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The Unsuitable Suitor and the Problem of Choice in the Novels of Jane Austen

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

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the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

The Unsuitable Suitor and the Problem of Choice
in the Novels of Jane Austen

Wendy Thatcher

The heroines of Jane Austen's novels are faced with various choices which establish the moral tone of her writing, and the most important of these choices is the selection of a marriage partner. Because of the social constraints governing all aspects of women's lives in the eighteenth century, the choice of a spouse was critical to a woman's social identity. Austen dramatizes this choice through the character of the unsuitable suitor; this figure serves as a link between the courtship, seduction/abduction and quest plots. This perspective of the unsuitable suitor gives new meaning to Austen's conception of marriage, education, individualism and social responsibility. The unsuitable suitor is, therefore, a key to Austen's didacticism and to her worldview.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the profusion of critical material on Jane Austen's novels, comparatively little has been written on her unsuitable suitors. For example, my research on Jane Austen criticism reveals only two articles on the subject: "The Rake and the Reader in Jane Austen's Novels," by Carole Berger and "Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Jane Austen's Novels," by John Lauber. In both cases, no attempt is made to place unsuitable suitors into an Austen tradition, nor to place Austen's unsuitable suitors into the tradition of women's writing.

Marriage is central to all of Jane Austen's novels. As Ian Watt points out in The Rise of the Novel, social changes in the eighteenth-century brought about a "crisis in marriage which bore particularly on the feminine part of the population" (167). Marriage was the only real choice that most women had to make, but it was a choice that would have an overriding effect on a woman's life. Social pressures induced women to marry, and these same pressures often undermined a truly meaningful choice. The dynamics of this situation provided a wellspring to Austen's writing. The ideology of marriage and some of the problems involved in the choice of a marriage partner will be discussed in the next chapter, "The Social Background."

In the third chapter, "The Literary Background," I will be examining Austen's writing and its relation to the tradition of the novel. The most important difference between Austen and earlier writers such as Fielding is that she is writing in a female tradition.

The focus of attention in her books is on the female protagonist; and the courtship plot, described by Eva Figes in Sex and Subterfuge, is the basis for all Austen's novels. This plot is common in novels written by women in the eighteenth century for several reasons. First, at a time when "romances" were not accepted as serious literature, women writers favoured the courtship plot because these novels provided examples of proper behaviour, much as did the conduct manuals of their day. Novels with didactic content were therefore more highly valued. Also, the courtship plot reflects the concerns of much of the female population about their tenuous social status, documented by Ian Watt in The Rise of the Novel and by Laurence Stone in The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800.

Austen also integrates into her novels aspects of the seduction/abduction plot, which was the second plot structure favoured by women writers in the eighteenth century. Used by Richardson in Clarissa, this plot provides a negative example to readers, as it depicts the terrible fate awaiting young women who, for one reason or another, make the wrong choice and suffer for their poor judgment.

A close examination of Austen's rejected suitors in Pride and Prejudice, Emma, Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, Northanger Abbey, and Persuasion reveals three patterns. The first type of unsuitable suitor is the boor. The second type of unsuitable suitor is a respectable young man with certain weaknesses. The third category represents Austen's most interesting anti-heroes, young men who pose serious threats to the heroines of the novels. Although Austen's heroines are often accused of being "marriage minded," I

believe her male characters are equally concerned with matrimony. In Chapters IV, V, and VI I will be examining the important characters in each pattern and their relation to the individual novels. I will also compare Austen's characterizations with the conventional rake figure and will examine the different forms of irony she uses in her presentation of these unsuitable suitors.

Chapter IV is entitled "Boors and Buffoons." In this first category, the boor, are included John Thorpe of Northanger Abbey and Mr. Collins of Pride and Prejudice. From the moment they first appear, both these characters are clearly unsuitable to the heroines, narrators and readers; they are pompous, overbearing and each has an inflated view of his own importance. Tension is created because it appears to the reader that Thorpe and Collins will overpower the as-yet untested heroines by the sheer force of their wills. Although he retains none of the comic overtones of the buffoon, Mr. Elton in Emma is also included, as he is most definitely a boor. His boorishness is first revealed by his proposal to Emma and then by his treatment of Harriet Smith.

In Chapter V, "Delinquents," I will be discussing the second type of unsuitable suitor, who is the well-meaning young man with rather poor judgment. He is also usually involved in a hidden engagement which leads to confusion about his affections. This type is personified in Frank Churchill in Emma. Churchill's greatest sins are indiscretion and insensibility. He poses no greater threat than considerable emotional upheaval and uncertainty, and his reputation is preserved at the end of the novel.

Austen's third type of anti-hero is discussed in Chapter VI, "Blackguards"; he is the apparently charming and suitable young man to whom the heroine is drawn by inclination and circumstances. This type is personified in Wickham (Pride and Prejudice), Willoughby (Sense and Sensibility), Henry Crawford (Mansfield Park) and William Elliot (Persuasion). There are many individual differences between these characters, but their similarities are especially striking. All are "outsiders" who have recently arrived in the district which serves as the main setting for each of the novels. All have been guilty of serious moral lapses and have "pasts" which they take great pains to conceal. Consequently, all pose real threats to the heroines. Though each of these characters makes (or, in the case of Wickham, appears to make) an honest attempt to overcome this moral blight, his past inevitably catches up with him, revealing his true nature to all and thus validating the heroine's preference for the real hero.

In Chapter VII, "Thematic Integration of the Unsuitable Suitor," I examine the way Austen uses the blackguards to serve as a bridge between the primary courtship plot and the secondary seduction/abduction plot. Until the blackguards are unmasked, the happy resolution of the courtship plot cannot be assured. In some cases, the seduction has already taken place before the novel "opens" (Wickham, Willoughby). In other cases, the event takes place in the course of the novel, such as when Wickham runs away with Lydia Bennett, or Henry Crawford with Maria Rushworth. Though the heroine escapes unscathed, this abduction often touches someone close to her and serves as a reminder of what might have been if she had let

herself be guided by impulse rather than sense. Through this embedded seduction/abduction plot, Austen digresses from the comic mode and introduces an element of tragedy which is, however, safely diffused.

To a great extent, Austen develops characters through contrast. In Chapter VII I will be analyzing the various ways the unsuitable suitor is contrasted with the suitable suitor. Also, these contrasts throw light on Austen's concept of the gentleman, on her concept of education and of the role of the individual.

Jane Austen's heroines are not passive spectators to the unfolding of the action; along the road to self-knowledge they are faced with various choices that are tests of their suitors' characters and tests of their own perception. "The Heroine's Choice," Chapter VIII, is an examination of the element of choice and Austen's integration of the quest plot with the courtship plot. There is always more than one suitor in Jane Austen's novels and, consequently, more than one possible resolution. The resolution of Jane Austen's novels invariably depends on these two intertwined threads: first, on the true hero stepping forward and the false hero being "unmasked," and secondly, on the final, irrevocable choice of the heroine. Upon these two bases rest both the future happiness of the heroine and the hero and the moral weight of the novels.

I believe my thesis on the unsuitable suitor will provide a new perspective on some of the questions that have been raised about Austen's relationship to society. Austen is a writer with a subtle, but nevertheless strong, moral message. Her novels reveal that she believes the individual is responsible for his/her moral development.

This is very clear in her portraits of the unsuitable suitor. For each unsuitable suitor Austen develops a background, and the unsuitable behaviour of these men can be attributed either to deficiencies in the family situation or to a weak moral education. Through the moral growth of the individual Austen sees the possibility for the regeneration of society. Marriage in Austen's writing is the catalyst for this moral regeneration. The unsuitable suitors have the choice of repeating the errors of the past or of making a moral contribution to society. In the final analysis, I believe Austen is less critical of social institutions and more critical of individuals who do not respond to the challenge of life as social and moral beings. This research will show, I believe, that this character is essential to an understanding of Austen's vision and why the unsuitable suitor should not be overlooked in future studies of Jane Austen's writing.

II. SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Jane Austen was born into the gentry, and all her novels reflect this level of society. Her novels provide a wealth of historical detail about the pastimes and preoccupations of her class. However, the social background of Jane Austen's novels is of interest not only to the historian but also to the literary critic. In order to have a clear understanding of Austen's artistic rendering of her world, it is important to understand the type of people who inhabited her world and the social conventions governing their behaviour. Although we cannot "turn back the clock" and read her novels as her contemporaries would have, the twentieth-century reader should nevertheless try to come to terms with the social background of her writing because this background affects the resolution of her novels.

All Austen's novels end with the marriage of her female protagonists; therefore, the ideology of marriage, the courtship process and the marital expectations of both young men and young women are of great importance in understanding the choices made by Austen's female characters and their suitors, both suitable and unsuitable.

During the eighteenth century the English concept of marriage was changing. According to Lawrence Stone, the author of The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800, there was a "shift away from economic and towards personal motives in the choice of a marriage partner . . ." (320). By the end of the century, when Jane Austen began writing, the ideal marriage was the "companionate marriage,"

whereby "companionship plus economic security were the prime goals of marriage" (Stone 318). The companionate marriage was based on mutual affection and the freedom of choice of the future marriage partners, "provided of course that the choice remained within the restricted range of acceptability by status" (Stone 320). It is the model apparently favoured by Austen, if we are to go by the resolution of her novels. In addition, Austen's letters give us a rare insight into her feelings and opinions on marriage. Writing to her sister Cassandra on December 27, 1808, she states that she considers "everybody as having a right to marry once in their lives for love, if they can . . ." (240). Writing to her niece Fanny Knight some years later, she makes her position very clear:

> Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection; and if his deficiencies of Manner &tc. strike you more than all his good qualities, if you continue to think strongly of them, give him up at once. (410)

However, the companionate marriage is not the only model Austen depicts in her novels, but this will be discussed in greater depth in the pages that follow.

The courting process depended on ample leisure time, the frequent removal from one place to another, and the development of certain institutions and practices, described by Stone:

> The building of assembly rooms in town after town during the eighteenth century is evidence of its importance. On the national level, the development of the London season, lasting from early in the New Year to June, and the subsequent season at a majoring watering place like Bath, provided the necessary facilities for the development of acquaintances across county boundaries. (317)

Numerous conduct books were written during this period detailing the strict rules of conduct to govern the relations between young men and young women. One of the most popular of the conduct manuals was An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex, which was written by Thomas Gisborne in 1799. In her letter to Cassandra on August 30, 1805, Austen notes that she is pleased with "Gisborne," even though she had "quite determined not to read it" (169). However, in the next breath she proceeds to discuss the purchase of either lace or ribbon for a certain occasion, and we are left wondering what her specific thoughts on "Gisborne" might be.

Courtship was very much a guessing game and well suited to the underlying theme of the conflict between appearance and reality in Jane Austen's work; not surprisingly, the advantages were all on the male side:

> . . . this shift of motives for marriage from the concrete ones of power, status and money to the imponderable one of affection probably worked to the benefit more of men than of women. This was because social custom dictated that the initiative in the courtship process should be with the male and not the female. The former was, therefore, free to follow his personal inclinations wherever they might lead him, but the latter was, at any rate in theory, restricted in her choice to those who made advances to her. She had great latitude to encourage or rebuff, but she could not formally initiate a courtship. (Stone 398)

Thus there was a fine line between not initiating and appearing uninterested. This distinction is the cause of Jane Bennett's predicament in Pride and Prejudice. Mr. Darcy observes her and assumes that she is not really interested in Mr. Bingley; this assumption prompts him to get Bingley out of harm's way--away from Netherfield and back to London.

At the same time the companionate marriage was becoming the standard, it was becoming more and more difficult for women to find suitable husbands:

> As a result of the shortage of suitable males, owing to the level of nuptiality among younger sons and to the rise in the cost of marriage portions, there developed in the eighteenth century a new and troublesome social phenomenon, the spinster lady who never married, whose numbers rose from under five percent of all upper-class girls in the sixteenth century to twenty to twenty-five percent in the eighteenth century. (Stone 380)

From Mrs. Bennett in Pride and Prejudice we get a sense of the real competition prevailing in the marriage market; she urges Mr. Bennett to visit their new neighbour, Mr. Bingley, as soon as possible in order to have a "competitive edge" over the Lucases. Yet marriage was still one of the only choices open to the daughters of the gentry, as paid "work" was out of the question:

> The increasing number of upper-class women who were forced to remain single often found themselves in an unenviable position. Because of their high social background, they could not work and were thus deprived of any independent social and economic function. This was a fate that loomed over any girl who was too particular about whom she would accept for a husband. (Stone 381)

Spinsters often found a home with wealthy relatives and fulfilled the role of housekeeper, nurse and general helpmeet. This seems to be the role that will be reserved for Anne Elliot in Persuasion until she has a second chance at love with the return of Captain Wentworth.

Another possible alternative to marriage at this time was a career as a governess. This alternative is seen through the eyes of Jane Fairfax in Emma:

> There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would soon produce something--Offices for the sale--not quite of human flesh--but of human intellect. . . . I was not thinking of the slave trade . . . governess-trade, I assure you, was all that I had in view; widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on; but as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies. (204)

Jane Fairfax's horror is easy to understand; she is already on the outer fringes of the gentry, and the post of governess would have undoubtedly reduced her status even further:

> . . . governesses suffered from both economic hardship and social stigma. They were usually very badly paid, sometimes as little as £12 to £30 a year. . . . The work was very hard, for they were on duty seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. . . . Worst of all was that their equivocal social status deprived them of any companionship or sense of belonging. (Stone 384)

One reason why fewer women could expect to marry was that women outnumbered men during this period. Another reason was that there was also a high percentage of lifelong bachelors among the younger sons of the nobility and gentry:

> For a younger son, early marriage was likely to increase expenses so significantly as almost to guarantee downward mobility. The exception to this rule is that marriage to an heiress or to the daughter of an influential member of his chosen profession or occupation was probably a younger son's best hope of hoisting himself back into the social and economic position in which he was born. (Stone 378)

Several of Jane Austen's unsuitable suitors were younger sons, while others were in financial straits because their incomes did not provide sufficiently for their expenses.

Thus the choice of a marriage partner was crucial for both sexes. As divorce was unthinkable, it was a choice that had lifelong effects. For a woman this choice often meant the difference between a life of penury and a life of ease. Because a woman took on the social

status of her husband and did not really exist in her own right beyond the family circle, choosing a husband meant choosing a social identity. Happiness was often a secondary consideration. Clearly, Charlotte Lucas in Pride and Prejudice is making a choice between remaining unmarried and dependent all her life; or, as Mrs. Collins, becoming the recipient of all the "advantages" Mr. Collins is so pleased to enumerate. It is undeniable that however ridiculous Mr. Collins might be, the alternatives were not always enviable.

For younger sons, the choice of a marriage partner often involved a choice between true affection and financial prosperity. This dilemma is explained to Elizabeth Bennett in Pride and Prejudice by Colonel Fitzwilliam, Darcy's cousin. When Elizabeth jokingly remarks that "the younger son of an Earl can know very little of either . . . [self-denial or dependence]" (126-127), he replies as follows:

> "These are home questions--and perhaps I cannot say that I have experienced many hardships of that nature. But in matters of greater weight, I may suffer from the want of money. Younger sons cannot marry where they like. . . . Our habits of expence [sic] make us too dependent, and there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money." (127)

There is one major difference, however, between the choices open to women and the choices open to men. While younger sons could make their way in the civil service, in the clergy, the army, navy or overseas in the colonies, women had few alternatives outside marriage.

Few of the young men that Austen depicts have the moral strength to sustain this type of choice and to earn their livings through actual work. Some exceptions are Edmund Bertram, Edward Ferrars, and Captain Wentworth. These characters prove to be worthy of the

heroines with whom they are linked. Austen's blackguards, however, invariably take the easy way out and make financial stability their only priority.

The eighteenth-century novel reflected these changing mores and the ideology of marriage, but it is difficult to determine the exact relationship between the romantic novel and the outward changes in society, as Stone notes:

> . . . romantic love and the romantic novel grew together after 1780, and the problem of cause and effect is one that is impossible to resolve. All that can be said is that for the first time in history, romantic love became a respectable motive for marriage among the propertied classes, and that at the same time there was a rising flood of novels filling the shelves of circulating libraries, devoted to the same theme. An extraordinarily large number of these novels were now written not merely for women but also by women. (Stone 284)

These novels will be the subject of the next chapter of this thesis.

III. THE LITERARY BACKGROUND

Jane Austen was a woman writer who wrote about women. She has often been criticized for her attention to marriage and for her inattention to the "major" historical events of her time, but this type of criticism ignores the fact that her purpose was not to write novels with a wide scope but rather to write about the choices available to women--realistically, morally and imaginatively.

To read Austen's work without understanding the social pressures under which she and her contemporaries lived is to ignore the real import of her novels. Her use of the unsuitable suitor is a transformation of the traditional rake figure and is clearly linked to some of the important literary and moral dilemmas of her age.

In order to understand Austen's use of the rake character, it is necessary to review the literary antecedents of the rake figure in the work of other novelists and the development of the plot structure which Austen chose to use in all of her novels. In addition, I will be looking at the influences on Austen's narrative technique, as this links the development of the main protagonist's self-knowledge with her perception of the unsuitability of the rake character.

In describing the development of the novel in the eighteenth century, Ian Watt uses the concept of "formal realism" in order to differentiate this form from previous genres:

> Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its readers with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms. (35)

As might be expected, the novelistic forms which express "the individuality of the actors concerned" are quite varied.

There is, for instance, a longstanding relationship between the novel form and the rake figure, as the novel can be traced back to the picaresque stories which appeared in Spain and England in the sixteenth century. The central character of these stories is the "picaro" (Spanish for rogue), typically a rascal who lives by his wits and usually sets out on a journey during which he experiences one adventure after another. In almost all of the novels written by women, the rake figures are secondary in importance to the heroines of the individual novels. In Moll Flanders and Roxana, Defoe created female rakes; but these characters were really anomalies. The heroines of early novels were subjected to the same restraints as women living in eighteenth-century England and to the type of behavior prescribed in the conduct novels, described in the preceding chapter.

Insofar as form is concerned, the loose structure of the novels of Defoe and Fielding can be compared to the episodic nature of the picaresque. In <u>Sex and Subterfuge</u>, Eva Figes discusses these two authors and describes the form of their novels as an essentially male structure: "The typical male structure was inherited from Fielding:

it was linear, episodic and picaresque. The hero moved from adventure to adventure, scene to scene" (2). Defoe's characters make incredible journeys and visit many continents. This type of adventure was far from the experience of his average male reader and worlds away from the experiences of his female readers.

