares after their first meeting that 'he could not conceive an angel more beautiful' (p. 64). I have previously discussed Austen's use of the word angel to raise doubts about male characters.[538] However, in this case use of the word also points to issues with Jane's own character, as is suggested by Elizabeth's informed assessment of her as 'angelic'.

As a consequence of Jane's 'angelic' qualities, which result in her inability to make realistic assessments of her acquaintances, she fails to appreciate the flaws in Bingley's character, or the motivations of his friends and family that lead to his desertion of her. Bingley is shown to be lacking in resolution and judgement as he is easily manipulated by others, including his sisters and Darcy. When he suddenly leaves Netherfield, Elizabeth, in contrast to her idealistic sister, finds that:

> she could not think without anger, hardly without contempt, on that easiness of temper, that want of proper resolution which now made him the slave of his designing friends, and led him to sacrifice his own happiness to the caprice of their inclinations (p. 172).

Elizabeth's assessment is severe but justified. His initial abandonment of his relationship with Jane is entirely due to external persuasion and against his own desires. Nevertheless, it is also noted that 'Jane was firm where she felt herself to be right' (p. 104), showing the moral basis for her judgements and that there are

[538] See Chapter Two, pp. 77-78, of this thesis.

limits to her credulity. She eventually sees through the false friendship of Bingley's sisters recognising that 'they were certainly no friends to his acquaintance with me' (p. 359). Bingley meanwhile is justly offended when the scope of the deception that persuaded him to abandon Jane is revealed to him. Austen shows that it is only once the couple break free from the prescribed behaviour dictated by conduct books and act honestly and openly that they are able to form a union and contribute appropriately to society.

In contrast to the romantic union of Jane and Bingley, or the pragmatism of Charlotte and Mr Collins, the marriage of Lydia to Wickham represents a relationship formed through lust and the moral laxity of both parties. Eloping together from Brighton their relationship represents the consequences that can result when unions are formed without proper consideration of the implications and highlights the dangers women are exposed to when entering into unsanctioned illicit relationships. As I have mentioned in the previous sections, Austen uses allusions to the Regency sex trade, and particularly prostitution, to indicate what Lydia's fate as a fallen woman would have been without Darcy's intervention when he intercedes to persuade, and bribe, Wickham to marry her following their elopement.

Although Lydia is only sixteen years old and is shown to have little appreciation of the significance of matrimony, her fate is sealed by the false step she has taken. Despite knowing that Wickham is disreputable and that they are unlikely to be content together, there is no alternative for her family except to arrange for their union. Lydia's marriage to Wickham therefore, despite being a 'patched-up business' (p. 367), saves her from the ultimate fate of the fallen woman. However, Heydt-Stevenson is correct when she says that through this marriage Austen:

> topples the contention that a disgraced woman's reclamation in a marriage such as Lydia Bennet's was better than nothing and that an empty ritual that could guarantee neither happiness nor fortune is better than scandal, than prostitution.[539]

Through this storyline Austen draws attention to the double standard which condemns a woman to social exclusion unless she marries the disreputable man responsible for her downfall, and laments the lack of opportunities for women within her social milieu to exist outside of marriage, by showing that there is no other option

[539] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 97.

for Lydia to save her from ruin and a life 'upon the town'. By including allusions which link Lydia's fate to prostitution, Austen highlights the vulnerability of women within the middle gentry once their claim to virtue is lost, as well as critiquing marriages that are formed solely through physical attraction. However, as Tomalin notes:

> Austen is too honest to pretend that stories like Lydia's must end as the gloating neighbours predict, with every erring girl either reduced to prostitution – 'on the town' – or banished to lonely penitence and poverty [and so] Lydia remains pleased with herself and her situation.[540]

In order to reach a satisfactory conclusion for the heroine it is necessary for this plot to be resolved by reaching a socially acceptable conclusion. Otherwise, as Mr Collins notes, 'this false step in one daughter, will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others' (p. 312). Indeed, the local gossips, characterised as 'spiteful old ladies' (p. 323), are disappointed at her eventual marriage, as they feel her alternative destiny as a prostitute 'would have been more for the advantage of conversation' (p. 323). The scandalous origins of Lydia's union have to be hushed up so that advantageous marriages can be made by her sisters, because as Austen makes clear, there is no other acceptable 'career' path for them.

In order to preserve the respectability of the family, and particularly her unmarried sisters, from the scandalous behaviour of the newly married Wickhams, the couple are relocated to northern England following their wedding. In despatching the social outcasts to Newcastle, it is possible that Austen is alluding to an infamous contemporary court case. In 1777 the heiress Mary Eleanor Bowes, Countess of Strathmore (1749-1800), whose inherited wealth came from coal-mining in the area of Newcastle, was tricked into marrying military officer Andrew Robinson Stoney (1747-1810), when he pretended to have been fatally injured in a duel.[541] After eight years of enduring brutality at the hands of her violent husband, Bowes escaped only to be subsequently kidnapped by Stoney.[542] The ensuing rescue efforts (in which she was freed after eight days) and the subsequent long-running, scandalous court cases were widely reported in the press.[543] Moore suggests that 'the Bowes trial

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[540] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 167.
[541] Moore, *Wedlock*, p. 160. According to Moore, Stoney changed his name to Bowes following the marriage and briefly held the position of Member of Parliament for Newcastle, *Wedlock*, pp. 169 and 227.
[542] Moore, *Wedlock*, p. 330.
[543] Moore, *Wedlock*, pp. 348-349 and 385.

was a land-mark case which signalled a warning to violent husbands everywhere that the powers they might have assumed were absolute over their wives were actually curtailed by law'.[544] Although Austen was only ten years old at the start of this case in 1786, the legal wrangling continued until 1807.[545] We know that Austen read newspapers, as her letters contain comments on the arrivals section during a visit to Bath and on scandalous reports about acquaintances.[546] Although *Pride and Prejudice* was not published until 1813 it is believed to have been written between October 1796 and August 1797,[547] and given Austen's obvious interest in marital relationships it is likely that this longstanding case would have come to her attention. It may even be that Austen's use of the name Wickham suggests a connection in her mind with this case, as Bowes's home, Gibside, was located close to the village of Whickham.[548] In addition, there are echoes of this case in Lydia and Wickham's marriage, as Stoney was a military officer and Bowes was portrayed in contemporary publications 'as a licentious, extravagant and flighty fool' due to Stoney's successful attempts to discredit her.[549] Stoney's campaign against Bowes included publication of *The Confessions of the Countess of Strathmore* (1793), which he had forced her to write during their marriage.[550] In this scandalous publication she admitted to having conducted an affair during her first marriage and having three abortions.[551] Austen's introduction of this reference hints at the risk a woman takes when entering into matrimony and placing herself under the control of her husband. Stoney's behaviour was extreme, even by Georgian standards which allowed women to be beaten by their husbands within limits, as Peakman notes. She gives the notorious example of Judge Buller, who is claimed to have specified 'the appropriate size of the stick to be used, declaring that a man could legally beat his wife with it as long as it was no thicker than the width of his thumb'.[552] Lydia's irresponsible behaviour has delivered her into the clutches of a husband with 'vicious propensities', and, by

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[544] Moore, *Wedlock*, p. 376.
[545] Moore, *Wedlock*, p. 407.
[546] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 19: 17 May 1799, pp. 39-41, p. 41; Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 53: 20-22 June 1808, pp. 128-132, p. 131.
[547] Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, pp. 189-197.
[548] Moore, *Wedlock*, p. 179.
[549] Moore, *Wedlock*, p. 402.
[550] Moore, *Wedlock*, p. 192.
[551] Moore, *Wedlock*, p. 192.
[552] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 237.

evoking Bowes' fate through connecting the couple with her Newcastle home, Austen indicates just how dangerous this could be.

It has been suggested that Lydia's banishment to Newcastle following her patched-up marriage acts as a 'symbolic purification', and that Elizabeth can only assist her secretly in defiance of her husband.[553] However, Lydia is not permanently expelled and it is clear from the last chapter of the novel that she is allowed to return from Newcastle into the family group, even visiting Pemberley, though without Wickham. Lydia's social rehabilitation shows that it is not true to say that Austen saw the Georgian sex trade as 'the world of unchaste women, seduced and disgraced, and then hidden away from decent folk […] a world from which there was no coming back'.[554] Nor is Heydt-Stevenson correct when describing Lydia as 'the greatest transgressor in all of the novels'.[555] As I will discuss in the next chapter, the 'greatest transgressor' is Maria Rushworth, in *Mansfield Park*, who is banished to another country in the company of her unrelentingly unpleasant aunt, Mrs Norris, after she leaves her husband and breaks her marriage vows to elope with Henry Crawford. Lydia's triumphant readmission into the extended Bennet family shows that this is not the case, as she is reclaimed from 'the world of unchaste women' despite her loss of virtue.

Nevertheless, despite Lydia's readmittance into her family, the reference to the Bowes' scandal foreshadows the failure of her marriage to Wickham, which is reported in the final chapter of the novel when Austen says that 'His affection for her soon sunk into indifference; her's lasted a little longer' (p. 395). Lydia's position within the marriage is damaged by her immoral behaviour during its formation and reflects the fate of the wife of Mr Bagenhall in Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*:

> Poor woman! she could not expect a better fate. To yield up her chastity; to be forced upon him afterwards, by way of doing her poor justice; what affiance can he have in her virtue, were she to meet with a trial?[556]

Having eloped with Wickham and lived with him before the marriage, this description prefigures Lydia's situation, as she has demonstrated to her husband that he cannot depend on her to behave virtuously. Indeed, as previously noted, even in her letter

[553] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 101.
[554] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 153.
[555] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 87.
[556] Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, 7 vols (London: S Richardson, 1754), V, p. 292, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction Full-Text Database*, https://literature.proquest.com/ (accessed July 2018).

announcing her elopement there is a hint that she is keeping her options open with other men. Furthermore, the final comments on Lydia are ambiguous, with Austen stating that 'in spite of her youth and her manners, she retained all the claims to reputation which her marriage had given her' (p. 395). This statement could indicate that Lydia moderates her behaviour and preserves what is left of her reputation once she is married. However, as Heydt-Stevenson has suggested, it could also indicate that Lydia 'disregards her wedding vows while also exploiting the safety they promise'.[557] Lydia's elopement and the circumstances of her marriage are well-known, and when Jane Bennet tries to draw positives from their union Elizabeth is dismissive, suggesting that 'their conduct has been such […] as neither you, nor I, nor any body, can ever forget. It is useless to talk of it' (p. 319). Therefore, the term 'all the claims to reputation', can be interpreted as meaning that the 'patched-up' marriage has given her no entitlement to claim respectability. Indeed, Georgian society had a specific term, that of 'demi-rep', to describe women known to engage in illicit dalliances whilst maintaining their claims to respectability by remaining under their husband's authority.[558] Furthermore, unmarried women, such as Elizabeth Armistead and Dora Jordan, adopted the title of 'Mrs' for pragmatic reasons, combined with a fictitious surname or the name of their current 'protector', to give them a veneer of propriety.[559] Therefore, Lydia's marriage does not restore her character, as her reputation is damaged by the elopement and her 'way of getting husbands' (p. 330) is condemned as immoral and perilous by all the right-thinking characters in the novel.

In contrast, Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy represents a relationship in which these different elements of romance, physical attraction and pragmatism are in balance and is achieved after she rejects inappropriate unions. Elizabeth's rejection of Mr Collins' proposal is not solely based upon the physical repulsion she feels, although as Byrne notes, it is clear that 'the sub-text of Lizzy's rejection of Mr

[557] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 101.
[558] Rubenhold notes that 'these were generally high-born or seemingly respectable women who conducted extra-marital sexual relations', *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 335.
[559] Hickman believes it likely that Mr Armistead 'was an early protector of Elizabeth's, and that, as was the frequent custom of the day, she decided to take his name', *Courtesans*, pp. 83-84; Dora Jordan was pregnant and unmarried when she changed her birth name of Bland, and adopted the prefix of 'Mrs' along with a false surname, Tomalin, *Mrs Jordan's Profession*, p. 27.

Collins's proposal is her sexual antipathy towards him'.[560] Heydt-Stevenson has noted how this is dramatically represented to the reader during the Netherfield Ball, 'when Elizabeth's dances with Collins produce what Austen describes as a sort of inverted orgasm'[561] describing how 'the moment of her release from him was exstacy' (p. 133). Mr Collins' patronising attitude towards her during his proposal, which leads her to plead that he should consider her 'a rational creature' not 'an elegant female' (p. 150), reinforces the correctness of her decision to reject him. Elizabeth also repudiates the physical attraction she feels for George Wickham, recognising that their mutual lack of fortune would make such a match irresponsible, even before she recognizes that his behaviour masks his immoral character. She recognises the imprudence of the match and is pragmatic when he switches his attentions to a wealthy heiress, noting that 'handsome men must have something to live on, as well as the plain' (p. 186). She also initially rejects the financial security offered by Darcy's first proposal, because at this stage she dislikes him, and the lack of respect he demonstrates towards her, and her family, during this scene exacerbates her negative response.

Elizabeth eventually comes to recognise that Darcy appreciates her intellect and the liveliness of her mind, as well as being physically attracted to her. Their physical compatibility is underlined during their dance at the Netherfield Ball, in contrast to her dance with Mr Collins, when Sir William compliments Darcy on 'such very superior dancing [that] is not often seen [and …] your fair partner does not disgrace you' (p. 135). Elizabeth jokes about her first feelings of love for Darcy having dated 'from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley' (p. 382), humorously underlining her recognition of the financial implications of this match, which will make her fabulously wealthy. However, when Lady Catherine rebukes her for 'upstart pretensions' (p. 365) in aspiring to the marriage, she is able to defend herself by stating that 'He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal' (p. 366). Austen shows that mutual respect and rational affection are necessary for a marriage to be successful and fulfilling for both partners. Elizabeth and Darcy's union is:

[560] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 184.
[561] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 77.

> to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind [will be] softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance (p. 325).

Austen does not reject marriage as a goal for her heroines, but she does critique the lack of opportunities for women in the gentrified classes. In portraying matrimony as their only legitimate goal, through the obsessive hunt for an appropriate marriage partner in her novels, she demonstrates that female financial insecurity often leads women into unfulfilling and potentially perilous relationships. In doing so she positions herself with contemporaries who championed opportunities for women and argued for greater equality within relationships, through education and knowledge, such as Wollstonecraft and Robinson. This equality would enable women to make rational decisions and so form satisfactory, durable unions for the benefit of their future families and the improvement of society, through greater social cohesion and stability.

Chapter Four

Mansfield Park: 'A mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so; darkened, yet fancying itself light'.[562]

Mansfield Park (1814) is a work which has polarized critical opinion, some readers viewing it as Austen's most ambitious social criticism and others believing it to be the ultimate expression of her conservatism in upholding the social hierarchy of the period and lauding the landed gentry. I will argue that Austen criticises patriarchal authority through her novel, and particularly by representing its detrimental influence on the vulnerable heroine, Fanny Price. It may appear contentious to suggest that Austen's prim and unpopular heroine is connected to the sex industry. However, I will demonstrate that Austen uses her heroine's name to highlight female vulnerability within a male dominated social structure, and particularly as this affects her position within the marriage market. Through the use of the surname 'Price', Austen connects her heroine with contemporary debates on slavery and prostitution. This association allows Austen to draw parallels between Fanny's position as a pawn to be traded between men to enhance their own prestige by establishing bonds between landed families, and the sale of 'human flesh' in the forms of prostitution and slavery.

Additionally, Austen contrasts her heroine with the attractive, but ultimately immoral, Mary Crawford. Through Mary, and her brother, Henry, Austen engages with contemporary perceptions that contrast the corrupting influence of the city with idealised rural gentility. Despite their initial attractiveness, the sophisticated Crawford siblings are shown to be corrupted by exposure to the fashionable views of their London associates and the negative influence of their guardians, Admiral Crawford and his wife. However, Austen challenges her readers' expectations by showing that the country estate, through the dissolute behaviour of its landed-gentry owners, can itself be a source of corruption when it is not managed effectively. Additionally, through demonstrating Mary's fundamental immorality and her corrupted mind, which is 'darkened, yet fancying itself light' (p. 340), without casting

[562] Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 340.

suspicion on her chaste behaviour, Austen rejects the commonly held contemporary view that chastity and virtue in women are synonymous.

Finally, I will examine Austen's portrayal of adultery, through the actions of Maria Rushworth (née Bertram). Maria's banishment into social exile with her irredeemably unpleasant Aunt Norris is the harshest punishment that Austen inflicts on any of the characters within her novels, suggesting that her descent into vice through the breaking of her marriage vows, is considered by the author to be irrecoverable. Maria's eventual fate as a fallen woman is foreshadowed by Austen in her account of the excursion to Sotherton, and underlined further in her portrayal of the home theatricals. I will argue that the play *Lovers' Vows* (1798) was selected deliberately by Austen to be performed by the Bertram siblings and their friends in order to link the theme of the fallen woman with both Maria and Mary Crawford. Indeed, references to specific scenes within this popular play would have been familiar to contemporary readers, allowing them to visualize the resultant opportunities for flirtation and physical contact. The fact that Maria's subsequent elopement from her husband's home in the company of Henry Crawford also results in the elopement of her sister, Julia, indicates the high social cost of such immorality. By comparing the consequences of the sisters' actions, Austen demonstrates that her condemnation of Maria centres on her adulterous behaviour rather than the act of elopement. As I will contend throughout this chapter, Austen's representations of female character in the novel are designed to exemplify the broader issues she was concerned to expose through her literary works, revealing the pressure exerted on women of the period by patriarchal expectations of female virtue.

'Considering who and what she is'[563]

Fanny Price, the heroine of *Mansfield Park*, has famously been described as 'a dreary, debilitated, priggish goody-goody',[564] and 'a monster of complacency and pride […] under a cloak of cringing self-abasement'.[565] These are harsh assessments of a character described by the author as crying herself to sleep every night when she arrives at Mansfield Park. Recent critics have reassessed the novel

[563] Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 137.
[564] D. W. Harding, 'Mansfield Park', in *Regulated Hatred and Other Essays on Jane Austen*, ed. Monica Lawlor (London & Atlantic Highlands: The Athlone Press, 1998), pp. 106-126, p. 122.
[565] Kingsley Amis, 'What Became of Jane Austen', in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1963), pp. 141-144, p. 144.

and its unpopular heroine, overturning the widely held belief that Austen has created a passive, 'cringing' character who is aligned with the conservative values within the novel, in setting the idealised rural 'Great House' of Mansfield Park against the corruption of the city (represented by London). By challenging the assumption that Austen's aim within her novel is to uphold the conservative ideals represented by the symbolic country estate, it becomes clear that:

> far from being the work of conservative quietism that much twentieth-century criticism has turned it into, [*Mansfield Park*] embodies Jane Austen's most ambitious and radical criticism of contemporary prejudice in society and in literature.[566]

This reassessment of the conservative aims of the author has led recent critics to refute the idea that Austen intended Fanny to be a representation of the exemplary female heroine typical of contemporary literature, in works such as Burney's *Evelina* or Edgeworth's *Belinda*. For example, Heydt-Stevenson notes that Fanny 'most certainly is not the paragon of virtue so often maintained'.[567] The assumption that Austen's protagonist was intended to be a model of feminine propriety has resulted in the conclusion that the author failed in her portrayal, by producing this unsympathetic, 'priggish' character with 'anomalies in Fanny's behaviour, [seen] as flaws in the perfect carrying out of the author's plan'.[568] As Waldron notes:

> this conviction, that Austen must have been trying to create a perfectly good girl and has failed, has spilled over into this century and has done little for the popularity of Fanny as a heroine.[569]

Recognising that this was not Austen's aim provides a different interpretation of her representation of the heroine. Accepting instead that Fanny is intended as a parody of the stereotypical exemplary heroine, and that such idealised standards of behaviour as those espoused in conduct books of the period are unrealistic and counterproductive, provides a very different reading of Austen's character. Fanny's repressed and withdrawn behaviour is shown to be the result of psychological damage caused by her adoption into the Bertram family and their treatment of her.[570]

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[566] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 119.
[567] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 156.
[568] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 89.
[569] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 88.
[570] Austen's negative portrayal of the effects of adoption in Fanny's case, and also in *Emma* through the experiences of Frank Churchill, does not seem to reflect her brother's experience in similar circumstances. Edward Austen seems to have benefited from being adopted by wealthy relatives and would eventually take

As Johnson suggests, 'Austen's enterprise in *Mansfield Park* is to turn conservative myth sour',[571] by showing the impact of the Bertram family on the heroine, who 'is betrayed by the same ethos she dutifully embraces'.[572] Indeed, when Fanny tries to act according to the conservative precepts she has learnt by rejecting the immorality represented by the Crawfords, her male relatives punish her temerity rather than supporting her principles. Therefore, Fanny's failures as a 'perfectly good girl' arise because of her dispossessed, vulnerable status within an unsympathetic, male-controlled social structure. Her predicament is further exacerbated by the requirement that she hide her love for her cousin Edmund Bertram and her jealousy of her vivacious rival, Mary Crawford, in order to maintain her subservient position within the family at Mansfield Park.

In addition, Heydt-Stevenson suggests that the choice of the name 'Fanny Price' for the heroine of her novel may explain the seemingly incongruous claim by Austen's niece that while working on *Mansfield Park* the author 'would suddenly burst out laughing, jump up and run across the room to a table where pens and paper were lying, write something down, and then come back to the fire'.[573] This image is apparently inconsistent with the assessment of the novel itself as her least humorous work (as well as undermining the usual family portrait of Austen as an author who hid her work when warned, by a creaking door, of anyone approaching).[574] This intimation of Austen's amusement with her own construction of the novel accords with recent critical assessments that suggest Fanny's name was selected with intent and may be the source of some of the novel's hidden humour. Heydt-Stevenson, for example, believes that the book 'arguably contains more examples of libidinous humor and sexual allusion than any other Austen novel'.[575] She suggests that by using the name 'Fanny' for her heroine, Austen is

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on their surname of Knight. See Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 14. His inheritance of the Knights' estate allowed him to provide a home for his mother and sisters at Chawton, Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 209.

[571] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 97.

[572] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 96.

[573] Constance Hill, *Jane Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends* (London & New York: John Lane, 1902), p. 202, https://archive.org/details/janeaustenherhom00hilluoft (accessed July 2018).

[574] James Edward Austen-Leigh famously suggested that 'She wrote upon small sheets of paper which could easily be put away, or covered with a piece of blotting paper. There was, between the front door and the offices, a swing door which creaked when it was opened; but she objected to having this little inconvenience remedied, because it gave her notice when anyone was coming', Austen-Leigh, 'A Memoir of Jane Austen', pp. 81-82.

[575] Heydt-Stevenson, 'Slipping into the Ha-Ha', 324.

alluding to the slang word for the female genitalia.[576] This association is believed to have derived from Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, which graphically describes the induction of a young girl, Fanny Hill, into prostitution; although Heydt-Stevenson does not believe Austen's use of the name is a direct allusion to the novel.[577] Nevertheless, she contends that Austen 'knew the unconventional meaning of the name, which necessarily enriches its significance in this novel'.[578] This connotation is particularly significant when linked to Fanny's surname 'Price', as it suggests a reference to prostitution in which access to the female body is given in return for financial remuneration. As Heydt-Stevenson notes, Fanny's 'very name signifies prostitution: the price of the body'.[579] Reading Austen's novel from this perspective, its ostensibly crude humour becomes apparent. For example, when returning from Antigua, Sir Thomas exclaims:

> 'But where is Fanny? – Why do not I see my little Fanny?' And on perceiving her, came forward with a kindness which astonished and penetrated her, calling her his dear Fanny, kissing her affectionately, and observing with decided pleasure how much she was grown! Fanny knew not how to feel, nor where to look (p. 165).

Sir Thomas's observations on her improved looks, combined with the use of the word 'penetrated' and Fanny's embarrassment at his physical response to her appearance, make a compelling case that Austen intended this scene to have a humorous sub-text. Alongside this, both Fanny's romantic connections, Henry Crawford and Edmund, refer to her as 'my Fanny', suggesting physical ownership of the young woman's body. Indeed, Henry also notes, 'it is "Fanny" that I think of all day, and dream of all night' (p. 318), which seems to underscore his erotic attraction to the heroine and his libertinism, as discussed later in this chapter. However, it can also be argued that suggesting Austen deliberately refers to the slang association of the name could be stretching her intention.[580] It is also the case that the appellation

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[576] Heydt-Stevenson, 'Slipping into the Ha-Ha', 328.

[577] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 144; the use of the shorter version of the name William (Willy) as a slang term for male genitalia dates from the twentieth century, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, www.oed.com (accessed July 2018). Therefore, Austen's choice of this name for her heroine's brother does not support Heydt-Stevenson's claim about the sexual connotations of Fanny's name.

[578] Heydt-Stevenson, 'Slipping into the Ha-Ha', 328.

[579] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 144.

[580] Particularly as the only other use in the novel is the authorial voice noting at the end that 'My Fanny indeed at this very time, I have the satisfaction of knowing, must have been happy in spite of every thing' (p. 428). It seems highly unlikely that Austen would have intended this as a pun. I believe that Austen uses this phrase to

was very common during this period, and that it was the name of one of Austen's favourite nieces.[581]

Nevertheless, although the link to Cleland and the slang association of the name remains speculative, I believe Heydt-Stevenson is correct in highlighting the significance of Fanny's surname. Giving her heroine's family the surname of Price emphasises the pecuniary considerations which will shape the lives of both Fanny and her brother, William. The siblings are thereby clearly connected to the theme of slavery that pervades the novel, and is the source of Sir Thomas Bertram's wealth. Edward W. Said was among the first to examine Austen's engagement with imperialist themes in *Mansfield Park*, although he argued that 'Austen seems only vaguely aware of the details of these activities' and that the scattered references to Antigua reveal her '*assuming* [….] the importance of an empire'.[582] Indeed, Said claims that 'it would be silly to expect Jane Austen to treat slavery with anything like the passion of an abolitionist'.[583] In contrast, connections to the abolitionist movement have been noted throughout the novel by critics such as Kirkham and Gabrielle White,[584] who contend that Austen engages with contemporary debates on slavery and shows sympathy for the abolitionist's cause, debunking previous claims of her seeming ambivalence. Indeed, White argues that the themes of slavery and the slave trade are woven into all of Austen's later works: *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*. Within *Mansfield Park*, numerous references to the slave trade have been noted, including the use of the name Mrs Norris. The most unpleasant character Austen ever created shares her name with a notorious slave trader.[585] Kelly also notes the repetitive use of the word 'plantation' to describe Mansfield's grounds, evoking the slave trading properties of the West Indies, and the

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show that she is reasserting her own claims, as a female author, over the fate of her character against the male patriarchy which has tried to manipulate Fanny for its own ends throughout the novel.

[581] Alternative sources of the name have been suggested. For instance, Byrne argues the name may be an allusion to Fanny Sterling, 'a character of solid worth and reliable qualities' in *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766), a play by George Colman the Elder and David Garrick, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London & New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2002), p. 184.

[582] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 106.

[583] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 115.

[584] Gabrielle D. V. White, *Jane Austen in the Context of Abolition: 'A Fling at the Slave Trade'* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

[585] Byrne notes that 'If the name of Mansfield was synonymous with the cause of abolition, then that of Norris was its opposite [as] Robert Norris […] was a slave trader in West Africa […]. When it came to a parliamentary enquiry, instead of testifying in support of the abolitionists he argued against them, brazenly proposing that the slave trade had positive effects in Africa', *A Life in Small Things*, pp. 222-223.

'inescapable connotations' of imagery referring to chains.[586] Even the title of the novel appears to be a reference to the Mansfield Judgement of 1772.[587] Despite its limited scope, the ruling was viewed as a turning point in the abolitionist movement, and according to popular perceptions, effectively meant that slavery was illegal in England.[588] Austen's use of these references to the slave trade explicitly links this debate to the position of her young heroine through her surname.

The suggestion of a resemblance between the subservient position of women within Georgian society and African slavery was common during this period. Wollstonecraft for example, refers to 'the more specious slavery which chains the very soul of woman, keeping her for ever under the bondage of ignorance'.[589] Kirkham suggests that in *Mansfield Park*, Austen employs this 'analogy used in the *Vindication* between the slaves in the colonies and women […] at home'.[590] This reading is supported by the fact that Austen also includes this analogy in *Emma*, when Jane Fairfax discusses her future as a governess, suggesting the trade represents 'the sale – not quite of human flesh – but of human intellect' (p. 300), and reflecting that although 'widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on; […] as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies' (p. 300). Of course, by linking marriage and slavery the sexual exploitation of women's bodies by men is implicit. The use of the surname 'Price' therefore draws on this common imagery and shows Austen evoking the issue of slavery to emphasize the vulnerability of her heroine to exploitation for financial and sexual purposes, because of her lack of status within a male-dominated society. Austen evokes the sexual exploitation of female slaves to critique the commodification of women in Georgian society.

In addition to this link to slavery, it has been noted that during the process of William's naval promotion, 'both William and Fanny become negotiable commodities

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[586] Kelly, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, pp. 195-196; Kelly also argues that Austen criticises the Church of England's involvement with slavery by linking the imagery concerning chains with the amber cross given to Fanny by her brother, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, p. 208.
[587] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, pp. 116-118.
[588] 'The decision […] was that a black defendant James Somersett could not be taken against his will back out of England and returned to slavery in the colony of Virginia', White, *Jane Austen in the Context of Abolition*, p. 5; Byrne notes that Lord Mansfield's mixed-race grand-niece, Dido Belle, lived in his household and grew up alongside their adopted niece, Lady Elizabeth Murray. Austen is known to have met Lady Elizabeth, and would certainly have known Dido's story. See Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 215.
[589] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 256.
[590] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 117.

available, after all, for a certain price'.[591] Through this storyline the sexual exploitation of women through prostitution is evoked. As Sales suggests, 'it is just possible […] that Regency readers might have made a connection between William's promotion and the scandal that was associated with the Duke of York and Mary Ann Clarke'.[592] However, I agree with Heydt-Stevenson who believes that Austen deliberately evokes this high-profile scandal to emphasis 'how thoroughly the granting of promotions had been sexualized'.[593] This is one of a number of allusions used by Austen to 'destabilize […] the boundary between prostitution and courtship' within the novel.[594] Heydt-Stevenson notes that military promotions such as William's in Austen's novel, 'were under special scrutiny as a result of the extensively publicized Mary Ann Clarke scandal', in which the Duke of York and his mistress were accused of selling army promotions.[595] Clarke was 'paid in cash and both sold and received sexual favors'.[596] Subjected to a Parliamentary inquiry in 1809, Clarke refused to be intimidated. In fact 'making the politicians laugh at her double entendres; she refused to answer some questions and talked back to others'.[597] As Anna Clark notes, Clarke also deliberately depicted herself 'according to a somewhat more sophisticated narrative of prostitution sometimes found in novels, that of the genteel woman […] forced to become a kept mistress'.[598] Her supporters portrayed her as 'a plucky heroine [of the kind found within radical gothic novels] who defied the aristocratic libertine'.[599] The scandal was extensively covered in the press and was not solely confined to military promotions, as it 'exposed a seething morass of corruption beyond the army, for offices in the government, and even seats in

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[591] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 142.
[592] Sales, *Representations of Regency England*, p. 110.
[593] Heydt-Stevenson, 'Slipping into the Ha-Ha', 327-328.
[594] Heydt-Stevenson, 'Slipping into the Ha-Ha', 329; Heydt-Stevenson has also noted that Austen further connects her heroine to prostitution through the 'significant intertextual relations between Fanny Price's story' and Samuel Johnson's two narratives, 'The History of Misella Debauched by Her Relation' and 'Misella's Description of the Life of a Prostitute', which were both published in *The Rambler* during 1751, 'Slipping into the Ha-Ha', 328-329. Johnson was known to have been one of Austen's favourite writers, Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice', p. 141. These publications are 'a sentimental narrative of a poor young woman seduced by her cousin/guardian', Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 144. Heydt-Stevenson also notes that 'the little girls' backgrounds and age at adoption are similar; their respective parents turn them over to other relatives with a "natural" ease; and both occupy a borderline space below the family but above the servants. The parallels begin to diverge when Misella's cousin seduces her', 'Slipping into the Ha-Ha', 329.
[595] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 143.
[596] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 143.
[597] Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 160.
[598] Clark, *Scandal*, p. 161.
[599] Clark, *Scandal*, p. 161.

Parliament, were bought and sold'.[600] Austen's work reflects the general dissatisfaction with this widespread corruption, which she would have been familiar with through the experiences of her own brothers who were naval officers. Contemporary readers would have been familiar with the high profile York-Clarke scandal, which only occurred a short time before Austen began work on *Mansfield Park* in February 1811.[601] This topical link emphasises Henry Crawford's ulterior motive in assisting William, whereby 'he "pays" to have Price promoted in exchange for Fanny Price's body, which he expects will be the reward for his labors'.[602] William's promotion thereby 'becomes a series of commercial-sexual dealings legitimized by an ideology of patronage and alliance'.[603] These references to contemporary events emphasise sexual behaviour as a form of financial exchange, or prostitution, in selling oneself for promotion or self-gain, alerting the reader to the erotic significance of Henry's seemingly altruistic actions and the corruption endemic in the Georgian state.

As a result of Henry's scheming it is clear that Fanny becomes a commodity to be exchanged between males for financial and dynastic advantage. Her uncle, Sir Thomas Bertram, highlights this in his response to Henry's proposal to marry his niece, viewing 'the connection [as] the most desirable in the world' (p. 304), and a means to form an advantageous alliance between the families. This underlines the similarities between the marriage market and prostitution, where access to the female body is subject to financial negotiation. Fanny is, of course, expected to be grateful for Henry's attentions, and to recognise the pecuniary advantages of her match with a wealthy suitor. However, because of her pre-existing attachment to her cousin, Edmund, and her recognition that Henry's behaviour towards Maria and Julia was immoral, so giving her grounds to believe him to be unprincipled and untrustworthy, she refuses his proposal. Fanny is not forgiven for this apparent breach of female rectitude, until her decision is justified by Henry's subsequent elopement with Maria, so revealing to the Bertram family his lack of moral integrity.

The response from Fanny's adoptive family to her refusal of Henry underlines her vulnerable position within a patriarchal social structure, and shows how she is

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[600] Clark, *Scandal*, p. 148.
[601] Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, p. 396.
[602] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 143.
[603] Heydt-Stevenson, 'Slipping into the Ha-Ha', 327.

pressured to accept her role as a pawn within the marriage market. Her uncle, Sir Thomas Bertram, unaware of her reasoning, is incredulous at this refusal. He closes his ludicrous diatribe on her feminine failures with the broken accusation 'if your heart can acquit you of *ingratitude* –' (p. 294). This harsh criticism is particularly distressing to Fanny given her vulnerable situation, which is dependent on the good will of her wealthy relatives. The obligation to show 'gratitude' has been repeatedly emphasised to Fanny since her arrival at Mansfield Park. As Johnson notes, 'Austen explores the sinister aspects of benevolence and the burden of gratitude it places on a recipient',[604] by demonstrating how this is used to manipulate Fanny, applying pressure on her to conform to patriarchal expectations and display 'correct' behaviour. Indeed, the pressure applied on Fanny commences even before her arrival at Mansfield Park, beginning with her coach journey to her new home, during which it is noted that:

> Mrs. Norris had been talking to her the whole way from Northampton of her wonderful good fortune, and the extraordinary degree of gratitude and good behaviour which it ought to produce (p. 14).

Fanny's initial misery at leaving her family, and the brothers and sisters she loves, is exacerbated through the guilt induced by Mrs Norris, and 'by the idea of its being a wicked thing for her not to be happy' (p. 14). This burden influences Fanny's actions in the Bertram house and is used by the family to apply pressure on her and maintain her position of inferiority. As Wiltshire notes, Aunt Norris, in particular, 'sees to it that [Fanny] is not accepted as one of the Bertram family and that she knows it'.[605] Aunt Norris's spiteful, humiliating comment, when Fanny objects to participating in the family's theatricals, that 'I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her Aunt, and Cousins wish her – very ungrateful indeed, considering who and what she is' (p. 137), both emphasizes and reinforces this separation. Sir Thomas calls this conduct 'kindly meant' (p. 289), explaining to Fanny that they believed they had been 'educating and preparing you for that mediocrity of condition which *seemed* to be your lot' (p. 289). This treatment is symbolised by the lack of a fire in the East room, a space which Fanny is allowed to adopt as her own, only because nobody else requires it. As Wiltshire notes, 'the

[604] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 107.
[605] Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen*, p. 94.

East room in fact is the very emblem of Fanny's condition as a displaced person'.[606] The room defines her position as neither a servant, nor part of the family, while the lack of a fire demonstrates the family's carelessness with regard to her comfort. Even here Fanny is not allowed a retreat from her tormentors. Her space is invaded first by Mary Crawford and Edmund, wishing to rehearse their romantic scenes from *Lovers' Vows*, (a mortifying experience because of Fanny's secret love for her cousin), and later by Sir Thomas, as the scene of his accusations of her 'ingratitude' as he attempts to put pressure on her to marry Henry.

