Université de Montréal

Jane Austen and Her Men:
Ancestors of the Modern Romances

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Résumé de Synthèse

Les personnages masculins de Jane Austen ainsi que leurs règles d'étiquette sont deux sujets longtemps oubliés des critiques. Après deux décennies d'analyse des hommes conjointement avec les femmes de ses histoires, ils sont de plus en plus analysés pour eux-mêmes et leurs règles. Ce mémoire présente les hommes des histoires d'Austen comme les ancêtres des hommes des romances modernes. Ses héros chevaleresques, ses anti-héros, et ses patriarches sont trois types d'hommes qui sont représentés dans les romances modernes. Ce mémoire est divisé en quatre chapitres et un épilogue. Le chapitre un est dévoué aux héros d'Austen, des hommes qui savent suivre les règles d'étiquette. Le second chapitre décrit les anti-héros et leur négligence de ces règles. Le chapitre trois est une discussion des patriarches et héritiers qui sont ridiculisés dans ses écrits. Le quatrième chapitre est une discussion en profondeur des romans Harlequin et de leur lien avec Austen. Ce dernier démontre comment les écrivains de ces romans l'utilisent volontairement comme inspiration. L'épilogue sur le film *Le Journal de Bridget Jones* veut démontrer que Austen est toujours actuelle, ses personnages étant capables de surpasser les adaptations sur papier afin d'être montrés au cinéma.

Mots clés : Jane Austen, romance, hommes, masculinité, patriarcat, étiquette.

Abstract

Jane Austen's men and their social conventions are subjects that have been long forgotten by critics. After two decades of being analysed in conjunction with female characters, Austen's men have started to be criticized for themselves, and their conventions. This thesis presents Austen's men as being the ancestors of the characters of the modern romances. Her chivalric heroes, her anti-heroes and her patriarchs are three types of men that are represented in modern romances. This thesis is divided in four chapters and an epilogue. Chapter one is devoted to Austen's heroes, the men who follow the social conventions. The second chapter depicts the anti-heroes and their neglect of social conventions. Chapter three involves a discussion of the patriarch and his heir who are depicted as ridiculous. Lastly, the fourth chapter is a thorough discussion of Harlequin romances and their link to Austen. This chapter shows the modern romance writers' wilful use of Austen as inspiration. The epilogue on the movie *Bridget Jones's Diary* is used to demonstrate how Austen is still actual, her characters being able to transcend novel adaptations to theatrical versions.

Key words: Jane Austen, masculinity, patriarchy, modern romances, men, social conventions.

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List of Abbreviations

E.....*Emma*

MP.....*Mansfield Park*

NA.....*Northanger Abbey*

P.....*Persuasion*

P.....*Pride and Prejudice*

SS.....*Sense and Sensibility*

To my two best friends, Catherine and Curtis, for always being so supportive.

To my family and boyfriend: "Home is the place that'll catch you when you fall. And we *all* fall" (Letts 19). Thanks for catching me always.

Introduction

Most young women who have read *Pride and Prejudice* have fantasized about being Elizabeth and have dreamt of finding a boyfriend as sweet and understanding as Mr. Darcy at the end of the novel. Women have been brought up to enjoy fairy tales of the Cinderella kind and as they grow older they still want to read a basic fairy tale plot. Women's interest for fairy tales is probably one of the reasons that explain the timelessness of Jane Austen's novels and their appeal to a feminine public. Austen's heroes are the heroes women have read about from their childhood. They are charming men that the women expect to love and respect. Her anti-heroes are not as monstrous as the real monsters of fairy tales but it is a close call. Robbers of virtue do not behave like gentlemen. Today, these "monsters" are not as monstrous as they used to be, so to be able to understand Jane Austen's world we must find out what were the qualities abhored in a man at the turn of the nineteenth century.