The female characters in novels by eighteenth century women writers are restricted to the outings, visits to women friends, and chaperoned journeys which women of their time and their class were permitted. One need only recall that, when General Tilney sends Catherine back to her parents unaccompanied in a carriage, he was abrogating his duty.

Because women had limited experience of the greater world and because they had considerable understanding of the day-to-day problems of other women, women writers chose to write about the experiences of other women. This female tradition has been largely ignored in literary scholarship. In Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen, Dale Spender discusses some of these novels. In the course of her research, she also discovered thirty neglected male novelists, leading her to conclude that "there were only two good women novelists to each man" (6).

As marriage was still the only real choice that women ever had to make, it became a central issue in the plot choices open to women; Eva Figes describes these choices in Sex and Subterfuge:

> There were two main themes open to the women novelists of the eighteenth century, and they were like different sides of the same coin: the conduct-in-courtship novel, and the novel of misconduct, of seduction, betrayal and ruin. One was an exemplar for young ladies to follow, the other a dreadful warning. (12)

The realities of women's existence also affected the setting or "focus" of these early novels; the world of interiors was the world with which women were more familiar. If the novel is, as Ian Watt describes it, close to the "texture of daily experience" (24), it is easy to understand why women writers chose the inward orientation.

The specific effects of this inward orientation are detailed in The Eighteenth-Century Novel by Frederick Karl:

> The drawing room, normally with two, often at most four, participants, has provided drama; . . . the major movement of English fiction starting with Richardson has been away from picaresque episodes towards the two-person, interior scene using elements of irony, concealment, wit, hypocrisy, affectation, vanity and innocence. (99)

In addition to her use of the interior setting, Austen relies on the other elements of this orientation that relate to the theme of appearance vs. reality, namely concealment, hypocrisy, affectation, and irony.

Richardson proved a much stronger influence than Fielding or Defoe because of his inward orientation, explained by Ian Watt in The Rise of the Novel: "This direction, of course, is towards the delineation of domestic life and the private experience of the characters who belong to it; the two go together--we get inside their minds as well as inside their houses" (198).

Richardson's use of the inward orientation was not innovative; rather he borrowed from the works of the many women writers who

preceded him. Unlike his predecessors, however, Richardson was popular with both men and women, and his popularity contributed to the critical acceptance of the inward orientation of the novel.

Richardson's writing was also at the centre of a controversy which was to decide the future of the novel well into the next century. At the heart of the controversy was concern about the effect of novel reading on the young; Dr. Johnson expressed his personal concern in The Rambler in 1750:

> These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy, not informed by experience and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account.
>
> If the power of example is so great, as to take possession of the memory by a kind of violence, and produces effects almost without the intervention of the will, care ought to be taken that, when the choice is unrestrained, the best examples only should be exhibited; and that which is likely to operate so strongly, should not be mischievous or uncertain in its effects. (3: 21, 22)

Dr. Johnson appeared to come down in favour of Richardson over Fielding. Consequently, writers took great pains to justify their work, as can readily be seen by perusing the prefaces to novels of this period.

Jane Austen herself came to the defense of the novel in Northanger Abbey:

> . . . for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding. . . . Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected

> pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried . . . 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 . . . 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, and the liveliest effusions of wit are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. (NA 54-55)

However, overt didacticism poses particular problems for the writer because it is at cross purposes with the aims of fiction. This problem was outlined by Mrs. Manlyearly in the eighteenth century: "Moral reflections, maxims and sentences are more proper in discourses for instruction [sermons] than in Historical Novels, whose chief end is to please" (cited in Karl 31).

Women writers were in a particularly difficult situation, as they were doubly on the defensive: first, because they were writing at all, and secondly, because they had to be especially careful to include the appropriate moral message, all the while attempting to entertain and please their audience. The courtship plot and the seduction/betrayal plot appear to be the resolution of the dilemma described above, as they allowed women writers to please their audience and to include a moral message at the same time.

All of Austen's novels follow the pattern of the courtship plot, and all end with the marriage of the hero and the heroine. In addition, she frequently uses several parallel courtship plots at once. Thus, in Sense and Sensibility, the reader follows attentively the development of Marianne's relationship with Willoughby as well as Elinor's attachment to Edward Ferrars.

However, Austen also integrated aspects of the seduction/betrayal plot into her novels. She does this by means of which Harrison Steeves calls "little histories":

> These interpolated biographies, or "little histories," have an almost standard pattern: the descent of a woman of some breeding through seduction and abandonment to prostitution, poverty and social repudiation. (136)
>
> The story is moral; that is, a commentary upon conduct and its relation to happiness. It usually relates the story of a reckless or vicious life, illustrating the value of virtue by the bad effect of wicked ways. In most cases, therefore, the little histories are stories of libertinism and dissipation. . . . (171)

The "little histories" were a convention of the early novel, but writers used them in many different ways. In Jane Austen's novels they always reveal something about the character of the unsuitable suitor or about a woman whom he has ruined. One example is the story of the two Elizas in Sense and Sensibility. However, the impact of the seduction and betrayal is lessened because their story is, in Mary Poovey's words, filtered through "a character whose judgment generally masters emotion" (188).

Writers in the eighteenth century adopted a variety of narrative techniques. Richardson used both the traditional "female" plots in combination with the epistolary style, but this approach was not successful when used by women writers because of the extremely personal nature of the epistolary form. Eva Figes explains this predicament in Sex and Subterfuge:

> A woman who is trying to come to terms with a world and with values where she is object and not subject, an outsider . . . must at all costs avoid the subjective voice if she is to conform to standard morality and at the same time remain in control of her material. Conformity was required of her both on a personal level and as an author, and in this situation she is at her best when she employs the detached irony of the authorial third person. (17)

There is considerable evidence that Jane Austen originally wrote Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility in epistolary form but that when rewriting she changed to the third person form (Q.D. Leavis 2).

In Richardson we can also trace the roots of Austen's blackguards, the most complex of her unsuitable suitors. In characters such as Sir Hargrave Pollexfen and Richard Lovelace, Richardson combines a surface charm with an underlying menace. The tragic ending of Clarissa, however, was not suited to Austen's personality or her position as a woman writer.

Austen began writing at a very early age in order to entertain her family. Her juvenilia reveal that even her first attempts at writing were humourous. In addition to the apparent suitability of comedy to Austen's temperament, the comic mode was particularly useful to women writers because of their tenuous social position. Eva Figes develops this point in Sex and Subterfuge:

> Writers of the generation of Burney, Edgeworth and Austen were not feminist revolutionaries. Trying to accept the world as it was, and teach their readers to adapt to the standards of a male world in order to survive, they had little use for the tragic outlook. Only by adapting a detached comic voice could they hope to give conviction to their portrayal. . . . (16)

There is a close affinity between Jane Austen and Fanny Burney; Burney, who was born 23 years before Austen, had used comedy to great

advantage in her writing. Although her novels are clumsy in comparison to Austen's, we can still see her influence on Austen's writing in several ways. For instance, she depicted in her novels a whole group of minor comic figures. In Jane Austen: A Study in Fictional Conventions, Henrietta Ten Harmsel has traced characters such as Mrs. Allen in Northanger Abbey and Mrs. Jennings in Sense and Sensibility to this "Burneyan gallery" (59-60). Burney also uses the rake figure as a comic character. In her writing he is usually a parody of the fop; he can be recognized by his extravagant dress and even more extravagant manners. Sir Clement Willoughby in Evelina is a case in point. Manners and men's clothing styles had become more conservative by the end of the century when Austen began writing her novels (Turbeville 94) and Austen scarcely mentions clothing styles in her novels. However, she often parodies manners. Thus, in her boors we can see traces of Burney's comic conception of the rake.

Finally, like Burney, Austen also combined the courtship plot and the quest plot. However, Burney's heroines are essentially passive. Their dilemma is not how they judge themselves and other people but rather how they are perceived by others, notably the hero. Invariably, because of their naivete and goodwill, they find themselves in difficult situations; in general, Burney's heroines are seeking social acceptance. Because of this, her unsuitable suitors are obstacles in the courtship plot and have only a very superficial relation to the quest plot.

Comparisons can be made between Austen and any number of other eighteenth-century writers. It soon becomes apparent, however, that

Austen's writing grew out of a tradition that is just being rediscovered. The work of critics such as Dale Spender and Eva Figes is revealing the many misconceptions that have developed about these unknown women:

> Ironically, these women writers of the so-called romances, allowed "romantic love" (as it is known today) little place in their novels: heroines were charged with the task of looking beneath the surface. . . . In their quests to determine the soundness and reliability of a man, young ladies were required to make some of the most astute assessments of human nature. And to fail to see this dimension of women's novels . . . is to miss one of the richest and most rewarding documentations of the human condition. (Spender 279)

Towards the end of her life, Jane Austen wrote "Plan of a Novel, according to hints from various quarters." The "hints" presumably came from the librarian to the Prince Regent, James Stanier Clarke, who had written to her to commission a novel based on his own life. Austen refused him in a much-quoted letter, saying that "she could no more write a romance than an epic poem" (126). In "Plan of a Novel" she satirizes both the emotional effusions and improbable coincidences often found in the sentimental novel. She also makes the only reference in her non-fiction to the figure she identifies as the "anti-hero":

> . . . From the outset the story will proceed, and contain a striking variety of adventures. . . . There will be no foibles or weaknesses but with the wicked, who will be completely depraved and infamous, hardly a resemblance of humanity left in them. Early in her career, the heroine must meet with the hero; all perfection, of course, and only prevented in paying his addresses to her by some excess of refinement . . . often carried away by the anti-hero, but rescued by her father or the hero. . . . Heroine inconsolable for some time . . . having at least twenty.

> narrow escapes of falling into the hands of anti-hero; and at last, in the very nick of time, turning a corner to avoid him, runs into the arms of the hero. . . . (In Pinion 327-328)

Despite Austen's satirical tone, there is indeed a link between the novel of sensibility and Austen's own novels, to be found primarily in her plot structure and her selection of "conventional" characters. An examination of Austen's various "anti-heroes" or unsuitable suitors throws light on her relationship to her predecessors and on her role in the evolution of the novel.

IV: BOORS AND BUFFOONS

> He was too happy, however, to need much attention; and luckily for the others, the business of love-making relieved them from a great deal of his company. (Pride and Prejudice 91)

Both Mr. Collins in Pride and Prejudice and John Thorpe in Northanger Abbey are boors. The two novels in which they appear were written early in Jane Austen's career, when her comic genius was at its height. Northanger Abbey (which was originally entitled Susan) was written between 1797 and 1798 and never substantially revised; while Pride and Prejudice, the rewrite of First Impressions, was completed in 1797 (Poovey 266; Ten Harmsel 37). Neither Collins nor Thorpe practise the subtle art of deception; they can be recognized as unsuitable as soon as they are first introduced.

Although the reader and the heroine are keenly aware of their unsuitability, it is unclear in each case what social and familial pressures will be exerted on Elizabeth and Catherine to accept these suitors. The reader is not yet sure whether he/she is reading a novel in which the heroine is to be forced against her wishes into a loveless marriage, as in the case of Sophia in Tom Jones.

Austen's development of Mr. Elton in Emma follows the pattern described above, with a few minor variations. Emma was written several years after Northanger Abbey and Pride and Prejudice; and there are no vestiges of the buffoon in Mr. Elton. Influenced by Emma

herself, the reader perceives Mr. Elton as an unsuitable suitor for her and a suitable suitor for her protegé, Harriet.

However, Mr. Elton is as blind to Emma's true feelings as are Thorpe and Collins to Catherine's and Elizabeth's. His reasons for proposing and the manner in which he proposes confirm his unsuitability.

Although the threats posed by each of these men are dissipated early on, the relief that follows is illusory. For in each case, these unsuitable suitors return to persecute the individual heroines in another guise.

The essence of Northanger Abbey is parody. The main target of this parody is the Gothic novel; in the first line of the novel we are introduced to the presumed heroine, Catherine Morland, and informed that, "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (29). Austen then proceeds to enumerate all the ways Catherine is unlike a heroine. In Jane Austen: A Study in Fictional Conventions Henrietta Ten Harmsel has observed that Catherine is a type of "anti-heroine":

> . . . in Catherine Morland, Jane Austen is burlesquing the convention of the perfect heroine in popular eighteenth-century fiction. . . . In thus calling attention to what her heroine is not, Jane Austen indicates what the conventional "Richardsonian" heroine has become. (16)

In John Thorpe, however, Austen is ridiculing the English country gentleman who is more at home with his dogs and horses than with

members of the opposite sex, more comfortable drinking than socializing in the assembly rooms at Bath:

> He was a strong young man of middling height, who, with a plain face and ungraceful form, seemed fearful of being too handsome unless he wore the dress of a groom, and too much a gentleman unless he were easy where he ought to be civil, and impudent where he might be allowed to be easy. (64)

Another theme of Northanger Abbey is the complex nature of truth and the way characters "bend" the truth to suit their own particular circumstances. Distinguishing what is real and true from what is sham and false is what Catherine must learn in order to become a heroine. She must also learn to distinguish the real world from the world of novels; in fact, the real world can be as confusing and unpredictable as the world of the Gothic romance, as she learns during her visit to the abbey.

We get some insight into how John Thorpe bends the truth to suit himself at his first appearance in the novel. He argues with James Morland about the distance his horse has travelled that day, insisting that it is "five and twenty if it is an inch" (65). A while later, when he wants to take Catherine for a drive the following day, Catherine argues that his horse may want rest. His reply reveals his basic dishonesty: "Rest! He has only come three-and-twenty miles today" . . . (67). Catherine's learning about the world has begun:

> Catherine listened with astonishment; she knew not how to reconcile two such very different accounts of the same thing; for she had not been brought up to understand the propensities of a rattle, nor to know how many idle assertions and impudent falsehoods the excess of vanity will lead. Her own family were plain matter-of-fact people. . . . they were not in the habit therefore of telling lies to increase their importance, or of asserting at one moment what they would contradict the next. (87)

John Thorpe further repulses Catherine and the reader by turning from his discussion of horseflesh to a discussion of women passersby: "Her companion's discourse now sunk from its hitherto animated pitch, to nothing more than a short decisive sentence of praise or condemnation on the face of every woman they met" (67).

If there were any doubt, John Thorpe confirms his ignorance by declaring that he never reads novels. When Catherine asks him if he has read Udolpho, he says that if he read any, it would be Mrs. Radcliffe's, not realizing that she is the author of Udolpho. In fact, from the subsequent conversation, it would appear that he frequently reads novels.

The selfishness of both John and Isabella Thorpe seriously affects Catherine's relationship with the Tilneys. John Thorpe engages Catherine to dance and then fails to make his appearance at the required time because he was involved in a discussion about horses and "a proposed exchange of terriers" (75). Because of this, Catherine is forced to decline a dance with Henry Tilney. This particular situation involving the unsuitable suitor is a convention of the early novel, as the complex rules regulating dancing and the selection and/or rejection of dance partners provided ample material for development of the conflict between appearance and reality. Because a woman could not take the initiative in social situations, her only real power was her "negative"--the power of refusal. In the situation described above, Catherine's negative was really positive. She really prefers Henry Tilney but is not able to act in accordance with her feelings because of Thorpe's selfish behaviour and the rules

of propriety. This type of confusion heightens the tension and imposes needed obstacles in the courtship plot.

The day after the dance, Catherine is forced to go for a drive against her will and again misses the opportunity of seeing the Tilneys. The others completely ignore her protestations and she is forced to give way. In addition to Austen's parodying the conventional heroine, in John Thorpe she is parodying the traditional villain:

> He does not abduct the struggling heroine to some far-off castle at the stroke of midnight, but instead tricks her slyly into a trip to Blaize Castle (which they never reach) immediately after the stroke of twelve at noon. . . . Thus he presents a humourous and realistic burlesque of the "Lovelace" type of villain whose attempted abductions of the heroine characterize many of the popular novels of Richardson's imitators. (Ten Harmsel 17)

Because Catherine genuinely likes Henry Tilney, the behaviour of John Thorpe does not endear him to her: "Little as Catherine was in the habit of judging for herself, and unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt while she bore with the effusions of his endless conceit, of his being altogether completely agreeable" (88).

Finally, John Thorpe proves himself an unsuitable suitor by the unromantic way he "proposes" to Catherine; it is so offhanded that she does not even recognize it as such. This evolves into confusion about Catherine's integrity, which is a "conventional" dilemma facing many eighteenth-century heroines. It later becomes clear that Thorpe's only motive was money. Isabella Thorpe's interest in James Morland proves equally pecuniary; she jilts him in favour of a richer man.

Catherine is thrilled when she is invited to Northanger Abbey, and the feared General Tilney is very solicitous. We later learn that General Tilney's interest in Catherine can be attributed to the boasting of John Thorpe:

> John Thorpe had first misled him . . . and being at that time not only in daily expectation of Morland's engaging Isabella, but likewise pretty well resolved upon marrying Catherine himself, his vanity induced him to represent the family as yet more wealthy than his vanity and avarice had made him believe them. . . . Upon such intelligence the General had proceeded; for never had it occurred to him to doubt its authority. . . . (282)

Later, John Thorpe is so angry at Catherine that he purposely misrepresents her and informs the General that she is even poorer than she actually is. This results in Catherine's being unceremoniously sent away from the abbey and her friends; Thorpe's action thereby jeopardizes the courtship of Catherine and Henry and is the source of the real villainy of the novel:

> John Thorpe . . . seems to be only an "anti-villain" until one notes that he is the dark accomplice who facilitates the final villainy of the General. True, it is only his boastful pride that first leads him to represent Catherine to the General as a wealthy heiress, and only his mean jealousy that makes him later represent her as quite the reverse, but it is certainly these falsifications, springing from completely mean and selfish motives, that introduce the main villainy of the piece. (Ten Harmsel 25-26)

Jane Austen was to develop this aspect of the unsuitable suitor in all of her future novels.

Whereas John Thorpe is a parody of the typical villain and the English country "gentleman," Mr. Collins in Pride and Prejudice is a parody of the self-serving clergyman. Mr. Collins is important to the development of Pride and Prejudice in three different ways: first, as

the unsuccessful suitor of Elizabeth; second, as the successful suitor of Charlotte Lucas; and third, as the instigator of Lady Catherine's unsuccessful visit to Elizabeth, which actually results in Mr. Darcy's final, acceptable proposal to Elizabeth.