This concerted treatment means that Fanny is typically reluctant to give her own opinion and questions her right to disagree with male authority figures, telling Edmund that 'I cannot see things as you do; but I ought to believe you to be right rather than myself' (p. 27). When she disagrees with what she is told Fanny desperately tries to regulate her thoughts and conform to expectations, as she 'supposed she must have been mistaken, and meant to think differently in future' (p. 109). White suggests that Fanny's rejection of Henry shows that she 'has what the slave does not have, and she makes use of it. She is legally free to refuse the marriage with Henry, and she does so, exercising her autonomy'.[607] Nevertheless, Fanny's resistance to male authority in this one case, in contrast to her usual conformity, results in her symbolic exile to her family home in Portsmouth, showing that exercising this 'autonomy' has negative consequences. Sir Thomas's banishment of her is a punishment for her independent behaviour, as he tells her that 'you have disappointed every expectation I had formed, and proved yourself of a character the very reverse of what I had supposed' (p. 293). It is also intended as a corrective for her faulty reasoning in not valuing the financial security that Henry's proposal offers. It is notable that Austen demonstrates the novel's male authority figures colluding in this action:

> It had occurred to Sir Thomas, in one of his dignified musings, as a right and desirable measure, but before he absolutely made up his mind, he consulted his son. Edmund considered it every way, and saw nothing but what was right. The thing was good in itself, and could not be done at a better time (p. 341).

[606] Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen*, p. 103.
[607] White, *Jane Austen in the Context of Abolition*, p. 36.

Her male relatives, whilst presenting her banishment as a kindness that allows her to visit her family, really intend the visit to alter her decision. It is seen as 'a medicinal project upon [her] understanding, which [Sir Thomas] must consider as at present diseased' (p. 342), so demonstrating the patriarchal structures of power she is subject to. By mockingly referring to it as the result of Sir Thomas's 'dignified musings', Austen demonstrates her own disapproval of the strategy and the manipulation it represents. Sir Thomas believes that:

> Her Father's house would, in all probability, teach her the value of a good income; and he trusted that she would be the wiser and happier woman, all her life, for the experiment he had devised (p. 342).

This unkind scheme damages Fanny's physical health, as her previous home is 'the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety' (p. 360), and her situation is exacerbated when at the end of her visit the Bertram family fail to retrieve her within the expected time frame, as other events, which they deem to be more important, claim their attention. This is characteristic of their behaviour towards her, of which it is noted that 'nobody meant to be unkind, but nobody put themselves out of their way to secure her comfort' (p. 15). It emphasises Fanny's dependant position and her vulnerability to patriarchal authority as a pawn within the marriage market. Her return to Portsmouth dramatically highlights that she no longer belongs with her own family, leaving her caught between these two worlds and demonstrating her social vulnerability. It also demonstrates the erroneous judgement of such structures of power and her own good sense and moral courage to resist them, by refusing to be prostituted for their gain even though she recognises her vulnerable position within society.

'This is what the world does'[608]

Within her novel, Austen contrasts her principled, reserved heroine to the attractive, but ultimately immoral, Mary Crawford. In opposition to her unobtrusive, mousy heroine, Mary is a vivacious and physically alluring woman. Their respective attitudes to horse riding provide a vivid demonstration of their divergent personalities.[609] Indeed, Kathleen Anderson notes that 'the differences in the two women's motivations for and styles of riding manifest their differences of character.

[608] Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 422.
[609] Kathleen Anderson, 'Lounging Ladies and Galloping Girls: Physical Strength and Femininity in *Mansfield Park*', *Women's Studies*, 38:3 (2009), 342-358, 347.

Fanny needs to ride for her health, whereas Mary rides for fun'.[610] Mary, proving to be undaunted by learning to ride, is 'active and fearless, and, though rather small, strongly made, [and] she seemed formed for a horse woman' (p. 63), while Fanny had 'trembled at [her] uncle's opening his lips if horses were talked of' (p. 27) and remembers 'how much I used to dread riding, what terrors it gave me to hear it talked of as likely to do me good' (p. 27). Through this contrast, and by having her timid heroine initially overshadowed by her socially adept and 'decidedly handsome' (p. 14) cousins, Austen invokes the opinions of Wollstonecraft. Famously condemning conduct book ideals, Wollstonecraft asks:

> In the name of truth and common sense, why should not one woman acknowledge that she can take more exercise than another? or, in other words, that she has a sound constitution; and why to damp innocent vivacity, is she darkly to be told, that men will draw conclusions which she little thinks of? Let the libertine draw what inference he pleases.[611]

Her belief is that women should be robust for their own sakes and that female exercise and energy should not be seen as suggestive of sexual availability. In contrast, many conduct books, such as Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* and Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughter*, encouraged women to appear passive and fragile in order to be considered suitable and desirable wives. Peakman notes that it was typical in these works for 'the weak delicate woman, especially when combined with her intermittent fainting', to be considered the ideal feminine model.[612] Yet one of Fanny's least attractive qualities is her delicate health, particularly when contrasted with the energetic, fearless Mary. Austen appears to agree with Wollstonecraft in satirising conduct-book opinions that female fragility is desirable, because such qualities in Fanny's character are not portrayed as attractive or demonstrating virtue. In fact, this results in her being overlooked and ignored so that her moral principles have no impact on her wider social circle. As a consequence, she is unable to exert any restraint on the behaviour of her associates, as 'her habits of submission, respect and obedience, as well as her almost invisible position in the family, make this impossible'.[613] She fails to prevent Maria's impropriety with Henry Crawford at Sotherton, or to restrain the theatrical activities despite her awareness

[610] Anderson, 'Lounging Ladies and Galloping Girls', 346.
[611] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 112.
[612] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 28.
[613] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 96.

that they are ill-advised.[614] Her lack of influence is emphasised by comparison with the magnetic power the lively but unprincipled Crawford siblings have over others. This contrast is clearly illustrated when Edmund, despite his stated intention to stay with Fanny, is drawn away from a conversation with her by the vivacity of Mary's musical performance:

> she had the mortification of seeing him advance too, moving forward by gentle degrees towards the instrument, and when it ceased, he was close by the singers, among the most urgent in requesting to hear the glee again (p. 106).

Austen demonstrates Edmund's unconscious attraction to the vibrancy of the 'glee' and Mary's role in this, while Fanny is left to sigh 'alone at the window' (p. 106). The suggestion that he is drawn away to Mary's performance 'by gentle degrees', implies a lack of conscious decision making and a physical attraction to Mary that is uncontrollable.

While Edmund is irresistibly drawn to Mary, Henry has no interest in Fanny while he sees her as 'merely a quiet, modest, not plain looking girl' (p. 212), who sighs alone at the window. It is notable that in her passive role, 'the libertine' Henry, initially sees Fanny as incapable of warm affections and wonders 'Is she solemn? – Is she queer? – Is she prudish?' (p. 213). He is baffled by her response because he 'never was so long in company with a girl in my life – trying to entertain her – and succeed so ill' (p. 213). Therefore, she initially represents a challenge for him to overcome in order to reaffirm his seductive abilities. However, Henry's real attraction to Fanny is stimulated when he witnesses her expressive response as she listens to her brother's tales of his naval exploits. Fanny is animated, and her complexion is heightened by her resultant blushes, so that for Henry:

> Fanny's attractions increased – increased two-fold – for the sensibility which beautified her complexion and illumined her countenance, was an attraction in itself. He was no longer in doubt of the capabilities of her heart. She had feeling, genuine feeling. It would be something to be loved by such a girl, to excite the first ardours of her young, unsophisticated mind! She interested him more than he had foreseen (p. 218).

Additionally, when Fanny rebukes Henry over his behaviour during the failed theatricals, it is noted that:

[614] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, pp. 96-97.

> She had never spoken so much at once to him in her life before, and never so angrily to any one; and when her speech was over, she trembled and blushed at her own daring (p. 209).

Her blushes, or 'illumined countenance', are shown to be the focus of Henry's erotic interest, as he states that 'I only want her to look kindly on me, to give me smiles as well as blushes' (p. 214), and again in his opinion that 'in that soft skin of hers, so frequently tinged with a blush as it was yesterday, there is decided beauty' (pp. 212-213). Austen uses this repetition of her blushing countenance to emphasise the physical nature of Henry's attraction to Fanny. His reading of her heightened colour follows the tradition within which 'the blush is assumed to be a guarantee of authentic emotion, a safeguard against feminine deceit'.[615] For instance, Wollstonecraft contrasts 'the harlot's *rouge* [which] will supply the place of that celestial suffusion which only virtuous affections can give to the face'.[616] As Katie Halsey notes, 'the innocent blush, demonstrating the transparency, honesty and modesty of a heroine, had long been established as a convenient literary convention'.[617] Halsey states that:

> Blushes, both real and figurative, are ever present in the literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and despite the evidence of contemporary physiologists (who saw anger and shame as the chief causes of blushing), novelists and poets continued to insist on the innate 'modesty' of the feminine blush.[618]

Indeed, Austen mocks this literary convention, using it to ridicule male interpretation of female blushes as a key to their sexual response. Henry's conventional interpretation of Fanny's blushes, as indicating her innate innocence, is in line with popular literary convention. He subscribes to the convention that 'the ingenuous heroine's blushes mirror both her modesty and the superiority of her mind. […] Many eighteenth-century writers insist on the perfect innocence of a blush'.[619] However, Henry's sister, Mary, reveals her own cynicism by interpreting Fanny's blushes as indicating her enjoyment of his attentions. In accordance with an alternative interpretation, she believes that Fanny's blushes reveal her emerging sexuality and her development of erotic feelings towards him. Mary's response recognises that

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[615] Katie Halsey, 'The Blush of Modesty or the Blush of Shame? Reading Jane Austen's Blushes', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 42:3 (2006), 226-238, 229.
[616] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp. 283-284.
[617] Halsey, 'Reading Jane Austen's Blushes', 230.
[618] Halsey, 'Reading Jane Austen's Blushes', 227-228.
[619] Halsey, 'Reading Jane Austen's Blushes', 228.

‘despite the volumes of insistent rhetoric arguing for the innate innocence of a woman’s blush, in fact a blush can represent knowledge as well as innocence’.[620] As Mary Ann O’Farrell notes ‘innocence, after all, is compromised by the knowledge that raises the blush’.[621] Mary believes Fanny’s blushes expose her sexualized understanding of Henry’s flirtation and is a physical response suggesting arousal. Halsey argues that in her novel Austen ‘draws on both traditions […] that of the transparently honest blush and that of the slyly knowing one’.[622]

However, Austen discards these literary conventions by allowing the reader access to Fanny’s true feelings. As Halsey notes, ‘the blush can provide the reader with privileged knowledge that characters within the novel may not have’.[623] Austen’s readers are in this ‘privileged’ position, ‘close enough to what Fanny has been feeling or thinking to interpret her colour better than the characters around her’.[624] Austen reveals to the reader that Fanny’s blushes in this context are a physiological response caused by anger and irritation at Henry’s pursuit. She is embarrassed by his behaviour because she dislikes being singled out for attention and views him as an unprincipled rake, not because of her knowledge of his sexual intent or budding sexual attraction. Austen emphasises this by showing that Fanny is capable of hiding her romantic feelings for Edmund without being betrayed except when placed under duress by Sir Thomas. When directly questioned by her uncle, Fanny’s heightened emotions almost betray her love for her cousin. However, Austen uses this scene to reiterate male misinterpretation of female responses as Sir Thomas dismisses his fleeting suspicion. As Halsey notes, ‘while Fanny’s blush truly tells the language of her heart, her uncle does not speak its language, and so cannot interpret it correctly’.[625] While ‘the natural blush informs a spectator, then, that the young woman is capable of authentic emotion, […] it does not always reveal what that emotion might be’.[626] Fanny may refuse to act in a theatrical sense, as I will discuss later in this chapter, but in her social life she is

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[620] Halsey, ‘Reading Jane Austen's Blushes’, 230.
[621] Mary Ann O’Farrell, *Telling Complexions: the Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 18.
[622] Halsey, ‘Reading Jane Austen's Blushes’, 232.
[623] Halsey, ‘Reading Jane Austen's Blushes’, 228.
[624] Halsey, ‘Reading Jane Austen's Blushes’, 230.
[625] Halsey, ‘Reading Jane Austen's Blushes’, 230.
[626] Halsey, ‘Reading Jane Austen's Blushes’, 229.

an accomplished dissembler. Indeed, Fanny's ability to dissimulate is so accomplished that Heydt-Stevenson suggests she eventually triumphs within the novel, securing marriage to her cousin 'because she has dissembled – she has performed the role patriarchal rules dictate women should play'.[627] Noting the conflation of actress and prostitute in relation to Fanny's ability to 'act' in a social sense, Heydt-Stevenson suggests that 'Austen's final joke is that one of the fallen women is in the parsonage'.[628]

However, despite this misinterpretation of Fanny's blushes as representing an awakening sexuality, it is also true, as Chandler notes, that 'nobody really notices Fanny until she reaches puberty', and that her importance depends on whether she is 'ripe for the marriage market or not yet sufficiently matured to warrant interest'.[629] On his return to England, her uncle acknowledges 'with decided pleasure how much she was grown!' (p. 165) and embarrasses her by further assessing her health and improved physical condition, noting 'her appearance spoke sufficiently on that point' (p. 166). The Ball that Sir Thomas throws for his niece reflects his acknowledgement of her sexual maturity and represents launching her into society as a marital prospect, while also confirming his patronage of the young woman. Henry's surprise and delight at her emotional responses, revealed by her blushes, combined with her growing physical maturity, constitute the motivating factors in his intention of 'making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart' (p. 212). This image, as Heydt-Stevenson notes, is 'a phrase that itself suggests defloration'.[630] It implies his erotic interest, but reveals that initially his pursuit is a game for his own amusement, which his sister Mary says arises from his 'idleness and folly' (p. 213) and has no serious intent. This scheme further reinforces his 'libertine' character by demonstrating his sexual motivation and lack of thought for the potential consequences of his actions, which have serious implications for Fanny's position in the family.

Indeed, for many critics, 'Henry and Mary Crawford are outsiders, modern, urban representatives of that age, who threaten to contaminate the sanctuary of Mansfield Park'.[631] As this quote from Glenda A. Hudson suggests, Mary, and her

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[627] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 158.
[628] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 158.
[629] Chandler, 'A Pair of Fine Eyes', 93.
[630] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 145.
[631] Hudson, *Sibling Love and Incest*, p. 42.

brother Henry, are often regarded as representatives of fashionable London society who introduce the corrupt sophistication and libertinism of the *bon ton* into the idealised country estate of the landed gentry. Thus, Austen invokes the contrast between the dissipation of the city and the rural gentility of the country, which was a common factor in Georgian thinking. In one of her letters Austen humorously reflects this, by suggesting on arriving in the capital that 'I begin already to find my Morals corrupted', and in referring to London as 'this Scene of Dissipation & vice'.[632] This debate is neatly summarized in Austen's novel through a conversation between Edmund and Mary:

> '*You* are speaking of London. *I* am speaking of the nation at large.'
>
> 'The metropolis, I imagine, is a pretty fair sample of the rest.'
>
> 'Not, I should hope, of the proportion of virtue to vice throughout the kingdom. We do not look in great cities for our best morality.' (p. 87).

According to Lawrence James, at this time 'the great house and its surroundings were statements of political and economic power. They represented stability, the security of property, dynastic continuity and dominance of the landed interest'.[633] This perception of rural 'stability' contrasts strongly with the image of London's 'Dissipation & vice', an opposition that is dramatized by Austen when Mary laments her inability to find transport for her harp in the countryside: 'I was astonished to find what a piece of work was made of it! To want a horse and cart in the country seemed impossible' (p. 55). Mary's inability to acknowledge the greater importance of farming activities and food production perfectly demonstrates the idle foppery associated with city dwellers, as she notes that 'coming down with the true London maxim, that every thing is to be got with money, I was a little embarrassed at first by the sturdy independence of your country customs' (p. 56). Through this scene Austen engages with contemporary debates in which, as Paul Mattick Jr notes:

> the opposition of city to country contrasts both a site of (idle) consumption with one of production, and wealth based on commercial and financial speculation with that derived from the honest cultivation of landed property.[634]

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[632] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 3, 23 August 1796, p. 5.

[633] Lawrence James, *Aristocrats: Power, Grace and Decadence: Britain's Great Ruling Classes from 1066 to the Present* (London: Abacus, 2009), p. 175.

[634] Paul Mattick Jr, 'Art and Money' in *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art*, ed. Paul Mattick Jr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 152-177, p. 161.

Edmund's response to her complaints emphasises the importance of this 'honest cultivation', telling her that:

> The hire of a cart at any time, might not be so easy as you suppose; our farmers are not in the habit of letting them out; but in harvest, it must be quite out of their power to spare a horse (p. 56).

Wiltshire states that this incident represents a 'glance at the extravagance and display practised as a natural right by people of the fashionable world'.[635] The Crawfords' London habits and lack of principles can consequently be seen as a threat to the stability of the social order, embodied in the great house, as it is represented by Mansfield Park.

However, as Waldron has noted, while:

> it is usual to regard the Crawfords as representatives of the outer, more wicked, world which is about to attack the moral stronghold of Mansfield […] it should be remembered that there is in fact nothing much to attack. No one at Mansfield is in possession of an unassailable set of principles.[636]

Although Austen clearly engages with contemporary debates that compare London vice to rural gentility, she exploits her readers' expectations by revealing that the great house itself can also be a source of immorality and social instability if it is not managed responsibly. It is clear that Mansfield Park, which is founded and maintained through money obtained from slavery, is far from the ideal standard and already has moral corruption at its core. The Bertram daughters are described as 'entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility' (p. 20), while the financial extravagance and gambling of the heir to the estate, Tom Bertram, has already disadvantaged the family. It is noted that his indulgence had 'been so great as to render a different disposal of the next presentation [of the Mansfield Parsonage] necessary, and the younger brother must help to pay for the pleasures of the elder' (p. 23). As Fullerton states, gambling was 'considered a threat to the stability of the nation', because of the potential for property to fall into the hands of low-born adventurers.[637] The possible financial losses could be substantial, for example the politician Charles James Fox obliged his

[635] Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen*, p. 39.
[636] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, pp. 91-92.
[637] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 147.

father to repay vast gaming debts of £140,000 before he was 25.[638] Low notes that 'the Regency was a time when Englishmen […] were ready to bet on almost anything, even if they lost their lives as a result'.[639] Tom is also responsible for introducing the disruptive theatrical activities that contribute to the eventual downfall of both his sisters and the failure of his brother's marital expectations, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter.

Nevertheless, although Mansfield Park and its inhabitants are not without fault, the dashing Crawfords are portrayed by Austen as representatives of the dissipated life-style and popular opinions of the fashionable world. Both siblings have good qualities, but their positive actions are undermined by their ulterior motives. For example, when Mary gives Fanny a necklace for the amber cross which was a present from William, this initially appears as a generous act. However, it is revealed to have been a scheme in collusion with her brother, and the chain becomes 'a painfully obvious signifier of entrapment'.[640] The Crawfords are shown to have been corrupted, or in Edmund's words 'Spoilt, spoilt!' (p. 422) by the influence of their London habits and the unhappy marriage of their uncle and aunt, so representing the negative influence of this lax morality. As Waldron notes:

> the Crawfords are accustomed to a much more sophisticated and complex metropolitan version of the sexual game than the young Bertrams […] Austen proceeds from this point to demonstrate how *all* the inhabitants of Mansfield, in different ways, fall victim to the unfamiliar game-strategy of the Crawfords.[641]

One of the central ways in which this fashionable sophistication is represented is through Mary's repeated attacks on the church. She suggests that a clergyman 'has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish – read the newspaper, watch the weather, and quarrel with his wife' (p. 103). Her opinion reflects her knowledge of her brother-in-law, Dr Grant, who she believes 'to be an indolent selfish Bon vivant' (p. 104). By demonstrating his negative influence on his niece Austen criticises such hypocrisy within the church while presenting, through Edmund, a more positive model for appropriate behaviour within the clergy. Furthermore, during the trip to Sotherton, before she is aware of Edmund's career path, Mary flippantly asks:

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[638] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 148.
[639] Low, *Thieves' Kitchen*, p. 126.
[640] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 146.
[641] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 92.

> Cannot you imagine with what unwilling feelings the former belles of the house of Rushworth did many a time repair to this chapel? The young Mrs. Eleanors and Mrs. Bridgets – starched up into seeming piety, but with heads full of something very different – especially if the poor chaplain were not worth looking at – and, in those days, I fancy parsons were very inferior even to what they are now (p. 82).

This frivolous comment, while clearly intended by her to be humorous, illustrates her faulty reasoning in placing illicit sexuality over moral guidance. Furthermore, she attempts to dissuade Edmund from his vocation and refuses to dance with him once he is ordained. Similarly, Henry views the church in a superficial manner, as primarily providing an opportunity for performance, suggesting 'I could not preach, but to the educated; to those who were capable of estimating my composition […] after being anxiously expected for half a dozen Sundays' (p. 316), and he ultimately undermines the sacrosanct state of marriage by eloping with a married woman. Furthermore, when Tom, the heir to the Mansfield estate falls ill and his life seems to be in danger, Mary's 'cold-hearted ambition and callousness'[642] are revealed in her 'hopes that Tom will die and even imagines herself bribing a physician to ensure he does so'.[643] Like her brother, Mary also demonstrates a faulty attitude towards marriage that reveals her acquisitive nature, as on arriving at Mansfield Park she speculates that 'she *should* like the eldest best. She knew it was her way' (p. 45), and states that:

> I would have every body marry if they can do it properly; I do not like to have people throw themselves away; but every body should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage (p. 41).

In her opinion this 'advantage' means securing financial affluence. Her assessment of the Rushworths' marriage is also based on the fortune that Maria has attained through her union, as demonstrated in the couple's ability to purchase exclusive London property, when she vulgarly suggests that the new bride should be satisfied as she 'has got her pennyworth for her penny' (p. 366).

As well as attacking the church and revealing her mercenary motives for marriage, Mary is also guilty of making a joke which is widely believed to refer to sodomy. She states that:

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[642] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 20.
[643] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 19.

> my home at my uncle's brought me acquainted with a circle of admirals. Of *Rears*, and *Vices*, I saw enough. Now, do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat' (p. 57).

Sodomy remained a capital crime during the Georgian period, although it appears that within wider society 'the likelihood of being prosecuted […] was limited'.[644] However, Austen's allusion appears to be a topical reference because there was much debate at this time about sodomy in the armed forces, and particularly the Navy, with 'offenders [being] severely punished, often through death by hanging'.[645] Indeed, Austen's brother Frank, 'had sailors on his ship lashed' for sodomy.[646] However, there is still debate about whether Mary's pun actually refers to sodomy. Southam, for example, argued against this connotation, contending that such a subject would not be referred to in polite society at this time, and that 'with the social and literary culture and conventions within which she was writing', such a joke could not have been published.[647] He contends that this 'was the forbidden topic and was not to be found even in the trashiest novels of the period'.[648] It is certainly true that such censorship existed and it can be seen in Austen's own publishing history. The second edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, for instance, omits improper allusions to a natural daughter.[649] However, Worsley argues that 'because her novels are so polished […] they often exist in readers' imaginations in a strait-laced Victorian setting. But in reality, Jane was a writer of the late Georgian period, a much bawdier age',[650] suggesting that 'it's only Jane's reputation for primness that has left some readers incredulous that she would make such a rude joke'.[651] Heydt-Stevenson justifies her own claims about the subject of the joke, by noting that Mary:

> refers to more than her boredom with the 'bickerings and jealousies' of naval politics and ambition; that would not involve a *double entendre*, and her pun, as her false demurral emphasizes, establishes her point. That pun points directly to sodomy in the navy.[652]

In her writing career Austen faced an issue recognised by other contemporary female authors, that in order to reveal her characters' depravities she has to reveal

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[644] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, pp. 60-62.
[645] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 156.
[646] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 90.
[647] Southam, '"Rears" and "Vices"', 24.
[648] Southam, '"Rears" and "Vices"', 25.
[649] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 109.
[650] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 89.
[651] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 90.
[652] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 138.

her own knowledge of such disreputable subjects. As Raff notes, 'it is difficult to show virtue overcoming vice without presenting an imitable portrait of vice and even harder to construct a good story in which model characters make no mistake at all'.[653] This explains Austen's family's insistence on her virtuous character and piety in their biographies, as they aim to defend her against criticism for addressing risqué topics.[654] Nevertheless, as Heydt-Stevenson suggests, 'Mary's admission (through denial) that she has made a sexual pun plainly reveals Austen's own awareness of the Navy's reputation for sodomy'.[655] Of course, it was also possible that Austen could avoid condemnation because those who believed that such a subject was unmentionable, would fail, as Edmund and Fanny do, to recognise the allusion. Southam argued that Edmund's lack of response to Mary's pun is evidence that it does not refer to sodomy, as he 'cannot be supposed to share his cousin's ignorance of the world'.[656] However, I read this as further evidence of Edmund's misunderstanding of Mary's character, as Fanny notes 'he was deceived in her; he gave her merits which she had not; her faults were what they had ever been, but he saw them no longer (p. 244). He dismisses the reference as, like Southam, he could not envisage a polite young lady referring to such a scandalous matter. However, Fanny's adulation of Edmund should not be mistaken for authorial approval. Austen presents Edmund as an unreliable judge, especially in his assessments of Mary, and his opinions clearly do not have narratorial endorsement. This is shown through his specious self-justification when he wants to act opposite Mary in the play, and his ridiculous belief that Fanny would benefit from living with Mrs Norris. Heydt-Stevenson argues that 'when [Edmund] and Fanny canvas Mary's statements, he both exonerates and censures Miss Crawford in such a way as to uncover the probability that the cousins "get the joke"', suggesting that they understand the pun.[657] However, I believe that the humour here is that they actually miss Mary's pun. Having such a gullible character as Edmund within her novel allows Austen to introduce such double entendres by presenting his reaction as the respectable response and distancing herself from those who understand Mary's 'false demurral'.

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[653] Raff, *Jane Austen's Erotic Advice*, p. 14.
[654] For instance, Henry Austen claims 'She was thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature', 'Biographical Notice', p. 141.
[655] Heydt-Stevenson, 'Slipping into the Ha-Ha', 315.
[656] Southam, '"Rears" and "Vices"', 29.
[657] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 138.

Austen teases the reader by initially making it appear that they have understood, with Edmund's initial response being ambiguous as he 'again felt grave, and only replied, "It is a noble profession."' (p. 57). However, when it is discussed by the cousins it becomes apparent that they have overlooked the reference. Fanny suggests that Mary:

> ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished. An uncle with whom she has been living so many years, and who, whatever his faults may be, is so very fond of her brother, treating him, they say, quite like a son. I could not have believed it! (p. 60).

Edmund's responds, 'I thought you would be struck. It was very wrong – very indecorous' (p. 60). Their comments show that they are only concerned by her openly disrespectful attitude towards her guardian, and have entirely missed the improper reference to this 'forbidden topic'.

Furthermore, it is not exceptional for Austen to introduce this 'forbidden' subject into her works. Heydt-Stevenson has noted the joke in Austen's *The History of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the death of Charles the 1st* about James I's homosexuality, where the King's 'keener penetration in Discovering Merit'[658] is followed by a charade referring to Sir Robert Carr, his supposed homosexual lover.[659] Byrne suggests that:

> those who believe that Jane Austen could never have made a joke about sodomy in the navy […] may want to reconsider their opinion in the light of her King James joke, made as a teenager. And read aloud to family and friends.[660]

While I recognise that there is a difference between writing for private entertainment and for public consumption, this demonstrates Austen's knowledge and shows her confidence in making references to this subject. Additionally, Mary's pun is not unique within Austen's novels, as there are oblique references in her other published works. For instance, in *Sense and Sensibility* Colonel Brandon cryptically notes that his brother's marriage to Eliza fails because his 'pleasures were not what they ought to have been' (p. 194). As Johnson suggests, 'Brandon is too gentlemanly to detail a brother's depravities to a young lady like Elinor, but he intimates them with

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[658] Jane Austen, 'The History of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the death of Charles the 1st' (1793), in Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*, pp. 153-186, p. 181.
[659] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 22-23.
[660] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 63.

tantalizing indirection'.[661] Georgian gentlemen had a wide range of illicit 'pleasures' available to them, but within this plethora the contemporary reader would surely have considered sodomy, especially if we read Colonel Brandon's statement as mitigating Eliza's fall. As previously noted, the Georgian wife was expected to tolerate her husband's behaviour, with only sodomy and physical violence being viewed as grounds for divorce.[662] Furthermore, Heydt-Stevenson suggests that within *Northanger Abbey* John Thorpe's overblown masculinity, which involves boisterous boasting about his 'well hung' gig, is employed by Austen to 'expose […] eighteenth-century clichés as conventions [and] adverts to the […] association between sodomy and bestiality'.[663] There is also an unresolved query regarding Tom Bertram's sexuality, as he shows little interest in female company during the novel and easily resists Mary Crawford's seductive sexuality,[664] instead 'form[ing] a large number of male friendships'.[665] Sales, noting Tom's tendency to gravitate towards male companions, suggests 'questions remain unanswered about his sexuality'.[666] In a letter to Cassandra, Austen states: 'I do not write for such dull Elves as have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves',[667] showing that she expects her readers to consider and interpret her correspondence and literary works beyond their surface information. Considered in this context, it appears that Mary's pun does indeed refer to sodomy in the Navy, and by publicly joking about such a subject Austen reveals her character to have 'a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so; darkened, yet fancying itself light' (p. 340). This debate is an illustration of the influence produced by the persistent image of Austen as a demure writer of polite fiction on our interpretation of her works. As Chandler notes, 'our preconceptions about [Austen's] personality […] have rendered the sexual aspects of her work less visible than they should be'.[668] Similarly, Heydt-Stevenson contends, '"getting" [Austen's] joke reveals an unexpected view of her humor's full range and

[661] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 56.
[662] See Chapter One, p. 13, of this thesis.
[663] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 117-118.
[664] Sales, *Representations of Regency England*, p. 96.
[665] Sales, *Representations of Regency England*, p. 100.
[666] Sales, *Representations of Regency England*, p. 106.
[667] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 79: 29 January 1813, pp. 201-202, p. 202.
[668] Chandler, 'A Pair of Fine Eyes', 88.

also of the way in which ideological blinders interfere with following that "train of thought"'.[669]

Edmund only acknowledges Mary's 'darkened' mind when she fails to condemn her brother's elopement with Maria. Until this incident, he has defended her occasional impropriety as 'the right of a lively mind […] seizing whatever may contribute to its own amusement or that of others; perfectly allowable, when untinctured by ill humour or roughness' (p. 61). As Fullerton notes, Edmund considers his sister's adultery to be 'a disgrace never to be wiped out', while Mary considers it to be merely folly.[670] This difference of opinions results in his exclamation that 'the charm is broken. My eyes are opened' (p. 423). Mary's response to the elopement reflects the fashionable views of the social elite, which condoned adultery as long as it was conducted discreetly and did not damage patriarchal power structures. Edmund relates that 'it was the detection, not the offence which she reprobated. It was the imprudence which had brought things to extremity' (p. 422). He recognises the influence of fashionable society on Mary's attitude, reflecting that 'she was speaking only, as she had been used to hear others speak, as she imagined every body else would speak' (p. 423). This attitude is reflected in the novel *The Sylph*, attributed to one of the notorious leaders of Georgian high society, the Duchess of Devonshire. In this novel the dissipated Lady Besford defends her licentious behaviour by explaining that 'I never indulged myself in the least liberty with other men, till I had secured my lord a lawful heir', claiming her 'conduct in the eye of the world is irreproachable'.[671] However she continues her self-justification by stressing that 'I extremely condemn those, who are enslaved by their passions, and bring a public disgrace on their families by suffering themselves to be detected'.[672] This reflects Mary's opinion that for 'the world', or fashionable society, dissipated behaviour is not considered to be disreputable as long as it is possible to maintain an outward image of respectability and it does not threaten the dynastic line of inheritance. Whilst this was a fashionable view, it did not reflect the moral judgement of the era. Wollstonecraft protests that for the fashionable 'it is reputation, not chastity and all its fair train, that they are employed to keep free from

[669] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 194.
[670] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 73.
[671] Cavendish, *The Sylph*, I, p. 136.
[672] Cavendish, *The Sylph*, I, p. 137.

spot, not as a virtue, but to preserve their station in the world'.[673] In addition, Wolf notes that 'one need only look at a random sampling of adultery trials in the late eighteenth century to see how rhetoric surrounding adultery emphasizes the sin of society in countenancing it as more dangerous than adultery itself'.[674] Fanny's response that it is 'too horrible a confusion of guilt; too gross a complication of evil, for human nature, not in a state of utter barbarism, to be capable of!' (p. 410) matches Edmund's own assessment of his sister's adultery, as a 'dreadful crime' (p. 425). Mary's response in contrast, that 'she saw it only as folly, and that folly stamped only by exposure' (p. 422), removes Edmund's delusions about her character which have been caused by his physical attraction to her. He realises that 'the evil lies yet deeper; in her total ignorance, unsuspiciousness of there being such feelings, in a perversion of mind which made it natural to her to treat the subject as she did' (p. 423). Through this epiphany he recognises her moral deficiency, noting that in his concluding conversation with her she gave 'a smile ill-suited to the conversation that had passed, a saucy playful smile, seeming to invite, in order to subdue, me' (p. 426). Mellor notes that through this image Mary 'is finally depicted as little better than a prostitute, beckoning seductively from a doorway',[675] demonstrating how he now sees her, and emphasising her moral corruption.

Nevertheless, despite Edmund's damning judgement of Mary, there is no suggestion that she is unchaste or has engaged in illicit sexual activity herself, as 'her's are faults of principle […] of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind' (p. 423). Mary is acutely aware of her value on the marriage market, as 'matrimony was her object, provided she could marry well' (p. 40). This precludes activity which would damage her own attempts to secure a husband. Anderson notes that '[Mary] conceals her tendency toward moral deviance, and would never have sacrificed social position for physical pleasure'.[676] As previously discussed, contemporary opinion considered virtue as synonymous with chastity.[677] Indeed, Henry's attraction to Fanny is partly motivated by his recognition that she is:

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[673] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 241.
[674] Wolf, 'Epistolarity, Narrative, and the Fallen Woman', 279.
[675] Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), p. 58.
[676] Anderson, 'Lounging Ladies and Galloping Girls', 348.
[677] See Chapter Three, pp. 92-93, of this thesis.

> exactly the woman to do away every prejudice of such a man as the Admiral, for she is exactly such a woman as he thinks does not exist in the world. She is the very impossibility he would describe' (pp. 269-270).

He recognises Fanny's fundamental good principles, in contrast to his fashionable associates, and the value of such 'steadiness and regularity of conduct, such a high notion of honour, and such an observance of decorum' (p. 271) in a wife. Johnson recognises that 'Henry's dependence on Fanny's steadiness, honor, decorum, faith, and integrity adds up to the singularly important confidence that she will be above the temptation of adultery'.[678] This is revealed in Henry's reflection that he 'could so wholly and absolutely confide in her' (p. 271). As Wiltshire explains, when Henry says he could 'confide in' Fanny, 'the usage of Austen's time suggests that he does not mean he could share private thoughts with her, but that he would have confidence in her, and that means confidence in her faithfulness'.[679] However, through Edmund's judgement on Mary, Austen demonstrates that 'chastity alone is not enough to assure and ensure the interests of patriarchy […] it is Mary's ability to speak about illicit sex that seems so audacious and perverse that Edmund's very power of speech is taken away'.[680] As Wollstonecraft notes 'if she hopeth to find favour in the sight of purity itself, her chastity must be founded on modesty, and not on worldly prudence'.[681] Mary's mercenary attitude towards marriage and her lack of modesty, shown through her jokes about sodomy and exculpation of adultery, reveal that her 'chastity' is founded on 'worldly prudence' not on modesty, and through this loss of virtue she becomes a fallen woman in Edmund's eyes. Wollstonecraft criticises the absurdity that if a woman is chaste she 'may neglect every social duty; nay, ruin her family by gaming and extravagance; yet still present a shameless front – for truly she is an honourable woman!'[682] Through her rejection of Mary's sentiments, Austen reflects Wollstonecraft's contention, refuting the idea that virtue should be measured by chastity alone and critiquing the attitudes of fashionable society by exposing the hypocrisy which condones such immoral reasoning.

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[678] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 109.
[679] Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen*, p. 82.
[680] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 112.
[681] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 238.
[682] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 247.

‘So totally improper for home representation’[683]

In the case of Maria Rushworth (née Bertram) her moral failures are more comprehensive than Mary’s ‘vitiated mind’. When she elopes from her marital home with Henry Crawford she disregards her marriage vows and commits adultery. She thereby becomes part of the *demimonde* and destroys her reputation beyond repair because the breach of propriety is made ‘public beyond a hope’ (p. 419). Maria’s fate as a fallen woman is initially foreshadowed during the image-laden excursion to Sotherton, her fiancé’s family estate. As Heydt-Stevenson has noted, during this visit ‘the characters amble through a landscape replete with sexual symbols: a locked iron gate, missing keys, and threatening spikes’.[684] Lamenting her inability to pass further beyond the grounds, Maria complains of ‘that iron gate, that ha-ha, [which] give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. I cannot get out’ (p. 93). She is encouraged to break through this ‘restraint’ by Henry, who says:

> I think you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance; I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited (p. 93).