People could easily find the true behaviour of a gentleman or a lady in the many conduct books that were published in the period. These books were the reference to consult in order to know the correct behaviour to have in society from the length of a visit to the correct conversational subjects to discuss with a stranger. Rules of courtship and proposals were also found in these conduct books. Anna Bryson underscores the two major aspects of these conduct books:

> On the one hand, civil behaviour represented a standard of conduct, and particularly of self-control, which distinguished the civil man from the beast, the savage, or, in practice within society, the non-gentleman. On the other, civil behaviour was a flexible code by which the civil man could define and redefine his relationships within civil society. (96)

Marriage is the most important social achievement in Austen's time, as it is still arguably today. As John M. Clum writes: "Marriage defines manhood, but men are supposed to define marriage. That assumption is the keystone of the system that supports marriage, a system that can be called patriarchy or the gender order, a vertical system with men, particularly straight white men, at the top" (23). Austen wrote about the patriarchal system of her time, a system that was thoroughly reinforced by primogeniture. In her writings, men must marry, and must produce sons who will do the same so the estate and family fortune would not be dilapidated. All men in Austen marry, and those who are single at the end of a novel will eventually marry. Marriage was a social obligation that defined manhood and assured the continuity of mankind. Once married, a man must be the breadwinner of the family. Supporting a wife and children is considered the manly thing to do. A man who would gamble all his money and leave his family in need was not considered to be a proper man in that society. Austen represented the truth about mankind as she knew it, and her society as she saw it, with a very critical eye and yet as truthfully as she could.

Because Austen is such a shrewd observer of mankind, I want to look at the men in Austen's writings to demonstrate how they have evolved to become the men that we read today in modern romances. In her novels, I have identified three types of men, the hero, the anti-hero, and the patriarch, that I will compare to those we can see in romantic comedies and modern romances such as Harlequin romance. I will also argue that Austen's romances figures as the predecessor of modern romances because many of their authors copied wilfully from her imaginary world.

The three categories of men mentioned in the previous paragraph stem from my reading of Austen's work and the recurring pattern I see at play in her six novels. In the

body of my thesis, I will support these categories by demonstrating through close readings of the novels how each hero, anti-hero, and patriarch belong to his respective category based on the qualities and defaults they each possess. The first three chapters are thus devoted to a thorough description and classification of Austen's men before turning my attention to the rewriting of her male characters into Harlequin novels and the film *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

My first chapter deals with the heroes or the gentlemen of her stories. These men's reputations are not necessarily faultless but they are always clean. They are generous and benevolent. They care for others and have a tremendous respect for women and women's virtue. They are also willing to help the poor as best as they can. In other words, he performs the role attributed to him not only around others but in his private life. He cares for the well-being and order of society and will help to see it grow.

My second chapter tackles the anti-hero. These men are characterized by their promiscuity and their lack of respect for women.[1] On the outside, they seem to possess every attribute of the perfect gentleman, but they definitely do not in their private life. Most of them are monsters of lust or greed and they are not interested in the women they court; they are only interested in getting what they want or need from them. They are opportunists, taking advantage of any situation. Their nice presentation makes them the idols of many parents, but most parents are deceived by appearances.

Parents, and in particular patriarchs, are of course not exempt from criticism in Austen's view. My third chapter surveys the failed patriarch and his heir. The patriarch

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[1]Of course, men who behave like this today are not as blameable as they were back in the Regency period. Susan Bordo writes that "Officially, our culture is supposed to be miles beyond the Victorian notion that men are bundles of raging animal instincts, while women are the sweet, pure, sexless guardians of civilization who keep the brutes at bay" (229). This description of the Victorian concept of manhood was also true in the Regency. Men such as Jane Austen's anti-hero proved that women had every reason to be careful. Beyond the best appearances were hidden monsters of lust who would abuse of their naivety.

is moderately or very rich but has no power over his family or home. As for the heir, he inherits a fortune or a title, but he is commonly depicted as stupid.

Keeping the aforementioned three categories of characters in mind, I will compare them to today's romances heroes, anti-heroes, and patriarchs. Contemporary writers of all kinds tend to imitate or purposely copy Austen's style, modernizing her writing or simply transforming it to fit within today's expectations. Harlequin Historical, a collection of Harlequin Romances written by modern authors to imitate past life and customs, is the best example of this. I use three novels from that collection in order to demonstrate how Austen's three types of men are depicted in these romances, and also to show the similitude and unmistakeable parallel between Austen and Harlequin.