Mr. Collins is first presented to the reader by means of his letter advising Mr. Bennett of an impending visit. Although Mr. Bennett states that, "He seems to be a most conscientious and polite young man" (44), Elizabeth is immediately struck by Mr. Collins' style: "He must be an oddity, I think. . . . There is something very pompous in his style. . . . Can he be a sensible man, sir?" (44). Mr. Bennett's rather perverse humour is betrayed by his rejoinder: "No, my dear. I think not. I have great hopes of finding him quite the reverse. There is a mixture of servility and self-importance in his letter, which promises well. I am impatient to see him" (44).

Once Mr. Collins has arrived, his lack of physical charms confirm that he is not the hero, for "he was a tall, heavy looking young man of five and twenty. His air was grave and stately, and his manners were formal" (44). He is proved truly ridiculous when he begins talking about his patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. His self-serving humility and studied compliments reveal him to be the antithesis of the romantic hero. Mr. Bennett, in fact, tricks Mr. Collins into revealing that he rehearses his flattery: ". . . and though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always give them as unstudied an air as possible" (47). In this

respect, Collins is as false as Jane Austen's blackguards; he is, however, guided to some extent by a rather vague morality.

Mr. Collins is visiting the Bennetts on a particular mission. Lady Catherine thought he should marry and he has decided to look amongst his relatives. This is perhaps the only thing that can be said in his favour, in that he is aware of the iniquities of the entail on the Longbourn estate and is trying to remedy the situation.

Although Mr. Collins had initially decided on Jane, Mrs. Bennett makes it clear that Jane is soon to be engaged and Mr. Collins then decides on Elizabeth: "It was soon done--done while Mr. Bennett was stirring the fire" (49). Tension is created because the reader identifies with Elizabeth from the beginning and it is clear that Mrs. Bennett is desperate to marry off her five daughters. A marriage to Mr. Collins would fulfill this hope and ensure her financial security after Mr. Bennett's death.

Mr. Collins begins his address to Elizabeth by saying that "her natural distress may force her to dissemble" (74). When in fact Elizabeth does turn him down, Collins believes her refusal is "merely words" and even goes so far as to suggest that, because of her lack of fortune, ". . . it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made her" (76), thus dramatizing the problem of choice for the single woman.

The irony is that, in spite of Elizabeth's refusal, Collins persists in being optimistic. Mrs. Bennett is less so; when she speaks of Elizabeth as being a "headstrong, foolish girl, . . . [who] does not know her own interest" (77), she is responsible for deterring

Mr. Collins, which is the last thing on her mind. It should be noted that, although Mr. Collins is unwilling to accept Elizabeth's "negative," he is quick to withdraw his suit in light of what has been revealed about Elizabeth's true nature. Mrs. Bennett is extremely annoyed with Elizabeth but the tension is soon relieved when Mr. Bennett restates the problem for Elizabeth:

> "An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents.--Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do." (78)

Up to this point in the novel, it seems that Mr. Collins' suit will interfere with Elizabeth's preference for Wickham, the most likely "hero" thus far. However, Austen's use of Mr. Collins as the unsuitable suitor is soon superseded by her development of Mr. Wickham in this role.

Charlotte Lucas is not as particular as Elizabeth. Ten Harmsel observes that "Even before Elizabeth has peremptorily refused the pompous Mr. Collins, Jane Austen is foreshadowing Charlotte Lucas' interest in him" (77). At the Netherfield ball when Mr. Collins refuses to leave Elizabeth's side, "She owed her greatest relief to her friend Miss Lucas, who often joined them, and good-naturedly engaged Mr. Collins's conversation to herself" (72). As Charlotte later explains to Elizabeth, she is not a "romantic." Charlotte, we are informed, "accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment" (85):

> She had gained her point and had time to consider it. Her reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensitive nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband.--Without thinking highly of either man or 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. (86)

This passage explains Charlotte's acceptance of Mr. Collins's proposal and some of the pressures on a woman in her situation. These pressures are well documented in an entertaining article by Lillian S. Robinson, entitled "Why Marry Mr. Collins?" After analyzing the respective fortunes of the Lucases and the Bennetts, Robinson suggests that, "in strictly material terms, it is really Elizabeth who should have been grateful to receive Mr. Collins's proposals" (188).

Elizabeth Bennett visits with the Collinses at Hunsford and is bemused by the ways in which Charlotte manages to preserve her privacy and to cover for the more glaring examples of Mr. Collins's peculiar mixture of pride and self-effacement.

Like John Thorpe, Mr. Collins reappears "indirectly," through a letter, later in the novel. One of the final ironies of the plot is that when Darcy seems to despair about ever gaining Elizabeth's acceptance, it is Mr. Collins who sends Lady Catherine on her mission to "dissuade" Elizabeth. It is Elizabeth's refusal to desist that convinces Darcy he has some hope.

Apart from the social realism which Austen has developed in her characterization of Mr. Collins, he is a figure of pure comedy.

Mr. Elton in Emma is also a clergyman, but Austen's characterization of him is much meaner. Mr. Elton also falls into this category of unsuitable suitor because of his presumptions on Emma--presumptions inspired more by her fortune than by her person. His subsequent behaviour to Emma and especially to Harriet Smith confirms him as a true boor.

Mr. Knightley warns Emma that she is interfering in Harriet's life, and he also suspects that Mr. Elton is really more interested in Emma herself than in Harriet. However, Emma persists in her flawed view of reality.

When Harriet Smith is sick with a sore throat and is unable to attend a party at the Westons, Mr. Elton is peculiarly happy and bothers Emma by his proprietary manner: "So scrupulous for others," he continued, "and yet so careless for herself. She wanted me to nurse my cold by staying at home today, and yet will not promise to avoid the danger of catching an ulcerated sore throat herself. . . . Have not I some right to complain? . . ." (85).

Emma is perturbed at his "assuming to himself the right of first interest in her" (85). Little does she know that a proposal is in the offing. He proposes, "flattering himself that his ardent attachment and unequalled love and unexampled passion could not fail of having some effect, and in short, very much resolved on being seriously affected as soon as possible" (88). Emma's annoyed response earns her and Harriet Mr. Elton's antipathy from then on.

Emma is particularly annoyed because she realizes that Mr. Elton's motives were mercenary alone:

> She thought nothing of his attachment, and was insulted by his hopes. He wanted to marry well, and having the arrogance to raise his eyes to her, pretended to be in love; but she was perfectly easy as to his not suffering any disappointment that need be cared for. There had been no real affection either in his language or manners. . . . He only worked to aggrandize and enrich himself; and if Miss Woodhouse of Hartfield, the heiress of thirty thousand pounds, were not quite so easily obtained as he had fancied, he would soon try for Miss Somebody else with twenty, or with ten. (92)

The vague "Miss Somebody" soon becomes "the charming Augusta Hawkins" (122). Mr. Elton "had caught both substance and shadow--both fortune and affection" (122). Mr. Elton fades from the action after his departure from Highbury, and Austen focuses interest on Frank Churchill. However, Mr. Elton does not disappear completely from the novel.

In this novel, the unsuitable suitor, Mr. Elton, returns to persecute the heroine and does so primarily through his wife. Mrs. Elton is without a doubt one of Austen's most pointed female characters; almost everything about her is irritating. The supreme irony of her characterization is that Mrs. Elton glories in all her "flaws". Emma finds Mrs. Elton completely annoying: "Such as Mrs. Elton appeared to her on this second interview, such she appeared whenever they met again,--self-important, presuming, familiar, ignorant, and ill-bred . . ." (190). Emma also realizes that ". . . poor Harriet's attachment had been an offering to conjugal unreserve, and her own share in the story, under a colouring the least favourable to her and most soothing to him had been given also. She was, of course, the object of their joint dislike" (191).

Because of her social standing, Emma is protected from overt offenses from the Eltons; Harriet, who is the "natural daughter of somebody" (13), is not. Mrs. Elton actively encourages Mr. Elton's rude behaviour towards Harriet. This is especially obvious at the ball organized by the Westons at the Crown Inn. When urged by Mrs. Weston to dance because there was a lady standing, Mr. Elton agrees to dance with anybody but the lady in question--Harriet:

> The last two dances before supper were begun, and Harriet had no partner. . . . But Emma's wonder lessened soon afterwards, on seeing Mr. Elton sauntering about. He would not ask Harriet to dance if it were possible to be avoided: she was sure he would not--and she was expecting him every moment to escape into the card-room.
> Escape, however, was not his plan. He came to the part of the room where the sitters-by were collected, spoke to some, and walked about in front of them, as if to show his liberty, and his resolution of maintaining it . . . and she [Emma] perceived his wife [Mrs. Elton], who was standing immediately above her, was not only listening also, but even encouraging him by significant glances. . . . (222)

Emma is shocked by his behaviour as his boorishness proves him to be the direct opposite of "the amiable, obliging, gentle Mr. Elton" (223) she had believed him. It is at this point that Mr. Knightley steps in to rescue Harriet from further embarrassment. His behaviour identifies him as a true gentleman, but it is not until Harriet confesses her gratitude and love that Emma recognizes Mr. Knightley as the only suitor suitable for her.

In these last three cases--John Thorpe, Mr. Collins and Mr. Elton--Austen reveals early in the novels the basic unsuitability of each character. But they are superficially "honest," and each of these unsuitable suitors actually proposes to the heroine. In spite of their "honesty," none of their proposals is based on love.

Mr. Collins is seeking a wife because he has reached the right time of life. John Thorpe proposes to Catherine because he thinks she is an heiress, while Philip Elton knows Emma is an heiress. For these men, marriage is a transaction; for Jane Austen it is much more.

V. DELINQUENTS

"Wickedness is always wickedness, but Folly is not always Folly." (Emma 142)

Although Sense and Sensibility or Elinor and Marianne, as it was originally named, was the first novel Austen wrote, she revised it first in 1797 and later between 1809 and 1810 (Ten Harmsel 37; Poovey 266). Emma was written between 1814 and 1815. In these novels she again relies on the character of the unsuitable suitor; however, her development of Edward Ferrars and Frank Churchill is different from that of Thorpe and Collins in several important respects.

In the first place, Ferrars and Churchill are not comic characters. Rather, they are youn[illegible] who sport with the affections of the main female character and [illegible]e involved in secret engagements. They are tied in with several of Austen's major themes, but in particular Austen is exploring in these two young men the question of duty--to oneself, to one's parents, and to other people.

These characters also represent a later phase in Austen's writing in that the reader is unsure about the role of Ferrars and Churchill until the closing pages of Sense and Sensibility and Emma. This uncertainty is due to Austen's careful construction of the plot, as both characters merge into and out of suitability and unsuitability. Henrietta Ten Harmsel sees this patterning as the essence of Austen's irony; she describes it in the following terms: "A skillful manipulation of the plot in such a way that events turn out exactly

the opposite from what is expected by the characters and often the readers" (144).

Jan Fergus also examines this structure in Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel, calling it "linear irony":

> The most obvious techniques are structural: parallels and contrasts order the characters and organize the action; and linear irony creates patterns of reversal or undercut judgments within the action. (90)

This form of irony, therefore, accounts for Austen's reliance on subtle comparisons between different characters, in particular the various suitors.

The reader is called upon to judge the behaviour of Edward Ferrars and Frank Churchill; but although their behaviour was inappropriate, we come to understand their underlying motivations and to absolve them of guilt.

In addition to being Austen's first novel, Sense and Sensibility was the first of her novels to be published; it came out in 1811, some sixteen years after she began work on it. Marvin Mudrick traces its roots back to her early attempts at parody, and comments that it "returns us to one of Jane Austen's earliest targets, the novel of sensibility" (60). Specifically, it burlesques emotional excesses and is therefore similar to Love and Freindship (sic), which she finished on 13 June 1790 at the age of 14.

The notions of sense and sensibility were common to the literature of the late eighteenth century, as described by Ten Harmsel:

> In that literature, "sense" usually meant basing one's action and judgment not upon the spontaneous reactions of the heart but upon observation, experience, prudence, and the conventions of society. "Sensibility," on the other hand, meant basing one's actions and judgments upon the spontaneous reactions of the heart, trusting its emotional responses implicitly, and expressing them immediately without restraint. (42)

The two qualities are represented by Elinor and Marianne, respectively.

As mentioned earlier, Austen uses many contrasts in the course of this novel to delineate character and to guide the reader's sympathies. By the first few pages of the novel, the reader has already taken a strong dislike to the younger Mrs. Dashwood because of her negative influence over Mr. John Dashwood. When her brother, Edward Ferrars, is first introduced at Morland, he is contrasted with his supercilious, wealthy family:

> But he was neither fitted by abilities nor disposition to answer the wishes of his mother and sister, who longed to see him distinguished--as they hardly knew what. They wanted him to make a fine figure in the world in some manner or other. His mother wished to interest him in political concerns, to get him into parliament, or to see him connected with some of the great men of the day. Mrs. John Dashwood wished it likewise; but in the meanwhile, till one of these superior blessings could be attained, it would have quieted her ambition to see him driving a barouche. But Edward had no turn for great men or barouches. All his wishes centered in domestic comfort and the quiet of private life. Fortunately he had a younger brother who was more promising. (50)

Thus the reader is guided into sympathizing with Edward, and Austen then substantiates the reader's emotional reaction with facts upon which to base a more rational judgment. On the one hand, we have the Ferrars, who are motivated by superficial concerns, while on the other

we have Edward yearning for "domestic comfort." The overall tone of the passage leaves the reader in no doubt about the sympathies of the narrator.

Elinor is attracted to Edward and he to her. Mrs. Dashwood sees them as almost engaged: "No sooner did she perceive any symptom of love in his behaviour to Elinor, than she considered their serious attachment as certain, and looked forward to their marriage as rapidly approaching" (50).

Elinor is very cautious, however, as befits a heroine representing "sense": ". . . she required greater certainty of it to make . . . [this] conviction of their attachment agreeable to her" (54). She admits to herself that she cares for Edward but models her behaviour so as not to reveal her preference. The relationship of Marianne and Willoughby is, of course, quite different because they model their conduct on the hero and heroine of a sentimental romance.

Although Edward and Willoughby are outwardly very dissimilar, there are nevertheless several parallels to be drawn between them. One such similarity is that there is an element of secrecy in the behaviour of each.

When Willoughby leaves the neighbourhood with scarcely any warning, Elinor confesses her uneasiness at his behaviour to Marianne: "Willoughby may undoubtedly have very sufficient reasons for his conduct, and I will hope that he has, but it would have been more like Willoughby to acknowledge them at once. Secrecy may be advisable; but I still cannot help wondering at its being practised by him" (106). This new secrecy is in sharp contrast with his hitherto

passionate and outgoing nature, but the reader is more likely to side with Marianne than with Elinor, who is accused of preferring "to take evil upon credit than good" (106).

Just a few pages later, Marianne accuses Edward of being "reserved":

> Edward stared--"Reserved: Am I reserved, Marianne?"
>
> "Yes, very."
>
> "I do not understand you," replied he, colouring.
>
> "Reserved:--how, in what manner? What am I to tell you? What can you suppose?" . . .
>
> Edward made no answer. His gravity and thoughtfulness returned on him in their fullest extent--and he sat for some time silent and dull. (120)

In fact, both men do have secrets to conceal, but their secrets are of a very different nature. Whereas Willoughby has a dishonourable past he would prefer to keep hidden (which will be discussed further in the next chapter), Edward's secret--his engagement to Lucy Steele--is misguided but honourable.

Edward becomes an unsuitable suitor when his engagement is revealed. Lucy herself first appears in the novel as the guest of Mrs. Jennings shortly after Edward's departure from Barton. Elinor is forced into frequent meetings with the two Miss Steeles in spite of her disinclination, which is revealed in the following observation:

> The vulgar freedom and folly of the eldest left her no recommendation; and as Elinor was not blinded by the beauty, or the shrewd look of the youngest, to her want of real elegance and artlessness, she left the house without any wish of knowing them better. (147)

She soon discovers that Edward himself has been blinded by the younger Miss Steele. Because of the various hints dropped by Mrs. Jennings, Lucy is suspicious of Elinor's relationship to Edward, and she selects Elinor to be her particular confidante.

Elinor's first reaction on learning of Edward's engagement is anger as it ". . . established as a fact, which no partiality could set aside, his ill-treatment of herself" (157). For a man to encourage the affections of a young lady when he was previously engaged and could not hope to marry her was definitely not the gentlemanly thing to do; and it shows calculated disregard for the feelings of the lady in question. This situation was, of course, a convention of the early novel; it had been used by Richardson in Sir Charles Grandison when Harriet Byron discovers the bizarre relationship existing between Sir Charles and Lady Clementina.

Upon examining the situation further, however, Elinor is sure that Edward's engagement to Lucy was the result of "youthful infatuation" (158) and that his affection was now "all her own" (157). Ironically, most of the other characters, including Edward's contemptible family, feel the same. This is made obvious when Mrs. Ferrars, contemplating a socially desirable marriage for Edward, purposely slights Elinor but is quite friendly to Lucy Steele, much to Lucy's delight. This is but one of many situations Austen uses to develop this irony.

The most difficult scene for Edward is Marianne's praise: "The sight of you, Edward, is the only comfort it has afforded; and thank Heaven: you are what you always were" (247). This statement reveals

ironies on many different levels. Marianne makes this remark unaware of Edward's engagement and believing him to be Elinor's suitor; the reader, on the other hand, knows better. However, keeping in mind the rules of propriety, it is true; for Edward never declared his intentions and he is what he always was--a good friend of the family. It is also true beneath the surface, for Elinor had believed him truly attached to her and she maintains this conviction in her own mind. Adding to the awkwardness of the moment, Lucy is present when Marianne makes this remark, and it serves to antagonize her. She understands Marianne's meaning but she knows that Edgar is her fiancé. On the other hand, she also suspects that he is in love with Elinor.

Lucy's secret has irrevocably changed what should have been, and Edward is not what he always was--a potential suitor. Or so it appears; but, "reading backwards"--reconsidering the statement with the end of the novel in mind--Edward is still the "suitable suitor" after all. Austen's repeated use of "linear irony" is probably what makes a re-reading of her novels so enjoyable, as a knowledge of the outcome of the novels throws new light on many of the situations Austen portrays and the subtle "hints" supplied by the narrator.