This scene clearly alludes to his eventual seduction of Maria, as Henry leads her beyond the bounds of her future husband’s restrictions, represented by the gate to which Rushworth holds the phallic, and suggestively redundant, key.[685] Furthermore, ‘when Julia follows Maria and Henry around the locked gate […] her action foreshadows her own elopement with Mr Yates’.[686] This foreshadowing represents the negative influence of Maria’s actions, which also result in the elopement of her sister, so reflecting the idea that a ‘false step in one daughter, will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others’ (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 312). Illicit misbehaviour by a female family member reflects on the entire family, and particularly on her sisters, as their own morality becomes suspect by association.

Fanny, with typical moral ineffectiveness, tries to forestall her cousin’s escape, warning that ‘you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes – you will tear your gown – you will be in danger of slipping into the Ha-Ha’ (p. 93). As

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[683] Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 128.
[684] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 5.
[685] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 149.
[686] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 75.

previously noted, Austen uses the image of a torn gown in *Pride and Prejudice* to represent Lydia Bennet's fall from grace and loss of virginity,[687] and the same danger here implies a similar threat to Maria's virtue. Fullerton notes that:

> [this] scene is one of the most symbolic Jane Austen ever wrote. The threatened tearing of the gown foreshadows the shredding of Maria's reputation when she commits adultery […] before much longer Maria is a fallen woman and the spikes of public retribution will hurt her far more than any grazes feared by Fanny Price.[688]

By utilizing this imagery, Austen alludes to Maria's ultimate loss of virtue when she escapes from her marriage, suggesting 'those who by-pass the iron gates of respectability must be prepared to pay a heavy price for doing so'.[689] However, as Austen makes clear, Maria's loss of chastity is initiated during this visit to her future home. Fanny notes that Maria and Henry, 'by taking a circuitous, and as it appeared to her, very unreasonable direction to the knoll, […] were soon beyond her eye' (p. 94), suggesting that they are deliberately hiding from her observation. Furthermore, whilst reflecting on the day trip, Mary exclaims:

> Only think what grand things were produced there by our all going with [Henry] one hot day in August to drive about the grounds, and see his genius take fire. There we went, and there we came home again; and what was done there is not to be told! (p. 226).

She is clearly intimating scandalous knowledge that is 'not to be told', about events involving her brother and Maria. The only 'genius' Henry demonstrates within the novel is the art of seduction through his abilities as a social actor, while the imagery of heat or 'fire' is suggestive of sexual passion. Henry's response to her teasing acknowledges this misconduct, as 'with something of consciousness he shook his head at his sister' (p. 226). If Maria's seduction and loss of chastity were not actually accomplished during the excursion to Sotherton, events there certainly created the foundations that would lead inevitably to her downfall.

The events of Sotherton, therefore, establish the behaviour of the individual 'actors' within the novel's drama and are followed by the home theatricals which give them scope to carry on their flirtations. There were fierce debates during the Georgian period regarding the morality of the theatre, between those who 'saw

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[687] See Chapter Three, pp. 90-91, of this thesis.
[688] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 190.
[689] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 81.

drama (and by extension theatricality) as a destroyer of existing social and moral hierarchies and [others] that felt that drama was a reinforcer of social stability'.[690] Notable female playwrights, including Joanna Baillie (1762-1851), Hannah More, Hannah Cowley (1743-1809), and Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821), the author of the play which Austen selected for performance in *Mansfield Park*, 'believed that the theatre had the potential to shape public opinion, to reform the manners of the nation, and to teach virtue'.[691] They used their works to entertain, but also to convey a moral message, believing that 'the theatre was uniquely well situated to promote social reform'.[692] However, they objected to the 'slapstick comedy and vulgar pantomimes' which were felt to dominate modern taste for theatrical performances.[693] For example, Cowley complains that to appeal to the audience, 'not a word must be uttered that looks like instruction, or a sentence which ought to be remembered'.[694] In contrast to the view held by these playwrights that drama could be morally instructive, the contrary, and widely-held view, was that the theatre was a source of corruption, and particularly for young, impressionable women. As Nachumi notes, 'the period's conduct-book writers were deeply suspicious of the theatre's influence on young female minds'.[695]

In particular, for those concerned about the moral influence of the theatre, actresses remained controversial figures. Their public role raised concerns about women's nature and cast doubts on the conduct book assertions that women were naturally modest and domestic.[696] Any woman engaged in a paid activity, including authorship, was at risk of being viewed as disreputable. This was especially true of actresses, because of their association with dissimulation as well as feigning love for different actors.[697] Although 'the figure of the professional actress was at odds with the domestic and private feminine ideal [this] threat to conventional ideas about

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[690] Anna Lott, 'Staging a Lesson: The Theatricals and Proper Conduct in *Mansfield Park*', *Studies in the Novel*, 38:3 (2006), 275-287, 275.
[691] Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 51.
[692] Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 39.
[693] Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 51.
[694] Hannah Cowley, 'Preface', *The Town Before You: A Comedy* (London: T. N. Longman, 1795), pp. ix-xi, p. x, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco (accessed August 2018).
[695] Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady*, p. 149.
[696] As espoused by writers such as the Reverend James Fordyce in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) and Dr John Gregory in *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774).
[697] Nachumi notes the perception that 'the actress's ability […] to feign love for different actors on different nights suggested a corresponding promiscuity in her offstage behavior', *Acting Like a Lady*, p. 12.

female nature was limited [by] focus[ing] on her sexuality', and suggesting such women were sexually promiscuous.[698] Despite this attempt to distance actresses from acceptable female mores, women who performed professionally on the stage 'raised the unsettling possibility that *all* women could act and appear as characters other than themselves'.[699] Furthermore, 'the traditional conflation of actress and whore […] raised the unsettling possibility that ordinary women, like actresses, could disguise their lax morals by feigning virtuous conduct'.[700] Some actresses were able to maintain their reputations, such as Sarah Siddons (1755-1831) and Elizabeth Farren (1759-1829; who eventually married the Earl of Derby and was 'praised by one and all as a true lady'),[701] but there were also cases of notoriety, including Mary Robinson and Dora Jordan, who both had affairs with members of the royal family. It was clearly more difficult for actresses to maintain their respectable reputation, because 'women who were paid to act in public could not entirely escape the association between female performers and women who pursued the world's oldest profession'.[702]

Additionally, there was a significant difference in the attitude towards professional actresses, compared to those members of fashionable high-society who performed in private theatricals. Many professional actresses claimed public sympathy for their need to act in order to support themselves or their family. Therefore, contemporary opinion suggested that 'women who perform on the professional stage are far more modest than women who perform in private theatricals; unlike amateur performers, who seek publicity, the professional actress has no choice but to endure it'.[703] As Vickery notes:

> if the professional actress was an ambiguous figure still vulnerable to the imputation of prostitution, then amateurish flaunting cast a reputation for demure dignity in a dubious light, to put it mildly.[704]

Home theatrical performances became particularly controversial towards the end of the eighteenth century, as they were associated with the excesses of the *bon ton*

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[698] Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady*, p. 15.
[699] Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady*, p. 12.
[700] Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady*, p. 18.
[701] Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 161.
[702] Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady*, p. 26.
[703] Thomas Campbell, *Life of Mrs Siddons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834), cited in Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady*, p. 20.
[704] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 235.

who engaged in large scale productions.[705] In fact, the period's 'fashion for private theatricals […] was widespread, ranging from aristocratic circles to the professional middle classes and minor gentry'.[706] Disapproval of this activity in conservative society is illustrated in More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, when the hero, speculating on the 'Christmas diversions' of the Stanley family suggests that 'I could hardly fear indeed to find at Stanley Grove what the newspapers pertly call Private Theatricals. Still I suspected it might be some gay dissipation, not quite suited to their general character'.[707] Private theatricals are, therefore, singled out by the eponymous hero as worse than other forms of 'gay dissipation'. Furthermore, Burney's *The Wanderer*, published in 1814, the same year as *Mansfield Park*, also gives an insight into contemporary opinion on the perceived differences between private and public performance, as 'Burney's last novel uses theatrical allusions and imagery to illustrate women's subjugation to masculine forms of authority'.[708] The hero, Harleigh, objects to the heroine, Juliet, performing in public at a musical recital, because such performance is a deviation from feminine propriety and may damage her future reputation and potentially harm her marriageable status.[709] Burney also suggests that appearing in private theatricals could have undesirable consequences, as the mistaken belief that Juliet had previously performed as a professional actress leads to her persecution by the licentious rake, Sir Lyell, who views her as a purchasable commodity. Juliet's unprotected social position, because she cannot prove her legitimacy until the end of the novel, means that her reputation is vulnerable, as Burney notes:

> How mighty, thus circumstanced, are the DIFFICULTIES with which a FEMALE has to struggle! Her honour always in danger of being assailed, her delicacy of being offended, her strength of being exhausted, and her virtue of being calumniated![710]

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[705] Byrne notes, 'at the more extreme end of the theatrical craze, members of the gentrified classes and aristocracy built their own scaled-down imitations of the London playhouses', with one erected by a 'spendthrift Earl' costing £60,000, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 3.
[706] Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 3.
[707] Hannah More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife: Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals*, 5th edn, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), II, p. 116, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction Full-Text Database*, https://literature.proquest.com/ (accessed July 2018).
[708] Nachumi, *Act Like a Lady*, p. 137.
[709] As Patricia Meyer Spacks notes, 'Harleigh makes it altogether clear […] that a woman's marital possibilities depend on her perceived propriety. […] To give a public concert implies courage and self-determination, willingness to expose oneself, quite at odds with the standard of delicacy', 'Privacy, Dissimulation, and Propriety: Frances Burney and Jane Austen', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 12:4 (2000), 515-531, 523.
[710] Burney, *The Wanderer*, p. 836.

Juliet's involvement in activities which are morally questionable, such as public musical performance and acting, therefore cause her additional 'DIFFICULTIES' and threaten to undermine her reputation.

In Austen's own novels many significant scenes occur in theatres, including the conversation between Elizabeth Bennet and her Aunt Gardiner in *Pride and Prejudice* when they discuss Jane's dejection at her abandonment by Mr Bingley, Catherine's reconciliation with Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, and Willoughby learning that Marianne is suffering a life-threatening illness in *Sense and Sensibility*. As Byrne notes, Austen 'uses the theatre as a place where key encounters and important conversations take place'.[711] The structure of her novels also reflects their theatrical heritage. For instance, there is a theatrical element to the Sotherton visit, as Fanny sits on a bench while other characters pass by, pausing with her momentarily, before exiting 'the stage' to continue their personal dramas. Indeed, Gay notes that 'generations of readers have observed that many scenes in her novels resemble plays'.[712] This resemblance is especially notable in *Mansfield Park*, where Kirkham notes that the format of the novel corresponds to the three acts of a play and a final chapter which acts as an epilogue.[713] This is particularly obvious at the end of the first volume, when Julia's sensational announcement of Sir Thomas's return resembles theatrical drama and effectively 'brings down the curtain'[714] on the first act of the novel:

> the door of the room was thrown open, and Julia appearing at it, with a face all aghast, exclaimed, 'My father is come! He is in the hall at this moment' (p. 159).

Sir Thomas's dramatic entry parodies theatrical melodrama to make him appear as the gothic villain returning to scupper his family's plans for enjoyment.

Despite the obvious presence of the theatre both as a location and as a literary influence in Austen's works, Fanny's refusal to accept an acting role in the theatrical performance in *Mansfield Park* has often been misinterpreted by those who view the novel as conservative in tone. They claim that this episode within the novel indicates Austen's growing disapproval of the theatre and suggest that she was

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[711] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 142.
[712] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. ix.
[713] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 107.
[714] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 98.

becoming increasing evangelical in her religious opinions.[715] However, it is important when examining Austen's novels to differentiate between characters' views and those of the author or narrator. Austen does not give her heroines or heroes, her complete approval. Indeed, the narratorial voice is often mocking. Fanny's shocked response to *Lovers' Vows* is a demonstration of this authorial distance created by Austen:

> Agatha and Amelia appeared to her in their different ways so totally improper for home representation – the situation of one, and the language of the other, so unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty, that she could hardly suppose her cousins could be aware of what they were engaging in (p. 128).

Austen emphasises Fanny's astonishment for comic effect through the use of free indirect speech. It is clear in fact from Austen's narration that Fanny's cousins are perfectly aware of the nature of the play and both will vie for the role of Agatha, the fallen woman, viewing it as an opportunity for flirtation with Henry, who will play Frederick, her illegitimate son. Performing these two roles requires the actors to participate in frequent displays of physical affection and over-wrought emotional engagement. Fanny's naivety regarding her cousins' motivation is used by Austen as a source of amusement for her readers. As Byrne suggests, 'it is an error to assume that Fanny Price's astringent judgement on the theatricals is Austen's own'.[716]

Recent critical works, particularly those by Gay and Byrne, have sought to correct misinterpretations regarding Austen's attitude towards the theatre, arguing that the influence of the stage on Austen's novels shows her interest in the dramatic form.[717] As previously noted in the introduction to this thesis, Gay contends that:

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[715] Evangelical religion was increasingly popular towards the end of the eighteenth century. Clark describes Evangelicalism as 'the religion of the heart: searching for an authentic, soulful spirituality, yearning after salvation, experiencing intense anxiety about sin, going out to convert new souls', *Scandal*, p. 12. The evidence of Austen's evangelicalism is provided by her comment that 'I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals', Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 109: 18-20 November 1814, pp. 278-282, p. 280. However, this is clearly an exaggeration and there is little evidence to support the claim that Austen had become evangelical in her later years or that she disapproved of the theatre. Indeed, even in her latest completed work, *Persuasion*, the admirable heroine Anne Elliot dismisses her sister's evening party, noting that 'I have no pleasure in the sort of meeting, and should be too happy to change it for a play' (p. 229), Jocelyn Harris, *Satire, Celebrity, and Politics in Jane Austen* (Lewisburgh: Bucknell University Press, 2017), p. 102.

[716] Paula Byrne, '"We Must Descend a Little": Mansfield Park and the Comic Theatre', *Women's Writing*, 5:1 (1998), 91-102, 91.

[717] See Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* and Byrne, *Jane Austen and the* Theatre.

> Jane Austen was fascinated by theatre. As a child she read plays, she watched and took part in the family theatricals at Steventon. As an adult she went to the theatre whenever opportunity arose.[718]

Gay and Byrne maintain that Austen's fascination with the theatre is clear not only from her novels, but also in her *Juvenilia* and personal letters which are scattered with references to plays, actors and theatrical trips. Byrne argues particularly that the assumption that Austen disapproved of the theatre 'is in flagrant defiance of the evidence of the letters'.[719] Indeed, Austen refers to numerous actors and actresses in her letters, including Sarah Siddons, Edmund Kean and Robert Elliston. Her remarks to her sister, who had missed the opportunity to see the infamous actress Dora Jordan, that 'you speak with such noble resignation of Mrs Jordan & the Opera House that it would be an insult to suppose consolation required',[720] do not suggest any moral condemnation of the actress or her domestic situation, showing interest instead in her professional reputation rather than criticising her personal morality. Furthermore, Austen's *Juvenilia* includes three spoof playlets: 'The visit', 'The mystery', and 'the first act of a comedy'. Gay suggests that 'the parodies that these three playlets constitute are knowing, extremely accurate satire. Obviously well before she was an adult Jane Austen knew a great deal about contemporary theatre'.[721]

The recognition of Austen's fascination with the theatre has led to a reinterpretation of the theatrical scenes in *Mansfield Park*. Much of this has focused on the choice of *Lovers' Vows* as the play to be performed in the house, with varying opinions on the significance of the choice of this specific drama being offered. Gay, for example, believes that 'Inchbald's play is ultimately most useful to Austen, not for its questionable subversive politics, but because it provides two strong female parts'.[722] Furthermore, Gay suggests that:

> any play selected by the bored young people would have served for Austen's introduction of the theme of carnival disruptions, the great house turned topsy-

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[718] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. ix.
[719] Byrne, *Jane Austen and the* Theatre, p. 66.
[720] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 30: 8-9 January 1801, pp. 69-72, p. 71.
[721] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 2; Tomalin argues that one of the schools that Austen attended as a child, Mrs La Tournelle's school in Reading, may have increased her interest in the theatre, her teacher being 'an odd creature' who 'enjoyed […] telling stories of actors and actresses', *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 43.
[722] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 107.

> turvy; and for the theme of the unavoidable theatricality of adult social life, which makes up the novel's final two volumes.[723]

Kirkham is also dismissive of the significance of the play, suggesting that Austen uses it to satirise the author of its original version, August von Kotzebue.[724] Furthermore, Kirkham sees Austen as critical of the drama, contrasting it unfavourably to Shakespeare[725] when performed by Henry Crawford with acclaim from Fanny, who recognises that 'in Mr. Crawford's reading, there was a variety of excellence beyond what she had ever met with' (p. 312). Kirkham recognises that 'Kotzebue's play is about the patriarchal family, about bastardy and about class distinctions as they affect sexual relations'.[726] Nevertheless, she contends that the subject is presented unrealistically and that 'his handling of his subject is inconsistent, as well as lacking credibility'.[727]

However, I believe that the choice of *Lovers' Vows* is significant. It is important to acknowledge that the play selected for performance was an adaptation by Inchbald from Kotzebue's original *Das Kind der Liebe* (1791).[728] Inchbald was a successful actress, dramatist and novelist who 'was popular in literary and fashionable society'.[729] Mellor suggests she was 'the most overtly political of the major female playwrights of the Romantic era'.[730] Inchbald's plays offered an 'arena where a liberated female desire briefly experiences itself, only to be oppressively confined by the reinstitution of patriarchal marriage at the plays' endings'.[731] Inchbald herself noted that parts of Kotzebue's play had been 'adapted to the English rather than the German taste', which was held to be particularly disreputable.[732] In the case of Amelia, the character played by Mary Crawford, Inchbald stresses that:

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[723] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 107.
[724] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 111.
[725] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 112.
[726] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 110.
[727] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, pp. 110-111.
[728] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 104.
[729] Elaine Jordan, 'Pulpit, Stage, and Novel: "Mansfield Park" and Mrs. Inchbald's "Lovers' Vows"', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 20: 2, Twentieth Anniversary Issue: II (Winter 1987), 138-148, 141.
[730] Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 61.
[731] Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 66.
[732] Elizabeth Inchbald, *Lovers' Vows. A Play, in Five Acts. Performing at the Theatre Royal, Covent-Garden. From the German of Kotzebue*, 9th edn (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1798), p. iv, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco (accessed July 2018).

> almost all the dialogue of the character I have changed: the forward and unequivocal manner in which she announces her affection to her lover, in the original, would have been revolting to an English audience: […] Amelia's love, by Kotzebue, is indelicately blunt, and yet void of mirth or sadness: I have endeavoured to attach the attention and sympathy of the audience by whimsical insinuations, rather than coarse abruptness.[733]

Inchbald claims, therefore, to have changed the original text of the play to make it acceptable for a British audience. In removing the coarse bluntness of the German original she shows awareness of the different requirements of the British theatrical tradition and distances it from Kotzebue's version. There were different contemporary opinions of the controversial play, and 'for those who believed that [it] ultimately encouraged chastity, honesty, and respect for one's elders, its emotional effect was something to be admired'.[734] Inchbald argued that such plays 'foster virtuous conduct in audience members', because they 'encourage sympathetic identification in order to teach by force of example'.[735] Inchbald acknowledged the concerns of critics over the moral tendency of the drama, but 'saw the play *in performance* as a vehicle for moral instruction'.[736] However, 'for those who believed that the play countenanced filial disobedience and encouraged licentious conduct, it was a serious concern'.[737] Reactions to this play reflect wider debates about the influence of drama during the Regency period, as I have previously noted.

I believe that the selection of *Lovers' Vows* allows Austen to continue foreshadowing later events in the novel, developing the themes regarding loss of chastity and seduction introduced during the visit to Sotherton. Notably the play:

> portrays a pre-marital sexual liaison as a laudable expression of natural love. Its heroes and heroines are not innocent young lovers, but seducers and fallen women. They are assertive and promiscuous and attract little moral opprobrium as a result of their behaviour.[738]

This choice of dramatic text allows Austen to highlight themes regarding fallen women and illicit sexual behaviour within her novel. As Byrne suggests, 'the choice of play signals Austen's engagement with the subject of prohibited relationships and

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[733] Inchbald, *Lovers' Vows*, pp. iii-iv.
[734] Nora Nachumi, 'Seeing Double: Theatrical Spectatorship in *Mansfield Park*', *Philological Quarterly*, 80:3 (2001), 233-252, 237.
[735] Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady*, p. 151.
[736] Nachumi, 'Seeing Double', 238.
[737] Nachumi, 'Seeing Double', 237.
[738] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 71.

with a long-standing debate about women's autonomy in courtship'.[739] Implicating Maria and Mary by giving them significant roles in the play, Austen hints at their subsequent fall from virtue and their exile from the social circle of Mansfield Park, the symbol, in Fanny's eyes at least, of genteel British society.[740] In contrast, Fanny is relegated to the role of spectator during the episode, ironically denying her ability to act.[741] Similarly, as Fullerton notes, 'It is important that Julia did not act in Lovers' Vows – she did not play a role'.[742] This foreshadows the fact that Fanny and Julia will both be exonerated for their own perceived breaches of female propriety, the former when her rejection of Henry's proposal is justified and the latter because her elopement proves to be less imprudent than initially feared. They are not excluded from Mansfield Park at the end of the novel, unlike Maria and Mary who both become outcasts after having embraced their disreputable roles through the rehearsal of their characters' most significant scenes.

Although Austen gives few specific details of the play within her novel, and none of the dialogue is quoted, a contemporary reader would have recognised the content of the scenes being rehearsed. As Carlotta Farese notes, 'the popularity of [*Lovers' Vows*] was immediate [and] spread all over England'.[743] Records of its performance during the period when Austen lived in Bath (1801-1806), for example, reflect this popularity by showing that the play was performed on a number of occasions at the Theatre Royal.[744] Therefore, the contemporary reader would have recognised that the scene which Edmund and Mary rehearse, with Fanny as witness, is predominately in dialogue and is suggestive of the philosophical debate at the heart of their relationship and her ethical fall from grace. Moreover, Nachumi notes that there was a system of gesture which was widely used and understood by audiences, so that 'although her plays rarely describe individual gestures, Inchbald's stage directions insist that actors physically illustrate their characters' emotional

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[739] Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 155.
[740] Raff, *Jane Austen's Erotic Advice*, p. 36.
[741] Despite her avowed inability to act in a theatrical sense, Fanny's ability to hide 'the breach between her feelings and the social self she projects' shows her to be 'the most brilliant actress in the novel', Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 156.
[742] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 75.
[743] Carlotta Farese, '"Comedy in its worst form"? Seduced and Seductive Heroines in "A Simple Story", "Lovers' Vows", and "Mansfield Park"', *Purloined Letters*, 16 (2017), 41-56, 42.
[744] For a list of performances see Arnold Hare (ed.), *Theatre Royal Bath: A Calendar of Performances at the Orchard Street Theatre 1750-1805* (Bath: Kingsmead Press: 1977), pp 187-218.

states'.[745] Therefore, contemporary readers would have understood what dramatizing these scenes involved, and would have been able to visualise the intimacy the play necessitated in a way which is inaccessible to a modern reader. Therefore, when Fanny escapes 'another, and, as she deemed it, most unnecessary rehearsal of the first act, which Henry Crawford was just proposing' (p. 155), the contemporary reader would have recognised the scene taking place and the physical contact this entailed. The scene which Henry and Maria repeatedly rehearse, as Frederick and Agatha, is replete with intimate stage directions, such as 'Agatha [*presses him to her breast*]'[746] and '[*He embraces her*]'.[747] These erotically charged scenes presage Maria's physical intimacy with Henry when she commits adultery. For example, the first meeting of the mother, Agatha, played by Maria, and Frederick, her illegitimate son, played by Henry, is as follows:

> AGATHA
>
> I cannot speak, dear son! *[Rising and embracing him.]*
> My dear Frederick! The joy is too great – I was not prepared –
>
> FREDERICK
>
> Dear mother, compose yourself: *[leans her head against his breast]*
> now, then, be comforted. How she trembles! She is fainting.[748]

Again, later in the same scene, there is further opportunity for physical contact and sexually charged dialogue, when Agatha continues:

> *[Frederick with his eyes cast down, takes her hand, and puts it to his heart.]*
> Oh! oh! my son! I was intoxicated by the fervent caresses of a young, inexperienced, capricious man, and did not recover from the delirium till it was too late.[749]

Austen's emphasis on this scene as the one being rehearsed highlights the physical nature of the performance. It gives Henry and Maria frequent opportunities for physical contact that would have been impossible in any other context of their highly regulated lives (other than during their unchaperoned escapade beyond the gate at Sotherton). As Fullerton notes, Austen's choice of play allows Maria and Henry 'to become other people and in so doing to satisfy certain desires which, in their

[745] Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady*, p. 95.
[746] Inchbald, *Lovers' Vows*, p. 13, Act I, Scene i (line numbers omitted).
[747] Inchbald, *Lovers' Vows*, p. 12, Act I, Scene i (line numbers omitted).
[748] Inchbald, *Lovers' Vows*, p. 5, Act I, Scene i (line numbers omitted).
[749] Inchbald, *Lovers' Vows*, p. 10, Act I, Scene i (line numbers omitted).

ordinary lives, would remain unfulfilled'.[750] Elaine Jordan suggests that Austen's portrayal of *Lovers' Vows* is intended to show that 'such a play performed privately in these circumstances will have an effect on feelings and conduct, and a very bad one too'.[751] However, it is important to note that within *Mansfield Park* those who disapprove of the choice of play are objecting to its use in specific circumstances – that of their father being overseas and Maria being an engaged woman – rather than to the play itself. Nachumi has noted that Edmund's response is not to condemn the play, but 'his specific objection is that a lady of delicacy would naturally revolt from playing either of the female leads'.[752] Austen's description of the day trip to Mr Rushworth's estate has already established the behaviour of the main characters, and demonstrates that the play itself does not alter their actions or motives. The theatricals merely give Maria 'repeated opportunities to indulge in intimate scenes with the man she loves'.[753] Therefore 'instead of profiting by Agatha's example, the pair use the rehearsals to further a flirtation that ends in adultery'.[754] Their flirtation contributes to the final denouement, because 'having sampled unrestrained liaisons, they cannot return to the bland roles of their previous restrained lives'.[755] Austen demonstrates that the play itself is not a corrupting influence on the amateur actors, but that it is exploited by them to indulge their existing faults and it invokes their eventual failings.

'A matrimonial *fracas* in the family of Mr. R.'[756]

The foreshadowing of events through the trip to Sotherton and the abortive theatrical performance, along with the flirtation these activities facilitate, lead to the consequent finale as Maria leaves her marital home to elope with Henry, an adulterous act which scandalises her family and wider society. Austen's presentation of Maria's adultery reflects her interest in the subject, and her knowledge of how such an event would be gleefully exploited by society as a source of titillating entertainment. As previously noted in the introduction to this thesis, Heydt-Stevenson contends that in *Mansfield Park* Austen 'offers a worldly and unfazed account of adultery – one in

[750] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 71.
[751] Jordan, 'Pulpit, Stage, and Novel', 143.
[752] Nachumi, 'Seeing Double', 240.
[753] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 70.
[754] Nachumi, 'Seeing Double', 240.
[755] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 71.
[756] Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 408.

stark contrast to her heroine's scandalised description of the crime'.[757] Similarly, Johnson argues that:

> although Austen writes nothing that can be construed as a palliation of adultery, the narrator shows no ladylike impulse to recoil in shame from the greatest insult that can be made to a man of Rushworth's prestige, and no inclination to moralize.[758]

Of course, adultery was not outside the scope of Austen's immediate experience. Her cousin Eliza was widely believed to have been the product of an adulterous relationship between Austen's aunt, Philadelphia, and a family friend, Warren Hastings.[759] Austen's letters suggest that she was aware of this rumour.[760] She also comments in her correspondence on salacious scandals involving her acquaintances, such as noting that 'L[or]d Lucan has taken a mistress, [an event] of course joyful to the Actors'.[761] According to Fullerton, 'throughout most of her life Jane Austen appears to have enjoyed spotting those guilty of adultery, discussing the "crime" with her sister and depicting its awful results in her fiction'.[762]

One of the ways that Austen reveals her knowledge of the subject is through her inclusion of the text of a newspaper report announcing the elopement. This shows the 'columnist is delighted to have such a juicy titbit of scandal to pass on',[763] despite hypocritically expressing 'infinite concern'. It also displays Austen's awareness of the contemporary practice of using initials rather than full names in such announcements:

> it was with infinite concern the newspaper had to announce to the world, a matrimonial *fracas* in the family of Mr. R. of Wimpole Street; the beautiful Mrs. R. whose name had not long been enrolled in the lists of hymen, and who had promised to become so brilliant a leader in the fashionable world, having quitted her husband's roof in company with the well known and captivating Mr. C. the intimate friend and associate of Mr. R. and it was not known, even to the editor of the newspaper, whither they were gone (pp. 408-409).

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[757] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 137-138.
[758] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 116.
[759] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, pp. 18-19.
[760] In a letter Austen cryptically reports that 'Mr Hastings never *hinted* at Eliza in the smallest degree', Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 87: 15-16 September 1813, pp. 217-222, p. 221.
[761] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 50: 8-9 February 1807, pp. 118-121, p. 118.
[762] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 57.
[763] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 75.

Nevertheless, despite this apparent obfuscation of names, such announcements were often easily interpreted. Fullerton notes that 'although initials were usually used in place of a full name, they were a poor screen to the identity of those involved'.[764] Austen herself notes the ineffectiveness of this convention when she gossips about details of a similar scandal which have been published. In a letter to her sister, Austen notes that 'a hint of it, with Initials, was in yesterday's *Courier*; and Mr Moore guessed it to be Ld Sackville, beleiving there was no other Viscount S. in the peerage, & so it proved'.[765] Russell suggests that 'by deciphering the "hint" […] Austen was signalling that she was "adultery literate", familiar with the reporting of such cases'.[766]

As well as the public reporting of such events in newspapers, as Fullerton notes, Mr Rushworth had the right to take out a 'criminal conversation', or 'crim. con.', suit against Henry,[767] with all the lurid details inevitably being published and widely distributed.[768] Indeed, Hitchcock suggests that 'by mid-century a successful crim.con.suit was usually deemed necessary in order to mount a successful parliamentary divorce'.[769] Therefore, it is likely that Austen intended the reader to anticipate that Rushworth would have followed this route.[770] Crim. Con. suits were based on the fact that:

> Courts treated women as chattels, pieces of property transferred from a father to a husband. If the property were damaged or stolen, then an appropriate fee must be paid by the man who had done the damage.[771]

As previously noted,[772] Lady Worsley was able to save her lover from a significant fine by allowing his defence team to demonstrate that she was essentially worthless because of having had a multitude of lovers.[773] However, women such as Admiral Crawford's long-suffering wife in *Mansfield Park*, did not have the same recourse if

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[764] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 65.
[765] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 53: 20-22 June 1808, pp. 128-132, p. 131.
[766] Russell, 'A Hint of it, With Initials', 472.
[767] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 66.
[768] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 16; Russell notes that 'adultery publicity as a whole was diverse and extensive [penetrating] into forms of "polite" literature such as the newspaper, which genteel women such as Austen could legitimately read', 'A Hint of it, With Initials', 472.
[769] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 16.
[770] Fullerton, 'Jane Austen and Adultery', 152.
[771] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 70.
[772] See Chapter Three, p. 87, of this thesis.
[773] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 157.

their husbands cheated on them. They were expected to ignore it.[774] This double standard applied because only 'women's adultery called into question property, progeny and the order they represented'.[775] The Crim. Con. trial would have been followed by divorce proceedings, which Rushworth is quick to initiate, and which required an Act of Parliament. This highly public shaming would have cast its shadow over the entire Bertram family. It explains Fanny's initial response that it seems:

> scarcely possible for [Maria's family] to support life and reason under such disgrace; and it appeared to her, that as far as this world alone was concerned, the greatest blessing to every one of kindred with Mrs. Rushworth would be instant annihilation (p. 410).

Fanny recognises the embarrassing 'certified guilt and public exposure' (p. 410) that is likely to result from Maria's 'disgrace'.

This episode also reveals Austen's awareness of the fact that servants were often pivotal witnesses in Crim. Con. and divorce proceedings. These proceedings, as Hitchcock notes, 'brought into the public domain all the lurid evidence provided by servants and principals'.[776] As Russell argues, 'the role of servants as monitors of elite behaviour would have been very familiar to readers of adultery trial texts'.[777] Austen reflects this when she notes that Maria and Henry's elopement was precipitated because 'the servant of Mrs. Rushworth, the mother, had exposure in her power, and, supported by her mistress, was not to be silenced' (p. 419). Servants may appear almost invisible within Austen's works, but they have a significant presence in many of her novels. In *Mansfield Park*, for example, she shows that the butler, Baddeley, has a greater understanding of what is happening than some members of the family.[778] When Sir Thomas summons Fanny for a conference with Henry regarding his proposal, Mrs Norris insists that it must be her that he has sent for. However:

> Baddeley was stout. 'No Ma'am, it is Miss Price, I am certain of its being Miss Price.' And there was a half smile with the words which meant, 'I do not think *you* would answer the purpose at all.' (pp. 299-300).

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[774] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 67.
[775] Wolf, 'Epistolarity, Narrative, and the Fallen Woman', 282.
[776] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 16.
[777] Russell, 'A Hint of it, With Initials', 477.
[778] Additionally, in *Sense and Sensibility*, Colonel Brandon notes that his planned elopement with Eliza was prevented by a servant, as 'The treachery, or the folly, of my cousin's maid betrayed us' (p. 194).

The ‘half smile’, of course, indicates that he understands the purport of Sir Thomas’s summons, even though it is not yet known to Fanny’s aunt. As Fullerton notes, ‘servants were the bane of adulterers’.[779] Mary’s response to the elopement, that ‘it was the detection, not the offence which she reprobated’ (p. 422), emphasises her own fashionable sophistication by expressing incredulity that they have been so naïve as to allow a servant to betray them.[780]

As well as this public embarrassment, the detrimental influence of Maria’s behaviour on her family is further shown by the elopement of her sister with the foppish Mr Yates, as it is noted that ‘Maria's guilt had induced Julia's folly’ (p. 433). Fanny’s response to Julia’s elopement makes it clear that this event is viewed entirely differently, as ‘Julia's elopement could affect her comparatively but little; she was amazed and shocked; but it could not occupy her, could not dwell on her mind’ (p. 411). Austen would have been aware of ‘many notorious journeys to Gretna Green, which she would have read of in the newspapers and heard publicly discussed’.[781] These stories are reflected throughout her work. As Fullerton suggests, ‘elopements and what results from them are, in the juvenilia, merely amusing and have no serious consequences at all’,[782] however in her mature works she ‘uses elopements to show unsoundness of character, faulty education and a lack of moral worth’.[783] Nonetheless, despite disregarding patriarchal authority and revealing her deficient moral education, Julia’s situation is not irredeemable. She can be forgiven because her elopement is viewed as merely an indiscretion that her marriage corrects. The main concern expressed is that the timing ‘placed Julia's feelings in a most unfavourable light, and severely aggravated the folly of her choice’ (p. 419). However, it is stressed that ‘Julia was yet more pardonable than Maria’ (p. 419), and once Mr Yates’ financially favourable situation is revealed, the ‘match became a less desperate business than [Sir Thomas] had considered it at first’ (p. 429).

Henry also escapes social condemnation without serious consequences, beyond feeling:

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[779] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 73.
[780] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 73.
[781] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 86.
[782] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 95.
[783] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 97.

> no small portion of vexation and regret – vexation that must rise sometimes to self-reproach, and regret to wretchedness – in having […] so lost the woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved (p. 435).

Since the novel's publication, many readers, including Austen's sister Cassandra,[784] have sympathized with Henry and argued that Fanny, as the model heroine, should have married him and, thereby, reformed and reclaimed his character. Waldron, for example, believes that:

> [Henry's] wish to change when he recognises a different kind of woman in Fanny may be illusory, but it is, within his limits, sincere. However, Fanny refuses to countenance the possibility of *any* reform in Henry; she seems to be rigid in her judgements and to lack compassion.[785]

However, Austen clearly demonstrates that Henry is irredeemable and that his misconduct was inevitable. His comment on first targeting Fanny, that 'if a fortnight can kill her, she must have a constitution which nothing could save' (p. 214), reveals his fundamental selfishness. He never shows any remorse for the distress his pursuit causes her. His sister recognises the instability of his feelings and contends that his love is transient when she notes 'that even when you ceased to love, [Fanny] would yet find in you the liberality and good-breeding of a gentleman' (p. 273). Through the denouement of the relationship Austen confirms that Fanny's rejection of Henry's proposal was well-founded. Despite Mary's hope that marriage to Fanny will secure 'the advantage to you of getting away from the Admiral before your manners are hurt by the contagion of his' (p. 272), the damage to his moral character has already been achieved by his involvement with fashionable society and his exposure to his uncle. This influential relative is shown to be disreputable through having moved his mistress into his home after the death of his wife and consequently having forced his niece, Mary, to find alternative accommodation. Through Henry's fate, Austen reflects on the period's double standard with regard to sexual indiscretions, by noting:

> That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend *his* share of the offence, is, we know, not one of the barriers, which society gives to virtue. In this world, the penalty is less equal than could be wished (p. 435).