In my epilogue, I will compare Austen's characters to those in the romantic comedy *Bridget Jones's Diary*. This comedy is explored in depth to illustrate Austen's presence in mainstream cinema. In fact, this movie is based on Helen Fielding's best seller *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and she admitted to have wilfully borrowed from *Pride and Prejudice*. Therefore, it is important to discuss this comedy as the evolution of Austen's adaptations, from novel to movie.

After two decades of scholarship devoted to female characters, critics have recently begun investigating men in Austen's novels. Most of the time, men are seen in conjunction with the females surrounding them, and they have consequently rarely been studied for themselves and their own conventions. In 2000, Audrey Hawkridge published her book *Jane and her Gentlemen: Jane Austen and the Men in Her Life and Novels*, which compares the men that populated Austen's imagination with the real men in her life. This book considers the topic of men's behaviour, and she makes her readers consider a new aspect of Austen's work. Hawkridge is very critical of the men in the

novels and she identifies some of the categories I put forward in this thesis; however, she does not treat the subject the same way I do in this work.[2] I do not plan to give a lot of importance to the men in Austen's life; I will concentrate only on the men in her romances.

[2] Another recent article on this topic, "Jane Austen and Her Men," written by Ivor Morris, was published on *Persuasions Online* in 2001. However, this article is mostly about men's pride and vanity, which is not closely related to this thesis.

Chapter One

Jane Austen's Heroes

> "But there is nobleness in the name of Edmund. It is a name of heroism and renown—of kings, princes and knights; and seems to breathe the spirit of chivalry and warm affections" (*MP* 190).

Jane Austen's vision of what a gentleman should be, or what the heroes of her stories should be, is very clear. It is their behaviour that determines if they are a gentleman or not. Indeed, all the gentlemen of her stories are not necessarily rich heirs, and it does not seem to matter whether the man is rich or poor. What qualifies a man as a gentleman is how he was educated and what he makes of that education. Indeed, a poor man such as Robert Martin could be perceived as a gentleman because of the good qualities he demonstrates. In other words, a gentleman is a constant man who tells the truth, faces his responsibilities and respects other people. This category includes men such as Mr. Martin, Mr. Bingley, Mr. Darcy, Edmund Bertram, Mr. Knightley, Captain Wentworth and Henry Tilney. All these men show to a great extent the qualities that Austen's society find essential in a man. They demonstrate a great respect for their neighbours, they are witty, chivalric, never lie, they read and they teach a moral lesson to the heroine of their respective novels. These qualities are very important since it is because of them that the society of each novel can function properly. Whether it is in Meryton, Highbury, Bath or Mansfield Park, these gentlemen balance society so that everyone finds their right mate for society to grow more wisely. In Jane Austen's novels, a gentleman is not only considered so because of his title. His behaviour to the community testifies to his gentility, and his clever way of handling certain delicate

situations proves his wit and sense. This chapter is devoted to those men who make the world of Jane Austen a fairy tale like place with a harmonious ending.

***Sense and Sensibility* - - Colonel Brandon**

In Austen's first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, there is no gentleman except for Colonel Brandon. He is interested in truth, and he has also at heart the virtue of women. A lady's reputation is very important in the eyes of Regency society and a gentleman would do anything to preserve it. Colonel Brandon failed in preserving Eliza's mother's virtue and he unfortunately also failed in preserving Eliza's. Facing his failure to protect his ward, he fights in a duel with Willoughby. It is too late to spare her shame, as she is pregnant, but at best, Colonel Brandon could try to force Willoughby to marry her. "While the duel is never revealed to us in its details directly or indirectly, it is significant as an emblem of the power relations informing the plot of *Sense and Sensibility*" (Brewton 78). It is true that the duel is not presented in great detail in the novel, since it is just barely mentioned, but the reader knows enough to acknowledge that Colonel Brandon wants to fight for Eliza's honour. He even has a second reason for attacking Willoughby since he believes that the latter is about to corrupt another very impressionable young lady, Marianne Dashwood. Brandon does not want Marianne to be abused by Willoughby, but he still ends up breaking her heart. Thus, as Vince Brewton argues, "the duel replicates the classical antithesis of the novel's basic form: Colonel Brandon, soldier, man of responsibility and duty, clashes with the Regency rake, the dissolute, profligate, and passionate Willoughby" (Brewton 81-2). In essence, the duel represents the contrast to be found within Austen's male characters. The gentlemen always need to fight to prevent virtuous young ladies from becoming the prey of immoral men such as Willoughby. Colonel Brandon appears to be a man of morals

and chivalry, while Willoughby is presented as a villain. However, because of its secrecy, the duel does not save Eliza's honour, even though Colonel Brandon is chivalric enough to try his best to save her.