As mentioned earlier, Edward does behave honourably towards Lucy, in spite of his mother's attempts to dissuade him:

> His mother explained to him her liberal designs, in case of his marrying Miss Morton; told him she would settle on him the Norfolk estate, which, clear of land-tax, brings in a good thousand a year; offered even, when matters grew desperate, to make it twelve hundred; and in opposition to this, if he still persisted in this low connection, represented to him the certain penury that must attend the

> match. His own two thousand pounds she protested should be his all; she would never see him again; and so far would she be from affording him the smallest assistance, that if he were to enter into any profession with a view of better support, she would do all in her power to prevent his advancing in it. (267)

Because of Edward's refusal to comply with his mother's request, he is "dismissed for ever from his mother's notice" (268). The dissimilarity in temperament noted at the beginning between Edward and his family is thereby intensified into complete estrangement.

In this situation Austen is using one of the conventions of the early novel--the opposition of parents to a marriage--in order to examine the duties and responsibilities inherent in the parent-child relationship. In this particular instance, Mrs. Ferrars appears not to "know" her son and has no interests at heart but her own worldly concerns. Edward blames his upbringing, namely the lack of affection at home and any occupation outside his home, for his entering into the engagement in the first place:

> . . . yet had I then had any pursuit, any object to engage my time and keep me at a distance from her [Lucy] for a few months, I should soon have outgrown the fancied attachment. . . . But instead of having anything to do, instead of having any profession chosen for me, or being allowed to choose any myself, I returned home to be completely idle. . . . I had therefore nothing in the world to do, but to fancy myself in love; and as my mother did not make my home in every respect comfortable, as I had no friend, no companion in my brother. . . . Considering everything, therefore, I hope, foolish as our engagement was, foolish as it has since in every way been proved, it was not at the time an unnatural, or an inexcusable piece of folly. (352)

Unlike many of the unsuitable suitors, however, Edward is able to overcome the defects of his upbringing through strength of character. Both Edward and Willoughby demonstrate mistaken conduct, but the way

they deal with their predicaments reveals one to be "suitable" and the other "unsuitable." When faced with the loss of all financial support from his family, Edward still behaves honourably. When Willoughby is in the same situation, he deserts the only woman he will ever love.

Although Edward no longer loves Lucy, he intends to marry her because he had once fancied himself in love with her and had engaged her affections (or so he thought). He is rejected by his family, but his honourable behaviour--his suitability--exemplified by his adherence to the dictates of propriety, is recognized by all in his immediate acquaintance. Austen is not entirely in favour of going against a parent's wishes (demonstrated in Persuasion), and in this case she balances the disapprobation of Edward's family with the approval of others who have greater moral weight. In this case, the irreproachable Colonel Brandon steps forward and offers Edward a living that will afford him a tolerable existence.

Lucy proves to be much less interested in marrying Edward in his reduced circumstances and marries his brother Robert instead. Edward is then free to marry Elinor, who loves him for his personal merits and not for his social position. Elinor's behaviour has also been perfectly proper; and she explains her motivations to Marianne by way of example:

> But I did not love only him;--and while the comfort of others was dear to me, I was glad to spare them from knowing how much I felt . . . I would not have you suffer on my account . . . I have many things to support me. (264)

Her selfless behaviour is in sharp contrast to the selfishness which resulted from Marianne's sensibility; from this point forward,

Marianne determines to modify her own conduct in order to be more considerate of others. Implied in this, also, is the realization that she would have been kinder to herself if she had learned the lesson of "sense" earlier on.

There is not one heroine but two, and this divided focus represents a problem, both in terms of the heroine and of the suitors and unsuitable suitors. Readers frequently comment on the apparent imbalance between the charismatic character of Willoughby and the relative insipidity of Edward. This same "imbalance" has also been noted between Marianne and Elinor. However, to continue in this line of thinking is to fall into the same trap as Elinor when Willoughby makes his sudden appearance at Cleveland late in the novel. She sympathizes with him, realizing that his "influence over her was heightened by circumstances which ought not in reason to have weight; by that person of uncommon attraction, that open, affectionate, and lively manner which it was no merit to possess" . . . (326). In other words, she was temporarily beguiled by his surface attractions; a further analysis of his behaviour reveals to her his many unacceptable weaknesses. Edward, on the other hand, has moral substance, but is less of the "romantic" hero. Because of his shyness and reserve, he can be compared to Fanny Price, whom Austen also developed with a didactic purpose in mind.

In these characters, actions "speak louder than words"; Austen intended the reader to forego the conventions of romance and to come to an understanding of virtuous behaviour. However, Austen herself must have realized that there was a possibility that readers might

sympathize too much with Marianne and Willoughby, and she never again "divided" the plot into such distinct stories. In future novels she often chose to offset the heroine with another female character or characters, but their flaws were much less attractive than Marianne's.

Jane Austen wrote Emma between 1814 and 1815 and it was published in 1816. She felt that the character of Emma was one whom no one but herself "will much like" (Intro., p. viii). Once again, she was inspired by the conflict between appearance and reality. At one time or another many of the characters in this novel, and particularly Emma herself, are caught deluding themselves and letting their perceptions be affected by their wishes or fears. There are many small deceptions and confusions which contribute to this theme, but Austen elaborates the conflict primarily through Emma's perception of Frank Churchill. Once again, Austen uses linear irony to involve the reader in Emma's various schemes and eventual enlightenment.

Austen surrounds the character of Frank Churchill with a great deal of suspense. He is first made known to the reader by reputation, while the narrator relates the background of Captain Weston, Miss Taylor's new husband. Frank was brought up by a wealthy aunt and uncle after his own mother died. Mr. Weston had agreed to this arrangement because of the financial advantages they were able to offer the boy. We learn that "it was most unlikely, therefore, that he should ever want his father's assistance" (9). At this point the reader is thinking only of financial assistance; in the course of the novel it will become apparent that Churchill would have benefitted

from a parent's moral assistance. But already Austen is providing clues for a different reading of Churchill's character: "The aunt was a capricious woman, and governed her husband entirely, but it was not in Mr. Weston's nature to imagine that any caprice could be strong enough to affect one so dear, and, as he believed, so deservedly dear" (9).

Emma firmly believes that she will never marry. In spite of this, she does have a vague interest in Frank Churchill, as "there was something in the name, in the idea of Churchill, which always interested her" (82):

> She had frequently thought . . . that if she were to marry, he was the very person to suit her in age, character and condition. . . . She had a great curiosity to see him, a decided intention of finding him pleasant, of being liked by him to a certain degree, and a sort of pleasure in the idea of their being coupled together in their friends' imaginations. (81)

If Emma had lived a hundred or even fifty years earlier, this situation could well have resulted in an arranged marriage--if Mr. Woodhouse had agreed. What Emma's idle speculation does reveal is that she is an unconscious romantic; in fact, she is very similar to Marianne Dashwood, who fell in love with the first "hero" she met or to Catherine Morland, who was intrigued by the "mysteriousness" of Mr. Tilney, a quality "which is always so becoming in a hero" (NA 53).

Austen increases the suspense by Churchill's repeated delays. Emma has an animated discussion with Mr. Knightley regarding the delays and "found herself directly involved in a disagreement with Mr. Knightley; and, to her great amusement, perceived that she was taking the other side of the question from her real opinion" (98).

This discussion points to two different interpretations of Churchill's behaviour and is extremely important to an understanding of the rest of the novel. Emma, defending Churchill, makes excuses for his not visiting Highbury and attributes it to the influence and needs of the capricious Mrs. Churchill. Mr. Knightley, on the other hand, criticizes him in very strong terms:

> "There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chooses, and that is his duty. . . . It is Frank Churchill's duty to pay this attention to his father. . . ." (99)

At the heart of this discussion is the relationship between parents and children; Emma is arguing for the duties of children to their parents. Of course, the issue here is complicated by the fact that Churchill has two sets of parents, the rich and demanding Churchills and the modest but deserving Westons. Mr. Knightley, on the other hand, is defining a type of honour which transcends the parent/child relationship.

This passage sets the stage for the arrival of Churchill and suggests the framework of values against which he is to be judged. But the reader's task is not made easy; although Mr. Knightley is the only character who personifies and explains correct values and correct conduct throughout the novel, the narrator suggests that in this instance he may not be completely objective. Emma realizes that Knightley is "vexed" and tries to conclude the discussion by noting that they are both prejudiced:

> "I will say no more about him," cried Emma, "you turn every thing to evil. We are both prejudiced; you against, I for him; and we have no chance of agreeing till he is really here." (102)

Her accusation is similar to Marianne's statement that Elinor is being unfair in her judgment of Willoughby; in each case, the circumspection of Knightley and of Elinor proves to be well founded. However, in this instance, even this most upright of characters is betraying his jealousy of Churchill. In fact, Mr. Knightley later confesses it was at precisely this moment that he became aware of his love for Emma.

When Frank Churchill finally arrives in Highbury, he and Emma enter into an easy flirtation, making sport of the foibles of their neighbours. Emma takes particular pleasure in jesting about Jane Fairfax, whom she flippantly believes is suffering because of the marriage of her friend to Mr. Dixon. Mr. Knightley makes several attempts to promote a friendship between Emma and Jane Fairfax. Jane Fairfax is recognized by all as a superior young woman, and she is also superior to Emma. Austen is careful to avoid the problem she encountered with Elinor and Marianne by making Jane extremely reserved and not letting the reader into her thoughts until the very end of the novel. Emma continues to prefer Harriet Smith's company until she realizes herself that it is inappropriate.

Emma enjoys Churchill's company a great deal but believes that her attraction to him does not go beyond flirtation:

> With Tuesday came the agreeable prospect of seeing him again, and for a longer time than hitherto, of judging his general manners, and by inference, of the meaning of his manners towards herself, of guessing how soon it might be necessary for her to throw coldness into her air. . . . (143)

Yet from the very first pages of the novel, the reader has been aware of Emma's errors in judgment and reasoning. For all intents and

purposes, then, Churchill "appears" to be the suitable suitor and it is entirely likely that Emma is misjudging her own heart.

In The Rhetoric of Fiction, Wayne Booth suggests that Austen is purchasing "mystery at the expense of irony. For many of us Jane Austen's choice here is perhaps the weakest aspect of the novel" (255). However, because of the nature of Austen's linear irony, all the clues that one needs in order to solve the mystery are there. For instance, Churchill looks wistfully at the parsonage and remarks that "If it were to be shared with the woman he loved, he would not think any man to be pitied for having that house. . . . The man must be a blockhead who wanted more" (137). This implies that the "woman he loved" is somehow connected to the idea of reduced circumstances. Similarly, when Emma comments that he must know what Miss Fairfax "is destined to be" (135), he replies in the affirmative. The ambiguity stems from the fact that Austen supplies so many different "pathways" through the novel it is difficult, if not impossible, to choose the right one on first reading.

When Churchill returns to the neighbourhood after a short interval away, the flirtation continues and reaches its climax at the outing to Box Hill:

> . . . Emma, glad to be enlivened, not sorry to be flattered, was gay and easy too, and gave him all the friendly encouragement, the admission to be gallant, which she had ever given in the first and most animating period of their acquaintance; but which now, in her own estimation, meant nothing, though in the judgment of most people looking on it must have been such an appearance as no English word but flirtation could very well describe. (252)

In the above passage, which begins inside Emma's mind, we can see a gradually changing point of reference; by the end of the passage, we are observing Emma from the "outside" and are judging the inappropriateness of her behaviour. This is an example of Austen's "indirect discourse." The passage also shows that Mr. Knightley's worst suspicions about Frank Churchill have come true: "He may be very 'amiable', have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him" (101).

In spite of the fact that Emma and Frank are both playing parts, other people around them mistake their behaviour. Both Mr. and Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley feel that there is something between them, although Knightley also suspects that there is something between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax. Jane Fairfax herself is so annoyed at Churchill's flirtatious behaviour that she breaks off their engagement and refuses to admit Emma to see her. What makes it seem a very dangerous game is the fact that Churchill himself is sure that Emma has guessed his secret, when in fact she hasn't.

Shortly after the disastrous outing to Box Hill Mrs. Churchill dies; this event enables Frank to disclose his secret engagement at last. The motive for keeping the engagement secret had been Mrs. Churchill's certain disapproval of it, which most likely would have resulted in Churchill's financial undoing. However, because Mrs. Churchill dies, Churchill is spared the treatment Edward Ferrars receives from his mother.

Their secret engagements reveal that both Edward Ferrars and Frank Churchill want to marry for love; and both are engaged to women who do not have independent incomes to bring to the marriage. But their similarities end there; while the conduct of Edward is in all respects honourable, Frank's conduct leaves much to be desired.

Not only does he flirt openly with Emma, but he flirts with her in front of Jane Fairfax; Emma condemns this behaviour to Mrs. Weston:

> I have escaped;--and that I should escape, may be a matter of grateful wonder to you and myself. But this does not acquit him, Mrs. Weston; and I must say, that I think him greatly to blame. What right had he to come among us with affection and faith engaged, and with manners so very disengaged? What right had he to endeavour to please, as he certainly did--to distinguish any one young woman with persevering attention, as he certainly did--while he really belonged to another?--How could he tell what mischief he might be doing?--How could he tell that he might not be making me in love with him?--very wrong, very wrong indeed. (273)

Emma continues to criticize Frank Churchill's "impropriety"; strangely enough, the words she uses are reminiscent of Mr. Knightley's description of the kind of behaviour to be expected in a gentleman: "So unlike what a man should be!--None of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life" (273). The person she is describing is Mr. Knightley himself, but she is still unaware that she is in love with him. That realization comes to her only after she has recognized her own errors and when she fears she may lose him to Harriet.

Frank Churchill's improper behaviour disqualifies him as a suitor who is suitable for the heroine in one of Austen's novels. Unlike Edward Ferrars, who made an error in judgment alone, Churchill

compounds his error in judgment with errors in conduct, especially towards Emma. However, Emma forgives him: "He has imposed on me, but he has not injured me" (294). Despite his inappropriate conduct, Austen maintains the moral balance by having him marry Jane Fairfax. Mr. Knightley sums up the possibilities represented in this marriage:

> He has had great faults, faults of inconsideration and thoughtlessness; and I am very much of his opinion in thinking him likely to be happier than he deserved; but still as he is, beyond a doubt, really attached to Miss Fairfax, and will soon, it may be hoped, have the advantage of being constantly with her, I am very ready to believe his character will improve, and acquire from her's the steadiness and delicacy of principle that it wants. (308-309)

Concealment is what links Edward Ferrors and Frank Churchill and it is also of great importance to the novel form, as Tony Tanner observes in Jane Austen:

> But if everything had been decided, "open" and simple from the start, there would of course have been no novel. In one form or another, the novel depends on some form of disguise, equivocation and mystery. (207)

Whereas the concealment practised by Austen's delinquents is honourable if inappropriate, the suppression of truth by her blackguards is entirely dishonourable.

VI. BLACKGUARDS

". . . and I had been growing a fine hardened villain. . . ." (SS 319)

The third category of unsuitable suitors is the blackguards; these are the young men in Austen's novels who are guilty of dishonesty and immorality. There are, however, two degrees of immorality; Henry Crawford in Mansfield Park and Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility are less reprehensible than are Wickham in Pride and Prejudice and Mr. Elliot in Persuasion. In spite of their weaknesses and in spite of the suffering they cause, the reader is more forgiving of Willoughby and Crawford because both of these characters waged battles with themselves and lost. They give the impression of being honest in spite of their weaknesses. On the other hand, Wickham and Mr. Elliot are truly heinous because they never face their own inadequacies and maintain their masks until the very end.

As with the "delinquents," who were discussed in the previous chapter, Austen again uses contrasts between the suitable and unsuitable suitors to round out the plot and the technique of linear irony to confound the reader's expectations.

In each of the novels featuring a "blackguard," the heroine comes to realize the threat represented by this man. While she escapes, someone else--often someone she is close to--does not. In these embedded seduction plots, then, the didactic message is most

explicit. On the one hand is love and a social role through marriage; on the other hand is the potential for isolation and social ruin.

As we have seen from the previous chapter, in Sense and Sensibility the heroine is Elinor. Early on we learn of her interest in Edward Ferrars, but Edward never declares himself and Elinor "sensibly" refuses to allow her feelings to overpower her reason. The novel is quickly dominated by the romance between Marianne and Willoughby.

Willoughby rescues Marianne from an unfortunate fall and immediately captivates her, for "his person and air were equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story" (75) and he appears to have all the "manly virtues." However, a careful reading of the early descriptions reveals someone with "exterior attractions" (75) only; Willoughby is like a chameleon in that he quickly falls into a conversation on books and music with Marianne and he knows how to please: "He acquiesced in all her decisions, caught all her enthusiasm" (79).

Elinor is concerned by Marianne's disdain for decorum:

> Elinor could not but be surprised at their attachment. She only wished it were less openly shown; and once or twice did venture to suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne. But 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. Willoughby thought the same; and their behaviour, at all times, was an illustration of their opinions. (85)

Only an engagement would permit the openness and attachment which Marianne and Willoughby are constantly demonstrating. Willoughby

clips a lock of Marianne's hair; Willoughby addresses Marianne by her first name; and together they visit Mrs. Smith's estate in her absence. Later Elinor notices that they appear to be corresponding. Because these favours would be acceptable only in the case of an engagement, Elinor is rather confused by their secrecy: ". . . it was so wholly contradictory to their general opinions and practice, that a doubt sometimes entered her mind of their being really engaged . . ." (100).

The irony of the situation is that although they refuse to conceal their affection for each other from their friends and acquaintances, Willoughby is concealing part of himself from Marianne. Although they mock "commonplace and mistaken notions" (85), Willoughby is interested in the most commonplace of all notions--marriage for financial gain rather than for love.

Willoughby leaves mysteriously and the following chapters focus on Elinor's confusion regarding the situation existing between her sister and Willoughby. The tension is heightened when both sisters go to town as the guests of Mrs. Jennings. In spite of Marianne's dislike for her hostess, she is eager to visit London because it would enable her to see Willoughby once again.