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[784] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 229.
[785] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 103.

Peakman argues that, 'As a general rule, sexual activity outside of marriage was much more acceptable for a man than for a woman. But discretion was necessary to avoid loss of social standing'.[786] However, Robinson laments that 'the avowed libertine, the very worst of defrauders, is tolerated and countenanced by our most fastidious British females. This is one of the causes why the manners of the age are so unblushingly licentious'.[787] Indeed, Austen shows that men such as Henry or even the debaucher, Willoughby, in *Sense and Sensibility*, retained their social standing despite their sexual indiscretions.

In contrast, Maria's fate is the harshest that Austen deals out to any of her characters.[788] Unlike Lydia Bennet, in *Pride and Prejudice*, who can be reclaimed through marriage, Maria's position is irredeemable because 'although both women may be dangerous examples, Maria's sin is adultery, a greater sin'.[789] Despite Mary's hope that by persuading the couple to marry 'it may all end well' (p. 424), marriage to Henry would not be sufficient to clear the stain of Maria's infamy. Even Mary accepts that Maria's social rehabilitation would only be partial:

> once married, and properly supported by her own family, people of respectability as they are, she may recover her footing in society to a certain degree. In some circles, we know, she would never be admitted, but with good dinners, and large parties, there will always be those who will be glad of her acquaintance (p. 424).

Maria also believes that marriage to Henry will restore her reputation. As a result, she 'was not to be prevailed on to leave Mr. Crawford. She hoped to marry him, and they continued together till she was obliged to be convinced that such hope was vain' (pp. 430-431).[790] There is some justification for Mary and Maria's claims. The well-known courtesan Elizabeth Armistead was able to hold successful revelries for the social elite following her marriage to Charles James Fox.[791] However, Edmund feels the marriage 'should rather be prevented than sought' (p. 425), as it represents a continuance of an immoral, sinful liaison.

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[786] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 31.
[787] Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England*, p. 74.
[788] The fate of Eliza Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility* is worse as she dies from venereal disease. However, she does not appear directly within the novel. See Chapter Two, pp. 65-66, of this thesis.
[789] Wolf, 'Epistolarity, Narrative, and the Fallen Woman', 281.
[790] In *Pride and Prejudice* Lydia Bennet also employs this strategy to secure her marriage to Wickham, refusing to leave her seducer to return to her family. In Lydia's case she is successful, though only through the financial intervention of Mr Darcy. See Chapter Three, p. 89 and 116, of this thesis.
[791] Hickman, *Courtesans*, pp. 140-141.

The family's consternation in deciding how to deal with Maria once her relationship with Henry breaks down ends in:

> Mrs. Norris's resolving to quit Mansfield, and devote herself to her unfortunate Maria, and in an establishment being formed for them in another country – remote and private, where, shut up together with little society, on one side no affection, on the other, no judgment, it may be reasonably supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment (p. 432).

Their exile to 'another country' is a deservedly 'mutual punishment', because Mrs Norris has been instrumental in Maria's faulty upbringing. Indeed, it is noted that Julia escapes largely through 'having been less the darling of that very aunt, less flattered, and less spoilt' (p. 432). Fullerton recognises that 'Mrs Norris's sympathy is misplaced', but nevertheless suggests that 'Mrs Norris is the only character in the novel to show charity to the disgraced woman', giving up her home and social position to live in isolation with her niece.[792] Similarly Heydt-Stevenson suggests that 'Sir Thomas casts his daughter out as ruthlessly as he had banished his niece',[793] and that the Bertrams 'sterilize their home and neighborhood by displacing the contaminant out of view'.[794] It is true that Maria has to be excluded from the society of Mansfield Park to limit her influence, as she 'is not only infected but also infectious'.[795] However, it is a mistake to believe that they are abandoned by Sir Thomas, as it is noted that 'as a daughter – he hoped a penitent one – she should be protected by him, and secured in every comfort, and supported by every encouragement to do right' (pp. 431-432). Austen makes it clear that their establishment is being provided by her family and that she is not abandoned to the fate that would have met many young women in similar circumstances, such as Grace Dalrymple Elliott, known as 'Dally the Tall', or Lady Worsley, of having to secure her living by becoming the mistress of a succession of men.[796]

Maria's fate highlights the inequalities and hypocrisies that lie at the heart of Georgian society's attitudes towards female sexuality. While Henry, Mary and Julia

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[792] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 74.
[793] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 154.
[794] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 155.
[795] Wolf, 'Epistolarity, Narrative, and the Fallen Woman', 280.
[796] For details of Dally the Tall's failed marriage and subsequent career as a courtesan see Barchas, *Matters of Fact*, pp. 251-253. Having eloped from her husband, Lady Worsley was abandoned by her lover, George Blisset. She was reduced to becoming a kept mistress through 'need[ing] a male protector to pay her expenses and to keep her in lodgings', Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 222.

maintain their positions in society despite their moral failings, Maria has crossed the boundary into the Georgian *demimonde* by living openly as Henry's mistress in an adulterous relationship. This public exposure of her lack of virtue makes her situation irretrievable. In contrast, Fanny has proven her virtue and negotiated the threats she is exposed to through the abuse of patriarchal authority and is rewarded by marriage to Edmund. It is noted that Fanny's new home in the parsonage is, 'as thoroughly perfect in her eyes, as every thing else, within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park' (p. 439). Yet the reader should acknowledge there is an underlying irony within this statement. The reader has been made aware that 'Sir Thomas […] has indirectly shaped Fanny to fit his desire, and [her] point of view has been entirely coopted by that of her guardian and father-in-law'.[797] Genteel Mansfield Park, despite its glittering outward appearance of 'silver forks, napkins, and finger glasses' (p. 414), is funded through slavery, is destined for a dissipated heir, and has nurtured immoral daughters whose behaviour undermines the sanctity of marriage and is far from the idealistic country idyll it appears to Fanny. As Johnson notes, 'like a grateful slave [Fanny] lets particular and small acts of kindness overshadow a larger act of cruelty'.[798] Austen criticises the treatment of women by showing that despite being a vulnerable young woman whose position should have warranted compassion and protection from her relatives, she has been neglected until she becomes valuable as a marital prospect and then abused for acting in accordance with her principles. Despite Fanny's indoctrination into the values of the Great House, she has been cruelly treated as a sexual commodity within the marriage market by being 'encouraged to sell herself for rank and wealth'[799] to further patriarchal dynastic and financial priorities.

[797] Raff, *Jane Austen's Erotic Advice*, p. 36.
[798] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 108.
[799] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 144.

Chapter Five

Emma: 'Most prudent men would be afraid of the inconvenience and disgrace they might be involved in, when the mystery of her parentage came to be revealed'.[800]

In the novel *Emma* (1815),[801] Austen challenges readers' expectations in her representation of children born out of illicit relationships. She examines the impact of illegitimacy on women's social position and marriage prospects through the depiction of Harriet Smith and her travails in the marriage market. Concerns about the fate of illegitimate children were topical during the Georgian period, as they became the focus of moral reformers who used their unhappy fate to illustrate the evils of the sex trade.[802] Illegitimacy featured widely in literature of the era and was used to entertain and titillate readers by accentuating female vulnerability through their exclusion from customary patriarchal structures. This was viewed as an issue that had a particular impact on female offspring because of the gender association with their mother's impropriety. As Rubenhold notes, 'social stigmas were easily transferable to one's offspring, especially female children'.[803] The period's double-standard regarding sexual indiscretions meant that a son's exposure to his mother's world of 'gaming and racing, to women divested of morals and clothing […] would not hinder his progress in the world [however] were a girl exposed to the same, it would be her ruin'.[804] Therefore, this maternal association was less damaging for male reputations and reflected less severely on the moral character of illegitimate male children.[805] In this chapter I argue that Austen uses references to Harriet as a

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[800] Austen, *Emma*, p. 90.

[801] Although dated 1816 in the frontispiece, *Emma* first appeared in December 1815. See Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, p. 525.

[802] This is revealed by the public concerns regarding the Foundling Hospital and anxieties about whether accepting children who were the result of prostitution encouraged their parents' vice, Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 252.

[803] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 273.

[804] Rubenhold, *The Covent Garden Ladies*, p. 273.

[805] However the implications for inheritance were significant, as illegitimate children were typically excluded from inheriting either property or titles. The illegitimate sons of the Duke of Clarence (King William IV) were excluded from the succession. The two eldest raised the suspicions of the Regent when they challenged the authority of their military commanders, giving rise to the fear that they may threaten the succession. As a result, they were banished to India, Tomalin, *Mrs Jordan's Profession*, p. 283. Tomalin suggests that the eldest

‘natural daughter’ to establish her illegitimate status and show how this influences the way she is treated by her acquaintances. By conclusively confirming Harriet’s illegitimacy and class-status through revealing her tradesman father, Austen is able to offer a realistic account of the issues that such women face. She also rejects the myths cultivated by romantic novelists who offered convenient resolutions to this popular storyline, with the difficulties of bastardy resolved by these characters proving their legitimacy, restoring their parents’ reputations, and so becoming in this way socially acceptable. By establishing Harriet’s illegitimacy, Austen is able to depict a plausible fate for such women who are stigmatized by association with their fallen mothers, and to discuss the vulnerable position of female children born from illicit relationships. Through the character of Harriet, readers are asked to examine attitudes towards illegitimacy and the social position of women in her predicament.

In addition, I will argue that Austen uses literary references contained within the novel, as well as the scene in which the novel’s eponymous heroine, Emma Woodhouse, produces a portrait of her friend, to highlight Harriet’s association with the Georgian sex trade through her disreputable maternal relationship. Austen links Harriet to the fate of her fallen mother through allusions to the common practice of using prostitutes as subjects for portraits. In particular Austen makes an association between Harriet and the infamous Lady Emma Hamilton, who was known to have been a courtesan before her marriage, and was celebrated for the public performance of her ‘Attitudes’; poses that she adopted to imitate classical figures. Austen shows that Emma, whilst trying to present an idealised image of Harriet as the perfect wife for Mr Elton (as demonstrated below) unintentionally draws attention to her friend’s dubious origins and reveals her own dangerous naivety about the Georgian *demimonde*.

Furthermore, Austen engages with contemporary anxieties regarding the routes that led young women into prostitution through discussions about the nature of Harriet’s ‘character’, which is linked to her disreputable maternal heritage. Emma naïvely exposes Harriet to influences that were believed to make women susceptible to seduction by raising her friend’s aspirations and encouraging her to cultivate delusions about her supposed social status as a gentleman’s daughter. By

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son, George, seems to have harboured hopes that he might ascend to the throne. He killed himself shortly after the birth of Queen Victoria’s first son, *Mrs Jordan’s Profession*, pp. 314-315.

encouraging Harriet to reject the security of a respectable marriage offered by the farmer, Robert Martin, in order to seek a union which would secure her social standing within Highbury's hierarchy, Emma naïvely exposes her innocent young friend to the risk of sexual exploitation by unscrupulous men. Through this storyline, Austen highlights the dangers for vulnerable, illegitimate young women, especially those who lack male protection, in the patriarchal Regency society that she depicts, showing that the influence of the Georgian *demimonde* reaches even into Highbury, and the heart of rural England.

'The natural daughter of nobody knows whom'[806]

In *Emma*, Austen uses the character of Harriet Smith to examine the impact of illegitimacy on the female children of illicit unions, in terms of their position within society and their long-term prospects. Austen demonstrates that despite her blameless behaviour, Harriet's association with the illicit sexuality of her parents, and her resultant unprotected position within a patriarchal structure of society, make her vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Harriet Smith is first introduced into the novel as:

> the natural daughter of somebody. Somebody had placed her, several years back, at Mrs. Goddard's school, and somebody had lately raised her from the condition of scholar to that of parlour-boarder. This was all that was generally known of her history. She had no visible friends (p. 53).

The repetition of the word 'somebody' within this paragraph, along with Harriet's common surname of 'Smith', the 'commonest of English labouring names',[807] emphasises her anonymity and lack of familial connections. Furthermore, Austen's use of the phrase 'no visible friends' also draws attention to Harriet's unprotected status, by highlighting the absence of a patriarchal authority figure to validate her social position or provide her with protection. The reiteration of the word 'somebody' also suggests that Austen is mocking the conventional storylines concerning illegitimacy contained within romantic literature, to intimate that there is a mystery to be uncovered and that the identity of this figure is significant and will eventually be revealed. Austen goes on to challenge the expectations she has established, so eschewing literary convention. Instead of employing the expected embedded

[806] Austen, *Emma*, p. 87.
[807] Margaret Doody, *Jane Austen's Names: Riddles, Persons, Places* (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 156.

seduction narrative (which the contemporary reader would anticipate) in order to explain Harriet's background, her true history is later revealed in a single sentence that shows her father to be an obscure, unnamed tradesman and provides no elucidation about her mother. The use of free indirect speech in the description above, suggests that Harriet's background is a source of debate amongst her acquaintances and that her appropriate social station is subject to speculation. Nevertheless, this passage is significant in explaining Harriet's dubious origins, because despite Austen's teasing tone that suggests there is more to be revealed, it removes any ambiguity about her status and confirms her illegitimacy by referring to her as a 'natural daughter', a polite euphemism of the period that alluded to her illegitimate position.[808]

The theme of illegitimacy, or 'natural' children, features in numerous works of the period.[809] This subject was popular within romantic novels because it allowed authors to titivate their readers by alluding to illicit behaviour, and placing their heroines in positions of extreme social vulnerability for erotic effect. This storyline typically involves an individual, usually female, who is widely believed, or suspected, to be illegitimate. The satisfactory resolution of these novels is conventionally achieved by their legitimacy being proven, as is the case, for example, in novels which Austen is known to have read, such as Burney's *Evelina*[810] and Smith's *Emmeline*.[811] The means by which the stigma of illegitimacy is removed are often highly improbable, particularly in gothic novels, which involve the recovery of lost documents or the intervention of obscure (sometimes ghostly) witnesses.[812] For example, Evelina's legitimacy is confirmed when her father, on finally seeing her,

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[808] Emma will later speculate that Mr Churchill might have disinherited his heir, Frank, in favour of 'half a dozen natural children' (p. 385). Austen also uses the same phrase in *Sense and Sensibility* when Mrs Jennings erroneously claims that Colonel Brandon's ward, Eliza Williams, is 'his natural daughter' (p. 67) and in her Juvenilia in the tale *Love and Freindship*, the character Laura notes that her mother is 'the natural Daughter of a Scotch Peer by an italian Opera-girl', Jane Austen, 'Love and Freindship: A novel in a series of letters' (1793), ed. Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*, pp. 1-64, pp. 4-5.

[809] Examples include Burney's *Evelina* (1778) and *The Wanderer* (1814); Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812); Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791).

[810] *Evelina* is mentioned in several of Austen's letters including 'What a Contretems! – in the Language of France; What an unluckiness! In that of Mde Duval', referring to the heroine's grandmother, Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 50: 8-9 February 1807, pp. 118-121, p. 120.

[811] Austen refers to the anti-hero Delamere in her 'The History of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the death of Charles the 1st', p. 168.

[812] In Cassandra Cooke's *Battleridge: An Historical Tale, Founded on Facts*, the plot is resolved by the recovery of a lost document 'in the false bottom of a mysterious chest thanks to the directions of a helpful ghost', Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 163.

fortuitously recognises her physical similarity to her dead mother and realises the girl he has been raising as his own is an imposter. In *Emmeline*, the eponymous orphaned heroine comes across her father's elderly servant whilst she is travelling in France, 'who seemed providentially to have been thrown in her way on purpose to elucidate her history'[813] and then discovers she has papers already in her possession, in a box inexplicably never opened before, that prove her legitimacy. The convoluted tale of the recovery of a marriage certificate proving Grace Nugent's legitimacy and clearing the way for her to marry the hero, Lord Colambre, in Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812) is also typical:

> Count O'Halloran told Mr. Reynolds that the packet had been given to him by captain Reynolds on his death bed; related the dying acknowledgment which captain Reynolds had made of his marriage; and gave an account of the delivery of the packet to the ambassador, who had promised to transmit it faithfully. Lord Colambre told the manner in which it had been mislaid, and at last recovered from among the deceased ambassador's papers.[814]

For these female novelists, it proves impossible for their heroines to achieve a respectable marriage and escape the stigma of illegitimacy, until their mother's implied disgrace can be refuted. By creating heroines with doubtful legitimacy these authors are able to investigate, in their ultimate extremity, the gender issues faced by all women in a patriarchal society. However, the need for these authors to avoid being associated with this disreputable topic, or to be seen to reward vice by suggesting a positive outcome for children born from illicit liaisons, means that ultimately, they are unable to realistically address the fate of such women. The romantic resolutions to the plots, employed by these writers to avoid addressing the realities of illegitimacy, allow them to circumvent the issue and thereby retain their own claims to respectability. However, if Austen's reader continues to harbour suspicions that Harriet will be proven, in some improbable fashion, to be a legitimate heiress, they have misunderstood Austen's intention. Despite many mistaken assumptions during the novel about her Highbury neighbours, even the deluded heroine, Emma, never suggests that Harriet will be proved to be of higher status than the illegitimate daughter of a gentleman (with the unspoken implication that her

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[813] Charlotte Turner Smith, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (London: T. Cadell, 1788), IV, p. 24, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction Full-Text Database*, https://literature.proquest.com/ (accessed July 2018).
[814] Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee* (1812), ed. Robert Lee Wolff (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1978), p. 396.

mother was a high-class courtesan or mistress). Harriet's illegitimacy is in fact confirmed when she is:

> proved to be the daughter of a tradesman, rich enough to afford her the comfortable maintenance which had ever been her's, and decent enough to have always wished for concealment (p. 462).

Eschewing the conventional 'fairy-tale' resolution to her story, Austen makes it clear that there is no doubt of Harriet's illegitimacy. Making Harriet a secondary character within the work, rather than the heroine, and giving her an unexceptional fate through marrying a farmer, with only brief allusions to her parents and the history of their illicit liaison (indeed her mother is never mentioned), allows Austen more latitude to address the fate of such women within patriarchal Georgian society. Her realistic approach to Harriet's situation avoids a melodramatic resolution of the subject while allowing her to escape the charge of writing improper material or condoning immorality.

Austen establishes Harriet's illegitimacy in order to realistically examine how this impacts on her position within the society of Highfield and particularly her travails within the marriage market. As Kirkham has noted:

> by making Harriet a genuine 'child of love', and showing the humiliations to which this exposes her at the hands of people like the Rev. Mr Elton and his wife, Austen de-romanticises illegitimacy and makes the attitudes of her characters towards it a sign of their ability, or inability, to judge in accordance with reason and nature.[815]

Like Kirkham, I believe that Austen deliberately presents the issue of illegitimacy in a realistic way that critiques the 'romantic' literary device of allowing a female heroine to be discovered as a lost member of an aristocratic family. In doing so she demonstrates the problems of class and status for those who are labelled illegitimate in Regency society. These have particular impact, as she demonstrates, on females like Harriet Smith, with marital aspirations despite the social stigma of their birth and close association with a damaged maternal reputation. Austen shows that despite Harriet's own blamelessness (even the dismissive Mr Elton concedes she is 'a very good sort of girl' (pp. 150-151)), her marital opportunities remain limited because of the way she is regarded within this patriarchal society. Even Burney's heroine,

[815] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 134.

Evelina, who is described as 'innocent as an angel, and artless as purity itself',[816] is threatened by the circumstances of her birth. Her guardian fears she will:

> receive a stigma, against which honour, truth, and innocence may appeal in vain! a stigma which will eternally blast the fair fame of her virtuous mother, and cast upon her blameless self the odium of a title, which not all her purity can rescue from established shame and dishonour.[817]

This 'stigma' associated with the circumstances of their birth influences their future prospects and makes these women vulnerable to the predatory attentions of disreputable men.

Harriet's vulnerable position is contrasted to the privileged position of the heroine of the novel, Emma Woodhouse, a spoilt, wealthy young woman who appears to be in an advantageous social position compared to other women within the work. Johnson argues that *Emma* is about the exercise of power, and particularly 'a woman who possesses and enjoys power, without bothering to demur about it'.[818] She suggests that Emma assumes power over her own destiny and 'does not need the mediation of marriage because she already possesses an independence and consequence that marriage to a "lord and master" would if anything, probably diminish'.[819] Similarly, Meaghan Malone suggests that Emma 'rules the home and wields as much social influence as any man'.[820] However, in my opinion Emma has little social influence. She is excluded from the local meetings held by decision-making males, and her behaviour, and particularly her belief that she will never marry, are dominated by her father's restrictive influence, which Kirkham describes as 'a peculiarly insidious form of parental tyranny'.[821] This leads Emma to dismiss marriage as an option for herself. As a result, Heydt-Stevenson contends that Emma's matchmaking efforts represent a 'displacement of her sexual desires onto superintending the courtship rituals of others'.[822] She seeks vicarious satisfaction, and involvement with the social life of her community, within the only sphere where she feels she has influence. She can exercise her 'powers' only

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[816] Burney, *Evelina*, p. 20.
[817] Burney, *Evelina*, p. 337.
[818] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 125.
[819] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 124.
[820] Meaghan Malone, 'Jane Austen's Balls: *Emma*'s Dance of Masculinity', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 70:4 (2016), 427-447, 436.
[821] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 126.
[822] Heydt-Stevenson, 'Pleasure is now, and ought to be, your business', section 12.

through attempting to arrange marriages amongst her friends and neighbours. Gay describes her as 'playing the role of a queen who believes she knows best for her subjects, treating them as pawns in the games which save her from terminal boredom'.[823] Austen emphasises this 'boredom' by showing the restricted scope available to her 'handsome, clever, and rich' (p. 37) heroine. For instance, Emma notes the 'great many independent resources' available to her 'busy mind' if she does not marry:

> Woman's usual occupations of eye and hand and mind will be as open to me then, as they are now; or with no important variation. If I draw less, I shall read more; if I give up music, I shall take to carpet-work (p. 110).

Evidently by suggesting that these trivial activities are the best 'resources' Emma has available to her, Austen gives a damning indictment of the lack of opportunities for intelligent, well-bred women to contribute usefully to society outside of marriage and parenthood.

As a result of this paucity of useful employment for exercising her intelligence, it is unsurprising that Emma diverts her mental capacity into arranging romantic unions amongst her associates, as 'an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers' (p. 54). Following the marriage of Miss Taylor, her former governess and companion, Emma befriends Harriet and forms the intention of orchestrating a socially advantageous marriage for her. Through this scheme Harriet becomes a convenient substitute for Emma's recently married ex-governess and gives the heroine a focus to alleviate her loneliness. Emma argues that a 'suitable' marriage will secure Harriet's social position, suggesting:

> It will give you every thing that you want – consideration, independence, a proper home – it will fix you in the centre of all your real friends, close to Hartfield and to me, and confirm our intimacy for ever (p. 99).

However, as this quote demonstrates, Emma's desire to help her friend originates in less admirable motives of 'fixing' Harriet within her own social circle and having a project to achieve. As Johnson has noted, Austen demonstrates Emma's loneliness and isolation in this need for a companion, 'by showing how a matter as simple as getting from one nearby house to another to see a dear friend is for Emma almost

[823] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 131.

prohibitively complicated'.[824] Emma's delusions about Harriet's genteel background are therefore grounded in her own needs, as following the marriage of her governess, despite 'all her advantages, natural and domestic, she was now in great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude' (p. 38). Emma's desire for companionship influences her assessment of the sort of marriage that would be suitable for Harriet, leading her to naïvely manipulate her friend into rejecting the respectable farmer, Robert Martin, because she superficially judges him to be 'so very clownish, so totally without air' (p. 61). In Emma's opinion 'his entire want of gentility' (p. 61) means that he does not have sufficient social standing to keep the two women on an equal level if Harriet were to marry him.

Nevertheless, Waldron has argued that Emma has 'good grounds for thinking it probable that Harriet may be of gentle, though illegitimate, birth'.[825] Mrs Goddard's introduction of Harriet into Hartfield's card-parties suggests she 'is somehow special, fit in some way to be singled out from other pupils'.[826] Therefore, Waldron argues, that Mrs Goddard, the mistress of the boarding school appears to have privileged knowledge of Harriet's background and seems to recommend her as a socially acceptable individual and suitable associate for Emma.[827] Thus Emma has some justification for her suppositions regarding her friend's background, along with evidence that care is being taken to fund her upbringing at a boarding school. As a consequence of this care Harriet avoids the fate of many illegitimate children during this period who were abandoned on the streets of the capital, sent to the notorious Foundling Hospital or simply murdered at birth.[828]

Waldron also suggests that Emma's aspirations for Harriet are not without foundation when examining the social instability that exists in the local population of Highbury, with characters like the Perrys and Coles rising in social position, and others, such as Mrs and Miss Bates sinking.[829] Indeed, Emma's own surname of

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[824] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 139.
[825] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 117.
[826] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 117.
[827] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 117.
[828] For a description of the fate of illegitimate children and the difficulties experienced by the Foundling Hospital, see Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, pp. 246-276.
[829] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, pp. 116-118.

'Woodhouse', suggests a lack of social permanence.[830] Her family is described as 'the younger branch of a very ancient family' (p. 155) who have been settled at Highbury for the rather unspecific term of 'several generations' (p. 155). Margaret Doody notes that by 'casting herself as the parish's Great Lady, [Emma] is playing a role above her station. She is *not* landed gentry'.[831] In contrast the novel's hero, Mr Knightley, is a responsible representative of the landed gentry, whose name clearly indicates his aristocratic, historical heritage as '*both* a portrait of an English gentleman […] *and* a mock-heroic "parfit gentil knight"'.[832] The examples of social fluidity that Emma perceives around her result in the misguided belief that Harriet, whose social status she conceives to be undefined, and therefore flexible, can move into a socially-advantageous position through marriage.[833]

However, Emma's position of social privilege leads her to underestimate the significance of marriage for the other women in her neighbourhood. She views match-making frivolously, as 'the greatest amusement in the world!' (p. 43). Within Emma's social circle, her situation is unique because she is 'wholly protected from the need to make her way in the world and with nothing much to do in life but pamper her silly father and meddle in the lives of those she thinks she is assisting'.[834] This presents a contrast to the other female characters in the novel, many of whom, like Harriet, lack patriarchal protection, so emphasising their dependence on marriage to improve their social position and financial security. Vickery has noted that 'probably as many as one in five women in Georgian England never married. Moreover, aristocratic spinsterhood ran between 25 per cent and 30 per cent'.[835] Therefore, this was a serious concern faced by many women, particularly within the upper-gentry who could not even pursue the few trades that were available to respectable lower-class women, such as millinery or shop-

[830] Doody notes that 'Emma's surname may conceal a pun [as] a "wood-house" is a homely shed for fuel', *Jane Austen's Names*, p. 156.
[831] Doody, *Jane Austen's Names*, p. 156.
[832] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 127; Kirkham argues that 'if he is, as his name and his character suggest, a sort of *Saint* George, he is designed by his author to mock latter-day romantic notions of the chivalric tradition, and latter-day aristocrats with their aversion to work', *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 128.
[833] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 118.
[834] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 136.
[835] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 208.

keeping.[836] As Peakman notes 'women were paid less than men for all forms of work, with the highest professions barred to women altogether'.[837] Throughout the novel, Austen shows the limited options available to women to secure their futures. In this way she critiques the limited social roles for women, where marriage is shown as a career in the absence of other suitable or legitimate occupations, and particularly for those within the gentry. Other less favourable options for women are depicted, such as Mrs Goddard's employment as a school teacher, or working as a governess or companion in the case of both Mrs Weston (the former Miss Taylor) and Jane Fairfax. Jane, indeed, views her future occupation with disquiet and likens the role of governess to slavery, reflecting that 'as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies' (p. 300). The unpleasant consequences of remaining unmarried are demonstrated through the likeable but fussy spinster, Miss Bates, who stands:

> in the very worst predicament in the world for having much of the public favour [with] no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself, or frighten those who might hate her, into outward respect (p. 52).

Miss Bates suffers social embarrassment and marginalisation because 'she is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more' (p. 368). Furthermore, through allusions that link Harriet to her fallen mother, Austen is able to raise the additional option for women to pursue illicit sexual relationships, because:

> in the wider context of poverty, injustice, repression and a crushing lack of opportunity […] women entered the sex trade simply because it offered a possible route to wealth and independence.[838]

This is an issue invoked throughout Austen's works, including her *Juvenilia*, showing her recognition that 'in a capitalist-driven system of marriage, high-class prostitution becomes an alternative to spinsterhood'.[839] Unlike the women of Highbury, courtesans were 'unencumbered by most of the prevailing notions of female propriety, they had the liberty to be themselves in ways that were absolutely denied

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[836] Henderson notes 'general agreement […] that certain trades were responsible for the introduction of a disproportionately large number of women to a career on the streets. The clothing industries were held to be particularly culpable', *Disorderly Women*, p. 14. As Tomalin notes, 'To be described as a little milliner carried a suggestion of something altogether more dubious', *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 15.
[837] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 37.
[838] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 458.
[839] Heydt-Stevenson, 'Pleasure is now, and ought to be, your business', section 6.

to other women'.[840] Emma's own secure status leads her to misjudge the vulnerability of other women to this 'poverty', 'injustice' and 'repression' within society. In particular, it results in her failure to appreciate that Harriet's questionable origins are an obstacle to her marital ambitions and make her less desirable as a marriage partner.

Emma's naivety about Harriet's prospects is not shared by many of the Highbury community, as revealed by Mr Elton when he realises that Emma expects him to propose to her friend. He exclaims:

> *I* think seriously of Miss Smith! – Miss Smith is a very good sort of girl; and I should be happy to see her respectably settled. I wish her extremely well: and, no doubt, there are men who might not object to – Every body has their level: but as for myself, I am not, I think, quite so much at a loss. I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance, as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith! – (pp. 150-151).

The heavily punctuated, fragmented speech shows Mr Elton's hesitancy as he tries to avoid direct mention of Harriet's illegitimacy, realising that it is an inappropriate topic for discussion in polite female company. His indignation at the suggestion that he should lower himself by courting Harriet is emphasised through exclamation marks, dashes and incomplete sentences. His slightly inebriated state (indicated by Emma's belief 'that half this folly must be drunkenness' (p. 149)), and his irritation at her rejection of the proposal he makes to her, leads him to hint at an issue that he should not be alluding to.

However, it is not only the novel's unpleasant characters, such as the self-absorbed Mr Elton, who believe that Harriet's martial ambitions should be modest due to her dubious parentage. Throughout her novel, Austen demonstrates that Harriet is associated with her mother's misconduct as a 'fallen woman', as she is assessed by others in the novel in relation to her supposed history and parentage. Mr Knightley also recognises the stigma attached to Harriet's illegitimacy, noting 'she is the natural daughter of nobody knows whom, with probably no settled provision at all, and certainly no respectable relations' (p. 87). He warns Emma that:

> Men of family would not be very fond of connecting themselves with a girl of such obscurity – and most prudent men would be afraid of the inconvenience and disgrace they might be involved in, when the mystery of her parentage came to be revealed (p. 90).

[840] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 155.

Mr Knightley's phraseology may be more polished than Mr Elton's, but the substance of his comments remains the same. His fears about 'inconvenience and disgrace' through an association with Harriet demonstrate how her social position is damaged by her link to her parents' immoral behaviour, and especially to her fallen mother. Indeed, Emma's final assessment, once Harriet's parentage has been confirmed, agrees with their perceptions:

> what a connexion had she been preparing for Mr. Knightley – or for the Churchills – or even for Mr. Elton! – The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed (pp. 462-3).

Kirkham suggests that 'towards the end of the novel, Emma […] sees that she has not taken a realistic view of the disadvantages of illegitimacy […] she sees the hypocrisy inherent in a romantic association of bastardy with "noble" blood'.[841] However, I would argue that Emma herself still believes that illegitimacy would have been excused by society had Harriet been proven to have noble blood. It is the authorial voice (in its use of free indirect discourse) which is commenting here ironically on society's hypocrisy in judging that illegitimacy could only be tolerable if it is mitigated (or bleached) by 'nobility' and 'wealth', rather than individual worth. In this way Austen's novel 'betrays a value system based on class affiliation, rather than on any recognisable moral code, religious or otherwise'.[842] Illegitimacy was a topical issue during the Regency Period, as the children of King George III were notorious for their libertinism. Indeed, as Fullerton notes 'no citizen of the Regency age could have remained unaware of the adulterous relationships of the royals, the peers and peeresses of the realm'.[843] The sons of George III had failed to produce a single legitimate male heir when Austen was writing her novel, despite having had numerous illegitimate children.[844] Nevertheless many of these illegitimate children, due to having royal blood, were able to secure positions of social pre-eminence.[845] Austen's comment is therefore telling - and mischievous - in a work which implicitly

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[841] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 135.
[842] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 170.
[843] Fullerton, 'Jane Austen and Adultery', 143.
[844] Tomalin, *Mrs Jordan's Profession*, p. 171. Unbeknown to Austen, the only legitimate heir, Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales, would die in childbirth in November 1817. Her uncles rushed into marriages as the succession became unclear, and the future Queen Victoria was not born until 1819, Tomalin, *Mrs Jordan's Profession*, p. 309.
[845] The illegitimate daughters of the Duke of Clarence (King William IV) and his mistress Dora Jordan 'lived interesting and easy lives, and married men of rank and fortune', but only by being separated from their disreputable mother, Tomalin, *Mrs Jordan's Profession*, p. 263. Nor was this a new phenomenon within the Royal family, as Nell Gwyn's two illegitimate sons by Charles II were ennobled, Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 41.

criticises the disreputable behaviour of the social elite. She retains the comment within her novel, despite (and perhaps because of) being forced reluctantly to dedicate her work to the Prince of Wales,[846] the most notorious libertine of them all.[847]

'It always ended in "Kitty, a fair but frozen maid"'[848]

Having established Harriet's illegitimacy, one of the ways in which Austen evokes the Georgian *demimonde* in connection to her is through literary allusions contained within the novel. References to the riddle, 'Kitty, a fair but frozen maid', had been largely overlooked until examined by Heydt-Stevenson, although Chandler had noted the riddle 'is a naughty one' that refers to venereal disease, suggesting 'precisely what kind of game Jane Austen is playing […] is hard to tell'.[849] However, Heydt-Stevenson suggests that Austen deliberately:

> interweaves into her novel the same topics that the riddle introduces, such as prostitution, venereal disease, and the double standard; and she incorporates similar images, including marked emphasis on heat and cold and on figures of cupids and chimneys. This vicious riddle exists both inside and outside *Emma.*[850]

It is, therefore, particularly relevant that the collecting of riddles is connected to the supposed courtship of Harriet by Mr Elton, as it highlights her possible connection to the dissipated *demimonde* (through the less than respectable character of her mother) whilst also emphasising Emma's naivety. Heydt-Stevenson notes that the riddle 'highlights the novel's subversive content and also collapses the gulf between the sexual underworld of Austen's time and Highbury's respectable world'.[851] This riddle by David Garrick, from 1771, was originally published in T*he New Foundling Hospital for Wit*, a publication which also contained contributions from the notorious

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[846] See correspondence from November 1815 in which Austen asks for clarification on whether it is 'incumbent' on her to dedicate the work to the Prince, Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 125 (D): 15 November 1815, p. 296, and also the response from James Stanier Clarke, Letter 125 (A): 16 November 1815, pp. 296-297, p. 296.

[847] Austen's letters reveal her sympathy for the Prince's wife, Princess Caroline of Brunswick, referring to her as a 'poor woman' and noting that she is 'resolved at least always to think that she would have been respectable, if the Prince had behaved only tolerably by her', Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 82: 16 February 1813, pp. 207-208, p. 208.

[848] Austen, *Emma*, p. 96.

[849] Chandler, 'A Pair of Fine Eyes', 91-92.

[850] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 162.

[851] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 163.

members of Sir Francis Dashwood's Hell-Fire Club and other 'salacious material'.[852] Whilst clearly aware of its provenance herself, Austen humorously has her naïve heroine, whilst correctly acknowledging Garrick as the author, claim that the riddle has been copied from *Elegant Extracts* (a conventional publication invoked here as a joke because it is unlikely to have contained such improper material).[853] The riddle, ostensibly about a chimney sweep, but which Heydt-Stevenson argues is actually about venereal disease,[854] is quoted three times, so clearly Austen intends to draw it to the reader's attention. The first mention is by Mr Woodhouse, who muses:

> 'So many clever riddles as there used to be when he was young – he wondered he could not remember them! but he hoped he should in time.' And it always ended in 'Kitty, a fair but frozen maid.' (p. 96).

A longer extract is given later in the novel when Mr Woodhouse quotes one of the verses:

> Kitty, a fair but frozen maid,
> Kindled a flame I yet deplore,
> The hood-wink'd boy I called to aid,
> Though of his near approach afraid,
> So fatal to my suit before.
>
> And that is all that I can recollect of it – but it is very clever all the way through. But I think, my dear, you said you had got it (p. 104).

Heydt-Stevenson explains that the riddle's narrator has been infected, with stanzas detailing how this occurred, either 'because his frozen maid sends him and his passion into a prostitute's lair or that the frozen Kitty, fountainhead of the narrator's disease, is now a dead Kitty'.[855] Further imagery details his efforts to seek a cure through sex with a virgin or the application of mercury, which in effect 'transformed the body into a literal chimney'.[856] It is disturbing that Mr Woodhouse links this riddle to both his deceased wife and his eldest daughter, Isabella, by referring to them whilst trying to recall the verses. He recalls that Isabella was almost called Catherine, apparently linking her to the 'frozen', or as Heydt-Stevenson contends,

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[852] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 160.
[853] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 162.
[854] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 161.
[855] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 170.
[856] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 161-162; Peakman notes that 'Mercury was prescribed as one of the main cures for syphilis, either as an ointment rubbed into the skin, through injection or taken orally. The body reacted to the toxic metal by inducing fever and causing sweating which was supposed to dispel the infection', *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 23.

possibly dead maid of the title. However, it is in keeping with his pathological dislike of marriage, as he appears through this reference to subconsciously link sexual activity with illness and even death.

Both Emma and her father are apparently oblivious to the secondary meanings within the riddle.[857] This naivety is also demonstrated by Mr Woodhouse's general conduct, which reflects the themes introduced through the riddle. Heydt-Stevenson has suggested that he appears to be trying to surround himself with virgins, noting that sex with a virgin was believed to cure syphilis.[858] He also insists on a light diet, particularly a 'small basin of thin gruel' (p. 55), and worries about undercooked asparagus.[859] The former was recommended for sufferers of venereal disease while the latter was felt to stimulate conditions for infection.[860] Heydt-Stevenson suggests that through these circumstances, Austen:

> raises the ludicrous and hilarious possibility through a series of covert associations that the asexual Mr Woodhouse might have been a libertine in his youth and now suffers from tertiary syphilis.[861]

However, I believe the significant factor in this representation is that Mr Woodhouse is unaware of the interpretation that could result from his quoting of the riddle and his wider behaviour, and that Austen intends this to be a source of comedy for her more perceptive readers, as well as his neighbours in Highbury, who may be more aware of the significance of these allusions and the implications of his conduct.

As well as collecting dubious riddles it is also revealed that Harriet reads romantic novels, an activity that was widely believed to increase a woman's susceptibility, as they 'were thought to fill a woman's head with erotic thoughts and prime her for easier seduction'.[862] Although links between *Emma* and Thomas Dibdin's *The Birth-Day* (1800), which was a translation of Kotzebue's original *Die Versöhnung* (1798), and Barrett's novel *The Heroine, Or Adventures of Cherubina* have been described by Kirkham and Gay, less attention has been given to the

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[857] This is another example of Austen subtly introducing salacious material into her work whilst being able to maintain her own respectability.
[858] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 163.
[859] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 163-164.
[860] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 163-164.
[861] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 163.
[862] Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 29.

works Austen herself draws attention to in this context.[863] The three novels which Austen deliberately associates with Harriet all have relevance to her own narrative. These novels are introduced when Harriet notes that Robert Martin 'has read the Vicar of Wakefield. He never read the Romance of the Forest, nor the Children of the Abbey. He had never heard of such books before I mentioned them' (p. 58). The latter two are both romantic, gothic novels and apparently favourites of Harriet, as she recommends them to him although he is too busy with his professional responsibilities for such frivolous material, a point which Emma uses to his disadvantage. Emma exploits this to suggest he lacks genuine interest in Harriet and to emphasise his social vulgarity. However, Austen shows that it is the result of Robert Martin having made constructive use of his time, in contrast to the unemployed gentility such as Emma and the novel's deceptive anti-hero Frank Churchill, whose only pursuit is their own amusement.

Both the novels that Harriet recommends to Robert Martin feature orphaned heroines who are subject to various trials due to their unprotected status, but eventually discover that they have been cheated of their inheritance and rightful affluence by unscrupulous relatives. In Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), the heroine, Adeline, appears to be friendless and without respectable family connections and at one point is believed to be illegitimate. This exposes her to being kidnapped and imprisoned by the Marquis de Montalt, who initially wants to make her his latest mistress. However, it is eventually discovered that she is the wealthy heiress of respectable married parents and that her persecutor is her uncle, who had murdered her father and stolen her fortune. This revelation allows her to save her lover, Theodore, from execution and to achieve a respectable marriage. In Regina Maria Roche's (1762-1845) *The Children of the Abbey: A Tale* (1796), the heroine, Amanda Fitzalan, is persecuted by male authority figures and repeatedly suspected of immorality by the hero, Lord Mortimer. Her father is unable to offer her any effective protection because of his financial insecurity, and eventually dies leaving her orphaned. Amanda is eventually vindicated and having recovered her family's fortune and noble title is married to the penitent Lord Mortimer.

These novels dramatize the dangers involved in being an unprotected (and in Adeline's case possibly illegitimate) female, and the resultant vulnerable state of

[863] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, pp. 121-139; Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, pp. 123-124.

marriageable-age girls like Harriet who within a different genre of literature are subject to the gothic terrors and romantic perils of writers like Radcliffe. Austen critiques the lack of realism in the contrived and unlikely resolutions reached in this form of fiction, with both denouements dependent on the convenient, and improbable, recovery of stolen legacies. For example, in *The Children of the Abbey*, the heroine Amanda is only restored to her rightful fortune when she stumbles upon her repentant grandmother locked away in a ruin. Indeed, Austen mocks these romantic works through the storyline involving Harriet's encounter with the gypsies and her rescue by Frank Churchill.[864] Emma believes that 'such an adventure as this, – a fine young man and a lovely young woman thrown together in such a way, could hardly fail of suggesting certain ideas to the coldest heart and the steadiest brain' (p. 331). Nevertheless, Austen demonstrates that the prosaic events at the Ball exert more influence on the susceptible Harriet. During the Ball, she forms a romantic attachment to Mr Knightley, who asks her to dance when she is slighted by Mr Elton. As Celia A. Easton notes, 'Harriet prizes Mr. Knightley's rescue on the dance floor after Mr. Elton's snub more highly than Frank Churchill's physical assistance'.[865] Romance, Austen suggests, is to be found in real-life activities not highly-charged romantic adventures. Similarly, in Austen's own parody of the gothic genre, *Northanger Abbey*, it is notable that the dangers her heroine encounters are real, social ones. Nevertheless, Harriet, like Catherine Morland, is susceptible to the ideas raised by reading gothic romances, and this interest prompted by her friend encourages her acceptance of Emma's delusions about her noble heritage. With such romantic and unrealistic reading-matter to hand it is easy to see why the gullible and unintelligent Harriet is quickly persuaded by Emma to fantasize about her own history, and potentially place herself in danger by doing so. [866]

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[864] It has been noted that by speaking to the 'Gypsies' Harriet commits a capital offence, see Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 49. But I believe that Austen intends this scene to function as a prosaic version of the encounters with Banditti which were typical of Gothic romances, thereby satirizing these works. The role played by gypsies in Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* in raising unrealistic expectations, suggests that Emma's romantic interpretation of the event will similarly prove to be untrue.

[865] Celia A. Easton, '"The Encouragement I Received": *Emma* and the Language of Sexual Assault', *Persuasions On-line*, 27:1 (2016).

[866] As Richard Cronin and Dorothy Macmillan suggest, 'Both novels tell the story of young women of doubtful birth, Adeline and Amanda, who are, at the last, revealed to be heirs to noble titles and estates, discoveries which permit them to marry the well-bred young men they love. They offer Harriet, the illegitimate 'parlour boarder' at Mrs Goddard's school, precisely the kind of wish-fulfilling fantasy that she might be expected to crave', 'Introduction', in *Emma*, eds Richard Cronin and Dorothy Macmillan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. xxi-lxxiv, p. liii.

In contrast, Austen further emphasises her point through reference to Robert Martin having read Oliver Goldsmith's (1730-1774) *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). Through this allusion Austen reinforces the idea that Robert offers the security and intelligent guidance that Harriet requires, in contrast to Emma's unrealistic ambitions. This novel and its cautionary tale would have been much more beneficial to the impressionable Harriet than the romantic fantasies she has been reading. However, Harriet appears to be dismissive of Goldsmith's warnings about unrealistic expectations for young female readers. Her judgement of this work is influenced by her friend, as she notes to Emma that 'I believe he has read a good deal – but not what you would think any thing of' (p. 58). Although Emma's 'views of improving her little friend's mind, by a great deal of useful reading and conversation, had never yet led to more than a few first chapters' (p. 95), it is implied that she has encouraged Harriet's recreational reading. Harriet's comment indicates her confidence in Emma's shared enjoyment of the romantic works she mentions and a mutual lack of appreciation of Goldsmith's novel. In fact, *The Vicar of Wakefield* details the downfall of a young woman who has pretensions above her rank. The father notes of his daughters that:

> their breeding was already superior to their fortune; and that greater refinement would only serve to make their poverty ridiculous, and give them a taste for pleasures they had no right to possess.[867]

In Goldsmith's novel, after having their fortunes told by a gypsy, their father reports critically that his family 'now began to think ourselves designed by the stars for something exalted, and already anticipated our future grandeur'.[868] This allows a wealthy libertine to persuade one of the daughters into a secret marriage, which he then denies, leaving her a destitute, fallen woman. Austen again plays with the reader's expectations by contrasting these novels, offering a potential foreshadowing of Harriet's possible fate if Emma continues to build her expectations and to prevent her from securing the suitable marriage offered by Robert Martin. Through these references to literary sources, Austen shows that Robert Martin offers the moral guidance and safekeeping that Harriet requires, while Emma merely offers

[867] Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), ed. Stephen Coote (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1982, repr. 1985), p. 71.
[868] Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, p. 73.

insubstantial romantic fantasies that make her friend susceptible to manipulation and the threat of seduction.

'She had been fortunate in the attitude'[869]

The scene in the novel in which Emma produces a portrait of her protégé, is central to Austen's depiction of Harriet's connection to the Regency sex trade through her fallen mother. Emma believes that through the activity of painting Harriet, she is demonstrating her friend's physical beauty as well as her submissive and biddable nature, and thereby her suitability as a wife. However, Emma's obsession with Harriet's 'soft blue eyes and all those natural graces [which] should not be wasted on the inferior society of Highbury' (p. 54) indicates that the younger girl has inherited her mother's physical attributes, with the implication that these contributed to her downfall. Indeed, when Emma argues that 'such a girl as Harriet is exactly what every man delights in – what at once bewitches his senses and satisfies his judgment' (p. 90), the language she uses has an erotic tendency which emphasises this connection between beauty and desirability. Therefore, as Emma tries to encourage a relationship between Mr Elton and Harriet in order to secure her new companion's social position, she is inadvertently highlighting her friend's association with prostitution by drawing attention to her physical attractions. Indeed, Emma puts herself in the position of a bawd, hawking her sexually-attractive friend for male consumption. Mr Knightley rebukes the impropriety of her match-making schemes, sarcastically referring to it as time 'properly and delicately spent […] A worthy employment for a young lady's mind!' (p. 43).

In addition, I believe that during this portrait scene Austen is deliberately connecting Harriet to famous courtesans and particularly to Lady Emma Hamilton, who, as Cruickshank notes, is believed to have begun her career as a child prostitute in London and would eventually become infamous as the mistress of Lord Nelson.[870] Lady Hamilton was celebrated for her dramatic poses, known as 'Attitudes',[871] and

[869] Austen, *Emma*, p. 74.
[870] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 349.
[871] During the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the word 'attitude' had two common uses, which are drawn on in my analysis:

1. 'The 'disposition' of a figure in statuary or painting; *hence*, the posture given to it'.
2. 'a posture of the body proper to, or implying, some action or mental state assumed by human beings or animals. To strike an attitude: to assume it theatrically, and not as the unstudied expression of action or passion', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, www.oed.com (accessed July 2018).

also for being the subject of popular portraits by artists such as George Romney (1734-1802) and Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792). Hamilton was eventually forced to flee to France to escape her creditors, because both her husband, Sir William Hamilton, and Nelson, failed to provide for her in their wills.[872] She died in France in January 1815[873] while Austen was writing *Emma*,[874] and her death, along with the scandalous publication of Nelson's stolen letters to her in 1814, ensured that her story remained under public scrutiny.[875] These events led to a renewed interest in the story of Hamilton's life and the fact that she began her career as a prostitute as 'Emma's obituaries were generally salacious'.[876] It is likely therefore that the scandalous aspects of her high-profile life influenced Austen in writing this novel (also named Emma),[877] and specifically when she links the portrait scene in her novel with Hamilton, as I will demonstrate. Austen can engage with her contemporary reader's awareness of the life of this infamous character, because her story comes to the fore at this time so allowing her to emphasise Harriet's connection with the figure of the fallen woman. As Emma tries to persuade Mr Elton that Harriet is a worthy marriage prospect, she is apparently unaware of the associations that she is creating, so demonstrating her naivety about the Georgian *demimonde* and the threat that it represents to susceptible illegitimate women like Harriet.

Emma's insistence that 'there can scarcely be a doubt that [Harriet's] father is a gentleman – and a gentleman of fortune' (p. 88), with the resulting inference that her mother must have been a high-class prostitute or kept mistress, means that the simple act of posing for a portrait associates her with famous courtesans of the period. Artists used courtesans as subjects for their works because they could not expect 'aristocratic female sitters to expose any part of their bodies for […] detailed

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[872] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 357.
[873] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 362.
[874] *Emma* was written between January 1814 and March 1815, Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, pp. 472-501.
[875] Austen also had a personal interest in Nelson, as her brother Frank served under his command and was described by him as 'an excellent young man', John Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography, or, Memoirs of the Services*, 4 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1823-1835), II, Part 1, p. 278, cited in Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 201. Frank narrowly missed being involved in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 196.
[876] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 364.
[877] Austen may be acknowledging this connection through a subtle joke when she ironically has her own Emma 'beg you not to talk of the sea. It makes me envious and miserable; – I who have never seen it!' (p. 124), in contrast to Hamilton who was famous for her own maritime exploits and for being the mistress of a naval hero.

scrutiny, let alone to strike poses that might be deemed incompatible with their virtue and dignity'.[878] As Williams notes, 'many painters lived and worked in the garrets of Covent Garden and all – even the most distinguished – scoured the area's brothels and taverns for potential models'.[879] These models also included high-profile courtesans such as Kitty Fisher, legendary for eating a bank note 'because she regarded the sum offered an insulting low payment for her nocturnal services',[880] Emma Hart (the future Lady Hamilton) who became Romney's artistic muse,[881] and the actress and author Mary Robinson, one-time mistress of the Prince of Wales. Elizabeth Fay suggests, in fact, that Robinson deliberately 'enhanced her image further through multiple society portraits, sitting for Romney, Gainsborough, Reynolds, and Hoppner'.[882] Portraits of courtesans became widely available, as access to prints 'did not depend only on fine mezzotints; cheaper copies could be had for sixpence plain or one shilling coloured' making them easily attainable.[883] Romney's portrait *Sensibility*, for example, which featured the teenaged Emma Hart, 'was soon reproduced as a print and became inordinately popular, displayed in shops across London [and] sold to hundreds of ordinary people who wanted it on their walls'.[884] Furthermore, alongside these portraits appeared their cruel antithesis, salacious caricatures featuring these women and their escapades, such as those by Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827) and James Gillray (1756-1815), 'the most brilliant and scabrous caricaturist in English history'.[885] These caricatures 'catered in different ways for the public's avid interest in political faction, sexual scandal, and literary controversy'.[886] Indeed, Byrne argues that such caricaturists copied distinctive clothing and poses from famous portraits to make their subjects recognisable.[887] The images of these women became extensions of their existence as purchasable commodities, and Hamilton was one of the most celebrated subjects

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[878] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 344.
[879] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 51.
[880] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 355.
[881] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 98.
[882] Elizabeth A. Fay, *Fashioning Faces: The Portraitive Mode in British Romanticism* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2009), p. 211. Indeed, Byrne suggests that Robinson 'knew how to manipulate her personal image and harness the insatiable public interest in her private life to her own advantage', *Perdita*, p. 192.
[883] Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 187.
[884] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 91.
[885] Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 197.
[886] Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 188.
[887] Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 188.

of the period, as 'versions of portraits of her began to appear on consumer goods: cups, fans, screens'.[888]

While this world may seem remote from the image of 'dear Aunt Jane' living in rural seclusion, we know that Austen spent time during a visit to London in 1813, not long before she started writing *Emma*, 'picking out portraits of fine ladies at the Exhibition and pretending they were characters from *Pride and Prejudice*'.[889] She records in her letter having found 'a small portrait of Mrs Bingley, excessively like her' [890] but feels that she has 'no chance of [Mrs Darcy] in the collection of Sir Joshua Reynolds's Paintings'.[891] Her comment therefore suggests a prior familiarity with Reynolds' works. She later confirms having 'been both to the Exhibition & Sir J.Reynolds, - and I am disappointed, for there was nothing like Mrs D. at either',[892] humorously suggesting that this is because Mr Darcy would not want to expose his wife's image for public scrutiny, being aware, as previously mentioned, of how this would affect her reputation.

Austen explores the implications of public display through the portrait scene in her novel when Emma imagines Mr Elton sharing the picture of Harriet with his family when he takes it to London for framing. The fate of the portrait, which once 'elegantly framed' (p. 95) is eventually 'hung over the mantle-piece of the common sitting-room' (p. 95), also links its display to wider consumption. Through the use of the word 'common' Austen highlights its availability to a wide audience. Furthermore, Austen links the portrait scene with the idea of 'availability' and 'possession' by presenting Harriet, and her likeness, as commodities with a definable value that can be purchased. When Emma first has the idea to sketch Harriet she declares 'What an exquisite possession a good picture of her would be! I would give any money for it' (p. 71). Harriet is thereby objectified as a decorative 'possession' which can be displayed for public scrutiny or purchase, even beyond her own social circle. Austen emphasises this voyeuristic male consumption by suggesting that when Mr Elton takes it to London for framing, 'it is his companion all this evening, his solace, his delight' (p. 83). This differentiates Harriet's portrait from the family

[888] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 99.
[889] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 285.
[890] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 85: 24 May 1813, pp. 211-214, p. 212.
[891] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 85: 24 May 1813, pp. 211-214, p. 212.
[892] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 85: 24 May 1813, pp. 211-214, p. 213.

sketches Emma has previously made, by presenting it as something with a definable financial value that relates to the display and consumption of the female form as a sexual commodity. Austen's intention in having her heroine present Harriet as a purchasable artefact, is to show how Emma inadvertently invokes prostitution through this idea, with the combined inference that there is little difference between that and the marriage market if motivated solely by male consumption of the female body. Marriages which are based entirely on physical attraction, such as that of Mr and Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, are always shown as failures in Austen's works.

This objectification of women as artworks to be displayed and examined was epitomised by the behaviour of Hamilton's husband, who was a renowned collector of relics and 'a focal member of the Society of Dilettanti, a circle of genteel libertines fascinated by foreign sexual cults'.[893] Indeed, Fay suggests that Hamilton 'became the crowning glory of [Sir William] Hamilton's extensive collection of antiquities and art objects'.[894] This kind of acquisitive male behaviour is also represented in Austen's novel through Frank Churchill's objectivisation of his fiancée, Jane Fairfax. As Gay notes, 'his relation to Jane is that of a voyeur. His gaze theatricalises, dehumanises, and commodifies Jane'.[895] His view of her 'is first and last [as] a decorative possession, a picture framed by her husband's perception of her social role'[896] as he fantasises about bedecking her with jewellery:

> Observe the turn of her throat. Observe her eyes […] my uncle means to give her all my aunt's jewels. […] I am resolved to have some in an ornament for the head. Will not it be beautiful in her dark hair? (pp. 459-460)

Similarly, Sir Hamilton treated his wife as part of his collection of artefacts, exemplified when he had her 'pose within a large chest painted black on the interior with a gold frame so that she appeared to be a living statue'.[897]

Furthermore, Emma Hamilton was renowned for a dramatic routine combined with dance, in which she adopted poses, or 'attitudes', representing figures taken

[893] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 101.
[894] Fay, *Fashioning Faces*, p. 173.
[895] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 145.
[896] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 146.
[897] Fay, *Fashioning Faces*, p. 174.

from classical mythology posing to resemble famous statues, as seen below (Illustration 3).

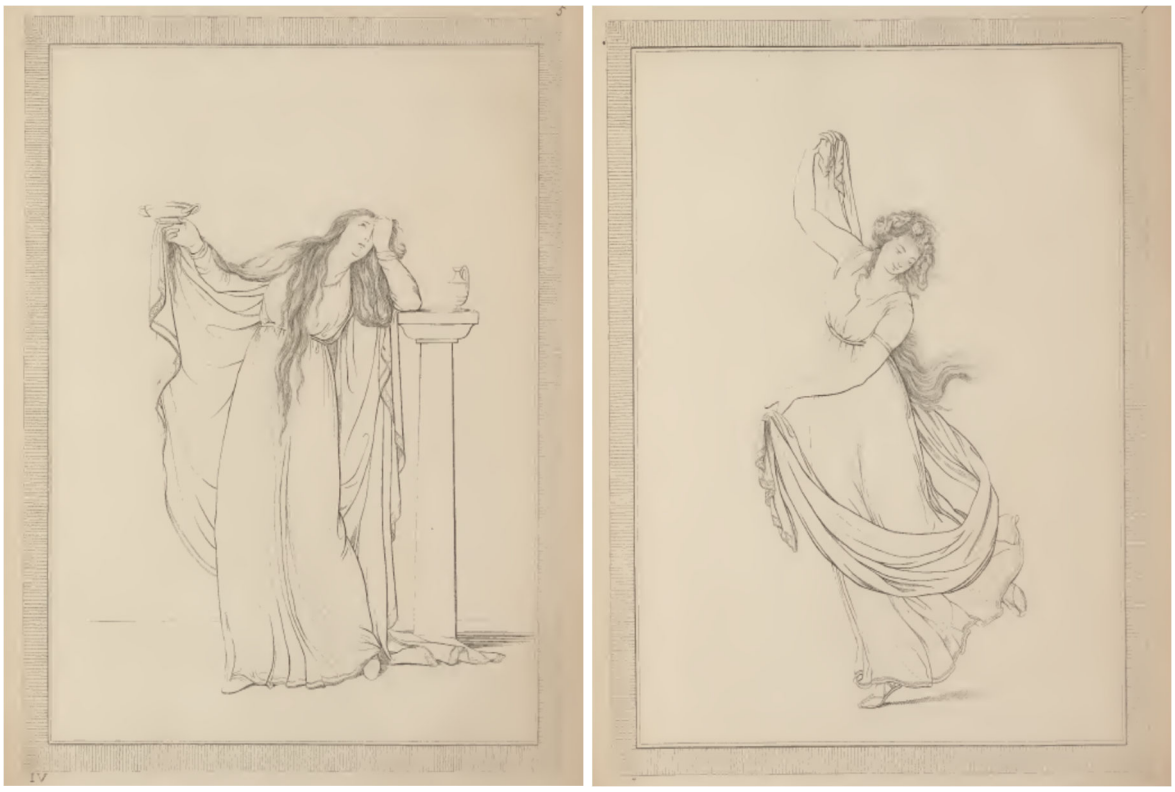

Illustration 3: Drawings faithfully copied from nature at Naples, Friedrich Rehberg (1794)

Two recent television adaptations of *Emma* draw on the contemporary fashion for classical portraits by having Harriet assume a Grecian pose holding a vase, not unlike Illustration 3, so (perhaps inadvertently) making the connections between the novel and Hamilton, prostitution and public display, explicit.[898] A series of drawings featuring Hamilton's poses, or 'attitudes', was published in 1794 by Friedrich Rehberg (1758-1835), although her performances were already well known before this publication.[899] However, this form of display also reflects the activities of prostitutes who used erotic and obscene postures to attract customers, 'probably with ironic and lewd reference to well-known classical sculptures or paintings'.[900] *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies* (1787), for example, features a 'Miss W–ts–n, No. 11, Glanville Street', who is described as 'an excellent posture mistress, and has

[898] *Emma* [TV adaptation], directed by Jim O'Hanlon, *BBC Worldwide Ltd* (London: distributed in the UK by 2 entertain Video Ltd, 2009); *Emma* [film adaptation], directed by Douglas McGrath, *Miramax Films*, 1996.
[899] Friedrich Rehberg, *Drawings Faithfully Copied from Nature at Naples and with Permission Dedicated to the Right Honourable Sir William Hamilton* (publisher not identified, 1794), *Getty Research Institute Collection*, https://archive.org/details/gri_33125008232577 (accessed July 2018).
[900] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 242.

studied each of *Aretine's* attitudes'[901] (a reference to Pietro Aretino (1492-1556), an Italian writer and artist famed for his erotic works).[902] As Williams notes 'the word 'attitude' was also used during this period to refer to postures by courtesans'.[903] Hamilton was known to have been a courtesan before her marriage, and 'some implied she had learnt to pose in the brothel'.[904] Indeed Hamilton may have first learned the practice of 'striking an attitude' while working as a prostitute in a tavern, or during her employment as a 'nymph' in Dr Graham's famous Temple of Health, suggesting that her sometimes risqué performances played on her own dubious background.[905] There are also a number of instances where the phrase is used within the *Memoirs* of the notorious courtesan Harriette Wilson. For example, Harriette reports how her friend, aware that her lover is observing from beneath her bed, admits to 'studying my attitudes, as I folded my hair gracefully around my head, and bathed my hands and face with rose-water, just as might be expected by any woman who believed herself watched'.[906]

The term 'attitude' was also commonly used in popular novels that Austen was familiar with. For instance, in More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* the hero is teased about the methods used by an acquaintance to attract his attention to her eligible daughters. It is conjectured that 'Maria, who is the most picturesque figure, was put to *attitudinize* at the harp, arrayed in the costume, and assuming the fascinating graces of Marmion's Lady Heron'.[907] The display of her 'graces', by the assumption of attitudes, is presented as a technique she has been taught to secure the attention of a potential suitor. In Burney's *Cecilia*, Mr Gosport draws the heroine's attention to 'the variety of disconsolate attitudes exhibited to the beholders' by 'young ladies of fashion', with the intention of 'exciting attention'.[908] Both quotes

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[901] *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies or Man of Pleasure's Kalendar for the Year 1787* (London: H. Ranger, 1787), p. 38, *Wellcome Library*, https://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b22674883 (accessed July 2018).
[902] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 292.
[903] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 141.
[904] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 141.
[905] Williams, *England's Mistress*, p. 139. Dr Graham's Temple of Health and Hymen 'was decked out with silver and crystal ornaments, gilded mirrors and lamps' and housed the celebrated 'Celestial Bed' which was patronised by the wealthy, including the Prince of Wales, politician Charles James Fox, and the Duchess of Devonshire, Byrne, *Perdita*, pp. 219-220. Peakman explains that 'notorious quack Dr James Graham devised an electric bed which allegedly had rejuvenating qualities […] it was supposed to add vigour to sexual activities and to assist in conception', *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 265.
[906] Wilson, *Memoirs*, p. 105.
[907] More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, I, p. 109.
[908] Burney, *Cecilia*, pp. 38-39.

demonstrate the cynical adoption of 'attitudes' by females with the aim of attracting male attention, thereby suggesting that such behaviour is little better than the use of postures by prostitutes.

Within Austen's other novels there are also a number of references that evoke Lady Hamilton's celebrated 'Attitudes'.[909] In *Pride and Prejudice* Caroline Bingley suggests to Elizabeth Bennet that she 'follow my example, and take a turn about the room. – I assure you it is very refreshing after sitting so long in one attitude' (pp. 100-101). Heydt-Stevenson suggests that:

> Austen may be satirizing Caroline by alluding here to the infamous originator of 'the art of the attitude', Lady Emma Hamilton, who amused private audiences with a kind of pantomime'[910]

It is possible that Caroline, in her jealousy, believes that Elizabeth is posing, or assuming an 'attitude', to attract Darcy's attention, or that her use of the phrase reveals her own similar motivation for walking (as well as hoping that the contrast in their figures will be disadvantageous to her rival). Darcy's response, which Heydt-Stevenson characterises as 'plainspoken bawdy talk',[911] shows that he certainly believes he is being encouraged to take a voyeuristic view of their bodies, noting 'I can admire you much better as I sit by the fire' (p. 101).

However, the most pertinent reference to Hamilton's *Attitudes* is within *Emma*, when the eponymous heroine persuades Harriet to pose for a portrait. The word 'attitude' is used twice within this episode. The first instance is:

> The sitting began; and Harriet, smiling and blushing, and afraid of not keeping her attitude and countenance, presented a very sweet mixture of youthful expression to the steady eyes of the artist (p. 74).

The reader is invited to take the voyeuristic position of the artist and subsequent viewers of the completed portrait, in seeing the likeness as a representation of a defined gender role for public consumption. Austen draws attention to Harriet's inviting youth and innocence, in contrast to the false 'attitude' adopted at Emma's instigation. This 'attitude', which has been imposed on her by Emma, is presented as an assumed role which conflicts with Harriet's natural character, so that she has difficulty maintaining the pose. This is followed by Emma's reflections on her own

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[909] See Chapter Two, p. 60, of this thesis for discussion of the use of this term in *Sense and Sensibility*.
[910] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 74.
[911] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 74.

artistic performance, noting that 'there was no want of likeness, she had been fortunate in the attitude' (p. 74). This double use of the word, within four paragraphs, suggests that Austen was deliberately emphasising the connection, and drawing a parallel between Harriet and Hamilton in showing that this display has a sexual component. Harriet is being exhibited by Emma through this portrait for male consumption.

By evoking Hamilton, Austen shows that Emma, taking on the masculine role in adopting the male gaze by objectivising her young friend, is manipulating Harriet into a form that she believes will appeal to potential husbands:

> she meant to throw in a little improvement to the figure, to give a little more height, and considerably more elegance, she had great confidence of its being in every way a pretty drawing at last (p. 74).

This type of manipulation of women – who were viewed as little more than children requiring instruction – to satisfy the desires of men, was commonly critiqued in contemporary literature.[912] In Edgeworth's *Belinda* this practice is criticized through the story-line involving the hero Clarence Hervey. As previously noted in the introduction to this thesis, he finds an uneducated, innocent girl, aptly named Virginia, hidden away from society, and decides to form her into the perfect wife, as 'the idea of attaching a perfectly pure, disinterested, unpractised heart, was delightful to his imagination: the cultivation of her understanding, he thought, would be an easy and a pleasing task'.[913] When his experiment inevitably fails because she 'was ignorant and indolent, she had few ideas, and no wish to extend her knowledge',[914] he finds himself honour bound to marry her because his behaviour has damaged her reputation as she is widely believed to be his mistress. Similarly, in the novel attributed to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, *The Sylph*, the heroine, Julia Stanley, newly married wife of Sir William, is humiliated by his implied criticism of her accomplishments. She acerbically notes that her husband 'has engaged a dancing-master to put me into a genteel and polite method of acquitting myself with propriety

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[912] The Earl of Chesterfield famously wrote that 'women […] are only children of a larger growth; they have an entertaining tattle, and sometimes wit; but for solid, reasoning good sense, I never in my life knew one that had it', Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, *Letters Written by the Late Right Honourable Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, to his son, Philip Stanhope, Esq; Late Envoy Extraordinary at the Court of Dresden. Together with Several Other Pieces on Various Subjects*, 2 vols (Dublin: E Stanhope, 1774), I, p. 317, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco (accessed July 2018).
[913] Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, 3 vols (London: J Thomson, 1801), III, pp. 103-104, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction Full-Text Database*, https://literature.proquest.com/ (accessed July 2018).
[914] Edgeworth, *Belinda*, III, p. 130.

on the important circumstances of moving about a room gracefully'.[915] Despite clearly feeling insulted by the implication that she needs to be taught how to walk, she notes that 'it is my duty to comply with every thing he judges proper to make me what he chuses'.[916] The novel laments the fate of a virtuous woman under the control of a disreputable man who almost leads her into corruption, until she is luckily preserved by his early death.[917]

Similarly, Emma is shown to be manipulating her friend into a physical form acceptable for a male audience. As Mrs Weston notes, Emma also enhances Harriet's image by giving 'her friend the only beauty she wanted, […] Miss Smith has not those eye-brows and eye-lashes' (p. 75). Emma 'improves' Harriet by making her taller (as Mr Knightley informs her with customary honesty) but also more elegant, reinforcing the idea that she is attempting to raise her friend into a socially elevated role. Indeed, Mr Elton tells her that:

> you have made [Harriet] graceful and easy. She was a beautiful creature when she came to you, but, in my opinion, the attractions you have added are infinitely superior to what she received from nature (p. 70).

This is an act of creation which Emma aims to repeat, again with Harriet as her subject, during the visit to Box Hill when she agrees to provide 'a charming wife' (p. 366) for Frank Churchill. Emma is focused on her attempt to present an idealised, public, and physically attractive version of Harriet and fails to appreciate that she is presenting her friend as sexually available in an illicit way, because of her association with her fallen mother. As a result of manipulating her image in this way, a distinction is made between the real person and the dissemination of her image for a public audience. Through Emma's artistic ambitions to create 'a pretty drawing', readers are also given an insight into how the 'improvement' of an image for wider circulation and social gain (here in attracting a suitor) may be achieved. There is little information given about the contents of the portrait that Emma produces. Portraitive practices of the period, such as the use of costume, 'allowed people to try on new identities',[918] or in this case, have an identity imposed on them. The reader is told that it is outside, in a summer setting and features a tree, so it appears to be

[915] Cavendish, *The Sylph*, I, p. 35.
[916] Cavendish, *The Sylph*, I, p. 36.
[917] Given the history of their own marriage, one wonders what the Duke of Devonshire thought of his wife's novelistic wish fulfilment.
[918] Fay, *Fashioning Faces*, p. 6.

an attempt to fix Harriet's position within the rural idyll, perhaps to associate her with Hartfield itself. It is hardly surprising then that Mr Elton misreads the situation. As Joe Bray suggests 'Emma fails to see that it is her supposed skill at "taking likenesses" rather than Harriet's "likeness" that Mr Elton admires'.[919] Mr Elton interprets the production of the portrait as a demonstration of Emma's feminine accomplishments, particularly her skill as an artist, rather than an attempt to fix his attention on Harriet.

Emma's attempt to 'improve' the image of her friend has greater resonance when compared to the continuing debates about Austen's own image, which also emphasise the manipulation of females by male figures to present an acceptable image. The only authenticated portrait showing Austen's features is the somewhat harsh sketch by her sister Cassandra, shown below (Illustration 4):

Illustration 4: *Jane Austen*, by Cassandra Austen, pencil and watercolour (circa 1810)
© National Portrait Gallery, London[920]

[919] Joe Bray, 'The Language of Portraiture in the Early Nineteenth-Century Novel: A Study in Opie and Austen', *Women's Writing*, 23:1 (2016), 53-67, 62.
[920] Kindly reproduced with permission from the National Portrait Gallery.

This was 'improved' by James Andrews for use in the biography published by Austen's nephew in 1871, to show an image more consistent with the appearance the family were trying to present of kindly 'dear Aunt Jane',[921] as shown below (Illustration 5):

Illustration 5: *Jane Austen*, published by Richard Bentley, after Cassandra Austen, stipple engraving, published 1870 © National Portrait Gallery, London[922]

The later portrait has been widely criticised by Austen scholars for softening the author's features and 'airbrushing' her personality to conform to a gentler, more feminine, Victorian ideal. As Kirkham notes, 'the face is no longer slightly alarming, the cap and curls are prettier, the pose is more ladylike'.[923] However, this later portrait remains in popular use and has recently been controversially adopted by the Bank of England as a design for the new £10 note.[924] Other contested images

[921] Margaret Kirkham, 'Portraits', in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 68-79, p. 76.
[922] Kindly reproduced with permission from the National Portrait Gallery.
[923] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 59.
[924] See 'Jane Austen Airbrushed on new £10 Note, Campaigners Complain', *The Telegraph*, May 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/21/jane-austen-airbrushed-new-10-note-campaigners-complain/ (accessed May 2017).

include the Rice Portrait, notably advocated by Johnson,[925] and Byrne's recently discovered portrait, which she claims represents Austen.[926] The evidence regarding their provenance remains disputed. It has also been suggested that Cassandra's sketches of the monarchs in Austen's *History of England* were family portraits.[927] The portrait of Mary Queen of Scots is widely believed to be Austen.[928] Personally I believe that Cassandra's watercolour from 1804 (see Illustration 6 below), which is still owned by the Austen family,[929] is the most fitting portrait of Austen. This is the only undisputed portrait of Austen.[930]

Illustration 6: *Watercolour of Jane Austen*, by Cassandra Austen (1804)[931]

It shows the author facing away from the artist, her sister Cassandra, and gazing into the distance with her bonnet obscuring her profile. It reflects Captain Tilney's

[925] Claudia L. Johnson, 'Jane Austen to the Life', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 28 August 2013, https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/jane-austen-to-the-life/ (accessed June 2017).
[926] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, pp. 306-308.
[927] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 64.
[928] Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 64; Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 45.
[929] Kirkham, 'Portraits', p. 69.
[930] Deborah Kaplan, '"There she is at last": The Byrne Portrait Controversy', *Persuasions*, 34 (2012), 121- 133, 121.
[931] Reproduced in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Frontispiece.

flirtatious comment to Isabella in *Northanger Abbey* when he says that 'the edge of a blooming cheek is still in view – at once too much and too little' (p. 155). This portrait seems the perfect representation of Austen for several reasons. It evokes the way in which her meanings have been obscured by the passage of time and her own subtlety in projecting an image of public propriety. It also suggests a desire to protect her reputation from being commodified or made to conform to patriarchal ideals of femininity.