But Willoughby is a changed being. No longer the passionate admirer of Marianne, he ignores the notes she sends him and ignores her presence at a party until forced into an acknowledgement. This behaviour confounds Elinor even further:

> Her indignation would have been still stronger than it was, had she not witnessed that embarrassment which seemed to speak a consciousness of his own misconduct, and prevented her from believing him so unprincipled as to have been sporting with the affections of her sister from the first, without any design that would bear investigation. (192)

As mentioned above, it is his consciousness of misconduct which makes Willougby such an appealing character and leaves the reader wondering about the motivations for his behaviour.

When Marianne receives a cruel letter from Willoughby announcing his engagement to another woman, Elinor is amazed. Nevertheless, she views the "disengagement" of Marianne as a positive good because it is an "escape from the worst and most irremediable of all evils, a connection for life, with an unprincipled man" (196).

At this juncture, halfway through the novel, Austen begins to develop the role of Colonel Brandon; through him we learn more about Willoughby. We learn that before meeting the Dashwoods, Willoughby had seduced the ward of Colonel Brandon:

> He had left the girl whose youth and innocence he had seduced, in a situation of the utmost distress, with no creditable home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his address! He had left her promising to return, had neither returned, nor wrote, nor relieved her. (218)

Of course, Colonel Brandon is an entirely creditable character; only after the truth about Willoughby and Marianne becomes known does he step forward with this additional information. Furthermore, Colonel Brandon's story validates the low opinion the reader has formed of Willoughby because of his unscrupulous behaviour towards Marianne.

Marianne's disillusionment is total, for "she felt the loss of Willoughby's character yet more heavily than she had felt the loss of

his heart. . ." (221). Because of Marianne's passionate involvement with Willoughby, she has lost a real sense of her own identity; the revelations about Willoughby's true nature sap all her strength. What Marianne experiences on her own account because of Willoughby and for Elinor because of Edward prove too much for her; she goes into a steady decline while staying with the Palmers at Cleveland. However, Sir John Middleton tells Willougby that Marianne is "dying of a putrid fever at Cleveland" (323) and he arrives unexpectedly. Elinor at first mistakes his behaviour for drunkenness, but he assures her that this is not the case and startles her by his conversation: "Tell me honestly!--a deeper glow overspreading his cheeks--"do you think me most a knave or a fool?" (313). He also asserts that "though . . . [he had] been always a blockhead, . . . [he had] not been always a rascal . . ." (314). Through his explanation, Willoughby seeks the forgiveness of Marianne; because of what we have learned about him, his honesty is jarring and we are reminded of the Willoughby of Barton Cottage.

Willoughby's open-hearted revelations about his feelings for Marianne earn him a hearing from Elinor. His explanation gives another character to what Elinor, and the reader, have come to believe. He does admit that when he first met Marianne, he had been motivated only by vanity:

> . . . Careless of her happiness, thinking only of my own amusement, giving way to feelings which I had been too much in the habit of indulging, I endeavoured by every means in my power to make myself pleasing to her, without any design of returning her affection. (314)

He also confesses that his insincerity was attributable to his financial circumstances which made it necessary, he felt, to marry a "woman of fortune":

> My fortune was never very large, and I had always been expensive, always in the habit of associating with people of better income than myself. Every year since my coming of age, or even before, I believe, had added to my debts, and though the death of my old cousin, Mrs. Smith, was to set me free; yet that event being uncertain, and possibly far distant, it had been for some time my intention to re-establish my circumstances by marrying a woman of fortune. (315)

Nevertheless, his affections were engaged in spite of himself. Even knowing how much Marianne cared for him and the way their relationship appeared to others, he allowed himself "improperly" to put off paying his addresses to her and becoming engaged in fact (315). He laments the absurdity of his ". . . scrupling to engage . . . [his] faith where . . . [his] honour was already bound" (315).

Just when he was on the verge of asking Marianne to marry him, a past indiscretion had come to the attention of Mrs. Smith. Because of his probable disinheritance, he thought that his financial predicament would be even more aggravated than it had been before. Consequently, Willoughby left for London without speaking formally to Marianne. He has come to realize in retrospect that marriage to someone like Marianne would have earned him Mrs. Smith's forgiveness. Henrietta Ten Harmsel believes that Austen was of two minds regarding Willoughby:

> By giving Willoughby the melodramatic confession scene with its appeal to the reader's sympathies, Jane Austen seems almost to consider "redeeming" him for Marianne, as Richardson "redeemed" Mr. B. for Pamela. But in the end and perhaps against her own desires--Jane Austen yields to the dictum that sense must win out over sensibility. (43)

Willoughby blames himself for not proposing to Marianne before he left Barton. In retrospect, however, this worked to Marianne's advantage; for Colonel Brandon only steps forward with his story after Willoughby's engagement to Miss Grey. It is Marianne who "finalizes" the portrait of Willoughby and guides the reader's understanding. Once Marianne has heard Willoughby's side of the story through Elinor, she must weigh it against what she knows of the younger Eliza:

> "I am now perfectly satisfied, I wish for no change. I could never have been happy with him, after knowing, as sooner or later I must have known, all this--I should have had no confidence, no esteem." (341)

Not only are Willoughby and Colonel Brandon very different in temperament, but Austen also develops the antipathy between the two men in order to add interest to the novel and to justify the final choice of Marianne.

Marianne does, in fact, marry Colonel Brandon, the man whom she and Willoughby had mocked at the beginning of the novel and who has been instrumental in revealing Willoughby's past. By the end of the novel, however, there is an odd reversal; Colonel Brandon is revealed as the true romantic and Willoughby as the pragmatist.

By the end of the novel, Willoughby's worst fear will have come true.

> I shall now go away and live in dread of one event. . . . Your sister's marriage! . . . And if that someone should be the very he whom, of all others, I could least bear. . . . (325)

In spite of Willoughby's downfall, Jane Austen reserves a reasonably comfortable life for him:

> But that he was for ever inconsolable; that he fled from society, or contracted an habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart, must not be depended on--for he did neither. He lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself. His wife was not always out of humour, nor his home always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity. (367)

Ten Harmsel feels that this "quick return to satire" (57) is but another of the many flaws in Sense and Sensibility. However, the negatives in the above passage suggest that while Willoughby was not inconsolable, he might well have been happier. Austen reserves the same "mixed" fate for her other blackguards.

Mansfield Park was written between 1811 and 1813 (Ten Harmsel 37; Poovey 266). In Mansfield Park, we are first introduced to Henry Crawford near the beginning of the novel. Henry and Mary Crawford are to visit their older sister, who is the wife of Dr. Grant; the Grants live in the parsonage on the grounds of Mansfield Park, the home of the Bertram family. The narrator informs the reader that up until that time the Crawfords lived with their uncle, Admiral Crawford. Upon the death of the Admiral's wife, however, Mary is obliged to leave his home to avoid being stigmatized by her uncle's immorality, for "Admiral Crawford was a man of vicious conduct, who chose, instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his own roof" (34). Mary has decided to visit Mrs. Grant after trying "in vain to persuade her brother to settle with her at his own country house" (35). However, "to anything like a permanence of abode, or limitation of society, Henry Crawford had, unluckily, a great dislike . . ." (35).

Unlike other unsuitable suitors whose real natures are revealed gradually, Jane Austen presents Henry Crawford in his true colours from the beginning. In the first place, he is a favourite of his "vicious" uncle. Secondly, he is selfish and lacking in brotherly feeling in refusing to provide a home for his sister. In addition, he is a terrible flirt. Although Mary can joke about his flirtatious nature and his reluctance to marry, she shares his values. When Dr. Grant congratulates her "on feeling no disinclination to the state herself" (36), she replies that she is not in agreement with people who "throw themselves away; but everybody should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage" (36).

The visit of the Crawfords to Mansfield Park and the values they bring with them have an unsettling effect on the relative peace and harmony prevailing there. The effects of their visit are exacerbated by the absence of Sir Thomas, the family head, who leaves on an extended visit to Antigua shortly before the Crawfords' arrival in the neighbourhood.

In spite of the faults enumerated earlier, Henry Crawford is extremely charming and witty. Maria and Julia Bertram, who have led a quiet life up until now, soon fall in love with him. He is quite prepared to enjoy their company but feels no deep affection or commitment: "He did not want them to die of love; but with sense and temper which ought to have made him judge and feel better, he allowed himself great latitude on such points" (37).

Crawford does leave Mansfield for a while. Instead of using the time to reflect on his behaviour towards the two Miss Bertrams "in the

intervals of shooting and sleeping" (92), he seems disinclined to alter his behaviour: "He gladly returned at the time appointed, and was welcomed thither quite as gladly by those whom he came to trifle with further" (92).

Fanny has a very low opinion of Henry Crawford. She silently observes her two counsins vying for Crawford's affections and is distressed that Crawford leads both of them on. She is particularly concerned because Maria is as good as engaged to Mr. Rushworth, and Crawford continues to flirt with her. The improprieties Fanny has observed increase when the group of young people decide to act in an amateur performance of Lovers' Vows by Kotzebue. Crawford is especially good in his role as Frederick; playing opposite him is Maria Rushworth as Agatha. The part calls for some improper scenes, and Fanny is amazed when Crawford says that he is never happier than when acting:

> With silent indignation, Fanny repeated to herself, "Never happier!--never happier than when doing what you must know was not justifiable!--never happier than when behaving so dishonourably and unfeelingly.-- Oh! What a corrupted mind." (176)

Fanny is the only character who categorically refuses to act in the play. Fanny is also the only character who has seen through the superficial charms of the Crawfords and understands the effect of their presence at the Park.

With the unexpected return of Sir Thomas just before the performance of the play, the play-acting meets an untimely end. Shortly afterwards, the unhappy Maria marries Mr. Rushworth as planned in order to "find consolation in fortune and consequence" (158). She

and Mr. Rushworth leave Mansfield for Brighton, and Julia accompanies them; while "Fanny's consequence increased on the departure of her cousins" (161).

The effects of this consequence are almost immediate; after a dinner party at the parsonage, Henry Crawford informs his sister that he has a plan in mind:

> "And how do you think I mean to amuse myself, Mary, on the days that I do not hunt? I am grown too old to go out more than three times a week; but I have a plan for the intermediate days, and what do you think it is? . . . My plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me." (179)

This appears to be just another idle flirtation. At this point, approximately half way through the novel, Jane Austen begins to depict Henry Crawford in a more sympathetic fashion. Again, she relies on linear irony to involve the reader in the dynamics of the novel.[5] She did this quite consciously; in a letter to her sister Cassandra on Saturday 5 March 1814, she discusses their brother Henry's reaction to Henry Crawford:

> Henry has this moment said that he likes M.P. better & better; he is in the 3[d] volume. I believe <u>now</u> he has changed his mind as to foreseeing the end; he said yesterday at least, that he defied anybody to say whether H.C. [Henry Crawford] would be reformed, or would forget Fanny in a fortnight. . . . (381)

For one thing, Crawford is perceived as more sympathetic because his pursuit of Fanny has a fairy-tale quality, combining the stories of the Ugly Duckling and Cinderella in one. Fanny, who is plain and pious and who has been at the beck and call of her aunts and cousins, has won the heart of Crawford where her more beautiful cousins failed.

Secondly, Crawford's obvious esteem for Fanny and his hopes of convincing her to marry him have a positive effect on his character. In the classic fairy tale structure, a young girl is transformed into a princess through marriage with the prince. In this case, Crawford would be transformed into a better person through marriage with a "superior" woman.

For instance, Crawford meets William Price, Fanny's sailor brother and feels great admiration and envy for him:

> He longed to have been at sea, and seen and done and suffered as much. His heart was warmed, his fancy fired, and he felt the highest respect for a lad who, before he was twenty, had gone through such bodily hardships, and given such proofs of mind. The glory of heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance, made his own habits of selfish indulgence appear in shameful contrast; and he wished he had been a William Price, distinguishing himself and working his way to fortune and consequence with so much self-respect and happy ardour, instead of what he was! (184-185)

This passage indicates that Crawford is beginning to analyze his past actions; it offers some hope that he will be able to improve his character.

Crawford tries hard to conform to what Fanny expects, but she is so silent that he doesn't know where to begin. Nevertheless, he is sincere in his attachment to Fanny: "It is not by protestations that I shall endeavour to convince you that I am wronged, it is not by telling you that my affections are steady. My conduct shall speak for me--absence, distance, time shall speak for me" (267).

Everyone in Fanny's family finds Crawford suitable with the exception of Fanny herself. To make Fanny understand the value of the life she had been leading at Mansfield Park, and to make her

understand the consequences of the match she is refusing, Sir Thomas sends her home to visit with the family she had not seen for years.

Henry Crawford really is a chameleon; it is not surprising that he had been in his element in the ill-judged theatre. Even when he visits Fanny at her parents' home, he appears not to notice their poverty and manages to be perfectly charming to everybody. Fanny observes that "such a man could come from no place, no society, without importing something to amuse" (315).

The main reason, of course, that Fanny is not interested in Henry Crawford is that she has a "pre-engaged heart"--she has long been in love with her cousin Edmund, but has kept it a secret from everybody. Nevertheless, she begins to think more favourably of Henry Crawford, especially when he visits her in Portsmouth:

> . . . She thought him altogether improved since she had seen him: he was much more gentle, obliging, and attentive to other people's feelings than he had ever been at Mansfield; she had never seen him so agreeable--so _near_ being agreeable; his behaviour to her father could not offend, and there was something particularly kind and proper in the notice he took of Susan. He was decidedly improved. . . . (317)

He has changed so much in her thoughts that she lets herself imagine that, were she to marry him, she might be able to have her sister Susan live with them to get her away from Portsmouth and bring out her natural qualities (327). Austen has made Crawford so attractive that the narrator suggests he might have convinced Fanny to marry him if he had only waited longer:

> Could he have been satisfied with the conquest of one amiable woman's affections, could he have found sufficient exultation in overcoming the reluctance, in working himself into the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, there would have been every probability of success and felicity for him. . . . Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward. . . . (92)

In spite of the more sympathetic feelings Fanny and the reader have for Henry Crawford, the vicissitudes of "absence, distance and time" (267)--which he himself had sworn to overcome--prove too much. Separated from Fanny, caught up in his old environment and with his former friends, Crawford is often in the company of Maria Rushworth, Fanny's cousin; and he runs away with her.

This seduction plot serves as the catastrophe which Austen often uses close to the end of her novels in order to sort out the various characters into suitable and unsuitable. In this case it clearly marks Henry Crawford as unsuitable.

Prior to this event Fanny had been alone in judging Crawford unsuitable and had even annoyed Sir Thomas by her obstinacy. Now all ties between the Bertrams and the Crawfords must be cut. This puts to an end any possibility of a marriage between Edmund and Mary:

> . . . but Sir Thomas was considering his [Edmund's] happiness as very deeply involved in the offence of his sister and friend, cut off by it as he must be from the woman, whom he had been pursuing with undoubted attachment, and strong probability of success; and who in everything but this despicable brother, would have been so eligible a connexion. (353)

Apart from her relationship to her brother, however, Mary Crawford is also revealed to be unsuitable through her reaction to this event. Edmund describes his last meeting with Mary to Fanny in terms of horror: ". . . She saw it only as folly, and that folly

stamped only by exposure. The want of common discretion, of caution . . . it was the detection, not the offense which she reprobated . . ." (355). Edmund and the two Crawfords have been on the most friendly terms up to this point in the novel. However, the permutations of this catastrophe serve to highlight the essential differences between Edmund and Fanny on the one hand and Mary and Henry Crawford on the other.

Nevertheless, the novel does not end on a tragic note. Jane Austen was writing in the comic genre and, although this is by far the least comic of her novels, she is bound by the conventions she had established for her writing. In the last chapter of Mansfield Park, she contrives to fit the events of the novel into her perspective of society:

> Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest. (359)

This ending meets the requirements of Austen's comic sense and her realistic depiction of character and events; for she realizes that there will be no stigma attached to Crawford:

> 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; but without presuming to look forward to a juster appointment hereafter, we may fairly consider a man of sense like Henry Crawford, to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret. . . . (366)

Maria, however, suffers a great deal more because of this entanglement; an "establishment" is formed for her with Mrs. Norris in another county.

Time was a contributing factor in the downfall of Mr. Crawford; but it is the restorative of the other characters at Mansfield Park for, the narrator informs us, "time will do almost anything" (360).

The appearance of Mr. Wickham in Pride and Prejudice follows that of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Collins. Darcy appears to be unsuitable because he was extremely rude at the Meryton assembly and even singled out Elizabeth for his criticism: "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men" (7). The narrator notes that "Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings towards him . . ." (7). Mr. Collins proves to be equally unsuitable, as has been discussed in Chapter IV. Mr. Wickham, therefore, appears to be the suitable suitor. Ten Harmsel observes that "Like Mr. B. [in Pamela], he appears briefly, upon his introduction, to be the man who will develop into Elizabeth's hero (80).

Wickham is first introduced as a young man "of most gentlemanlike appearance" (50):

> His appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address. The introduction was followed on his side by a happy readiness of conversation--a readiness at the same time perfectly correct and unassuming. . . . (50)

Seconds after Mr. Wickham makes his first appearance in Meryton, he encounters Mr. Darcy; Elizabeth immediately perceives the strangeness of the encounter:

> Mr. Darcy . . . was beginning to determine not to fix his eyes on Elizabeth, when they were suddenly arrested by the sight of the stranger, and Elizabeth happening to see the countenance of both as they looked at each other, was all astonishment at the effect of the meeting. Both changed colour, one looked white, the other red. Mr. Wickham, after a few moments, touched his hat--a salutation which Mr. Darcy just deigned to return. . . . (50)

In this novel, then, from the very beginning, Austen develops a relationship of overt hostility between the suitable and the unsuitable suitor. And, once again she uses linear irony to confuse the reader about the correct identity of the suitable and unsuitable suitor.

From the beginning the reader identifies with the character of Elizabeth. In the early part of the novel, however, it is difficult to evaluate Elizabeth's responses objectively because her strengths and weaknesses are so closely connected. She has strong--prejudiced--opinions, but she expresses them with such wit and vivacity that it is easy for the reader to be misguided into an incorrect reading of people's characters and, as a result, of the novel.

Mr. Wickham singles out Elizabeth for his attentions at an evening card party in the home of her aunt Philips:

> Mr. Wickham was the happy man towards whom almost every female eye was turned, and Elizabeth was the happy woman by whom he finally seated himself; and the agreeable manner in which he immediately fell into conversation, though it was only on its being a wet night, and on the probability of a rainy season, made her feel the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker. (53)

This attention appears to be just recognition of Elizabeth's talents. Although Elizabeth had already assumed that "what she chiefly wished to hear [about Darcy] she could not hope to be

told" (53), she does not take it amiss when "Wickham began the subject himself" (53). Elizabeth's feelings for Wickham are strengthened when he recounts to her the story of the wrongs he has experienced at the hands of Mr. Darcy, whom Elizabeth is prepared to dislike because of her experience at the Meryton assembly. Elizabeth's feelings for Wickham appear to grow with every meeting:

> Whatever he said, was said well; and whatever he did, done gracefully. Elizabeth went away with her head full of him. She could think of nothing but of Mr. Wickham and of what he had told her, all the way home. . . . (59)

When Jane is told about Elizabeth's conversation with Wickham, she is torn between her loyalty to the friends of Mr. Bingley and to Mr. Wickham, for "it was not in her nature to question the veracity of a young man of such amiable appearance as Wickham" (59).

Another version of the relations between Wickham and Darcy is presented by Miss Bingley, who states that "George Wickham has treated Mr. Darcy in a most infamous manner" (66). In addition to her prejudiced view of Mr. Darcy and his supercilious manner, Elizabeth also dislikes Miss Bingley. Miss Bingley makes her view of Wickham even less credible by ending with the comment that ". . . considering his descent, one could not expect much better" (66). Of course, Elizabeth is rather sensitive on the subject of descent in view of the tenuous social situation of her mother's family. For all these reasons, she accepts Wickham's excuses for not attending the party at Netherfield.

Though Elizabeth has not been able to promise her Aunt Gardiner that she will not fall in love with Wickham, she does promise her not

to be in a hurry to do so (100). Several weeks pass in the space of a few pages; having promised to keep Mrs. Gardiner informed about her feelings for Mr. Wickham, Elizabeth "had such information as might rather give contentment to her aunt than to herself" (104):

> His apparent partiality had subsided, his attentions were over, he was the admirer of someone else. . . . The sudden acquisition of ten thousand pounds was the most remarkable charm of the young lady, to whom he was now rendering himself agreeable. . . . (104)

Elizabeth's "losses" of Mr. Collins to Charlotte and of Mr. Wickham to Miss King are juxtaposed. However, her willingness to reject Charlotte and to forgive Mr. Wickham is another example of Elizabeth's "prejudice." The narrator notes that in the case of Mr. Wickham Elizabeth is "less clear-sighted perhaps . . . than in Charlotte's" (104). Whereas she is prepared to admit that "handsome young men must have something to live on," Elizabeth feels that she can no longer address Charlotte "without feeling that all the comfort of intimacy was over" (101).

In spite of Wickham's interest in Miss King, when Elizabeth is preparing to leave for Hunsford, "the farewell between herself and Mr. Wickham was perfectly friendly; . . . and she parted from him convinced, that whether married or single, he must always be her model of the amiable and pleasing" (105).

During her brief stay in London on the way to Hunsford, Elizabeth is questioned further by her aunt, who is somewhat more suspicious at the possibility of Mr. Wickham's having mercenary motives. Nevertheless, Elizabeth still defends him: "Pray my dear aunt, what is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and

the prudent motive? Where does discretion end, and avarice begin . . . ." (106).

Elizabeth's remarks are quite justified in view of the pressures to marry and, above all, to marry "well." There was indeed a fine line between caution and greed, and much depends on a clear picture of the circumstances of the individuals concerned. This same dilemma is developed by Austen in Persuasion. In the case of Wickham, however, Elizabeth's defense is based on an erroneous evaluation of information she received from a very interested party--himself.

A contradictory portrait of Mr. Wickham is presented in Darcy's letter to Elizabeth. Darcy claims that, as a young man, Wickham had had "vicious propensities"; "as a student in London, he led a life of "idleness and dissipation" (139). When Darcy failed to grant him the family living he had already turned down, he schemes to marry Georgiana, Darcy's young sister, in order to have access to her fortune of thirty thousand pounds. Darcy concludes that, in addition to the financial enticement, Wickham was motivated by revenge.

Whereas Wickham is the sole witness in his own defense, Darcy offers Colonel Fitzwilliam as a witness to corroborate his version of the story. Upon examining the evidence before her, Elizabeth is forced to re-evaluate her perception of the conduct of the two men and her own unconscious complicity in Wickham's falsifications. However, she chooses not to reveal the truth to anyone but Jane, who agrees with her approach: "You are quite right. To have his errors made public might ruin him forever. He is now perhaps sorry for what he has done . . ." (156).

Of course, Wickham is not in the least bit sorry; soon thereafter he elopes with Lydia Bennett. This is the "catastrophe" which Austen again uses to identify once and for all the true nature of her characters. From this time Wickham's real character is revealed to the Bennett family and to the people of Meryton: "All Meryton seemed striving to blacken the man, who, but three months before, had been almost an angel of light" (201):

> He was declared to be in debt to every tradesman in the place, and his intrigues, all honoured with the title of seduction, had been extended into every tradesman's family. (202)

Everyone is shocked by this news, and even Jane Bennett exclaims "A Gamester!" in horror (204).

Darcy proves himself the hero and arranges the marriage of Lydia and Wickham; however, Elizabeth is not optimistic: "But how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, she could only conjecture" (214).

What makes Wickham so despicable is that even at the end of the novel--after he has "eloped" with Lydia--he is still hiding behind the mask he created. Discussing the parsonage which was to have been his (until he turned it down in exchange for money), he wistfully observes that "The quiet, the retirement of such a life, would have answered all . . . [his] ideas of happiness!" (225). Elizabeth's obvious knowledge unsettles him, for "he hardly knew how to look . . ." (226).

Mr. Elliot in Persuasion is probably the blackest of the blackguards as he appears to be the most calculating of the unsuitable

suitor. Although Andrew Wright treats Mr. Elliot as a "red herring" (169), I concur with Ten Harmsel's opinion that "Mr. Elliot's characterization proves that he possesses the characteristics common to Jane Austen's other 'villains'" (184). Several different Mr. Elliots are revealed in the course of the novel. The first is the unwilling suitor of Elizabeth; the second is as the hopeful suitor of Anne; and the third is the scheming Mr. Elliot revealed by Mrs. Smith. The reader's sympathies change significantly during the course of the novel as the real Mr. Elliot is gradually unmasked.

In Persuasion the family situation is quite similar to the one in Pride and Prejudice. We are introduced to the Elliot family, which has two unmarried daughters, and we are made aware of the heir presumptive, Mr. Elliot, a distant cousin. Unlike Mr. Collins, however, who was eager to marry first Jane and then Elizabeth, Mr. Elliot keeps his distance. The eldest daughter Elizabeth is her father's favourite and she had hoped to marry her cousin in order to consolidate the family fortunes. However, she had been snubbed: "Instead of pushing his fortune in the line marked out for the heir of the house of Mr. Elliot, he had purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth (39). Mr. Elliot had even gone so far as to speak "most disrespectfully of them all, most slightingly of the very blood he belonged to, and the honours which were hereafter to be his own" (40).

At this point the portrait of Mr. Elliot is an ambivalent one. The reader sympathizes with Anne and deplores the treatment she receives from her father and Elizabeth, who share the traits of vanity

and pretension. Mr. Elliot's avoidance of his family might possibly be traced to his discernment of their superficiality, which could be interpreted as a virtue. Because of the harsh depiction of Sir Walter and Elizabeth, it is possible for the reader to condone Mr. Elliot's behaviour, and fall into the trap of judging on the basis of prejudice, as did Elizabeth Bennett.

When Mr. Elliot is next presented, it is at a chance encounter at an inn in Lyme, at a time when Anne is silently observing Captain Wentworth's growing interest in the Musgrove girls.

It must be remembered that Anne is poorly treated by everyone except Lady Russell. Anne is now twenty-seven years old; she had been "a very pretty girl, but her bloom had vanished early" (37). However after her walk in Lyme, she attracts the admiring eye of an unknown gentleman:

> When they came to the steps . . . a gentleman at the same moment preparing to come down, politely drew back, and stopped to give them way. They ascended and passed him; and as they passed, Anne's face caught his eye, and he looked at her with a degree of honest admiration, which she could not but be insensible of. (124-125)

Captain Wentworth notices first the reaction of the stranger and then Anne: "He gave her a momentary glance . . . which seemed to say, "That man is struck with you,--and even I, at the moment, see something like Anne Elliot again" (125). In <u>Persuasian</u>, then, Austen develops the relationship between the two suitors through jealousy over Anne. Although it is only suggested in the preceding passage, Captain Wentworth's jealousy becomes much stronger as the novel progresses.

This novel also has a fairy tale quality to it. Anne is a Cinderella-like figure, having no standing with the other members of her family. She was "nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give;--she was only Anne" (37). To Mary, her other sister, she is useful, "and Anne, glad to be thought of some use, glad to have anything marked out as a duty . . . obliges her" (61). As mentioned earlier, Elizabeth had wanted to marry Mr. Elliot and Mary is almost overcome with excitement that the strange "gentleman" in Lyme is their cousin. Yet the reader knows that it is Anne who attracts his interest and in whom, therefore, the family hopes might better be placed.

Anne Elliot is also suggestive of Sleeping Beauty. She has been "asleep" for seven years since she rejected Captain Wentworth. Since she turned down his offer of marriage, she has had no social role to play either outside or inside the family circle, which highlights the predicament of the unmarried woman in English society at this time. Anne Elliot's external appearance mirrors her emotional and social status. Like the princess who awakes with Prince Charming's kiss, Anne is changed by Mr. Elliot's notice and Captain Wentworth is also re-animated in the process.

Lady Russell puts a damper on Mary's enthusiasm for Mr. Elliot:

> "He is a man," said Lady Russell, "who I have no wish to see. His declining to be on cordial terms with the head of his family, has left a very strong impression in his disfavour with me." (147)

However, Lady Russell's opinion is questionable to readers. She had disapproved of Anne's marriage to Captain Wentworth; while to readers,

and to Anne, he remains "suitable." Because of these contradictions, Lady Russell is not able to "persuade" the reader to see Mr. Elliot her way. In addition, to add to the irony, just minutes before she had been presented with two very different descriptions of Captain Benwick. She laughingly comments that, "I should not have supposed that my opinion of any one could have admitted of such difference of conjecture, steady and matter of fact as I call myself . . ." (147).

By the time Anne arrives in Bath, Mr. Elliot has been reconciled with her family and "had explained away all the appearance of neglect on his side" (152). He had also introduced them to a close friend, Colonel Wallis, who corroborates various aspects of his story. Nevertheless, although Anne felt "that she would rather see Mr. Elliot again than not" (150), "she had the sensation of there being something more than immediately appeared, in Mr. Elliot's wishing . . . to be well received by them" (153). At this point, however, Mr. Elliot did not realize who Anne was--the lady whom he had so admired in Lyme. When they do meet, he is agreeably surprised to learn that she is his cousin. For her part, Anne found that "He was quite as good-looking as he appeared at Lyme . . . and his manner were so exactly what they ought to be . . . that she could compare them in excellence to only one person's manners" (156).

When Lady Elliot expresses a favourable opinion of Mr. Elliot and suggests that Anne would be rightly succeeding her mother as Lady Elliot, Anne is torn but certain that she can not marry Mr. Elliot:

> Though they had now been acquainted a month, she could not be satisfied that she really knew his character. . . . She distrusted the past, if not the present. . . . How could it ever be ascertained that his mind was truly cleansed?. (173)

Another objection to Mr. Elliot is that "he was not open" (173). Of course, a way of "ascertaining" Mr. Elliot's mind conveniently becomes available in the person of Mrs. Smith, who reveals all the worst details about Mr. Elliot's character. By revealing Mr. Elliot's past, Mrs. Smith introduces the "catastrophe" which leads to the realignment of characters at the end of Austen's novels.

Mrs. Smith declares that "Facts shall speak" (206). Her story reveals that Mr. Elliot married for money and spoke disparagingly of the Elliots; "all the honour of the family he held as cheap as dirt" (208). To back up her assertions, Mrs. Smith shows Anne a letter in which Mr. Elliot betrays himself:

> ". . . my first visit to Kellynch will be with a surveyor. . . . The baronet, nevertheless, is not unlikely to marry again, he is quite fool enough. . . . I wish I had any name but Elliot. I am sick of it." (210)

Mrs. Smith has further information about Mr. Elliot's current intentions; this information explains the reversal in his behaviour towards his relations. Her source is Mrs. Rooke, who is both her nurse and nurse to Mrs. Wallis, the wife of Mr. Elliot's good friend. Anne is not prepared to accept this information as reliable until Mrs. Smith backs up her story with incontrovertible evidence about Anne herself.

Mrs. Smith's story reveals a "double motive" in Mr. Elliot's present intimacy with the Elliot family. The first motive was to get an inside view of the relationship between Sir Walter and Mrs. Clay

because "Having long had as much money as he could spend . . . he has been gradually learning to pin his happiness upon the consequence he is heir to" (212). A marriage between Sir Walter and Mrs. Clay might well produce a male heir that would rob him of this "consequence." His second motive in spending time in Camden Place is to get closer to Anne, with whom he has fallen in love.

Of course, Mrs. Smith's revelations serve to defeat these aspirations, as Anne concludes that "Mr. Elliot is evidently a disingenuous, artificial, worldly man, who has never had any better principle to guide him than selfishness" (214). Anne's judgment of Mr. Elliot is confirmed publicly when he leaves town with Mrs. Clay.

Anne is repelled by the idea of marriage with such a man, but she realizes that it might have happened:

> Anne could just acknowledge within herself such a possibility of having been induced to marry him. . . . It was just possible that she might have been persuaded by Lady Russell: And under such a supposition, when time had disclosed all, too late?" (216)

The question is left unanswered, but it can be surmised that Anne sees herself as having escaped the worst type of imprisonment possible, marriage to a man without principles.

Richardson was very concerned about the lot of "reformed rakes" and Sir Charles Grandison spends a great deal of time trying to bring about marriages between reformed rakes and poor but principled women. Although Austen's blackguards do not suffer any permanent damage, they are excluded from the society of the elect few, "the small band of true friends" (Emma 335) who are her central focus. Fanny Price,

Marianne Dashwood and Anne Elliot all recoil in horror at the thought of marriage with an unprincipled man.

Austen is not as explicit in this respect as Richardson. In Sir Charles Grandison Harriet Byron explains the risks involved in marrying an unprincipled man in a letter to her friend, Miss Selby:

> But yet it is my opinion . . . that a woman who, with her eyes open, marries a profligate man, had, generally, much better remain single all her life; since it is very likely, that by such a step she defeats, as to herself, all the good ends of society. What a dreadful, what a presumptuous risque runs she, who marries a wicked man, even hoping to reclaim him, when she cannot be sure of keeping her own principles. Be not deceived; evil communication corrupts good manners [I Corinthians 15:33], a caution truly apostolical. (25)

In Austen's writing, the qualities that the blackguards embody serve to undermine any kind of lasting happiness. In addition, they threaten the regeneration of society through marriage which characterizes Austen's moral outlook. These aspects of her writing will be the focus of the following two chapters of this thesis.

VII. THEMATIC INTEGRATION OF THE UNSUITABLE SUITOR

As shown in the three previous chapters, Austen relies on the figure of the unsuitable suitor for the linear structuring of her novels. However, she also "rounds out" these characters by creating for them an individual "story"--a family, an education and a place of origin--which connects them to the major themes in her writing and, at the same time, serves as an explanation for their faulty behaviour.

Austen often relies on contrasts in her presentation of characters. Dr. Chapman commented on this technique in Jane Austen Facts and Problems: ". . . each heroine is furnished with a pendant, rival or foil, Marianne with Eleanor, Elizabeth with Jane, Catherine with Isabella, Fanny with Mary . . ." (189-190). Similarly, each of the suitable suitors has a foil in an unsuitable suitor, and the unfolding of the various plots depends in large part on the revelation of "unsuitability." Through these contrasts, the reader is shown actions which are either suitable or unsuitable and, what is more important, the consequences of these actions.

Austen also develops her themes through the same technique; because of this, they tend to be dualistic in nature. Some of the important themes developed in this way are education, marriage and "habitat." Thus, she compares a "good" education to a "bad" education, marriage for love to marriage for money and the city to the country. In each of these comparisons, the unsuitable suitor represents the negative value. Through an examination of these

themes, we can obtain a broader profile of Austen's concepts of suitability and unsuitability.

A discussion of the ways Austen uses the unsuitable suitor must inevitably consider the role of education in the formation of character. Invariably, the choices the unsuitable suitors make are attributed to their family background and education. The debate regarding the relative importance of nature vs. nurture had already begun before the eighteenth century. Jane Austen's novels suggest that she felt that "nurture" or education was a determining influence. In Jane Austen and Education, D. D. Devlin has examined the theme of education in Austen's writing; Devlin observes that her development of this theme corroborates the theories of John Locke, whose Thoughts Concerning Education went through 25 editions between 1693 and 1777 (7).

In most cases the unsuitable suitors have had an inadequate upbringing. This is the background of Mr. Collins in Pride and Prejudice.

> Mr. Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been little assisted by education or society; the greatest part of his life having been spent under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly father. (48)

Similarly, John Thorpe in Northanger Abbey grew up without a father and with only a very silly mother to guide him.

The Crawfords in Mansfield Park have been brought up by an aunt and uncle; however, the uncle is a man of vicious conduct (34). Wickham was the son of "a very respectable man" (PP 138) who was "always poor from the extravagance of his wife" (PP 138). Frank

Churchill is the product of an unequal marriage; when his mother died, he was brought up by an aunt and uncle; however, "the aunt was a capricious woman, and governed her husband entirely . . ." (E 9).

Jane Austen's novels clearly indicate that she felt education was much more than the acquisition of certain types of learning, such as the classical languages; it is instrumental in giving individuals a strong moral foundation. In this respect, too, she is similar to Locke, who felt "the four great aims of education are 'virtue, wisdom, breeding and learning'" (Devlin 11), virtue being foremost: "Tis virtue, then, direct virtue which is the hard and valuable part to be aimed at in education'" (Devlin 9).

In After Virtue Alasdair MacIntyre has traced the concept of virtue through history and observes that Jane Austen is "important for the way in which she finds it possible to combine what are at first sight disparate theoretical accounts of the virtues" (185). In particular, he notes "the central place she assigns to self-knowledge . . ." (241). All forms of education, then, must be evaluated on the basis of whether or not they lead to "virtue."