'Tempted by every thing'[932]

Alongside allusions linking Harriet to her fallen mother, Austen uses discussions regarding Harriet's personality to engage with contemporary discourse and anxieties about how, and why, females were seduced into prostitution. As Heydt-Stevenson notes:

> when Emma pushes Harriet toward Elton and then Frank Churchill, when she teaches her vanity and class prejudice, and when she stimulates her romantic imagination, Emma's actions all enact various strands in the public discourse about the causes of prostitution.[933]

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, as the eighteenth century progressed the representation of prostitution changed in response to a shift in attitudes towards women's sexuality.[934] Women were increasingly presented as the victims of male seduction, rather than as the instigators or willing participants in their own downfall. As Cruickshank suggests:

> The eighteenth century truly was an age of transition with the general perception of female sexual nature changing from the warm, earthy sexuality characteristically described by late-seventeenth-century writers to the chaste and cool female ideal of the late eighteenth century that prefigures the virtually sexless and refined female of the Victorian age.[935]

Figures like Cleland's Fanny Hill and Defoe's Moll Flanders, who were seen as complicit in their downfall and found enjoyment from their sexual exploits, were increasingly replaced with figures more likely to reflect the heroine of Richardson's

[932] Austen, *Emma*, p. 241.
[933] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 167.
[934] See Chapter One, pp. 19-21, of this thesis.
[935] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 447.

Clarissa, who would rather die than live with their dishonour.[936] By the end of the century the view of women's sexuality had changed to the extent that female sexual desire was viewed as 'some type of aberration suffered by abnormal women'.[937] Fallen women were increasingly represented as victims 'of specifically feminine weakness and male sexual voracity' whose personal frailties and financial vulnerability had led them to be exploited by unscrupulous men.[938]

Harriet's position in this context is one that is especially vulnerable to male exploitation, because the stigma of illegitimacy was particularly associated with female offspring of an illicit pairing. Sexual misconduct by the mother, with the supposed consequence of inherited moral weakness or character flaws in a child, reflected particularly on female offspring because of the double-standard that vilified illicit sexuality in females while excusing or celebrating it in males. Men were not under the same imperative as females to remain chaste, as previously discussed. In Smith's *Emmeline*, for example, on the birth of an illegitimate male child the eponymous heroine, whose own legitimacy is questioned, laments 'the evils to which it might be exposed; tho' of a sex which would prevent it's encountering the same species of sorrow as that which had embittered her own life'.[939] In contrast, the impact of this inherited blame on female children is noted in Edgeworth's *The Absentee*, when the hero, Lord Colambre, feels that Grace Nugent's illegitimate birth is an 'invincible obstacle'[940] to his marrying her, despite her irreproachable personal qualities. Grace recognises that her fate depended on the exoneration of her parents, fearing that 'if I had been the daughter of a mother who had conducted herself ill, he never would have trusted me'.[941] The potential taint of her supposed illegitimacy, and her association with a fallen woman, cannot be overlooked.

Through Austen's portrayal of Harriet, the reader is encouraged to make inferences that her characteristics are inherited from her mother. The implication of Emma's belief that Harriet's father is a gentleman, is that Harriet's mother must be a

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[936] As previously noted in Chapter One, p. 21, of this thesis in many respects both images continued to exist side-by-side, representing the period's confusion about prostitution. For instance, *Clarissa* and *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* were both published in the same year.
[937] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 449.
[938] Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 167.
[939] Smith, *Emmeline*, III, p. 118.
[940] Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, p. 442.
[941] Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, p. 442.

high-class courtesan, one of those fascinating women who were 'like an exotic wild animal escaped from a zoo'.[942] Courtesans were:

> a powerful symbol of a woman's potential for autonomy, for sexual and emotional self-expression; and a sweet-throated counterblast to the stultifying tyranny of female 'propriety'.[943]

However, unlike the characteristics typical of self-assured and unrepentant courtesans, Harriet is shown to be naïve and romantic, and most significantly, not particularly intelligent. Mr Knightley notes that 'she is not a sensible girl, nor a girl of any information' (p. 87). This undermines Emma's arguments about Harriet's noble parentage. The seduction narrative of Harriet's mother is never told, and by denying the fallen woman a voice within her novel Austen rejects conventional representations which sentimentalize seduction. Instead Austen displaces the seduction narrative and reveals the story of Harriet's mother through her portrayal of her illegitimate offspring. In contrast to Emma's mistaken beliefs, Austen thereby connects Harriet's mother with the contemporary seduction narrative of the naïve young middle-gentry woman betrayed by predatory male deception through her depiction of her daughter's innocent beauty and romantic susceptibility. Therefore, her mother is portrayed through this inferred narrative as one of the multitudes who were believed to have resorted to prostitution through economic necessity after being seduced and abandoned by unscrupulous men happy to exploit their vulnerabilities.

The faults that Harriet demonstrates are consistent with the personal failings that were believed at this period to make women vulnerable and lead them into prostitution. It can therefore be implied that these traits led Harriet's mother to her downfall and have been inherited by her daughter. Harriet's most troubling characteristic, in terms of the causes of young women being seduced into prostitution, is her predisposition to being 'guided' or manipulated. She is described as having 'a sweet, docile, grateful disposition; was totally free from conceit; and only desiring to be guided by any one she looked up to' (p. 56). This flaw in Harriet's personality is highlighted in a number of incidents. For example, it is significantly noted that 'Harriet, tempted by every thing and swayed by half a word, was always very long at a purchase' (p. 241). Her subsequent muddle about where to send her

[942] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 21.
[943] Hickman, *Courtesans*, p. 332.

purchases, which is resolved by Emma, reinforces her inability to make decisions independently. The clearest representation of this characteristic is given in the episode during which Emma persuades Harriet to reject an offer of marriage from Robert Martin. It is clear that Harriet would have accepted the proposal except for the persuasion of her friend. This flaw is shown again in the portrait scene, where it is noted that Harriet 'had no scruples which could stand many minutes against the earnest pressing of both the others' (p. 72). The pliability that Harriet demonstrates reveals the absence of what the heroine of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price, calls 'a better guide in ourselves' (p. 383), or the ability to rely on her own moral judgement.

This is a concern for Mr Knightley, who recognises the potential not only for Emma to manipulate her friend for her own aims, thereby raising Harriet's marital expectations, but for this to expose the gullible young woman to unscrupulous male exploitation. He believes that Harriet is at risk because she is 'a good-tempered, soft-hearted girl, not likely to be very, very determined against any young man who told her he loved her' (p. 454). Knightley expresses concern that raising Harriet's aspirations puts her at risk, suggesting that:

> as for Harriet, I will venture to say that *she* cannot gain by the acquaintance. Hartfield will only put her out of conceit with all the other places she belongs to. She will grow just refined enough to be uncomfortable with those among whom birth and circumstances have placed her home (p. 67).

He worries that Emma, here represented as 'Hartfield' as he tries to soften his criticism of her, will raise Harriet's marital aspirations to unrealistic levels. Mr Knightley's social responsibility and concern for the welfare of vulnerable members of the community, 'a subtly chivalric concern for others' that defines the gentleman,[944] provides a contrast to other male characters within the novel, such as Frank Churchill and Mr Woodhouse. Frank is a disruptive influence; his name links him to France contrasting him unfavourably with Mr Knightley, as 'English plainness is contrasted with French affectation'.[945] This connection suggests Frank represents an external threat to the peace of Highbury.[946] His destabilising influence is shown during the outing to Box Hill, when normal social order breaks down as a result of his

[944] Malone, 'Jane Austen's Balls', 444.
[945] Byrne, *Jane Austen and the* Theatre, p. 223.
[946] Sales suggests that 'The particular threat posed by Frank Churchill to the worlds of both the village and the watering place is that he is a disruptive character who nevertheless enjoys access to the most exclusive places', *Representations of Regency England*, p. 142.

concealed disagreement with Jane Fairfax over their secret engagement.[947] Waldron notes that their disagreement 'as it reaches its crisis, is poisoning the atmosphere'.[948] The resulting disturbance to the social 'atmosphere' leads to Emma thoughtlessly insulting Miss Bates.[949] Mr Woodhouse portrays himself as a protector of women, but is actually a restrictive influence. His behaviour prevents his daughter, Emma, from viewing marriage as a possibility and her physical restriction is underlined by the fact that she is hardly allowed to travel beyond Highbury. He even prevents his friends eating as they would like. For example, Miss Bates notes that 'Mr. Woodhouse, not thinking the asparagus quite boiled enough, sent it all out again. Now there is nothing grandmamma loves better than sweetbread and asparagus – so she was rather disappointed' (p. 326). He thereby deprives his old friends of delicacies that would not otherwise be available to them on their straitened means, showing that his idea of 'care' is detrimental to the women he claims to protect. Mr Knightley, in contrast, worries about Jane Fairfax's well-being, sending her apples and giving her the use of his carriage. He also tries to warn Emma when he suspects Frank Churchill of duplicity.[950] Mr Knightley fears Emma's influence on Harriet, and is concerned that 'in a little while, nobody within her reach will be good enough for her. Vanity working on a weak head, produces every sort of mischief' (p. 90). The phrase 'every sort of mischief' is open to interpretation, and an eighteenth-century reader would have been aware that sexual indiscretions were the ultimate 'mischief' that resulted from 'vanity' in young women. Mr Knightley also suggests that he encouraged Robert Martin to propose, in the belief of Harriet 'having that sort of disposition, which, in good hands, like his, might be easily led aright and turn out very well' (p. 88). This, of course, implies that without the guidance of these 'good hands' she might just as easily be led astray. His fears for Harriet are illustrated by his returning frequently to the idea that she would be 'safe' if she married Robert Martin. He notes 'let her marry Robert Martin, and she is safe, respectable, and

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[947] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, pp. 129-130.
[948] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 130.
[949] Waldron notes that because of the concealed quarrel between Frank and Jane, Emma's 'internal moral monitor, which has until now prevented her real irritation and impatience with Miss Bates from breaking through to the surface, has failed', *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 129.
[950] Although it should be noted that Austen does not create 'perfect' heroes. After Emma repulses Mr Knightley's warnings he effectively abandons her to her fate by going to London 'to avoid […] the painful spectacle of the final stages of Frank's courtship of Emma', Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 130.

happy for ever' (p. 90). Although Mr Knightley is careful about the expressions he uses, a perceptive reader can recognise the wider implications of his concerns.

Knightley's fears that Emma will encourage Harriet's vanity, reflect the contemporary view that unrealistically raising a young woman's social expectations was a route into prostitution, as previously discussed in relation to Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*. *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies* (1787), for example, contains the description of 'Miss Kitty P——t , No. 4, Union Street, Middlesex Hospital':

> her parents used to dress her up in a higher stile than her expectations could by any means entitle her to, which soon got the ascendency over her morals, so that as she grew up she determined rather than not to keep up her usual gaiety, she would suffer prostitution.[951]

In contrast to Mr Knightley, who tries to protect vulnerable women within his social arena, Heydt-Stevenson suggests that Emma 'apes the gentleman's role of seducer and poisoner of poor women and innocent wives, and thereby "taints" Harriet, contaminating her with ambition'.[952] Despite the recognition that Harriet's claim to the 'station' of gentleman's daughter is tenuous, Emma continues to put Harriet in danger by giving her unrealistic romantic expectations that could place her in a compromising position. Emma herself notes to Harriet that:

> The misfortune of your birth ought to make you particularly careful as to your associates […] and you must support your claim to that station by every thing within your own power, or there will be plenty of people who would take pleasure in degrading you (p. 60).

Emma means by this, of course, to warn Harriet against associating with people who, in her opinion, are socially inferior, such as the Martins. However, the idea that 'pleasure' could be taken in 'degrading' Harriet emphasises to perceptive readers the potential for a darker sexual predation to which Emma will expose her friend. Although Emma may be naïve about the darker side of Regency society, Austen's use of resonant phrases such as 'pleasure in degrading' and Mr Knightley's fears about vanity leading to 'every sort of mischief' in relation to Harriet, reveals her own understanding that the risks to which Harriet is exposed are not trivial.

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[951] *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies or Man of Pleasure's Kalendar for the Year 1787*, p. 108.
[952] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 170.

Nevertheless, there is a widely held belief that the novel presents Emma's behaviour as benign. Waldron, for example, states that:

> at every turn Austen presents Emma's errors as mild and understandable given the confusing environment in which she has to find an identity. Her little snobberies are essentially harmless, for they have no effect.[953]

Johnson similarly suggests that the novel 'amply corroborates Mrs Weston's faith in the fitness of Emma's rule',[954] while Kirkham believes that Austen 'restrict[s] her heroine's delusions to relatively minor matters, leaving her, with all her youthful faults, essentially right in her judgements and feelings on a great many important matters'.[955] These critics would agree with Mrs Weston's claim that Emma 'has qualities which may be trusted; she will never lead any one really wrong; she will make no lasting blunder' (p. 68). However, I would contest these critical views and argue that Austen emphasises the danger that Harriet is exposed to by Emma's behaviour, as well as Jane Fairfax to some extent (when she shares unfounded gossip about her), by increasing their vulnerability to male exploitation. She persuades Harriet to believe that 'the thing is, to be always happy with pleasant companions' (p. 81). This is a dangerous mantra for a beautiful, naïve young woman during the Regency period. Emma herself later recognises that her behaviour:

> was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple (p. 155).

Further she recognises that 'she had not quite done nothing – for she had done mischief. She had brought evil on Harriet' (p. 402). As Heydt-Stevenson recognises, through this storyline Austen 'exposes the patriarchal/heterosexual world of conventional courtship as a dangerous, violent, and even life-threatening arena for both men and women'.[956] Austen's allusions to the Georgian *demimonde* show her recognition of this darker aspect of society, and her intention is to expose Emma's innocence of it as hazardous.

Of course, Emma's attempts to manipulate Harriet eventually backfire, as 'the humble, grateful, little girl' (p. 55) who first arrives at Hartfield changes and escapes

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[953] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 116.
[954] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 128.
[955] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, pp. 130-131.
[956] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 168.

the bounds of Emma's control by forming an unsanctioned romantic attachment. Emma is shocked that her friend has 'the presumption to raise her thoughts to Mr. Knightley!' (p. 403) but recognises that 'Harriet was less humble, had fewer scruples than formerly. – Her inferiority, whether of mind or situation, seemed little felt' (p. 403). Indeed, Harriet says that 'now I seem to feel that I may deserve him; and that if he does choose me, it will not be any thing so very wonderful' (pp. 400-401). Emma rightly blames herself, reflecting that:

> Who but herself had taught her, that she was to elevate herself if possible, and that her claims were great to a high worldly establishment? – If Harriet, from being humble, were grown vain, it was her doing (p. 403).

It is notable that it is now Emma who is frozen into an 'attitude' by her protégé, as she is left 'silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes' (p. 398), while Harriet in contrast is 'standing in no unhappy reverie' (p. 398). Emma tries to justify her objections to the match, which she feels would be 'Such an elevation on her side! Such a debasement on his! – It was horrible to Emma to think how it must sink him in the general opinion' (p. 402), although this response is influenced by her own jealousy, as she now realises that she loves Mr Knightley. Austen shows that Emma's wealth and class status have led her to believe that she can assume the powerful 'male' position in manipulating Harriet's prospects, and the ultimate disruption of her plans teaches her about her responsibilities, and limitations, as a leading female member of Highbury society. However, it is also notable that as Emma's prospects change, due to her own forthcoming marriage, Harriet becomes unnecessary as a companion and she 'could not deplore her future absence as any deduction from her own enjoyment. […] Harriet would be rather a dead weight than otherwise' (p. 434). Emma is relieved that Harriet's marriage allows her to establish an appropriate relationship with her friend and retreat from their unwise intimacy, as she now recognises that her behaviour was not beneficent.

It is significant that the language which describes Harriet's eventual marriage to the reliable Robert Martin focuses not only on the security, but also the obscurity, that the union would provide. Emma notes that:

> in the home he offered, there would be the hope of more, of security, stability, and improvement. She would be placed in the midst of those who loved her, and who had better sense than herself; retired enough for

> safety […]. She would be never led into temptation, nor left for it to find her out (p. 463).

The marriage provides Harriet with financial and physical security, putting her beyond the reach of those unscrupulous men (like Willoughby or Wickham in Austen's other novels), who might exploit her as an easy target for seduction. As Mr Knightley recognises, Harriet's 'character depends upon those she is with; but in good hands she will turn out a valuable woman' (p. 85). Robert Martin has proved that he offers the 'good hands', which Mr Knightley has repeatedly suggested she requires, and will be able to maintain Harriet as a 'valuable woman'. Indeed, Austen reiterates this image when Mr Knightley tells Emma 'you could not wish your friend in better hands' (p. 454). Austen demonstrates that despite Harriet's character flaws, it is the way she is treated by patriarchal society due to her maternal association and her lack of male protection, that actually makes her vulnerable to male (and female) exploitation. Austen takes society to task, in showing how misguided it is in its treatment of vulnerable young women, through this example of an unprotected, naïve young girl who is tainted by illegitimacy and presented as a potential victim of the Georgian *demimonde*.

Chapter Six

Persuasion and *Northanger Abbey*: 'She was a clever young woman, who understood the art of pleasing'.[957]

Persuasion and *Northanger Abbey* were published together posthumously in 1817.[958] However, despite being published at the same time, there is some distance in time between their compositions. *Northanger Abbey* is apparently a revised version of the work, *Susan*, which was accepted for publication in 1803 by Crosby & Co, but which they failed to publish.[959] It is believed to have originally been written during 1798.[960] Having recovered the manuscript in 1816, Austen appended a note to her revision of the text, encouraging the reader:

> to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes (p. 35).

In contrast, *Persuasion*, Austen's last completed novel, represents some of her latest work having been written between August 1815 and August 1816.[961]

It is illuminating to consider these two works in conjunction with each other, due to the long period of time between their compositions. Both novels feature discussions on the influence of fashionable genres of literature, using this association to illuminate character and to highlight gender issues. It is also notable that both works are set partly in Bath and, through a comparison of these novels, I will analyse Austen's representation of this socially unique Georgian spa town. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland, the teenaged heroine, is youthful and optimistic, engaging enthusiastically with the popular entertainments offered in Bath. However, she also experiences a threatening social environment which leads her eventually into genuine danger through the machinations of General Tilney. In contrast, *Persuasion's* heroine, Anne Elliot, dislikes the city and due to the

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[957] Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 46.
[958] Although dated 1818 in the frontispiece both novels were first published in December 1817, Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, p. 590.
[959] The novel was bought back from the publisher in early 1816 and revised while Austen was writing *Persuasion*, Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, p. 526; see also Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 185.
[960] Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, p. 205.
[961] Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, pp. 513-544.

dissolution of her engagement to Captain Wentworth, feels alienated from the marriage market that was central to Bath's social structure. I will argue that Austen's representation of the city reflects the different ages and marital expectations of her heroines as well as her own changing connection with the city. Critics have argued that the contrast in the attitudes of her heroines reveals that Austen had become disenchanted with the city once she became a resident. However, my belief is that this ignores the ironic distance that the author maintains from her characters, and that conflating Austen with her heroine in the later work is misleading. Austen benefited from her time in the city, as it provided her with additional intellectual opportunities and sources of material that would influence her works.

In addition, although Bath featured widely in literature of the period as a popular location for seeking marriage partners, it also had a salacious side to its reputation as a scene of seduction and vice. In both her novels, Austen exploits this dubious side of Bath's reputation, as a place of licentiousness and indulgence, to highlight the risks associated with seeking matrimony there for naïve or vulnerable young women. Furthermore, I will argue that Austen alludes to the Georgian sex trade by locating the Elliots and their companion, Mrs Clay, in Bath, to invoke the city's reputation for immorality through this connection. Throughout *Persuasion*, Austen uses various allusions to the *demimonde* to raise suspicions about Mrs Clay's respectability, including references to venereal disease and to the *ménage à trois* which was at the heart of a number of high profile scandals during the Georgian era.[962] As I will demonstrate, by linking Mrs Clay to prostitution through allusions to illicit behaviour and the sex trade, Austen intimates that the widow means to use her sexuality for financial gain, so foreshadowing her eventual fate when she elopes to become Mr Elliot's mistress.

Finally, I will discuss Austen's presentation of female vulnerability and the impact it has on feminine relationships within these novels. Whilst, in *Northanger Abbey*, the manipulative, deceitful behaviour of husband-hunting Isabella Thorpe is condemned, in her later work Austen shows that the prevailing patriarchal social structures force women into devious strategies against their fellow females as they seek to obtain financial security. Nevertheless, in this later novel, which features a high proportion of widowed female characters, such behaviour does not elicit

[962] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 187; Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 101.

authorial disapproval. Mrs Smith and Mrs Clay both profit from their schemes, revealing Austen's intention to highlight how the pressures of patriarchal society corrupt female morality.[963] Within her final novel, Austen seeks to describe and criticise her society by observing how it limits female opportunities and causes behavioural aberrations among them as a result.

'Only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them'[964]

I have previously discussed, in Chapter Two of this thesis, Austen's subtle use of associations as indicators to her readers that assist them in interpreting male characters.[965] Another method that she employs more broadly within her works, as an indication of authorial judgement, is the association of characters with works of literature. As Dow and Halsey suggest 'time and again, characters reveal themselves through their responses to literature'.[966] This use of literature as a key for understanding character is employed within all of Austen's works.

However, this use of literary references to reveal an individual's character is most fully explored within *Northanger Abbey* where worthy characters are associated with a sensible and proportionate approach to literature. Indeed, *Northanger Abbey* famously contains Austen's defence of the novel, as she argues that:

> Alas! if the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? […] There seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them [….] 'It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;' or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language (p. 58).

The novels listed here, as works 'in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed', are by Burney and Edgeworth. The novelists Austen appeals to for

[963] As Wollstonecraft asks, 'Is it then surprising that when the sole ambition of woman centres in beauty, and interest gives vanity additional force, perpetual rivalships should ensue? They are all running the same race, and would rise above the virtue of mortals, if they did not view each other with a suspicious and even envious eye', *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 311.
[964] Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 58.
[965] See Chapter Two, pp. 76-78, of this thesis.
[966] Dow and Halsey, 'Jane Austen's Reading: The Chawton Years', 2.

‘protection and regard’ are therefore fellow female authors.[967] Within this novel a balanced attitude towards reading, including novels, is shown to be a positive indication of sense. For instance, the motherly and dependable (though unimaginative) Mrs Morland, who is described as ‘a woman of useful plain sense, with a good temper’ (p. 37), reads Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison*. Her inability to detect Catherine’s romantic dejection when she returns home after being expelled from Northanger Abbey, along with the practical advice she offers her daughter, demonstrates that the novel has not encouraged her into sentimental fantasy. Furthermore, Catherine describes the work as ‘very entertaining’ (p. 62), suggesting her own practical good sense, (despite her youthful infatuation with the Gothic genre as I will discuss later in this chapter).[968] The hero, Henry Tilney, as well as reading more serious works of history, is happy to admit to enjoying *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and other novels, claiming ‘I myself have read hundreds and hundreds. Do not imagine that you can cope with me in a knowledge of Julias and Louisas’ (p. 122). This admission shows him to be honest and uninfluenced by the popular dogma that dismissed novels as worthless or having an immoral influence. Indeed, Henry argues, ‘the person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid’ (p. 121).

In contrast, the duplicitous Isabella Thorpe, believes *Sir Charles Grandison* to be ‘an amazing horrid book’ (p. 62) despite not having read it, showing her opinions to be vacuous. Similarly, her brother, the boorish John Thorpe demonstrates his stupidity when he exclaims ‘novels are all so full of nonsense and stuff; there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since *Tom Jones*, except *the Monk*’ (p. 69). Appreciation of Fielding’s *Tom Jones* became increasingly problematic as the eighteenth century progressed as disapproval of such bawdiness increased,[969] while Lewis’s *The Monk*, which features incest, rape and murder, was renowned as a lurid tale of sex and horror. It is not known whether Austen had read *The Monk*, but she would certainly have been aware of its controversial content due to the publicity it

[967] Of course, as previously noted in Chapter One, p. 36 of this thesis, Austen is named in the list of subscribers attached to Burney’s *Camilla* thereby showing her support of her fellow authors, Byrne, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 83.
[968] See note 272 in Chapter One, p. 41, of this thesis for discussion of Austen’s attitude towards *Sir Charles Grandison*.
[969] Averring Austen’s appreciation of Richardson, Henry Austen suggests ‘she did not rank any work of Fielding quite so high’, ‘Biographical Notice’, p. 141.

attracted on publication.[970] Neither of these novels was considered suitable reading matter for innocent young females like Catherine, and Thorpe's recommendation of them to her demonstrates his social ineptitude. Furthermore, Thorpe describes Burney's *Camilla*, one of the works Austen lists 'in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed' (p. 58), as a 'stupid book' (p. 69). He adds that it is 'the horridest nonsense you can imagine; there is nothing in the world in it but an old man's playing at see-saw and learning Latin' (pp. 69-70), whilst admitting to only having looked at the first volume. Unlike Tilney (or Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* who skilfully ingratiates himself by claiming the same tastes as Marianne) Thorpe shows he is unintelligent and incapable of creating a good impression in his claim never to read novels, and not distinguishing that *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was written by Radcliffe. These attributions to particular characters reveal where the author's approval or disapprobation lies. As Dow and Halsey aver, 'the cultural resonance of books allows Austen to use them as a sort of convenient shorthand to help her readers swiftly understand her characters'.[971]

The same technique is used by Austen in *Persuasion* to highlight the novel's central opposition between the worthy naval characters, such as the hero Captain Wentworth and Admiral Croft, with the dissolute aristocracy embodied by Sir Walter Elliot. This contrast is encapsulated by the opposition of the *Baronetage* and the *Navy Lists*.[972] As Jocelyn Harris notes:

> These two volumes represent radically different definitions of honour and rank, with the Navy List's proud record of names and deeds everywhere challenging the Baronetage's parade of inherited but not always deserved privilege.[973]

Furthermore, Austen uses literary associations with regard to Captain Benwick, who is described as being, 'intimately acquainted with all the tenderest songs of the one poet, and all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of the other' (p. 121).[974] As Waldron notes, Anne 'recognises Benwick's melancholy as an

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[970] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 160.
[971] Dow and Halsey, 'Jane Austen's Reading: The Chawton Years', 2.
[972] Probably John Debrett's *Baronetage of England* (1815) and the 1814 *Navy List* published by Austen's own publisher, John Murray, Barchas, *Matters of Fact*, pp. 207-208.
[973] Jocelyn Harris, '"Domestic Virtues and National Importance": Lord Nelson, Captain Wentworth, and the English Napoleonic War Hero', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 19: 1&2 (2006), 181-205, 204.
[974] The poets referred to here are Lord Byron (1788-1824) and Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). Austen reveals a grudging appreciation of Scott's novels in her complaint that: 'Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones. — It is not fair. — He has Fame & Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the

indulgence in an *expected*, theoretical and literary, sensibility rather than real suffering'.[975] Indeed, on hearing the descriptions of his reading habits, Anne 'ventured to hope he did not always read only poetry' (pp. 121-122) and recommends instead:

> a larger allowance of prose in his daily study; and on being requested to particularize, mentioned such works of our best moralists, such collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering (p. 122).

Anne is sympathetic towards Benwick, but his sentimental consumption of melancholy works of poetry and historical romance is often mocked by the authorial voice. It suggests a lack of sincerity in his behaviour, which is confirmed when he rapidly forgets his dead fiancée and forms another attachment. Furthermore, Anne's recognition that 'she had been eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would ill bear examination' (p. 122), involves her in this criticism of his self-indulgence. Austen, whilst sympathetic to Anne's situation, mocks her heroine's self-indulgent melancholy.

Indeed, as Johnson notes, the novel is often mistakenly viewed as Austen's most autobiographical work; claimed by critics as an autumnal retrospective that reflects her own romantic disappointments and suggests a presentiment that her life is reaching its conclusion.[976] I agree that this is an erroneous reading, based on readers interpreting the story through their own knowledge of Austen's approaching death, which ignores the ironic distance that Austen maintains in the construction of

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bread out of other people's mouths. — I do not like him, & do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it — but fear I must', Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 108: 28 September 1814, pp. 276-278, p. 277. However, it is not clear what attitude Austen held towards the controversial Byron, although they did share the same publisher, John Murray, Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 249. Her comment referring to Byron's work, that she has 'read the Corsair, mended my petticoat, & have nothing else to do' is ambiguous, Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 98: 5-8 March 1814, pp. 257-260, p. 257. However, Worsley believes it shows that she 'put him firmly into his place', *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 264. It certainly appears that she is being derogatory when she links his work to a mundane household task.
It is not known whether Austen was aware of Byron's role in the marriage of her acquaintance Lord Portsmouth. He had been a pupil of Mr Austen but became increasingly 'disturbed and eccentric' as he developed. He was married to his lawyer's daughter Mary-Ann Hanson in 1814 and Byron attended the ceremony. However, the Hansons 'fell into disgrace' due to their mistreatment of Lord Portsmouth, and the marriage was eventually declared void, Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, pp. 89-91. Austen notes the marriage of Lord Portsmouth and Miss Hanson in a letter to her sister, Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 99: 9 March 1814, pp. 261-262, p. 261.

[975] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 144.

[976] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 144.

her heroine.[977] It is important to note in this context that Anne is only twenty-seven at the commencement of the novel. This is still some distance 'to the years of danger' (p. 38), or spinsterhood, whose approach is feared by Anne's unmarried, elder sister. As Vickery notes 'the average age of marriage was around 26 for females before 1750, and almost 25 thereafter'.[978] Anne is still of marriageable age but has condemned herself to early spinsterhood. As Raff notes, 'Anne habitually welcomes immediate suffering in hopes of obtaining a future dividend of happiness'.[979] This is also shown by her musings when she joins the Musgroves and Captain Wentworth in a country walk. It is noted that 'the fresh-made path spoke the farmer, counteracting the sweets of poetical despondence, and meaning to have spring again' (p. 108). However, it is important to recognise that this is the narrator's interpretation of Anne's internal monologue and the juxtaposition of the practical farming activities with Anne's 'poetical' melancholy, show the author's ironic distance. This is reinforced later in the novel when Austen notes that:

> Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy, could never have passed along the streets of Bath, than Anne was sporting with from Camdenplace to Westgate-buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way (p. 200).

The narrator's affectionate mockery of the heroine's romantic, emotional response is unmissable in this passage with its alliteration and 'high-wrought' sentimental language. The overtly romantic diction of 'prettier musings' and 'eternal constancy' reveals the author's distance from Anne's idealised perceptions.

However, literature is not solely used within these two novels as an indication of personal qualities. It is also used to critique the treatment of women within Georgian society. It is a mistake to read *Northanger Abbey* as a criticism of the Gothic genre or the novels of Radcliffe, a popular author within this category whose works are cited frequently by Austen in her novel. The television adaptation of *Northanger Abbey*, which shows a repentant Catherine burning Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is very far from Austen's intention.[980] Indeed, as Gay notes, 'Austen and Radcliffe share an interest in the situation of the vulnerable young

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[977] Heydt-Stevenson notes that the clichéd descriptions of autumn within the novel 'ironically transform Anne's reverie and depression into an aesthetic construct', *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 186.
[978] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 208.
[979] Raff, *Jane Austen's Erotic Advice*, p. 135.
[980] *Northanger Abbey* [TV adaptation], directed by Jon Jones. *ITV Productions Ltd* (London: distributed in the UK by Granada Ventures Ltd, 2007).

woman, and her perception of the dangers that threaten her'.[981] Austen humorously engages with this theme in *Northanger Abbey*, as the heroine, Catherine, misinterprets her environment partly because of her reading of Gothic romances. Catherine seems to be led into a series of errors because of her overactive imagination, apparently stimulated by her reading of Gothic novels. This is particularly evidenced by her behaviour when she arrives at Northanger Abbey. Yet it should be noted that it is Henry's flirtatious teasing of Catherine with a Gothic fiction during their journey to his family estate that stimulates her subsequent behaviour.[982] As Johnson notes, 'the reason Catherine assents to ludicrously dark surmises about the cabinet is not that her imagination is inflamed with *Radcliffean* excesses, but rather that she trusts *Henry's* authority as a sensible man, and does not suspect that he […] would impose on her credulity in order to amuse himself'.[983] As a result, she embarrasses herself with fantasies about a chest she finds in her room that she discovers to be storing blankets, and a cabinet within which she discovers mysterious papers that are revealed to be nothing more than a laundry bill.

Furthermore, Kirkham has noted that although it appears that Catherine is chastened by Henry's dismissal of her wild fantasies, 'as events show, she was not so far out as might at first appear'.[984] Despite Catherine's acceptance that 'in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land' (p. 202), the fate of Henry's mother raises doubts about this assertion.[985] The contemporary reader would also, no doubt, have been able to call to mind high-profile cases which contradicted Henry's assertion that such events could not 'be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies' (p. 199). For instance, this recalls the violent treatment of Mary Eleanor Bowes, Countess of Strathmore, by her husband.[986] As previously discussed, the law at this time effectively classed a wife as her husband's

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[981] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 59.
[982] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 128-129.
[983] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 39.
[984] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 89.
[985] Kelly also suggests that through Catherine's repentant thoughts, when she realises that 'neither poison nor sleeping potions [are] to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist' (p. 202), Austen raises the possibility that Henry's mother died from complications due to pregnancy. Kelly notes that 'rhubarb was used as a purgative and, in high enough doses, could affect pregnancy', *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, pp. 70-71.
[986] See Chapter Three, pp. 117-119, of this thesis.

property.[987] Therefore, as Kirkham notes, 'General Tilney is allowed by the laws of England and the manners of the age to exert near absolute power over his wife and daughter, and he does so as an irrational tyrant'.[988] General Tilney's subsequent behaviour towards Catherine demonstrates this and emphasises that he is not worthy of the legal authority that he held over his wife and continues to wield over his daughter. As Fullerton argues, by ejecting Catherine from his home the General is guilty of a breach of care, as 'he has a duty to treat Catherine hospitably and to return her safely to her parents at the end of her visit'.[989] Catherine may be incorrect to believe that General Tilney is a murderer, but her judgement that he is morally deficient and untrustworthy proves accurate. Indeed, once she understands his behaviour she eventually concludes that 'she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty' (p. 243).

Catherine's dismissal from Northanger Abbey, when General Tilney discovers she is not an heiress as he mistakenly believed, and her unescorted journey home, represent both 'a real-life replay of the Gothic heroine's unaccompanied flight across the country'[990] and an inversion of the abduction scenario which features widely in literature of this period. Such abductions and plucky escapes were commonplace, both in the Gothic novels that Catherine enjoyed and also in those works that Austen recommends because they demonstrate 'the greatest powers of the mind' (p. 58). In Burney's *Camilla* for instance, the heiress, Eugenia, is abducted by the villainous Bellamy and forced into marriage with him so that he can steal her fortune. She is only released by his death, when he accidently shoots himself. Similarly, in Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, Harriet Byron is abducted by Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, who subsequently attempts to force her into marriage. She is eventually rescued by the eponymous Sir Charles, Richardson's depiction of the perfect hero, and her virtue is preserved. Furthermore, in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen mocks the abduction theme when Catherine is tricked, by John Thorpe, into missing an engagement to meet the Tilneys. The description of this event draws on the melodrama common in Gothic romance as:

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[987] See Chapter One, p. 14 of this thesis.
[988] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 89.
[989] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 164.
[990] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 71.

> Thorpe only lashed his horse into a brisker trot; […] and in another moment she was herself whisked into the Market-place. Still, however, and during the length of another street, she intreated him to stop. 'Pray, pray stop, Mr. Thorpe. – I cannot go on. – I will not go on. – I must go back to Miss Tilney.' But Mr. Thorpe only laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises, and drove on; and Catherine, angry and vexed as she was, having no power of getting away, was obliged to give up the point and submit (p. 103).