Austen presents many different forms of education. The contrast between a public and a private education can be observed in Sense and Sensibility; Edward Ferrars was educated as a private student in the home of Mr. Pratt, Lucy Steel's uncle. His brother, Robert, on the other hand, was educated at a public school. Robert, however, blames Edward's "private" education for his secret engagement to Lucy. It is ironic because at the end of the novel it is Robert himself who actually marries Lucy, although they are cunning enough to avoid the

problems that Edward encountered. Robert is perhaps best remembered by the way he is first observed by Elinor and for the care he gave to choosing his toothpick case (228). This example gives a clear indication that Austen did not rate highly the values taught in a public school.

Devlin points out that not all people who have had a private education received only benefits:

> Darcy was educated at home but confesses that he has been a selfish being all his life in practice though not in principle; and Miss Taylor was not successful as a governess in getting rid of the "real evils" of Emma's situation, "the power of having rather too much her own way and a disposition to think a little too well of herself." (10)

However, Devlin also notes that ". . . nobody who had had a public education acquired either virtue or insight" (11).

Austen's apparent preference for a private education is in line with Locke's thinking. Locke favours a private tutor because this system involves a closer contact between tutor and pupil:

> . . . for let the master's industry and skill be never so great, it is impossible he should have fifty or a hundred scholars under his eye any longer than they are in school together; nor can it be expected that he should instruct them successfully in anything but their books; the forming of their mind and manners requiring a constant attention and particular application to every single boy, which is impossible in numerous flock and would be wholly in vain. . . . When the lad was to be left to himself or the prevailing infection of his fellows the greatest part of the four and twenty hours. (Cited in Devlin 10)

The typical education afforded to women in Jane Austen's day was quite different. In Sense and Sensibility when Elinor and Marianne stay with Mrs. Jenkins in London, they observe over the mantelpiece a landscape in coloured silks done by her daughter Charlotte, "in proof

of her having spent seven years at a great school in town to some effect" (SS 176). Of all Austen's heroines, only Anne Elliot attended a school, and that is the main reason she developed a disinclination for Bath (P 45). Most of them have been "educated" at home, with or without a governess.

The theme of education is of particular importance in Mansfield Park. With the help of Edmund Bertram, Fanny acquires an "education" through reading:

> He [Edmund] knew her to be clever, to have a quick education as well as good sense, and a fondness for reading, which, properly directed, must be an education in itself . . . . he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attraction by judicious praise. (MP 20)

Through her reading Fanny develops inner resources and self-knowledge, which her cousins do not. Sir Thomas later laments the "grievous mismanagement" of his daughters' education:

> . . . He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition . . .
>
> Bitterly did he deplore a deficiency which now he could scarcely comprehend to have been possible. Wretchedly did he feel, that with all the cost and care of an anxious and expensive education, he had brought up his daughters, without their understanding their first duties, or his being acquainted with their character and temper. (361-362)

However, in spite of the "grievous mismanagement," Sir Thomas concludes that "something must have been wanting within, or time would have worn away much of its ill effect" (361).

Thus Elinor Dashwood notices Lucy Steele's lack of education but is more concerned about her consequent moral inferiority:

> Elinor saw, and pitied her for, the neglect of abilities which education might have rendered so respectable; but she saw with less tenderness of feeling, the thorough want of delicacy, or rectitude, and integrity of mind, which her attentions, her assiduities, her flatteries at the Park betrayed; and she could have no lasting satisfaction in the company of a person who joined insincerity with ignorance; whose want of instruction prevented their meeting in conversation in terms of equality. . . . (149)

Although Austen paints her characters' educational background in great detail, it is finally the individual alone who is responsible for his or her moral growth. Juliet McMaster has commented on this in Jane Austen on Love:

> Ultimately Jane Austen insists that richly as a pupil may receive, or disastrously as he may be misled, he is responsible. He cannot be a mere passive receptacle of wisdom, or a mere victim of bad advice. The pupil makes his choices--he may choose or not choose to be instructed; he may elect his instructor; he may select which of his instructors to attend to. In all these choices he defines himself and he has himself to accuse if they are wrong. (61)

Virtue, then is the aim of education. However, as Alasdair MacIntyre states, Jane Austen is ". . . --indeed, given the moral climate of her times, she has to be--preoccupied in a quite new way with counterfeits of the virtues" (241).

Clearly the unsuitable suitors have not benefitted from a Lockean education; it would appear that they have been moulded more by the principles advocated by Lord Chesterfield in his Letters to His Son (1774). For Chesterfield, "appearance is everything, but not at all easy, and the best way to appear virtuous is to be virtuous" (cited in Devlin 26). But the notion of virtue for its own sake is absent from Chesterfield's writing, leading Devlin to conclude that Austen's

"unadmirable young men" (the unsuitable suitors) exemplify the superficiality of Chesterfield's principles:

> For Locke the aim of education is to know the good and follow it; for Chesterfield it is to please. We may remember how persistently the unadmirable young men in Jane Austen's novels, Willoughby, Wickham, Frank Churchill, Mr. Elliot, try to please. . . . Vanity is the beginning and end of Chesterfield's gentleman. . . . (27)

Thus, when Willoughby returns her letters to Marianne, Elinor is puzzled by the cold, punctilious style of the letter:

> Though she was aware . . . that it must bring a confession of his inconstancy . . . she was not aware that such language could be suffered to announce it; nor could she have supposed Willoughby capable of departing so far from the appearance of every honourable and delicate feeling--so far from the common decorum of a gentleman. . . . (SS 196)

In an odd reversal, Elinor is less surprised to learn the truth about Willoughby than she is by the manner in which he reveals it.

While the unsuitable suitors counterfeit virtuous behaviour, the suitable suitors do not. Although some of them, e.g. Edmund Bertram and Captain Wentworth, do not "know themselves" throughout Mansfield Park and Persuasion, they acquire self-knowledge--virtue--by the end. Similarly, self-knowledge is important to the heroine's choice, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

MacIntyre notes that "for Jane Austen the touchstone of the virtues is a certain kind of marriage" (186). This marriage is the companionate marriage which I discussed in Chapter II of this thesis. The companionate marriage was based on economic security and love. Only the "delinquents" are really seeking this type of marriage. With the exception of Mr. Collins and Henry Crawford, who are already in

comfortable circumstances, all the unsuitable suitors are interested in securing wealthy heiresses.

In English Society in the Eighteenth Century, Roy Porter comments on the mobility possible in England during the eighteenth century and notes that "spectacular ascent was often due to the magic wand of patronage" or "a fortunate marriage": "The alliancé of a gentleman's son with a merchant's daughter, the landed embracing the loaded, was marriage à la mode" (67). Among Jane Austen's unsuitable suitors, Willoughby, Wickham and Mr. Elliot all marry wealthy women in order to maintain a certain style of living. None of them was destitute; Wickham had spent the money settled on him by Darcy while Willoughby and Mr. Elliot simply felt that they had certain standards to maintain.

The primacy of the economic motive in these men is quite interesting. In The Rise of the Novel Ian Watt describes Defoe's protagonist, Robinson Crusoe, who is "used by many economic theorists as their illustration of homo economicus" (69). Watt examines Crusoe's economic individualism and studies the way this influences his relations with other people. An interesting comparison can be made between Crusoe and Austen's unsuitable suitors, as the unsuitable suitors represent a later portrait of the "homo economicus."

Watt describes Defoe's heroes as having no family (71); this is true, also, of Austen's unsuitable suitors. Defoe's heroes travel far afield to satisfy their ambitions; Austen's unsuitable suitors have the same "disconnectedness," journeying from place to place when a good prospect arises. For instance, George Wickham makes his way to Ramsgate, "by design" (PP 139), following Georgiana Darcy.

Defoe's heroes minimize the value of social ties. Quoting Weber, Watt notes that this is especially true with regard to sex. Watt traces this development in Crusoe, noting that sex is "still strictly subordinate to business" (75).

One is reminded of Mr. Elliot in Persuasion who chose to marry a "low woman" for her money alone:

> . . . Money, money, was all that he wanted. Her father was a grazier, her grandfather had been a butcher, but that was all nothing. She was a fine woman, had had a decent education, was brought forward by some cousins, thrown by chance into Mr. Elliot's company, and fell in love with him; and not a difficulty or a scruple was there on his side, with respect to her birth. All his caution was spent in being secured of the real amount of her fortune, before he committed himself. (208)

Austen's blackguards are not uninterested in sex. It is because Wickham and Willoughby are interested in sex and marriage to a wealthy woman that they are so threatening to the Bennett and Dashwood daughters, who are definitely not rich.

The "homo economicus" is essentially selfish. External influences had brought about changes in Willoughby's nature; but, as Elinor thinks further about Willoughby's downfall, she decides that selfishness was the real problem:

> The whole of his behaviour from the beginning to the end of the affair has been grounded on selfishness. It was selfishness which first made him sport with your affections; which afterwards, when his own were engaged, made him delay the confession of it, and which finally carried him from Barton. His own enjoyment, or his own ease, was in every particular, his ruling principle. (342)

Although Willoughby really loves Marianne, he hesitates, torn by his desire for wealth; he later reveals his actions to Elinor:

> The struggle was great--but it ended too soon. My affection for Marianne, my thorough conviction of her attachment to me-it was all insufficient to outweigh that dread of poverty, or get the better of those false ideas of the necessity of riches, which I was naturally inclined to feel, and expensive society had increased. (317)

In addition to the conflicts between a moral education and a "superficial" education, between marriage for love or for economic gain, we can also trace Austen's comparison between the city and the country through the characters of the unsuitable suitors.

Most of Austen's novels have, as their primary setting, a country town or estate. In Northanger Abbey, Catherine Morland lives in Fullerton, a village in Wiltshire; the action of the novel takes her first to Bath and then to Northanger Abbey, which is located in Gloucestershire. Sense and Sensibility begins at Norland Park in Sussex; from there the Dashwoods move to Barton in Devonshire. Marianne and Elinor then spend some time in London with Mrs. Jennings, but they return to Barton to live at the end of the novel. The Bennett family in Pride and Prejudice live near Meryton, a small market town. In the novel Elizabeth visits Netherfield Park, Hunsford, and eventually Pemberley, the home of Mr. Darcy, while on a tour with her aunt and uncle. Mansfield Park is set in the country seat of Sir Thomas Bertram; Fanny Price returns only briefly to Portsmouth where her family still resides. Emma Woodhouse lives in Hartfield, only "sixteen miles from London" (2), but, with the exception of a day trip to Box Hill, never once leaves her own neighbourhood in the course of the novel.

Jane Austen consciously limited the scope of her novels. When her niece Anne sent her a manuscript for her criticism, Austen congratulated her for adopting this same approach:

> You are now collecting your people delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life;--3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on--& I hope you will write a great deal more, & make full use of them while they are so very favourably arranged (401, 9 Sept. 1814).

Jane Austen's preference for the country is not unique. Quoting Ernst Robert Curtius in an article entitled "The Rural Ideal in Eighteenth-century England," Jeffrey L. Duncan notes that novelists such as Fielding, Smollett, Goldsmith and Sterne used "the social structure of rural life as a convenient and meaningful social microcosm to manipulate according to their own interests, attitudes and values" (518).

With the exception of John Thorpe and Mr. Collins, who are true country boobies, the unsuitable suitors as a group have a particular affinity for the urban environment, whether it be London or a watering hole such as Bath. However, because they also have connections with the rural gentry, they enter into Jane Austen's fictional world.

The values these characters bring with them to the country are negative ones. Thus in Mansfield Park, when Mary Crawford and Edmund Bertram are discussing clergymen, Mary downplays their role in society: "One does not see much of this influence and importance in society, and how can it be acquired when they are so seldom seem themselves (75). Edmund, of course, defends the clergy and, at the same time, betrays his preference for the countryside:

> "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. . . . (MP 75)

In this quotation, we see that Edmund is using the two senses of the word "country" synonymously, whereas for Mary "the city is the country."

Historically, the "city" is often associated with vice; more important, however, is the consistency of the negative connotations associated with the urban environment in Jane Austen's writing. In Persuasion, we learn that the character of Mr. Elliot has been formed in the city. When Mrs. Smith recounts his story, Anne is surprised that Mr. Elliot married for money; she remarks naively to Mrs. Smith that this was the ". . . circumstance probably which first opened your eyes to his character" (208). Mrs. Smith, however, is used to the values and practices of London, and sets Anne right:

> . . . Oh, those things are too common when one lives in the world, a man or woman's marrying for money is too common to strike one as it ought. I was very young, and we were a thoughtless, gay set, without any strict rules of conduct. We lived for enjoyment. (208)

Thus, London was the preferred habitat of the "homo economicus" because it was the centre of industrial capitalism.

The distractions of the city appear to account for some of Jane Austen's uneasiness. These distractions seem to encourage individuals to lose perspective on what is important, namely moral values. In the city, these moral values are weakened, partly because of the influence

of thoughtless, superficial companions and partly because family ties are weakened.

Another aspect of urban life that makes the city fertile ground for vice is its anonymity. Raymond Williams notes that the population of London "between 1700 and 1820 . . . rose to a million and a quarter" (141). This is quite a change from the country town, where everybody knows who everybody else is (even if they wouldn't necessarily visit them, as Williams points out). This anonymity is demonstrated when Lydia Bennett disappears from Brighton; it takes some time and the combined resources of Mr. Gardiner, Mr. Bennett and Mr. Darcy to locate her in London.

In addition, the many diversions and new forms of entertainment attracted large numbers of people. The unsuitable suitors have few "inner resources" and seek out various types of entertainment. Because of the high concentration of people, their chances of meeting a wealthy merchant's daughter were much better in the city than in a country village. As Tony Tanner observes, "The Crawfords are far from villains . . . but they have been spoilt and subtly corrupted by their prolonged immersion in the amoral fashionable London world" (149).

In Mansfield Park, when Henry Crawford returns to London after visiting at Mansfield Parsonage, Fanny hopes that the distractions of London will make him forget her. In fact, they do, and he runs away with Maria Rushworth. Similarly, when Edmund visits Mary in London, he is surprised at the change in her attitude and attributes it to the negative influences of her friends, Mrs. Fraser and Lady Stornaway.

Tanner also notes that "throughout the early years of the century the cities were growing at a great rate . . . on the other hand, England in 1813 was still predominantly a land of country towns and villages . . ." (144). Even though Austen prefers the country, the country itself was being transformed in this period; Tanner quotes William Cobbett's description of this new threat as,

> . . . the difference between a resident native gentry, attached to the soil, known to every farmer and labourer from their childhood, frequently mixing with them in those pursuits where all artificial distinctions are lost, practicing hospitality without ceremony, from habit and not on calculation and a gentry only now-and-then resident at all, having no relish for country delights, foreign in their manners, distant and haughty in their behaviour, looking to the soil only for its rents, viewing it as a mere object of speculation, unacquainted with its cultivators, despising them and their pursuits, and relying for influence, not upon the good will of the vicinage, but upon the dread of their power. (145)

The disintegration of rural institutions is evident in Mansfield Park; Sir Thomas is absent for much of the novel and blames himself for the disintegration of life at the Park. Through Fanny and Edmund, however, these values are being reconstituted. In Persuasion, on the other hand, the disintegration is complete. Sir Walter leaves Kellynch and moves to Bath; the house is then inhabited by the Crofts, who are not of the rural gentry but who more effectively embody traditional values. Tanner believes that Austen's perception that her class "was contributing to its own accelerating demise" (40-41) is what marks her "subversion."

The right kind of marriage, then, is an antidote to the disintegration of society. It is a marriage based on love and mutual esteem, which will serve to uphold the virtues. For this to be true,

both partners must understand the nature of the virtuous life and must live in an environment in which these virtues can prosper. The heroine's choice is, in effect, the realization that marriage is a gesture with many ramifications, both on the personal and on the social levels.

VIII. THE HEROINE'S CHOICE

"The Lady, I suppose, has no choice in the affair."

"Choice.--how do you mean?" (SS 294)

Due to the impact of feminist literary criticism, recent studies of the evolution of the novel have had to give due consideration to the importance of the courtship plot. However, it should be recognized that Austen relies heavily on the quest plot as well; this fact has been overlooked, probably because critics have had presuppositions about what constitutes a quest and because women's experience has been trivialized. It is only in analyzing Austen's combination of the courtship plot and the quest plot can we understand her concept of marriage and its role in society. The key to deciphering this pattern is the heroine's rejection of the unsuitable suitor.

Most of Jane Austen's novels begin with the introduction of the main female character on the brink of maturity and, consequently, at the beginning of a new phase of her life. In many societies the various phases of life are marked by distinct "rites of passage." In eighteenth-century English society "coming out" signified that a young woman was ready to enter the adult world. In Austen's novels, there is no official "coming out" ceremony. Elizabeth Bennett tells the amazed Lady Catherine de Bourgh that all her four sisters were "out." Instead, this new phase of life is marked by a very subtle change in the life of the main protagonist.

The heroine's quest is precipitated by a change in the boundaries of her existence beyond the close circle of family and friends. It is, therefore, a juxtaposition of the principles she has inculcated in her hitherto enclosed and safe environment with the new situations and people she will be encountering.

We can look at the opening of Austen's novels, then, as what Joseph Campbell has labelled the "call to adventure."

> But whether small or great . . . the call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration--a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand. (51)

In fact, although D. W. Harding and Henrietta Ten Harmsel have noted the Cinderella motif in Austen's writing, no one has commented on the extent to which Austen's novels resemble Campbell's description of the "monomyth." The term comes from Finnegans Wake and is "represented in the rites of passage: separation--initiation--return . . ." (30).

In some instances, the quest is initiated through an actual journey. In Northanger Abbey the young and inexperienced Catherine Morland accompanies the Allens to Bath. In Sense and Sensibility the death of Mr. Dashwood leaves Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters in drastically reduced circumstances which necessitate their removal to Barton Cottage, and this move introduces them to a whole new set of people.

In other instances, the environment of the heroine and her family is static and Austen introduces new people into their midst. Pride and Prejudice begins with the arrival of the Bingley/Darcy party to

Netherfield and is followed by the quartering of a militia regiment in Meryton. These additions to local society call for an intensification of social intercourse. The same can be said for the arrival of the Crawfords in Mansfield Park and the long-awaited appearance of Frank Churchill in Emma. In the latter novel, Churchill's arrival is followed by that of Mrs. Elton who is toasted around the neighbourhood as a new bride, much to Emma's chagrin.

The heroine's "journey" is marked by the balls, card parties and visits which contribute to the movement of the novel. These social events can be seen as obstacles in that the heroine must conform to an elaborate system of manners, the "code of propriety." Tony Tanner describes this aspect of social life in his recent book entitled Jane Austen:

> One can get some sense of the nature of that drama if one considers the social occasions on which 'manners'--the enactments or the infringements of the tacit codes of proper conduct--were most conspicuously visible. I shall call this drama the hermeneutics of manners. Consider a ball or a formal dinner, for example. If you subtract the very basic purpose of the occasions--to enjoy the pleasures of dancing and eating--you are left with a large superstructure of the occasion which is in effect simply concerned with manners. . . . They are performances of communal decorum in which society mimes its codes and signs of behavioural values. In themselves they are morally and politically neutral. . . . Their importance lies in their being meta-events. (28)

In Austen's novels, the "adventure" or "journey" is interiorized. Most of the scenes in the novels take place indoors. Also, however, the heroine must look within herself for the solution to her situation as a young woman in a society that imposed severe restrictions on young women.

Beneath the surface of these gatherings governed by "manners," it is also possible to see another "subtext." As the heroine passes beyond the boundaries of the world she knows, she encounters many new people. It is incumbent on the young woman to identify men as either suitable or unsuitable, because the unsuitable suitors represent a risk.

Joseph Campbell reports that, "The folk mythologies populate with deceitful and dangerous presences every desert place outside the normal traffic of the village" (78). Campbell also notes that "these regions of the unknown . . . are free fields for the projection of unconscious content" (79). In many folk tales Pan or Dionysos was believed to inhabit these dwelling places; both of these gods were evocations of sexuality. It is possible to speculate that the blackguards in Austen's novels fulfill this function, and it is their association with sexuality--or a certain type of sexuality--which make them so threatening.

The embedded seduction/abduction plots reveal several of the blackguards to be "libertines." Willoughby seduced the second Eliza and abandoned her. Henry Crawford ran away with Maria Rushworth, and this results in her ostracism from her family. Wickham "eloped" with Lydia, but really only married her when he was paid to do so. And even the calculating Mr. Elliot is finally paired with Mrs. Clay, who is "established under his protection" in London (252). These subplots reveal what happens to women who make the wrong choice.

Julia Prewitt Brown argues that such a fear was justified; considering the absence of birth control, sexuality was inevitably associated with conception:

> Since no social provision was made for women who bore children outside of marriage, it is understandable that the sexual act was regarded as a potential as well as an actual experience, a complicated and, outside of marriage, dangerous undertaking. (13)

Men could operate inside and outside society and, by the double standard, inside and outside the code of propriety. This the blackguards do through their "disguises." However, a women's sexuality had the potential to "mark" her through an unwanted pregnancy in a way that would ensure her lasting isolation.

Despite her increased exposure to new situations and people and the potential danger they represent, the female protagonist is remarkably isolated; Campbell notes this same isolation in myths and religious rituals (104). In some cases Austen effects this isolation through the removal of a hitherto important character. For example, Emma has been brought up by the wise but indulgent Miss Taylor; but Miss Taylor's departure from Hartfield to become Mrs. Weston marks the beginning of Emma's independence. In Mansfield Park Sir Thomas Bertram has been the stabilizing influence, but he is obliged to take care of his estate in the West Indies and is absent for much of the novel.

In other novels, however, the isolation of the heroine is more a metaphor than a reality. In these instances her moral guardians are inadequate. This is true of the guardianship of Mrs. Norris, who alternates between spoiling the Bertram girls and abusing Fanny

Price. Mrs. Allen in Northanger Abbey hardly qualifies as a chaperon by the usual requirements. The narrator wryly comments on her "merits": "In one respect she was admirably fitted to introduce a young lady into public, being as fond of going everywhere and seeing everything as any young lady could be" (36). Similarly, Mrs. Dashwood is portrayed as a fond but overly permissive mother who refuses to intercede between Marianne and Willoughby until it is almost too late. In Pride and Prejudice Mrs. Bennett is described as a "woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper" (3). For her, the ends justify the means; she is interested in marrying off her daughters and cares little about the "niceties" of correct behaviour as long as the end is achieved. In Jane Austen: A Study in Fictional Conventions, Henrietta Ten Harmsel discusses the convention of the chaperon with "questionable judgment" and examines the ways Austen transforms these figures into credible characters.

These various forms of isolation place the heroines in situations where they must rely on their own inexperienced and sometimes faulty judgment. Whereas in a Richardson novel the heroine receives letters which contain overt didactic messages from various guardians, in Austen's novels the heroines necessarily become involved in an inner dialogue. Whereas conventional heroines have tended to be passive, Austen's heroines are active. Although their activity is only occasionally expressed physically (e.g. Elizabeth Bennett), it is most frequently expressed through their individual consciousnesses:

> Thus the "activity" which is recorded by Jane Austen is largely an ACTIVITY of seeing and saying, thinking and feeling, wandering and assessing, hoping and fearing, conjecturing and interpreting. The movements are predominantly movements of the mind and heart. There is a much larger vocabulary of meditation and response than of proposition and initiation. (Tanner 37)

It is through the evolution of the heroine's consciousness that Austen develops her didacticism.

Discussing Emma in particular, Wayne Booth discusses the way the reader participates actively in Emma's moral growth, but this observation is true for her other novels as well:

> While only immature readers ever really identify with any characters, losing all sense of distance and hence all chance of an artistic experience, our emotional reaction to every event concerning Emma tends to become like her own. . . . Jane Austen, in developing the sustained use of a sympathetic inside view, has mastered one of the most successful of all devices for inducing a parallel emotional response between the deficient heroine and the reader. (249)

Although the reader participates emotionally in Emma's development, he/she participates morally and intellectually as well. In following Emma's or some of the other heroines' faulty thought processes, the reader can also observe the effect such thinking has both on the character herself and on other people.

The "perfect" heroine was a convention in popular eighteenth-century fiction, as Ten Harmsel has shown:

> The "pageant of excellence" which had begun with three virtuous, beautiful and accomplished heroines had continued to flourish throughout the century. Few writers of popular romance ignored the "tradition that the heroine should be 'great throughout.'" (16)

By creating heroines who were both a mixture of good and bad, Austen was able to create characters who are more credible than her

predecessors' characters. She was also able to develop a much subtler form of didacticism and, at the same time, impose on the form of her novels a sense of direction through the quest or transformation plot. There is also a mythological basis to this choice. For in many tales, as Campbell observes, "The adventure may begin as a mere blunder . . ." (58).

Austen uses two distinct varieties of the traditional bildüng plot. The first is the most common and involves the faulty heroine who, because of her "flaw," encounters various problems on the road to self-knowledge. This type of heroine is exemplified in Catherine Morland, Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennett and Emma Woodhouse. The second pattern that Austen uses centers on her "flawless" heroines--Fanny Price, Anne Elliot and Elinor Dashwood; these women seek to maintain their moral integrity in spite of the many flaws in the world around them.

Catherine Morland is young and inexperienced and cannot distinguish between the "real world" and the world of Gothic romances. In the first half of the novel Catherine learns to distinguish fact from fiction, but in the second half she also learns that truth is sometimes stranger than fiction. She has to learn to "read" human character and to distinguish the false values represented by John and Isabella Thorpe from the true values personified in Henry and Eleanor Tilney.

Marianne Dashwood can be compared to a heroine of sensibility, but her sensibility impairs both her judgment and her conduct. She trusts Willoughby's intentions even though he has offered her no real

proof; her suffering leads her to a new understanding of proper behaviour and a greater concern for the feelings of other people.

Elizabeth Bennett's pride in her judgment leads her too easily into opinions formed on insufficient evidence. She has to learn the lesson she attempted to give Darcy early in the novel: "It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to be secure of judging properly at first" (65).

For each of these young women, the unsuitable suitor plays an important role in her quest. Catherine, who is more passive than other Austen heroines in that she is "acted upon" more often, is first set up by John Thorpe as a wealthy heiress and then "unmasked," which results in her banishment from the Abbey. However, Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennett and Emma Woodhouse have each deluded themselves about the unsuitable suitor. These delusions represent the foundations of their worldviews; until he is "unmasked," they cannot begin to see clearly. Marianne can only see herself as the future wife of Willoughby and is either inconsiderate of or quite rude to everyone around her. Elizabeth accepts Wickham's story and proceeds to misjudge Darcy. Emma deludes herself about one thing after another; her behaviour with Churchill leads her to behave very inappropriately to Miss Bates. Knowing she herself does not love Churchill, Emma assumes that he is the man whom Harriet loves. It is only when his engagement to Jane Fairfax is revealed that her eyes are opened. Thus, Marianne, Elizabeth and Emma are each in some way "diminished" through their relationships with the unsuitable suitors.

In Jane Austen and Education, D. D. Devlin points out that Austen often uses the metaphor of sight to mark this realization:

> The importance of seeing clearly (even the very phrase) recurs repeatedly in Jane Austen's novels: Seeing clearly is there both seeing one's self clearly (self-knowledge) and seeing other people and the external world as existing in their own right and independently of self. (2)

Thus the recognition scene is important in each novel featuring a flawed heroine. Catherine Morland has imagined Northanger Abbey to be a Gothic castle with secrets to uncover; however, the unreality of her own fantasies is revealed: "The visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened. Henry's address . . . had more thoroughly opened her eyes . . ." (NA 229). Marianne's illness has given her also a new view of life:

> . . . I saw in my own behaviour since the beginning of our acquaintance with him [Willoughby] last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself, and want of kindness to others. I saw that may own feelings had prepared my sufferings. . . . (337)

Elizabeth Bennett, too, feels that she has been "blind":

> I, who have prided myself on my discernment--I, who have valued myself on my abilities: . . . . Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. . . . Till this moment, I never knew myself. (144)

And finally, the sight metaphor reappears in Emma's moment of self-recognition:

> How to understand it all: How to understand the deceptions she had been thus practising on herself, and living under--The blunders, the blindness of her own head and heart: . . . . she perceived that she had acted most weakly. . . . (283)

These discoveries, then, initiate a descent into the self, and this image is also extremely common in quest literature:

> This popular motif gives emphasis to the lesson that the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation . . . . But here, instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again. (92)

Once the heroine "knows herself," she is also free to love. At this point in the novels, the courtship plot and the bildüng plot become more closely connected.

In the second variety of the quest plot which Austen uses, we are presented with heroines who approach perfection; they are models of propriety and they know themselves and their hearts. However, they are unknown to other people. For these women, the quest involves a search for "meaningful occupation" (Tanner 32).

The novels involving Austen's flawless heroines are punctuated by the same round of social events that mark the others, but the heroines do not make the same errors. For them it is a question of maintaining their perceptions in spite of the fact that this act contributes to their further isolation. In the plots featuring Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price and Anne Elliot it is the hero who must do most of the learning. Edmund must overcome his infatuation with Mary Crawford, who is the female equivalent of her brother. Edward learns early on the value of Elinor, but first he has to suffer through his engagement with Lucy Steele. And Captain Wentworth must overcome his pride, which was hurt by Anne's first refusal.

In both combinations of the courtship and quest plots, Austen depicts relationships that are based on self-knowledge and knowledge of the other. In fact, in several instances, the hero has been known to the heroine for some time and has been instrumental in forming her

character. However, Austen's heroines are only free to love once the deceptions of the unsuitable suitor and the heroine's (or hero's) self-deceptions have ended. Once the "charm is broken" the suitability of the hero becomes apparent.

The marriage which ends each of Austen's novels marks the end of the heroine's isolation and her integration into society with a meaningful role. She chooses to love the hero because he shares her view of society and the role of the individual in society. As Tony Tanner points out, marriage for Austen is "the metaphor for the most desirable kind of relationship" (10).

Lionel Trilling has described Jane Austen as being committed to the idea of "intelligent love":

> . . . according to . . . [this concept] the deepest and truest relationship that can exist between human beings is pedagogic. The relationship consists in giving and receiving knowledge about right conduct, in the formation of one person's character by another, the acceptance of another's guidance in one's growth. (cited in McMaster 43)

Often the heroines learn from the heroes, but sometimes it is the heroines who do the teaching. We have a sense that the marriage partners are moral equals. As Juliet McMaster has observed, "For . . . [Austen] the pedagogic relationship is not parasitic but symbiotic, a relationship that is mutual and joyful: it blesseth him that gives, and him that takes . . ." (McMaster 45). To see marriage in Jane Austen's novels as the "double prison of romantic imprisonment" as does Nina Auerbach is to judge it by contemporary standards. Such a view is not in keeping with Austen's view that the moral life of the community is perpetuated through marriage.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Austen disapproves of the type of sexuality associated with the unsuitable suitor, but she disapproves because it is transitory. Some critics have assumed that passion is absent from her novels because she never married. In fact, probably more than for any other writer, her marital status is persistently mentioned and related to a great variety of observations. For instance, D. H. Lawrence found Austen--"this old maid"--"thoroughly unpleasant" because of her "knowing in apartness instead of knowing in togetherness" (in O'Neill 31-32). However, recent critics such as Juliet McMaster and Jan Fergus have demonstrated the many ways sexuality is a strong undercurrent in the relationship of the heroine and the hero. As McMaster notes, for Austen "the full and mutual engagement of head and heart is what _is_ passionate" (_L&P_ 46).

In _Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers_, Rachel Blau Duplessis argues that there is a basic contradiction between the marriage (courtship) plot and the quest plot:

> In nineteenth-century narrative, where women heroes were concerned, quest and love plots were intertwined simultaneous discourses, but at the resolution of the work, the energies of the _Bildüng_ were incompatible with the closure in successful courtship or marriage. Quest for women was thus finite; we learn that any plot of self-realization was at the service of the marriage plot and was subordinate to, or covered with, the magnetic power of that ending. (6)

However, this view does not give due consideration to Austen's concept of marriage as the regeneration of society. In discussing _Jane Eyre_, however, Blau-Duplessis agrees that closure by marriage should not

always be seen as the imprisonment of the woman: "When a man is totally confined to the private sphere . . . then female confinement to the same sphere does not seem so narrow (10). In fact, this is the case in Jane Austen's novels as well. Austen lived in a period of great transition, between the end of the feudal patriarchy and before the advent of widescale capitalist industrialization. Austen's heroes are "gentlemen" who, with the exception of Captain Wentworth, live in settled communities and are responsible for the physical or spiritual well-being of other people in that community. The type of marriage Austen is describing is the companionate marriage where both parties were free to pursue their interests and develop their "resources" within the local community.

Marriage in Austen's worldview is a social as well as a personal gesture, as the family is responsible for providing guidance to children and wards. When such guidance has not been given to a young person in Austen's novels, he or she suffers a blight from which it is almost impossible to recover. In Austen's writing, marriage represents a "renewal of society" (Tanner 10). Tony Tanner sees Austen's concept of marriage as a type of moral imperative. He attributes this aspect of her writing to the disintegration of social structures during her lifetime: "She indeed saw her society threatened, but mainly from inside: by the failures and derelictions of those very figures who should be responsibly upholding, renewing and regenerating that social order" (18). Tanner also observes that in Austen's novels "the ideal marriage . . . is not simply a conventional happy ending" (19): "It offers itself as an emblem of

the ideal union . . . on which the future of her society depends" (19).

However, Austen's "happy endings" also complete the mythological pattern of the heroine's quest:

> The happy ending of the fairy tale, the myth, and the divine comedy of the soul, is to be read, not as a contradiction, but as a transcendence of the universal tragedy of man. . . . The objective world remains what it was, but, because of a shift of emphasis within the subject, is beheld as though transformed. (Campbell 28)

Although the courtship plot "ends" with the marriage of the heroine and hero and the "end" of the novel, the heroine's quest--for self-knowledge, for a "meaningful occupation," and for a moral life--is extended "beyond the ending."

IX. CONCLUSION

The unsuitable suitor works in Jane Austen's novels in several different ways. In the first place, the villain is a conventional figure in eighteenth-century literature. However, Austen transforms this conventional character into a very credible one. She does this by projecting a background onto this character against which we can study his motivations, his actions or behaviour and the results--to himself and to others in her fictional world.

Although he is a fictional character, he is grounded in the historical background of the eighteenth century where--because of demographics, because of the system of land holding and because of incipient changes to this system--he is a precursor of individualism wearing the mask of a gentleman. He is, therefore, emblematic of the destruction of society from within.

The unsuitable suitor is instrumental to Austen's use of linear irony; the reader follows the path of the heroine through multiple ironies and, consequently, participates in her experiences and her judgments of those experiences. Because of this conscious involvement of the reader in the heroine's choices, Austen is able to educate her readers much more subtly than was possible for earlier writers with didactic concerns.

In addition to the conscious involvement of the reader in the heroine's choices, the reader's unconscious is also involved through Austen's presentation of the quest plot. Austen's "adult fairy tales"

become morality tales of the highest order. Austen's novels elevate the importance of individual choice; the choices that she is most interested in are those that are most difficult to make. In her writing, the individual choice becomes a gesture of significant social meaning.

In Austen's novels, perception is unreliable. Time and time again characters are deluded by themselves or by other people. The unsuitable suitor is the great deceiver in her writing: "Self is almost, if not quite, dissolved into the presentation of self, but what in Goffman's social world becomes the the form of the self is still in Jane Austen's world a symptom of the vices" (MacIntyre, 241).

Jane Austen's depiction of characters and their choices had led Alasdair MacIntyre to view her as an important moral thinker--"the last great representative of the classical tradition of the virtues" (243):

> Jane Austen's moral point of view and the narrative form of her novels coincide. The form of her novels is that of ironic comedy. Jane Austen writes comedy rather than tragedy for the same reason that Dante did; she is a Christian and she sees the telos of human life implicit in its everyday form. Her irony resides in the way that she makes her characters and her readers see and say more and other than they are intended to, so that they and we correct ourselves. (243)

According to this reading of Austen, character is more important than background; this tends to make irrelevant discussions of how accurate Austen's portrayal of her society is. Because she is interested primarily in people in all their complexity, Austen's writing transcends her time and place; her characters are as alive today as when they were first conceived nearly 200 years ago.

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