As Heydt-Stevenson contends, the language used here by Austen 'makes it impossible to read this kidnapping as anything other than a symbolic double of rape'.[991] These scenarios within the literature of the period reflected the real social position of women and the difficulties they encountered. Worsley has noted that in the eighteenth century 'men can travel and decide where they want to go and when they want to go. Women are moved about as if they were objects'.[992] Austen, in her letters, reveals her own experience of this, often bemoaning having to await the convenience of male relatives in order to travel. It is this difficulty which results in her previously noted famous comment about falling 'a Sacrifice to the arts of some fat Woman who would make me drunk with Small Beer',[993] apparently referring to one of the plates from Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress*.[994] She notes having to be 'dissuaded […] from so rash a step' as travelling at the convenience of her brother without confirmation that her friends will be available to receive her.[995] It also placed her in an embarrassing position in 1808 when she had to reveal to her brother details of her refusal of Harris Bigg-Wither's marriage proposal, in order to justify her urgency to get back to Southampton while his sisters were visiting to avoid seeming to slight them.[996] As Tomalin notes 'the family had simply assumed Godmersham [her brother's home] was as good for her as anywhere else […] she must have felt like an awkward parcel'.[997] It was not until later in her life that she was 'considered by her brothers to be worldly-wise enough to travel to London by stagecoach alone rather than having to wait about until a male relative was ready to accompany her'.[998] In *Persuasion*, Sales has noted that Anne has to wait for travel arrangements to be

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[991] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 121.
[992] Lucy Worsley, *A Very British Romance with Lucy Worsley*, Episode One, *BBC One Television* (8 October 2015).
[993] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 7, 18 September 1796, pp. 11-13, p. 12.
[994] See Chapter One, pp. 42-43 of this thesis.
[995] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 7, 18 September 1796, pp. 11-13, p. 12.
[996] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 222.
[997] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 207.
[998] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 278.

made for her in Lyme and when she is caught out by the rain in Bath.[999] He suggests that 'the severe restrictions on her movement are in marked contrast to Wentworth's ability to please himself'.[1000] As Sales suggests, while there 'is no overt comment about the gendered nature of transport and movement', Austen uses this theme within her novels to raise a gender issue.[1001] It was an issue that she frequently had to deal with in her own daily life.[1002]

Furthermore, Austen ironically emphasises her gender point by showing that the guileless teenager, Catherine, reaches home safely without inconvenience. Although Austen does not expose Catherine to criminal activity, as Fullerton contends:

> this was not because meeting a highwayman was an unlikely experience – it was quite the opposite – but because she knew that highwaymen had become a favourite image of the sentimental novelist and [she] determined to avoid them in her own fiction.[1003]

Nevertheless, at this time travelling was a hazardous undertaking for a young, unaccompanied female. Fullerton notes that during this period 'the roads of England were "decorated" with the grisly remains of highwaymen, hanging in gibbets near the scenes of their crimes […] Austen, travelling in southern England, is certain to have seen some'.[1004] However, Austen demonstrates that her heroine's greatest danger is not abduction by unscrupulous seducers or highway men, but rather from mundane pecuniary considerations. Eleanor Tilney, with greater foresight than Catherine, realises that she needs money to facilitate her journey, so that:

> but for this kindness of her friend, she might have been turned from the house without even the means of getting home; and the distress in which she must have been thereby involved fill[ed] the minds of both (p. 227).

This, of course, refers the reader back to Mrs Morland's initial advice to Catherine when she sets out for Bath. In Austen's ironic commentary on the plots of Gothic novels, she states that the heroine's mother failed to deliver 'cautions against the violence of such noblemen and baronets as delight in forcing young ladies away to

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[999] Sales, *Representations of Regency England*, p. 192.
[1000] Sales, *Representations of Regency England*, p. 192.
[1001] Sales, *Representations of Regency England*, p. 193.
[1002] The same issue is dramatically represented in *Pride and Prejudice* following Lydia's elopement. The male authority figures collectively pursue the couple to London while the female characters, and the reader, are forced to wait anxiously at home for letters carrying news.
[1003] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 43.
[1004] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, pp. 47-48.

some remote farm-house' (p. 41). In fact, Mrs Morland 'knew so little of lords and baronets, that she entertained no notion of their general mischievousness, and was wholly unsuspicious of danger to her daughter from their machinations' (p. 41). Instead she practically advises her daughter to keep a record of her expenditure and gives her a book for the purpose. Austen demonstrates that this everyday advice is far more valuable, as the greatest threat to Catherine within Georgian society is financial. General Tilney cannot even treat her with human decency once he realises she does not have substantial 'prospects', and her journey home can only be achieved with financial support. Her financial position makes her vulnerable and represents a greater threat than the dramatic schemes and 'machinations' of disreputable 'noblemen and baronets' that feature in Gothic romances.

'In all the white glare of Bath'[1005]

Of course, the most obvious similarity between *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* is that a substantial part of each of these novels is set in the city of Bath. During the majority of the Georgian period Bath was 'the most famous resort town in England, the queen of the spa towns'.[1006] As well as providing for those seeking health benefits from 'taking the waters', Bath was also widely viewed as a prime location for securing marriage partners.[1007] This reputation as the pre-eminent place for seeking matrimony explains its appearance as a significant location in two of Austen's novels and the frequent allusions to the city which appear throughout her works. Furthermore, it featured widely in literature of the period and Austen was one of the many authors who would find Bath's unique social structure to be 'a rich mine of human material for satire and fiction'.[1008] The city features in works by authors Austen is known to have admired, such as Burney's *Evelina*, Smith's *Emmeline* and Edgeworth's *Belinda*, in which it is noted that the heroine 'was hawked about every where, and the aunt was puffing her with might and main'[1009] in an attempt to find her a husband. This quote highlights another aspect of Bath's reputation, where the

[1005] Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 61.
[1006] Paula Byrne, '"The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath": Urban Pleasures in Jane Austen's World', *Persuasions*, 26 (2004), 13-26, 14.
[1007] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 15.
[1008] David Gadd, *Georgian Summer: Bath in the Eighteenth Century* (Bradford on Avon: Moonraker Press, 1977), p. 135.
[1009] Edgeworth, *Belinda*, I, p. 45.

suggestion that Belinda is being 'hawked' implies she is effectively being offered for sale, so conflating the aggressive hunt for marriage partners with prostitution.

Edgeworth's quote draws on the licentious side of Bath's reputation, which was also viewed as a scene of seduction and illicit sexual behaviour. Moll Flanders, Defoe's eponymous heroine, describes Bath as 'a Place of Gallantry enough; Expensive, and full of Snares'.[1010] She expands on the nature of these 'snares' when she describes the city as a place 'where Men find a Mistress sometimes, but very rarely look for a Wife; and Consequently all the particular Acquaintances a Woman can Expect to make there must have some Tendency that way'.[1011] Austen herself reflects this less salubrious reputation in her own works by using Bath as the location for Willoughby's seduction of the *ingénue*, Eliza Williams, in *Sense and Sensibility*, and by having her most morally questionable male characters, such as Henry Crawford and Frank Churchill, frequent the city. Bath's reputation for illicit behaviour was partly a result of the city's unique social structure, as it 'prided itself on its relaxed attitude towards rank'.[1012] This breakdown of social barriers could be exploited by the unscrupulous and represented a threat to the vulnerable or unsophisticated. The literature of the period exploits this disruption of social norms to expose characters to situations which could be perilous for the socially naïve.

Northanger Abbey and *Persuasion* reveal Austen's intimate knowledge of Bath and the unique social rules that governed it. For instance, Byrne has noted that in *Northanger Abbey*, 'the regulated uniformity of the Bath social circuit is parodied in a dialogue between Catherine and Henry in the Lower Rooms'.[1013] Their conversation reflects the 'regulated' weekly round of activities:

> 'Have you yet honoured the Upper Rooms?'
>
> 'Yes, sir, I was there last Monday.'
>
> 'Have you been to the theatre?'
>
> 'Yes, sir, I was at the play on Tuesday.'
>
> 'To the concert?'
>
> 'Yes, sir, on Wednesday.' (p. 48)

[1010] Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 106.
[1011] Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 106.
[1012] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 14-15.
[1013] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 20.

Austen's understanding of the social routines, reflected in this quotation, resulted from short visits paid to the city on a number of occasions during the late 1790s.[1014] These visits coincided with her writing of the original version of *Northanger Abbey*. Furthermore, she would subsequently live in the city following the retirement of her father, from 1801 to 1806.[1015] By the time Austen came to reside in Bath, the city had already begun to decline from its earlier heyday, becoming less fashionable as visits to seaside resorts, such as Brighton, increased in popularity.[1016] Austen would reflect this fashion in her final uncompleted work, *Sanditon*, which is based in a fledgling coastal village that optimistically hopes to rival more established resorts such as Brighton and Eastbourne, boasting the advantage of being 'the most desirable distance from London! One complete, measured mile nearer' than the latter.[1017] Consequently, as these resorts increased in popularity the aristocratic *bon ton* became less likely to patronise Bath. As Worsley notes:

> the more Bath society was penetrated by members of the middling sort of people, the more the truly posh withdrew from the great and glittering public gatherings formerly presided over by Beau Nash.[1018]

When Austen visited and lived in the city the days of Richard 'Beau' Nash, the famous Master of Ceremonies and original 'legislator of manners and guardian of public decorum',[1019] were long gone after his death in 1761.[1020] However, his influence on the social structure of Bath remained in evidence, and as reflected in Catherine and Henry's conversation, it was still the case that 'events and activities followed each other in a prescribed order like the steps in a minuet'.[1021]

Austen's well-informed representation of Bath within *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* reflects the distance between their composition as well as the different ages and social positions of the two heroines.[1022] The youthful Catherine, on her

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[1014] For instance, visits are recorded in November 1797 and May 1799, Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, pp. 202 and 225.
[1015] Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, p. 257 (arrival in Bath) and p. 330 (departure from Bath).
[1016] Byrne notes that the move from 'the spa town to the seaside, reflect[ed] an important trend in the health and leisure industries', *A Life in Small Things*, p. 320. Furthermore, 'sea-bathing was the latest vogue in healthcare', Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 262.
[1017] Jane Austen, *Sanditon* (1817), in Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*, p. b1-13.
[1018] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 155.
[1019] Gadd, *Georgian Summer*, p. 53.
[1020] Gadd, *Georgian Summer*, p. 82.
[1021] Gadd, *Georgian Summer*, p. 59.
[1022] Wheeler, 'English Spa Culture', 127.

first visit to Bath, is full of optimism and eagerness, engaging readily in social engagements, as 'shops were to be visited; some new part of the town to be looked at; and the Pump-room to be attended, where they paraded up and down for an hour' (p. 47). Nevertheless, Catherine's first experience of a Ball when she arrives in Bath, presents the reader with a threatening environment as she clings firmly to Mrs Allen while they navigate the 'mob' to avoid being 'torn asunder by any common effort of a struggling assembly' (p. 43). Within this scene, Heydt-Stevenson has noted 'the revolutionary imagery, embedded here in everyday conversation'.[1023] Austen uses this imagery to depict the almost riotous nature of the Ball by evoking the language of the French Revolution and political instability in England though her use of the words 'mob' and 'struggling assembly'.[1024] Heydt-Stevenson notes that during the 1790s 'trials for treason, gag orders, famine, and the subsequent uprisings protesting starvation and repressive measures made such physical imagery ubiquitous'.[1025] The word 'mob' was especially politicised as its derogatory use was employed by the English gentry to dismiss protests.[1026] It is a term used by Henry Tilney to mock his sister's fears, suggesting that:

> she immediately pictured to herself a mob of three thousand men assembling in St. George's Fields; the Bank attacked, the Tower threatened, the streets of London flowing with blood, a detachment of the 12th Light Dragoons, (the hopes of the nation,) called up from Northampton to quell the insurgents, and the gallant Capt. Frederick Tilney, in the moment of charging at the head of his troop, knocked off his horse by a brickbat from an upper window.

Although Henry dismisses his sister as a 'simpleton' for her concerns, such events were in fact common during the 1790s and 'Eleanor's "stupid" terror alludes to multiple events, including the Gordon Riots [and] uprisings in London in 1792 (one Eliza de Feuillide [Austen's cousin, and later sister-in-law] witnessed)'.[1027] Austen's use of such language undermines Henry's claims about the safety of women within society, revealing the threatening nature of the Georgian world for those existing outside of patriarchal protection (Catherine and Mrs Allen are left exposed to the 'mob' when Mr Allen abandons them to play cards). Catherine's subsequent fears about breaching social etiquette when she is tricked by her brother and the Thorpes

[1023] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 109.
[1024] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 109.
[1025] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 109.
[1026] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 109.
[1027] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 110.

into slighting the Tilneys, also shows the threatening nature of Bath society which can 'be painful and humiliating if the social codes are misunderstood'.[1028] Catherine is distressed because:

> she knew not how such an offence as her's might be classed by the laws of worldly politeness, to what a degree of unforgivingness it might with propriety lead, nor to what rigours of rudeness in return it might justly make her amenable' (p. 108).

Catherine's 'offence' is simply having gone on a carriage ride with Thorpe, when he convinces her that the Tilneys have broken their engagement with her to go for a walk. The language that she uses, 'unforgivingness' and 'rigours of rudeness', show the anxiety that she feels, due to her inexperience in negotiating an unfamiliar social milieu, to avoid giving offence. Throughout the novel, as Gay notes, 'we see [Catherine] unconsciously shifting, as she tries on adult roles, between socially defined femininity and her native commonsense'.[1029] Although Catherine meets her future husband in her first dancing partner (as Austen mocks romantic literary conventions), she also experiences challenges to her security through the Thorpes' attempts to manipulate her and the avaricious behaviour of General Tilney. Catherine questions her own decision-making and lacks a reliable moral guide, having only the fashion obsessed Mrs Allen to rely upon. When asked for advice, Mrs Allen can only reflect that riding in open carriages is objectionable because 'you are splashed getting in and getting out; and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction' (p. 119). She is unable to make a moral judgement on whether it is appropriate for her young companion to participate in such activities. Catherine's first visit to Bath is exciting but also destabilizing as she is faced with new situations to negotiate that are shown to be potentially threatening to her social position. In this way Austen reflects just how tightly governed and rule-bound this highly structured social environment was, and the impact it could have on the lives and marriage prospects of the women within it.

In contrast, Anne's response to the city reflects the different stage of her life and marital expectations, compared to Catherine's youthful enthusiasm and social naivety. Anne has an aversion to 'all the white glare of Bath' (p. 61) and holds 'a very determined, though very silent, disinclination for Bath; [catching] the first dim

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[1028] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 21.
[1029] Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, p. 65.

view of the extensive buildings, smoking in rain, without any wish of seeing them better' (p. 149). Anne associates Bath with painful memories from her past and does not share Catherine's optimism about her own future, believing she has missed her opportunity to marry. Furthermore, Austen reveals Anne's disengagement from the marriage market through having her choose to play the piano during the dancing at Uppercross, rather than engaging in the dancing herself. Nevertheless, Anne does not experience the social anxiety exhibited by Catherine, as she has confidence in her own judgement and is able to resist attempts by her family and friends to manipulate her. For example, Anne relies on her own judgement of Mr Elliot's attentions, which raise her suspicions because he 'was too generally agreeable. Various as were the tempers in her father's house, he pleased them all' (p. 173). She also ignores her father's criticism when she visits her impoverished friend, Mrs Smith, rather than accompanying him to see wealthy relatives.

In contrast to Catherine's exploits, the activities which Anne's family attend in Bath, mostly private parties or sedate musical recitals, reflect the way the city itself had altered in the intervening time between the novels, with the social elite beginning to shun its public social entertainments and mixed company, as noted earlier in this chapter. Anne's family have retired to Bath to retrench on their spending, whilst still maintaining their social standing, while her friend, Mrs Smith, has retired there through ill health. As Byrne notes:

> Bath was popular not just for recreation, but also for recuperation. It was a place associated with sickness and the dying as much as it was with health and pleasure.[1030]

Anne finds Bath to be a place of retirement, as it was for Austen's father. *Persuasion* consequently reflects a different view of Bath, as opposed to the exciting social whirl of courtship shown in *Northanger Abbey*.

As well as representing differences between the situations of the heroines and changes in Bath's popularity, it has been argued that the novels also reflect Austen's changing attitude towards the city.[1031] It is easy to believe that, as a young visitor, Austen shared Catherine's enthusiasm for the novelty of Bath, and this early novel

[1030] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 22.
[1031] Wheeler, 'English Spa Culture', 127.

'depicts a city of amusement, sociability and pleasure'.[1032] But though Austen may have shared Catherine's youthful fervour during her first short visits to Bath, it seems she felt differently about permanently moving to the city.[1033] There is an anecdote that Austen fainted when told about the family's intended relocation to Bath on her father's retirement.[1034] Some have taken this story as an indication that Austen must have been unhappy about moving to Bath, even claiming that she was depressed whilst living there and became unproductive as a writer because of this depression.[1035] In *Persuasion*, the unenthusiastic response of the heroine to the city has been interpreted as suggesting a revised opinion formed during Austen's residence in the city when it became her home. This argument is supported by the idea that Austen's works are the products of the two stable periods of her home life. However, Worsley notes 'scholars have since disputed th[e] suggestion of a two-phase career'.[1036] In addition, Byrne suggests that once Austen 'got over the shock of the removal to Bath, she began to look forward to the greater freedoms urban life would bring'.[1037] Indeed, in a letter from this period, as the family prepared to relocate, Austen notes:

> I get more & more reconciled to the idea of our removal […] there is something interesting in the bustle of going away […] It must not be generally known however that I am not sacrificing a great deal in quitting the Country – or I can expect to inspire no tenderness.[1038]

It is difficult to assess Austen's feelings about living in Bath as the evidence is sparse and at times contradictory. Austen appears to have appreciated the opportunities for taking part in the social activities and events that were now on offer to her. As Byrne notes:

> Bath, as a spa town devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, offered outdoor and indoor concerts, theatrical entertainments, public breakfasts and dances in the Upper and Lower Rooms, libraries, chocolate, and coffee houses. The theatre was run in tandem with the Bristol playhouse and was regarded as one of the best in the country.[1039]

[1032] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 21.
[1033] Tomalin suggests Austen had 'enjoyed Bath as a visitor and used it as a writer, but she had no wish at all to live there', *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 173.
[1034] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 171.
[1035] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 175.
[1036] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 250.
[1037] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 15.
[1038] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 29, 3-5 January 1801, pp. 66-69, p. 68.
[1039] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 14.

Austen enjoyed going to the theatre, attending musical performances and public assemblies, visiting the pleasure gardens and 'promenading the crescent'.[1040] References to plays she may have attended in Bath have been noted within her novels and correspondence,[1041] suggesting her interest in the wider cultural opportunities available and their enduring influence on her own works.[1042] However, little correspondence from the period has survived and 'her very occasional letters from this early time in Bath are sad, sharp [and] lonely'.[1043] Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that several of these letters were written whilst Austen was still dealing with the double loss of her father, who died in 1805, and the death of her close friend, Mrs Lefroy, in a riding accident.[1044] The tone inevitably reflects these distressing events and not necessarily her broader feelings about living in Bath. However, it is certainly true that her literary activity seems to have decreased, with only the fragment of an aborted novel, *The Watsons*, remaining from this period. However, as Kelly notes, it was also 'during this period, in the spring of 1803, that she had her first novel accepted for publication'.[1045] This apparently encouraging development in her career as an author led only to disappointment when the novel, *Susan*, inexplicably failed to appear despite being advertised.[1046] Nonetheless, the speed of composition of her later novels suggests that she had already cogitated on them before she became settled at Chawton and could begin drafting these works. Rather than representing a fallow period therefore, it seems that Bath supplied her imagination with further material to incorporate into her novels.

One of the sources that appears to have had a significant influence on Austen's imagination, was the weekly *Bath Chronicle.* This newspaper included 'announcements of entertainments and, most important, a list of arrivals'.[1047] In 1799 whilst visiting Bath, Austen noted in a letter that 'There was a very long list of Arrivals here, in the Newspaper yesterday, so that we need not immediately dread absolute

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[1040] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 18.
[1041] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, pp. 64-65.
[1042] Similarly, Byrne notes that for the author Mary Robinson, 'Bath was an ideal location to contemplate the fashionable world and brood upon the ways in which it might provide raw material for new literary production', *Perdita*, p. 285.
[1043] Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home*, p. 164.
[1044] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 189.
[1045] Kelly, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, p. 15.
[1046] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 185.
[1047] Gadd, *Georgian Summer*, p. 64.

Solitude'.[1048] It has been noted that many of the names appearing in this column during Austen's first winter in Bath would later appear in her novels.[1049] This provides evidence that she was attentive to the comings and goings of high-society. It is notable that during the period when Austen was in residence the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and their entourage, including the Duke's mistress, Elizabeth (Bess) Foster, were also in Bath due to ill health (from late 1803 until early 1804).[1050] Georgiana was 'drinking the waters and trying to wean herself off laudanum',[1051] and it is entirely possible that Austen was aware of this trio being in Bath, as their presence would have been noteworthy. Their arrival appeared in the 'Arrived Here' section of *The Bath Chronicle* in November 1803.[1052] Knowledge of this high-profile *ménage à trois* may have influenced Austen while she was writing *Persuasion*, as she reflects on this form of scandalous relationship in the storyline concerning Mrs Clay and the Elliot family, as I will demonstrate.

'A very dangerous companion'[1053]

One of the key storylines in *Persuasion* concerns the relationship between Mrs Clay, Sir Walter Elliot and his eldest daughter, Elizabeth. It is a situation that reflects the *ménage à trois*, which was at the heart of many high-profile Georgian scandals. As discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, securing a divorce during this period was virtually impossible.[1054] Requiring an Act of Parliament, it was an option only available for an aggrieved, wealthy husband, and it incurred significant social stigma for both parties as details of proceedings were published for public entertainment.[1055] As Fullerton notes '*ménage à trois* were far from uncommon amongst the aristocracy of Jane Austen's day',[1056] and it seems possible that the difficulties in securing divorce made it easier to tolerate living in a relationship of this nature rather than encountering the disadvantages and difficulties of a public scandal. For instance,

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[1048] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 19, 17 May 1799, pp. 39-41, p. 41.
[1049] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, pp. 139-140.
[1050] Foreman, *Georgiana*, p. 368.
[1051] Foreman, *Georgiana*, p. 369.
[1052] *The Bath Chronicle*, Thursday, 17 November 1803, p. 3, *British Library Newspapers, Part IV: 1780-1950*, https://www.gale.com/uk/c/british-library-newspapers-part-iv (accessed August 2015).
[1053] Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 46.
[1054] See Chapter One, p. 13, of this thesis.
[1055] Bailey notes that 'almost all Parliamentary divorces were granted to husbands. None were granted to wives prior to 1791, and of eighty-eight Parliamentary divorces granted between 1791 and 1820, only one was granted to a wife', 'The Marriage Law of Jane Austen's World'.
[1056] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 61.

Emma Hamilton famously lived in a *ménage à trois* with her compliant husband, Sir William, and her married lover, Admiral Nelson.[1057] Other high-profile scandals, such as those involving Sir Richard and Lady Worsley and her lover, George Bisset, and the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and his mistress, Elizabeth Foster, also featured *ménage à trois*.[1058] Although high-profile public scandals usually featured the most salacious form of this connection, involving a married couple living with the lover of one of the pair, literary representations of this type of relationship differed. In literature the *ménage à trois* is often evoked through a male authority figure using a younger female relative to allow him to live with his lover under the guise of a companionate relationship for the young girl. In Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, for example, Sir Thomas Grandison invites the widowed Mrs Oldham, who will become his mistress, into his household as a governess for his daughters. This plotline was used as a device in novels to present a moral challenge to the younger character or reveal the depravity of those persons engaging in this illicit behaviour. Austen alludes to a *ménage à trois* in *Mansfield Park* to reveal the moral deficiencies of Admiral Croft. His niece, Mary Crawford, refuses to live with her uncle after he decides to move his mistress into his home. Mary's lack of compliance was no doubt inconvenient for her Uncle and his mistress, as it meant that they did not have a legitimate excuse for her residence. I will contend that in *Persuasion* Austen evokes the *ménage à trois* as one of a number of allusions used to raise suspicions about Mrs Clay's character and her intentions, while also highlighting Elizabeth Elliot's naivety regarding her friend's motivations.

Mrs Clay had returned to her parents' home after 'an unprosperous marriage' (p. 46), a phrase which suggests that her motivation for entering the marriage state was predominately pecuniary rather than romantic. In contrast to the Elliot family's friend, Lady Russell, a financially independent widow who has no need to remarry, Austen indicates through the language she employs in her description of Mrs Clay that she is actively seeking an eligible marriage. When Mrs Clay is widowed her lack

[1057] I have previously argued in Chapter Five, pp. 191-199, of this thesis, that Austen alludes to Hamilton in her novel *Emma*.

[1058] Sir Richard Worsley, 'far from being ignorant of [his wife's] affair with their neighbour, […] openly encouraged it', Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 51; Foster 'could see that [the Devonshires] both needed a confidante, a role that she was very happy to play, although it required her to act two quite different parts: with the Duke she was submissive and flirtatious; with Georgiana she was passionate and sensitive', Foreman, *Georgiana*, p. 102.

of 'prosperity' results in her return to her parent's home, showing her to be deficient of independent means. She has also produced 'the additional burthen of two children' (p. 46), who conveniently vanish and are never again mentioned.[1059] This may be intended to humorously evoke novels such as *Moll Flanders*, in which the eponymous prostitute heroine produces numerous children, who subsequently disappear with their fate remaining undisclosed. However, this was also the real, lived experience of women who were forced to give up their children in order to maintain their social position or the ability to operate unencumbered within the *demimonde*. Both the Duchess of Devonshire and Lady Worsley were forced to send away their illegitimate children into the care of others.[1060] Furthermore, Mrs Clay's offspring significantly underline the threat that she represents, by providing vital evidence that she can bear children and, therefore, can potentially produce male heirs. Mrs Clay accompanies Sir Walter and his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, ostensibly as her companion, when they are forced to leave their home, Kellynch Hall, and move to Bath due to their extravagant lifestyle and the need to reduce their expenditure. This justification gives a respectable appearance to the arrangement. However, because Mrs Clay is an impoverished widow (and therefore was considered to be sexually initiated) and Sir Walter is an eligible single man, the connection raises suspicions about the true nature of the relationships between the parties.[1061] Wider society would have viewed the relationship cynically because of their awareness of the strategies employed by the fashionably dissipated to create the illusion of respectability by presenting illicit liaisons in a different aspect. However, as Rubenhold notes, 'society was still of a mind to accept innocent

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[1059] It is sometimes mistakenly claimed that Mrs Clay is divorced. Although women could not usually secure Parliamentary divorce, as Bailey notes, 'wives could obtain a separation from bed and board in the Ecclesiastical Courts on the grounds of adultery', 'The Marriage Law of Jane Austen's World'. However, this form of legal separation would not allow the parties to remarry so this is clearly not the case. It would almost certainly have only been possible for Mrs Clay's husband to secure a divorce through Parliament if she had committed adultery. As a divorced woman she certainly would not have been admitted into the society of young, unmarried women. Her fate would have been the same social exclusion experienced by Maria Rushworth in *Mansfield Park*. Mrs Clay's widowhood is confirmed when Anne, reflecting on her father's hypocrisy, notes internally that her own friend 'Mrs Smith was not the only widow in Bath between thirty and forty, with little to live on, and no s[u]rname of dignity' (p. 170).

[1060] The Duchess of Devonshire, on her husband's orders, gave up the child she had with her lover Charles Grey, Foreman, *Georgiana*, p. 265; Lady Worsley travelled to France to leave her illegitimate daughter in the care of a local family, Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, p. 226.

[1061] This is, of course, different to Catherine's cohabitation with the Allens or Elizabeth's holiday with the Gardiners. The respective situations of the individuals involved influences the way the relationship is viewed by society. Mrs Clay's previous history and sexual knowledge makes her intentions questionable and raises the belief that the penurious widow is seeking a husband.

explanations for suspicious situations so long as any incriminating behaviour was scrupulously concealed'.[1062] For instance, Elizabeth Foster was able to live with her lover, the Duke of Devonshire, despite the relationship being widely known, because she was presented as his wife's companion. Indeed, Foreman suggests that when the Duke of Devonshire threatened to separate from his wife, due to her gambling debts, Foster did not encourage him because 'she would become a non-person - ostracized by polite society and despised' had she lived as the Duke's acknowledged mistress.[1063]

Austen invokes this type of relationship within her own novel through her portrayal of Mrs Clay. Mrs Clay and her father, Mr Shepherd, a 'civil, cautious lawyer' (p. 42) who acts as Sir Walter's agent, are both shown to be skilful flatterers and manipulators.[1064] Manipulative, self-serving and sycophantic characters are common figures in Georgian literature. These are characters, such as Wickham in Austen's own works, or Colonel Fitz-Edward in Smith's *Emmeline*, who 'possessed a sort of plausible and insinuating eloquence, which hardly ever failed of removing every impression, however strong, against him'.[1065] They use flattery to gain their own objectives, usually practicing on the pride and susceptibility of their targets. It is noted that Mr Shepherd 'would rather have the *disagreeable* prompted by any body else, [and] excused himself from offering the slightest hint' (p. 42). His manipulative abilities are demonstrated when Sir Walter exclaims against reducing his expenditure, claiming 'he would sooner quit Kellynch-hall at once, than remain in it on such disgraceful terms' (p. 44). In response, this 'hint was immediately taken up by Mr. Shepherd, whose interest was involved in the reality of Sir Walter's retrenching' (p. 44). In this way, Mr Shepherd makes it appear that leaving Kellynch was Sir Walter's proposal, suggesting that 'the idea had been started in the very quarter which ought to dictate' (p. 44). Preferring the family to move to Bath, despite Sir Walter's initial preference for London, Mr Shepherd demonstrates that he is 'skilful enough to dissuade him from it, and make Bath preferred' (p. 44).

[1062] Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley's Whim*, pp. 51-52.
[1063] Foreman, *Georgiana*, p. 188.
[1064] Tomalin suggests that 'Lawyer Hanson's daughter Mary-Ann [who married Lord Portsmouth] could even have suggested Mrs Clay, daughter of Sir Walter Elliot's "civil, cautious lawyer", Mr Shepherd, with her aspirations to the baronet', *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 102. See note 974 above.
[1065] Smith, *Emmeline*, 1, p. 166; in Colonel Fitz-Edward's case he will be reformed by his guilt over the fate of the married woman he seduces.

Recognising these persuasive skills as a familial trait, Lady Russell considers Mrs Clay 'a very dangerous companion' (p. 46) for Elizabeth. The heroine, Anne, echoes this sentiment, believing Mrs Clay to possess 'in an acute mind and assiduous pleasing manners, infinitely more dangerous attractions than any merely personal might have been' (p. 62). Anne recognises that although Mrs Clay has 'freckles, and a projecting tooth, and a clumsy wrist, which [Sir Walter] was continually making severe remarks upon' (p. 62), these shortcomings might eventually be overcome by a flattering manner due to her father's pronounced vanity. Anne tries to warn Elizabeth of 'results the most serious to [their] family from the intimacy' (p. 62), because she is aware of how the relationship might be interpreted and of the possibility that Mrs Clay might manipulate Sir Walter into an unsuitable marriage. However, Elizabeth exclaims against 'such an absurd suspicion' (p. 62), suggesting that 'one would imagine you had never heard my father speak of her personal misfortunes, though I know you must fifty times' (p. 63). Austen demonstrates that Elizabeth is being duped by her flattering friend. One example of this manipulation is revealed to the reader through Mrs Clay's encouragement of Elizabeth to view Mr Elliot as a suitor. Mrs Clay's duplicity is subsequently exposed when she elopes with her friend's supposed admirer. Austen shows that the female friendship between Mrs Clay and Elizabeth is corrupted by the necessitous scheming of the former. Through such insincere performances Mrs Clay is able to secure her position with Sir Walter and his eldest daughter and blind them to her own objectives.

Furthermore, although Sir Walter and Elizabeth are shown to be naïve about their sycophantic friend, by locating the Elliots and their companion in Bath, Austen invokes her readers' knowledge of the city's salacious reputation to raise suspicions about the nature of the relationship between these characters. Contemporary readers could interpret the relationship through their own knowledge of high-profile scandals, and would have recognised this allusion to a *ménage à trois*. In addition, Barchas notes that Austen's 'project of ironic inversion becomes increasingly risqué' when she introduces the Elliots' relative, the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple.[1066] By connecting these names, Austen thereby invokes her readers' knowledge of the scandalous Georgian figure, Grace Dalrymple Elliott, through this storyline.

[1066] Barchas, *Matters of Fact*, p. 251.

Commonly known as 'Dally the Tall', Grace had fallen into disrepute following a scandalous divorce.[1067] She would become one of the era's most fashionable courtesans, counting figures such as the Prince of Wales and Duc d'Orléans amongst her lovers.[1068] The Elliots' obsequious fawning over their relative thereby becomes another humorous indication of their lack of judgement.

Furthermore, Austen indicates that the wider society of Bath views the family's connection to Mrs Clay with suspicion, ascribing an illicit intent to the liaison. Mrs Smith, Anne's old school friend who is also resident in the city, reports that she has heard general gossip about Mrs Clay, noting that:

> she is a clever, insinuating, handsome woman, poor and plausible, and altogether such in situation and manner, as to give a general idea among Sir Walter's acquaintance, of her meaning to be Lady Elliot, and as general a surprise that Miss Elliot should be apparently blind to the danger (p. 212).

Sir Walter's heir, Mr Elliot, also recognises the threat that Elizabeth refuses to acknowledge, viewing Mrs Clay as a danger to his inheritance. He re-establishes his connection to the family with the intention of exerting influence and preventing Mrs Clay's supposed scheme to marry Sir Walter. Mr Elliot fears that the birth of a male child from such a union would displace his own inheritance of the baronetcy. Mr Elliot had been estranged from Sir Walter since it was reported that he had 'spoken most disrespectfully of them all, most slightingly and contemptuously of the very blood he belonged to, and the honours which were hereafter to be his own' (p. 40). However, he is another of Austen's plausible charmers, and once he desires re-admittance into the family he is able to '[explain] away all the appearance of neglect on his own side. It had originated in misapprehension entirely' (p. 152). Although he indignantly denies snubbing his family, in reality he still views them with contempt. His duplicitous behaviour is solely motivated by his desire to ensure that Sir Walter does not remarry, so re-introducing himself:

> with the view of renewing his former acquaintance and recovering such a footing in the family, as might give him the means of ascertaining the degree of his danger, and of circumventing the lady [Mrs Clay] if he found it material (pp. 212-213).

[1067] Barchas, *Matters of Fact*, p. 251.
[1068] Barchas, *Matters of Fact*, pp. 251-253.

A marriage between Mrs Clay and Sir Walter would threaten Mr Elliot's future prospects and he is intent on preventing this outcome. Contemporary readers would have recognised his fears as well-founded, from examples such as the success of Elizabeth Foster, who eventually married her lover the Duke of Devonshire in 1809, following the death of his first wife Georgiana.[1069]

Furthermore, the efficacy of Mrs Clay's strategy is confirmed when Anne joins her family in Bath, after being absent for some months. It is notable that Sir Walter suggests Mrs Clay's freckles have been improved by the application of Gowland's lotion, so indicating an increased inclination to admire her and justifying Anne's earlier fears. His altered perception reveals that Mrs Clay's flattery is having its desired effect. Moreover, the reference to Gowland's lotion is another allusion used by Austen to raise doubts about Mrs Clay's character and link her to prostitution. Heydt-Stevenson notes that one of the uses of Gowland's lotion was as a treatment for venereal disease, an infection commonly associated with the sex trade.[1070] Fullerton explains that Gowland's lotion 'contained mercury, the usual prescription for syphilis', and additionally that freckles were considered an indication of the disease.[1071] Plate 3 of Hogarth's *Harlot's Progress*, for instance (see Illustration 7 below), shows a 'beauty spot' on Moll's face, and the 'medicines littered around [the room] suggest that she is already in the early stages of infection'.[1072]

[1069] Foreman, *Georgiana*, p. 396.
[1070] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 187.
[1071] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 101.
[1072] Cruickshank, *Georgian London*, p. 13.

Illustration 7: *The Harlot's Progress, Plate 3: Moll has gone from kept woman to common prostitute*, William Hogarth (1732)[1073]

Furthermore, Mrs Clay is linked to prostitution through her reference to the Navy, when she claims that 'I have known a good deal of the profession; and besides their liberality, they are so neat and careful in all their ways!' (p. 48). Heydt-Stevenson suggests that this is 'a ribald joke at the character's expense in order to reveal that she poses a serious threat to the family', arguing that the word 'known' has a sexual connotation in this context and particularly in the light of the Navy's reputation for libertinism.[1074] Heydt-Stevenson explains that Mrs Clay's 'comment about the Navy's liberality implies that they pay well in all kinds of respects, and that their ability to be "neat and careful in all their ways" puns on their ability to avoid venereal disease'.[1075] This joke therefore links Mrs Clay to prostitution, reinforcing the impression that her behaviour is immoral and that she is not adverse to using her sexuality for pecuniary advantage. In addition, it is significant that Mr Elliot's liaison with Mrs Clay first becomes apparent when they are seen meeting surreptitiously outside The White Hart Inn. Fullerton notes that:

[1073] British Library, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-harlots-progress (accessed July 2018).
[1074] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 187-188.
[1075] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 188.

> the stables at the rear were a particularly popular stamping ground for local prostitutes […] As Mrs Clay is about to elope with [Mr Elliot], and he is trying to 'buy' her services so that she won't marry Sir Walter Elliot, this seems a symbolically fitting place for them to be meeting. Contemporary Bath readers would have picked up the subtle hint.[1076]

These hints that Mrs Clay may not be entirely respectable foreshadow her fate in becoming Mr Elliot's mistress. Heydt-Stevenson notes that 'Austen […] associate[s] this character with the *demimonde* early in the novel, foreshadowing her eventual end'.[1077] As Fullerton suggests 'Austen wants her readers to look doubtfully on Mrs Clay even before she runs off with Mr Elliot and is established as his mistress in London'.[1078] This reading of Mrs Clay as morally deficient, with an intent to use her sexuality for financial gain, is reinforced at the novel's conclusion when she is revealed to be living under Mr Elliot's protection. It is clear Mrs Clay has thrown off the illusion of respectability in order to secure financial benefit, by openly becoming Mr Elliot's lover in the hope of one day becoming mistress of Kellynch Hall. Contemporary opinion would have considered her as prostituting herself for financial benefit, and so becoming part of a wider social vice in trading sex for privilege. However, these allusions to venereal disease and common prostitution evoke the high risk of her strategy and it is unclear whether her gamble will lead to destitution or affluence.

As a result of this elopement the end of the novel leaves the fate of Kellynch Hall in doubt,[1079] suggesting it will eventually be inherited by the calculating heir, Mr Elliot, and potentially by Mrs Clay, as:

> it is now a doubtful point whether his cunning, or hers, may finally carry the day; whether, after preventing her from being the wife of Sir Walter, he may not be wheedled and caressed at last into making her the wife of Sir William (p. 252).

This unsatisfactory ending was felt to require amendment in one recent adaptation, which ends with Wentworth seemingly purchasing Kellynch Hall as a wedding gift for

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[1076] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 101.
[1077] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 187.
[1078] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 102.
[1079] Similarly, the destiny of Mansfield Park is left in doubt as the long-term fate of the heir, Tom Bertram, remains uncertain. As Sales notes, 'there is […] a deafening silence on the crucial question of whether the heir to Mansfield will ever produce an heir himself', *Representations of Regency England*, p. 106.

Anne, so imposing a resolution that Austen evidently did not intend.[1080] Austen's conclusion, of course, emphasises one of the novel's main themes in juxtaposing the irresponsible land-owning aristocracy with worthy naval officers, as noted earlier in this chapter. Through this uncertain ending, Austen underlines the novel's criticism of the landed gentry who neglect their social responsibilities. This is reinforced through the contrast between the merited success of naval characters, such as the novel's hero, Captain Wentworth, and the estimable Admiral Croft, and the irresponsible nobility, represented by the vain and vacuous Sir Walter, 'who cares more about his mirrors than his estate or his daughters'.[1081] As Johnson notes, 'in *Persuasion* the landed classes have not lost their power, they have lost their prestige and their moral authority for the heroine'.[1082] Austen criticises the moral deficiency of the landed gentry through the behaviour of Sir Walter and his heir, demonstrating that the well-being of the nation depends on both the responsible behaviour of its land-owning aristocracy and the courageousness of its armed forces.

'There was nothing else to be done'[1083]

While Mrs Clay directly engages in an illicit liaison to secure her own advantage, another widowed female, Mrs Smith, unsuccessfully attempts to benefit from advocating another type of sexual liaison. Mrs Smith hopes to profit financially by encouraging the heroine, Anne, into marriage with Mr Elliot. Austen uses the behaviour of these financially challenged widows to highlight the difficulties faced by women who lack independent means, and to draw attention to the extremes such women are forced into through their exigency. Indeed, Austen's intention to emphasise their position is revealed by the fact that 'more widows and widowers appear in *Persuasion* than in all of Austen's novels: out of eighteen adult characters, six have dead spouses'.[1084] As a result of their schemes against their female brethren, as Heydt-Stevenson notes, 'Mrs Smith apes the bawd and Mrs Clay the prostitute'.[1085] While Mrs Clay's elopement overtly classes her as a whore by the era's definitions, Mrs Smith is subtly positioned as a bawd through her engagement

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[1080] *Persuasion* [TV adaptation], directed by Adrian Shergold, *Clerkenwell Films Ltd in association with WGBH*, (Boston: distributed in the UK by 2 entertain Video Ltd, 2007).
[1081] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 145.
[1082] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 145.
[1083] Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 216.
[1084] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 185.
[1085] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 190.

in this scheme to benefit financially by the sexual relationship of her friend, with matrimony for pecuniary benefit considered tantamount to prostitution.[1086]

It is easy to overlook the significance of Mrs Smith, the heroine's old school friend, in *Persuasion*. Her name brings derision from Sir Walter:

> A widow Mrs. Smith, lodging in Westgate-buildings! – A poor widow, barely able to live, between thirty and forty – a mere Mrs. Smith, an every day Mrs. Smith, of all people and all names in the world, to be the chosen friend of Miss Anne Elliot, and to be preferred by her, to her own family connections among the nobility of England and Ireland! Mrs. Smith, such a name! (p. 170).

As well as emphasising Sir Walter's vain snobbery, this quote reveals patriarchal society's unsupportive attitude towards 'poor' widows who have lost their social standing through the death of their husbands.[1087] Nonetheless, it is clear that Mrs Smith has been partly responsible for her own decline from affluence. She admits to having lived a dissipated, thoughtless life 'very much in the world' (p. 166) and to have 'been led among that part of mankind which made her think worse of the world' (p. 169). Indeed, comparisons can be made between the dissipated Mrs Smith and the Duchess of Devonshire, who was in Bath because of health problems during the period when Austen lived there, as previously noted. Interestingly, Georgiana had also suffered an attack of rheumatism, which left her and her husband, 'lying like invalids on chaise-longues'.[1088] Furthermore, Byrne has noted the striking similarities between Mrs Smith and the infamous actress and author Mary Robinson, who spent periods of her later life in Bath due to ill health.[1089] Commonly known as 'Perdita', after the role that brought her to royal attention,[1090] Robinson was:

> the notorious first mistress of the Prince of Wales. A celebrated actress, beauty, and style icon, she was once the most infamous woman in England,

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[1086] See Chapter Three, pp. 110-111, of this thesis.
[1087] Austen had used the name Smith before to represent an individual's lack of social position. I have previously looked at its significance when discussing Harriet Smith in Chapter Five, p. 174, of this thesis.
[1088] Foreman, *Georgiana*, p. 370.
[1089] Robinson was in Bath in 1795, Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 335. This was only two years before Austen's apparent first visit to the city in November 1797, Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, p. 202. Possibly stories of this controversial literary figure lingered in the city and caught the attention of the aspiring author. Byrne also suggests Austen's awareness of Robinson's works, noting that the use of the name Vernon in Austen's *Lady Susan* may be a reference to Robinson's novel *The Widow* (1794), which also contains an unprincipled widow and a 'lively and charismatic anti-heroine' who resembles Lady Susan, *A Life in Small Things*, p. 273.
[1090] Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 1.

> whose life was changed when she became paralysed from the waist down at the age of 25.[1091]

Both Mrs Smith and Mary Robinson are afflicted by paralysis caused by rheumatic fever and have sought refuge in Bath for access to the hot baths, having previously led immoral lives.[1092] Indeed, in Robinson's case her ill health is believed to have been precipitated by the miscarriage of a pregnancy resulting from one of her illicit liaisons.[1093] Like Mrs Smith, Robinson turned to creative activities to earn a living after her health failed and she lost her position within the social elite. She became a popular poet and author, with the initial print run of her successful first novel selling out in one day.[1094] As Byrne notes, this extraordinary 'transformation from royal mistress to one of the most admired authors of the age has never been achieved before or since'.[1095] Meanwhile, Harris has suggested that Mrs Smith's maiden name of Hamilton may be intended to connect this character to the infamous Lady Emma Hamilton, in the context of Wentworth's apparent similarities to Admiral Nelson.[1096] Although the connection to Mary Robinson is most compelling, it may be that Austen intends to invoke multiple disreputable characters from the *demimonde*, so creating a composite of associations to highlight Mrs Smith's own dissipated lifestyle prior to her husband's death, but also evoking her resilience to the challenges she faced.

Mrs Smith's 'elasticity of mind' in the face of her difficulties is an example to Anne, who recognises that, like Benwick mourning his dead love, her own behaviour when faced with loss has been self-indulgent. As Waldron notes, 'some of [Anne's] dejection seems almost wilful',[1097] as she 'wallow[s] in romantic melancholy'.[1098] In contrast, as Byrne notes, 'Mrs. Smith also has hope, in the face of her appalling

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[1091] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 23.
[1092] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 23.
[1093] Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 229.
[1094] Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 293.
[1095] Byrne, *Perdita*, p. 420.
[1096] Harris, 'Domestic Virtues and National Importance', 189. Melinda Graefe argues that Austen also evokes Hamilton in *Persuasion* 'through contrasting Anne Elliot's almost ethereal form' with Mrs Musgrove's 'large fat sighings' (p. 92) over her dead, sailor son. In unsympathetic caricatures following Nelson's death, 'Emma's ample figure was, like Mrs. Musgrove's, comically portrayed as an inappropriate shape for the display of authentic expressions of grief'. In contrast, Anne's graceful mournfulness is 'like the youthful Emma Hamilton's, tak[ing] on the contours of grief' through the performance of her Attitudes, Melinda Graefe, '"Dido, in Despair!" Emma Hamilton's Attitudes and the Shape of Mourning in *Persuasion*', *Persuasions On-line*, 38:1 (2018).
[1097] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 143.
[1098] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 146.

illness, poverty, and isolation'.[1099] However, Mrs Smith's vulnerable position, as a widow who has fallen into difficult circumstances, influences her behaviour towards Anne. Indeed, she schemes to benefit from the rekindling of their association by securing her own financial security through the marriage of her friend to Mr Elliot. Despite her low opinion of Mr Elliot, and her previous knowledge of his devious character, she actively encourages Anne to marry him in order to serve her own purposes:

> Let me plead for my – present friend I cannot call him – but for my former friend. Where can you look for a more suitable match? Where could you expect a more gentlemanlike, agreeable man? Let me recommend Mr. Elliot (p. 203).

Mrs Smith hopes that Anne will be able to use her influence to encourage Mr Elliot to resolve the financial difficulties she has encountered since the death of her husband. She assures Anne that 'your peace will not be shipwrecked as mine has been. You are safe in all worldly matters, and safe in his character' (p. 203). However, once she is convinced that Anne does not intend to marry Mr Elliot, she entirely changes her advice, cautioning Anne about his character by describing him as:

> a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; who, for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. […] He is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion. Oh! he is black at heart, hollow and black! (p. 206).

This damning indictment is delivered within moments of her former recommendations of his good character. As Heydt-Stevenson notes '[Mrs Smith's] arch cosmopolitanism rapidly shifts to a melodramatic declaration of his villainy'.[1100] When Anne questions this rapid change in perspective her friend suggests that:

> there was nothing else to be done. […] My heart bled for you, as I talked of happiness. […] He was very unkind to his first wife. […] I was willing to hope that you must fare better (p. 216).

[1099] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 24.
[1100] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 188.

Though this self-justification 'constitutes a remarkably specious act of self-defense',[1101] Anne's response seems incongruous in merely expressing 'some surprise' (p. 216) at her friend's initial encouragement of the connection. Anne's tolerance of Mrs Smith's duplicitous 'persuasion', and acceptance of her subsequent self-justification is difficult to understand, because she does not condemn her friend, and neither does Austen.

Indeed, as Byrne notes, 'strikingly, the penultimate and the greater part of the final paragraph of *Persuasion* are devoted to Mrs. Smith'.[1102] The conclusion of the novel concentrates on Mrs Smith's recovery of her financial security as a result of the intervention of Wentworth, giving this resolution seemingly unwarranted prominence. Significantly, it is possible to analyse this resolution to the novel through the existence of two draft chapters of *Persuasion* that have survived. These drafts show that the original penultimate chapter has been replaced in the final version by chapters 22 and 23, with the draft of the final chapter retained in the published version. These draft chapters refute the Austen family's claims that 'Every thing came finished from her pen',[1103] which clearly aimed at minimising the idea of her writing as a professional undertaking. They also reveal Austen's process for revising her works and it is notable that apparently small textual changes make significant alternations to the tone and significance of the scene. As Kelly notes, 'you can see her, choosing one word over another, checking that the sentence balances, that she's picked the right phrase'.[1104] For instance, Austen removes inconsistencies within the text such as sections where Anne appears to be gloating at Lady Russell's expense, about her friend's misunderstanding of Mr Elliot's character, and lines in which the heroine is uncharacteristically 'vexed' at being 'obliged' to stop to talk to Mrs Croft.[1105] These draft chapters also offer an insight into the incongruity surrounding Mrs Smith. They reveal that in the original version of the final chapter, Austen initially focused the last lines of the novel on Mrs Smith before crossing out 'finis' and adding an additional page

[1101] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 189.
[1102] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 25.
[1103] Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice', p. 141.
[1104] Kelly, *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical*, p. 19.
[1105] Jane Austen, 'Persuasion' (1816), in Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts.*

which refocuses the conclusion on Anne.[1106] However, Mrs Smith's fate retains its significance within the conclusion, so confirming Austen's purpose of highlighting the resolution of her difficulties as fundamental within the scheme of the novel.

Tomalin has noted that Austen took three weeks to rewrite the final two chapters of the novel but then 'put the manuscript aside and did nothing with it for six months'.[1107] It was not immediately offered for publication, unlike the other works she completed while living at Chawton.[1108] This may be because she was beginning to feel the early effects of the illness that would lead to her death,[1109] and did not have the energy to pursue its publication, or that she did not consider it to be satisfactorily completed.[1110] Austen wrote in 1817 that 'I have something ready for Publication, which may perhaps appear about a twelvemonth hence' suggesting that she felt that some further revision was required.[1111] Tomalin notes that 'there are […] undeniably rough, cold and undeveloped patches in the book', particularly regarding the 'plotting around Mrs Clay, Mrs Smith and Mr Elliot'.[1112] Similarly, Kirkham suggests, 'there is a good deal which calls for further revision' within the novel.[1113] I also believe that the revisions to these chapters show that similar changes were required to fully integrate the storyline concerning Mrs Smith and to justify its significance in the conclusion of the novel.

Similarly, the plot twist which reveals Mrs Clay's elopement is devoid of the subtlety the author demonstrates in *Emma* regarding Frank Churchill's engagement to Jane Fairfax. In *Emma*, following the revelation of the secret engagement, the reader can retrace hints woven throughout the novel. Indeed, some scenes are illuminated by the revelation, and especially events during the

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[1106] Austen, 'Persuasion', in Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*, pp. 27-28.
[1107] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 261.
[1108] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 144; Austen also set aside *Northanger Abbey*, noting that 'Miss Catherine is put upon the Shelve for the present, and I do not know that she will ever come out', Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 153, 13 March 1817, pp. 331-334, p. 333. However, this is explained by her introductory comments as she recognised that the novel referred to an earlier period and was no longer current.
[1109] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 259.
[1110] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 261.
[1111] Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, Letter 153, 13 March 1817, pp. 331-334, p. 333.
[1112] Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 262.
[1113] Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 144.

trip to Box Hill, as it becomes clear that the dynamic between the couple, resulting from an argument influences the general mood of the company.[1114] In *Persuasion* the elopement is almost entirely unforeseeable. Austen herself mocks such sudden revelations in *Northanger Abbey*. For instance, Eleanor Tilney's unexpected marriage, which facilitates the union of Catherine and Henry, involves the late introduction of a new character. However, Austen humorously defends this romantic cliché by noting that:

> I have only to add – (aware that the rules of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected with my fable) – that this was the very gentleman whose negligent servant left behind him that collection of washing-bills, resulting from a long visit at Northanger, by which my heroine was involved in one of her most alarming adventures (p. 247).

I believe that in *Persuasion* subtle hints are provided of the elopement, for example when Mrs Clay recognises Mr Elliot's knock at the door, suggesting a heightened awareness of him. However, it seems that additional development was required to fully integrate this scheme.

Furthermore, Heydt-Stevenson has noted the ambiguity within the final chapter of the novel which suggests that Wentworth, 'fully requited the services which [Mrs Smith] had rendered, or ever meant to render, to his wife' (p. 253). She questions what 'services' this refers to: 'were they the true stories she revealed to Anne about Elliot or were they the kindness Mrs Smith "meant" to render' by encouraging their marriage.[1115] Mrs Smith has been far from 'kind' in encouraging a marriage that would have been disastrous for Anne. Nevertheless, as Byrne notes '[Mrs Smith] is pivotal in the (uncharacteristically clumsy) plot twist of Anne discovering the real character of the duplicitous Mr. Elliot'.[1116] I believe that the threads of the storylines involving Mrs Clay and Mrs Smith required further revision to make the denouement of the novel fully consistent with Austen's aims to highlight the corruption of female relationships due to the financial vulnerability of women (whilst still justifying Mrs Smith's claims to friendship through a more plausible justification of the inconsistency in her behaviour).

[1114] As previously discussed in Chapter Five, pp. 207-208, of this thesis.
[1115] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 190.
[1116] Byrne, 'The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath', 23.

However, it is also true that Anne's continuing friendship with Mrs Smith needs to be considered alongside her relationship with Lady Russell. Lady Russell has also given advice which has proven to be detrimental to her young friend. Some years before the commencement of the novel Lady Russell dissuaded Anne from marrying her first love, Captain Wentworth. It is noted that Lady Russell 'had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them' (p. 42). As a result of this prejudice in favour of 'rank', she judges that Wentworth 'had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession' (p. 55). Her opinion reveals the commodification of marriage within the gentry, whereby Anne's 'claims of birth, beauty, and mind' (p. 55) should be used to secure social status and financial benefit rather than seeking a companionate union of mutual affection. Authorial disapproval of Lady Russell's snobbish ideology is shown by attributing similar sentiments to discreditable Sir Walter, 'who thought it a very degrading alliance' (p. 55). Both Sir Walter and Lady Russell fail to see the merit in Wentworth's professional attainments, viewing the Navy as 'the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction [and] cut[ting] up a man's youth and vigour' (p. 49). By contrasting the dissipation and lack of social responsibility of the gentry with the worthy naval characters throughout her novel, Austen contradicts their faulty reasoning. Furthermore, Austen demonstrates that Lady Russell's judgement in this matter was questionable as she is shown to champion suitors such as Charles Musgrove and Mr Elliot, who are clearly inappropriate for the heroine. As Johnson suggests, 'Lady Russell's approval of Charles Musgrove's suit and her championship of William Elliot's do not testify to her powers of discrimination'.[1117] Her championing of these suitors emphasises her underlying class bias, which leaves her 'incapable of perceiving genuine human merit when class inferiority is present'.[1118]

Nevertheless, Austen demonstrates that there is some justification for Lady Russell's initial fears about Wentworth's lack of 'connexions' and his limited 'hopes of attaining affluence'. Heydt-Stevenson suggests that when Lady Russell fails to see Wentworth in Bath because she is looking for some curtains, which are 'the

[1117] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 155.
[1118] Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 62.

handsomest and best hung of any in Bath' (p. 189), the curtains 'function as a metonymy for her fixation on material wealth'[1119] and her failure to recognize his value or his physical attractions.[1120] However, despite being unduly concerned with fortune and rank, Lady Russell's objections to the match are not entirely financial. Wentworth is sanguinely 'confident that he should soon be rich; – full of life and ardour, he knew that he should soon have a ship […] He had always been lucky; he knew he should be so still' (p. 56). However, he has no real grounds for this optimism. In Lady Russell's opinion his attitude is 'but an aggravation of the evil. It only added a dangerous character to himself' (p. 56). Although he returns having made his fortune, Anne recognises that the vicissitudes of fate could have resulted in a different outcome and has the examples of the bereft Benwick, whose fiancée died while he was at sea, and the penurious situation of the Harville family to compare with her own potential fate. Indeed, Wentworth notes an occasion when he escaped death, saying that he would have been posthumously referred to as the 'gallant Captain Wentworth, in a small paragraph at one corner of the newspapers; and being lost in only a sloop, nobody would have thought about me' (p. 90). Anne acknowledges that it is only with hindsight that Lady Russell's advice can be criticised, suggesting it is 'one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides' (p. 248).

Furthermore, Austen makes it clear that it is Wentworth's anger which causes the couple's long estrangement rather than the well-meant interference of Lady Russell. As Waldron notes, Wentworth 'compounds [Anne's] misery by his version of a contemporary expectation of female conduct'.[1121] Although 'he loves Anne partly for her traditional womanly virtues [he] expects her to rise up in revolt against those traditions when, and probably only when, it suits him'.[1122] When the reconciled couple discuss their separation, he questions whether she would have accepted him if he had re-applied for her hand once his situation was financially secure:

> 'if I had then written to you, would you have answered my letter? would you, in short, have renewed the engagement then?'

[1119] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 194.
[1120] Heydt-Stevenson has noted that Mr Elliot is described as 'under-hung' and Wentworth here is associated with being handsome and 'well hung' indicating his 'physical passion and power', *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 196. It is no wonder then that Anne blushes.
[1121] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 141.
[1122] Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, p. 141.

> 'Would I!' was all her answer; but the accent was decisive enough. (p. 248)

This reveals that an earlier reconciliation was within his reach. Although Anne regrets having been influenced by Lady Russell, she recognises that her younger self could not have acted in defiance of her friends and family. However, after being guided to refuse Wentworth by Lady Russell, Anne 'never allows herself to be persuaded again'.[1123] Despite her deferential position within her family, when she receives a proposal from Charles Musgrove it is noted that she 'left nothing for advice to do' (p. 57), turning him down before anyone can offer an opinion.[1124] Anne has developed confidence in her own judgement as a mature woman and is similarly unmoved by the attempts of Lady Russell and Mrs Smith to encourage her into marriage with Mr Elliot.

In contrast, Catherine, the young heroine of *Northanger Abbey*, is too naïve to resist the manipulative behaviour of her friend, Isabella Thorpe. Isabella cultivates a relationship with Catherine with the aim of facilitating a marriage to her young friend's brother, James. The Thorpe family are under the mistaken belief that the Morlands are wealthy, and that Catherine will inherit wealth from their rich neighbour, Mr Allen.[1125] Isabella's duplicitous behaviour is used by Austen to highlight Catherine's lack of sophistication and her honesty, as 'posited against Isabella's jaded maneuvrings, Catherine's intellectual inelasticity appears charming'.[1126] Indeed, Isabella's superficial claims of sentimental affection are relentlessly mocked by the author. This ridicule is shown by Austen's cutting description of a mundane conversation between Catherine and Isabella, as 'a specimen of their very warm attachment, and of the delicacy, discretion, originality of thought, and literary taste

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[1123] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 155.
[1124] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 155.
[1125] Barchas suggests that Austen refers to events occurring during the 1790s regarding the fortune of Ralph Allen, one of Bath's founders, through Thorpe's pursuit of Catherine, suggesting that he mistakes her for the heir to this inheritance. Allen had died in 1764 with his immense fortune being passed on to his niece, Gertrude Tucker. Following her death in 1796 the fortune passed back into the Allen family. Barchas shows Austen emphasising this connection through Thorpe's commendation of *Tom Jones*, as Ralph Allen was believed to be a model for Fielding's squire Allworthy. Barchas further suggests that it is during their carriage ride, 'in direct sight of the Prior Park gates' of the Allen estate, that Thorpe first mentions 'old Allen' and his money. Therefore, 'the entire exchange about the Allens takes place in a carriage that is slowly edging [around] Ralph Allen's grounds at Prior Park [and] any reader who knows the landscape cannot remain innocent of the Allen-Allen link'. Furthermore, it is argued that Austen's 'street names are not casual throwaways to mark the urban setting generally, but compact clues that ironically highlight what the characters are looking at', Barchas, *Matters of Fact*, pp. 57-59, 67-68, 72-73.
[1126] Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p. 103.

which marked the reasonableness of that attachment' (p. 60). Their 'warm attachment' is mocked because of its sentimental insincerity, as they have only recently become acquainted and the subject matters they discuss, ribbons and Gothic novels, are trivial. The irony is that their conversation is deficient of the 'originality of thought' and 'reasonableness' of which it is supposed to offer an example. Isabella exploits Catherine's naivety to further her own flirtations and she is also a bully, who is prepared to use physical force against her female companion. When Catherine's friends want her to join them in an excursion it is noted that Isabella 'caught hold of one hand; Thorpe of the other; and remonstrances poured in' (p. 116). They restrain Catherine in an effort to persuade her to submit to their schemes. Indeed, Johnson notes that 'the moral and physical coercion of powerless females which figures so predominantly in gothic fiction is here transposed to the daytime world of [the] drawing room'.[1127] Nevertheless, despite her friends' attempts at 'coercion', Catherine, like Anne, learns to stand firm when she feels she is justified, eventually declaring 'If I could not be persuaded into doing what I thought wrong, I never will be tricked into it' (p. 116).

In contrast to Catherine's fundamental morality, Isabella is shown as an insincere flirt whose sole object is to obtain marriage and social distinction. Indeed, her attention begins to wander even before she is aware of the Morlands' true financial situation, pursuing two men when they leave Bath's social hub, the Pump Room, and dancing with Captain Tilney at a Ball despite protesting that she would not participate. Once Isabella gains an accurate understanding of James's financial expectations she writes to disabuse her brother, telling Catherine:

> You have both of you something to be sure, but it is not a trifle that will support a family now-a-days; and after all that romancers may say, there is no doing without money. I only wonder John could think of it; he could not have received my last (p. 153).

She clearly expects her brother to discontinue his pursuit of Catherine once he understands she is not an heiress. Isabella rejects James and changes the object of her pursuit to Captain Tilney, because she considers him a better prospect with superior financial expectations. Isabella's duplicity is eventually clear even to the credulous Catherine, who, as a result, refuses to assist in reuniting her with James.

[1127] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p. 37.

The behaviour of husband-hunting Isabella Thorpe is condemned by Austen, and her self-serving pretence of friendship is finally rejected by Catherine.

Austen reveals that the conduct of Isabella, Mrs Clay and Mrs Smith towards their female 'friends' is influenced by their desire for financial security and social position. However, while in the earlier novel Isabella is condemned for her mercenary behaviour, Mrs Smith (and Mrs Clay) receive a more sympathetic response from the author. Isabella's behaviour is represented as an unacceptable breach of female companionship. However, in Austen's later work such behaviour becomes an inevitable response to the patriarchal pressures women face. Wollstonecraft argued that, in contrast to male relationships, within a patriarchal society 'women are very differently situated with respect to each other—for they are all rivals'.[1128] Austen reflects this sentiment in her novel, showing that female associations can become adversarial relationships because of the social pressures they face. In both *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*, Austen presents the reader with female relationships which are corrupted by the need for women to secure their financial positions either through patronage or through marriage. Austen reveals the strategies that women employ against each other in order to secure their own advantage, showing this to be the result of their vulnerable position within patriarchal Georgian society. Furthermore, Austen shows that the romantic relationships formed by these women are corrupted by the need to employ their own sexuality in securing financial gain. Indeed, both Mrs Clay and Isabella Thorpe engage in morally disreputable and sexually duplicitous activities in their attempts to secure their position. Mrs Clay dupes Elizabeth by eloping with Mr Elliot, and Isabella betrays her betrothed by flirting with a wealthier prospect. Their fate is left in doubt as Isabella's destiny remains unspecified while Mrs Clay risks being drawn into the *demimonde*. As I have argued, all of Austen's novels reveal the variety of dangers represented by this illicit sphere to women in Georgian society who fail to conform to societal expectations. The Georgian sex trade has a pervasive presence within her works, never far beneath the polished surface, demonstrating her own understanding of its inescapable influence on women's fate even within the apparently elegant and refined sphere of her novels.

[1128] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 310.

Conclusion

'Musing on the difference of woman's destiny'[1129]

This thesis aims to add to the body of criticism that seeks to restore Austen's work to its historical context, by demonstrating how she employs references to contemporary scandals, prostitution and fallen women in her novels to critique the period's gender inequalities and lack of opportunities available to genteel women beyond marriage and motherhood. These references have been obscured by the passage of time and by a persistent preconception that Austen's works are the timeless result of her own gentrified, rural isolation. Indeed, it has become conventional within works regarding Georgian criminality to evoke the refined, polite drawing rooms of Austen's novels as a contrast to this nefarious, violent, criminal world. My thesis argues that Austen skilfully weaves allusions to this pervasive aspect of society throughout her works. The subtlety of these allusions allows the unsophisticated reader to interpret her novels as merely polite romances. However, the attentive contemporary reader would have identified these topical references to high-profile scandals and notorious characters of the *demimonde*. In order for the modern reader to appreciate Austen's aim of critiquing the social mores of her world it is vital to recover these allusions and reinstate their significance.

Undoubtedly, Austen's exposure to this aspect of her world was predominately through published sources, such as novels and newspapers. Her own works and correspondence contain numerous references to literary sources which featured such stories, such as Burney's *Evelina* and Smith's *Emmeline*, thereby attesting to her own awareness of these themes. However, this thesis has also argued that Austen cannot have failed to witness the public nature of the sex trade and the activities of the *demimonde* while she resided in Bath and when she visited London and its theatres. Furthermore, she had indirect connections, through friends and family, to some of the most controversial figures inhabiting the *demimonde*, such as Admiral Nelson's mistress, Lady Emma Hamilton (through her naval brothers) and the notorious courtesan Harriet Wilson (through her sister

[1129] Austen, *Emma*, p. 376.

Cassandra's fiancé). Austen's allusions to the Georgian sex trade reveal the depth of her own knowledge and understanding of this pervasive social issue of her era.

Austen uses these references regarding illicit sexuality within Georgian society in order to highlight her arguments regarding the position of women within her world. I have argued that Austen's novels reflect on issues raised by early feminist writers such as Wollstonecraft and Robinson. Her engagement with the themes raised by such writers reveals her own aim to advocate for changes in the way women are treated especially through their commodification within the marriage market. Her subtlety in engaging with such controversial issues reveals her consciousness of the need to maintain her own respectability. Nevertheless, Austen underlines her criticism of Georgian society through the unresolved or unsatisfactory endings of her novels. The marriages which conclude Austen's novels provide a romantic resolution for her heroines and offer a model for socially beneficial unions. However, the unresolved issues within Austen's novels highlight the contrast between this positive model and the reality of Georgian society in which the sycophantic Mr Collins will still inherit Longbourn, vicious Mr Elliot will gain the baronetcy and Kellynch Hall and the privileged heroine in *Emma* will still have to live in harmony with the spiteful Eltons and her selfish father.

Austen's novels are undeniably set within polite Georgian society and focus on her heroines' search for a physically and intellectually fulfilling marriage. In Chapter Two of this thesis I have argued that to reinforce the necessity for women to secure this ideal union, Austen reveals the threatening social environment within which her heroines exist and the difficulties of assessing suitable partners. Within *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen employs conventional variants of the seduction narrative to highlight the potential fate of vulnerable women, whilst laying the blame for their exploitation on both the legal structures of patriarchal society and the behaviour of dissolute and ineffective men who deliberately mistreat them or simply fail in their duty to protect them. The need for women to be able to maintain the appearance of 'virtue' within this milieu is shown though Marianne Dashwood's fate within a pragmatic marriage.

The potential results for women who failed to maintain their 'virtue' are revealed in Austen's second novel, through allusions connecting Lydia Bennet to the

Georgian *demimonde*. Chapter Three of this thesis avers that in her second novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen evokes this threatening criminal sphere with specific references to the era's pervasive sex trade to highlight the risk that Lydia has taken in her pursuit of marriage. Austen employs terminology and imagery which connect the youngest Bennet sister with prostitution, invoking her likely fate 'upon the town' had she failed to secure marriage to George Wickham after having surrendered her virginity to his false professions. Furthermore, Austen laments the fact that Lydia is forced into marriage with her seducer due to social expectations that will only allow her re-admittance into polite society on this basis. The ultimate failure of her sexually motivated liaison with Wickham is used to examine different forms of marriage, such as matrimony for pragmatic reasons, romantic unions and companionate matches. Austen invokes images of prostitution within her novel to reveal the risks associated with Lydia's dissolute behaviour and her failure to negotiate her society's codes of acceptable conduct in courtship.

Similarly, in my analysis of *Mansfield Park* in Chapter Four, I have argued that Austen's choice of surname for her vulnerable heroine is used to invoke images of slavery and prostitution. Through her depiction of Fanny Price, Austen critiques the patriarchal ideology of her era which conflated marriage and prostitution by reducing matrimony to a financial/sexual exchange. Furthermore, through her portrayal of the fashionable Crawfords Austen rejects fashionable opinions that justified illicit sexual behaviour and refutes the conflating of virtue and chastity. Austen incorporates imagery of fallen women and prostitution throughout this novel and foreshadows the fates of her characters through the theatrical episode. Moreover, Austen demonstrates her own interest in sexual scandals by the specificity of her description of the consequences of Maria's elopement. Through the denouement of the novel, Austen criticises the hypocrisy of Georgian society in allowing Henry, Julia and Mary to retain their positions in polite company despite their immorality, while Maria is banished for her sins against patriarchal authority.

Austen returns to the seduction narrative in her novel *Emma* by invoking the disreputable maternal heritage of the illegitimate Harriet Smith. In Chapter Five, I have argued that by displacing the mother's seduction narrative into the representation of her daughter, and so eschewing the conventional embedded tale, Harriet's disreputable parentage and her illegitimate status allow Austen to engage

realistically with the fate of such women, while avoiding a sentimental, romantic resolution to her story. Harriet is linked to her mother through allusions which connect her to the image of the fallen woman, for instance, through the riddle 'Kitty, a fair but frozen maid', and by aligning her with the practice of assuming 'Attitudes' and their chief exponent, Emma Hamilton. Austen alludes to the vulnerable position of women in Harriet's situation by stressing the need for her to be kept safely from exposure to Georgian society's rapaciousness. Austen critiques the lascivious behaviour that produces illegitimate children through showing how fallen women in this position are treated, and the consequences of these illicit relationships on the offspring they produce. Her criticism of patriarchal society's exploitation of the vulnerabilities of such women makes it very clear that it is their mistreatment which leads to their downfall, rather than their personal failings or inherited susceptibilities.

In the final chapter, I have examined *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* to argue that both novels reveal the corruption of female relationships through the pressure to marry or be financially secure due to their vulnerability within patriarchal society. Mrs Clay is linked to the dissolute behaviour of the Georgian elite by evoking the *ménage à trois*, a common feature of Georgian scandals, and through references to prostitution and venereal disease. These allusions raise doubts about the nature of the relationship between Mrs Clay and Sir Walter Elliot foreshadowing her eventual descent into the sex trade. Similarly, Isabella Thorpe's disreputable behaviour as she vacillates between suitors is the result of her desire to secure social position and affluence. Meanwhile, Mrs Smith deviously tries to benefit from Anne Elliot's supposed marriage by hiding her knowledge of Mr Elliot's disreputable character. Through her portrayal of the strategies employed by these women, Austen demonstrates the corruption of female relationships due to patriarchal pressures and the detrimental behaviour this engenders. However, in her later novel, Austen shows some sympathy for such conduct, acknowledging the difficulties faced by women and the necessity for them to secure their positions within the existing social structures.

This thesis has focused predominately on Austen's novels with some reference to her wider oeuvre. Nevertheless, I believe that additional research on the theme of this thesis could be conducted regarding her other surviving works and particularly her *Juvenilia*. The publication of Austen's surviving manuscripts

facilitates further analysis of these documents, which was beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, I recognise that there is increasing interest in the under-appreciated works of Austen's eighteenth-century contemporaries. Looking at the representation of fallen women and prostitution in the works of other late eighteenth-century writers such as Charlotte Turner Smith, Amelia Opie and Mary Robinson would greatly add to this field. Using similar methods to restore the contextual significance of these works would be an interesting means to continue and broaden this area of research. This would also heighten our understanding of debates regarding gender issues during this fascinating and turbulent period.

While it may appear contentious, I have argued that allusions to this Georgian *demimonde* have a significant presence within all of Austen's works, influencing the motivation of her characters and underpinning her examination of the position of women within the marriage market. Her novels refer to high-profile scandals which illustrate the high risk for women who formed an unfortunate marriage union due to its binding nature, and the near absolute power a husband attained over his wife. The results of such failed unions are portrayed through the destinies of characters such as Eliza Brandon, who dies in wretched poverty, and Maria Rushworth, who is banished from polite society. Austen was aware that 'it was only too easy for "single women of small fortune" to meet such a fate'.[1130] Furthermore, Austen reveals the perpetuation of these unfortunate unions through the fates of their offspring such as Eliza Williams and Harriet Smith, refusing to adopt the period's standard novelistic expedient of removing the stain of their illegitimacy to secure convenient resolutions to their difficulties. Both these vulnerable young women are disadvantaged by their parents' licentiousness, leaving them exposed to male exploitation and degradation because of the failure of patriarchal society to safeguard such individuals. However, Austen's novels also reveal her awareness that illicit sexual relationships represented an option that women could pursue, in lieu of other suitable opportunities, if they were prepared to take the risk. Through her depiction of characters such as Lydia Bennet and Mrs Clay she acknowledges that this was a choice that could prove to be profitable, given the limited availability of other employment, even though it could also result in destitution and death.

[1130] Fullerton, *Jane Austen and Crime*, p. 105.

The subtlety of Austen's references to the sex trade and illicit sexual behaviour in her society has led to these allusions being largely unacknowledged or understated. Nevertheless, Austen invokes the *demimonde* by alluding in her works to notorious figures such as Lady Emma Hamilton, Mary Robinson and Mary Ann Clarke. Given the prevailing and increasing hostility towards women who addressed gender concerns in their writing, it was essential that Austen was able to achieve this subtlety to avoid being condemned for producing improper material which condoned vice or titillated readers. Nevertheless, Chandler argues that 'her referents are so obvious at times that it is hard to believe they are unconscious'.[1131] I would add they are also too sustained to be coincidental. Her works are a dialogue with other writers of the period, particularly her female peers, in which she strips away their conventional hyperbole and sensationalism to show how the issues they raise apply to the ordinary lives of women within the gentry. Situated at the end of the long eighteenth century, Austen's novels invoke a world which was on the point of disappearing, by capturing the final climax of the licentious Georgian period. Acknowledging the influence of this domain on the literature and social milieu of the period restores the nuances of Austen's works and enhances our appreciation of her achievements.

[1131] Chandler 'A Pair of Fine Eyes', 93.

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