***Pride and Prejudice* - - Mr. Darcy**

Even if Colonel Brandon's attempt to save his ward proved unfruitful, Mr. Darcy, another Austen gentleman, succeeded where he failed. In fact, one of the most important qualities in a true Austen hero is his respect for other people, and for the virtue of the young women around him. It is why, on many occasions, Austen's gentlemen have proven themselves worthy of the title of prince charming by saving the honour and virtue of a "damsel in distress." Darcy, the gentleman who seems to have no consideration for anybody below him, is ironically the man who heroically saves the reputation of Lydia Bennet. At the same time, he did it to save Elizabeth's reputation, because, as Lydia's sister, her reputation would be tainted by the elopement. Yet, saving Lydia was not an easy task: "[Darcy and Gardiner] battled it together for a long time, which was more than either the gentleman or lady concerned in it deserved" (*PP* 246). Darcy insists on being the one to save Lydia because he feels responsible for the man who caused her ruin. It is hard for him to deal with Wickham since the latter had no intention of marrying her at all. However, this chivalry on Darcy's part is what made Elizabeth fall for him. "George Wickham turns out to be a liar, whose entanglements with Darcy's sister in the past, and then with Lydia Bennet, contribute to bringing the lovers together" (Brownstein 52). Indeed, Darcy's letter to Elizabeth, and Lydia's foolishness, are responsible for bringing them together. If Elizabeth started to like Darcy from the letter avowing his faults and clarifying Wickham's situation towards him, and from his agreeableness during her visit at Pemberley, it is what he did for her sister that

completely won her over. "'If you *will* thank me,' he replied, 'let it be for yourself alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you, might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny. But your *family* owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe, I thought only of *you*'" (*PP* 280). Even though he saved Lydia for the sake of Elizabeth's happiness, he did not want her to know, because he did not want the people of the community to believe that she loves him for his money and for the service he rendered to her family. He did it only to save a poor undeserving girl from the hands of the wicked man who had brought her ruin because, as Mary Bennet puts it, "loss of virtue in a woman is irretrievable" (*PP* 219).[1]

A gentleman would always be constant in his behaviour and his opinion, and so remain faithful to his pledged word. As Elizabeth Bennet cleverly tells Lady Catherine De Bourgh in the shocking scene where she begged for Elizabeth's refusal of Darcy, she knows how a gentleman's integrity is important: "'Mr. Darcy is engaged to *my daughter*. Now what have you to say?' 'Only this; that if he is so, you can have no reason to suppose he will make an offer to me' (*PP* 271). She knows that Mr. Darcy is a gentleman and that if he has pledged his word to his cousin, he will marry her, just like Edward Ferrars remained faithful to Lucy Steele until she broke off the engagement herself.[2] However, since there is no such agreement between Darcy and his cousin, only a fancy of their mothers when they were children, he is allowed to marry whomever he likes, even if it is a poor person like Elizabeth. Moreover, a gentleman is constant in his love for a woman. Bingley never stopped loving Jane Bennet even though Darcy was

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[1] Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the Durbervilles* illustrates the truth of Mary Bennet's allegation since Angel leaves Tess after he learns of her previous loss of virginity.

[2] Even though Edward Ferrars remained faithful to his engagement to Lucy Steele, he did not act right towards Elinor Dashwood. I thus discuss him in chapter two (page 26) amongst the anti-heroes.

against the match at first. And Captain Wentworth finally decided to marry Anne Elliott because he could not find anyone who would take her place in his heart. It is also similar for Henry and Catherine who get married even if Henry's father disapproved of the union at first.

Another important characteristic of a gentleman is his spotless record. He never lies and never introduces himself under false pretences. He is also ready to rectify unclear situations. Darcy's marriage proposal to Elizabeth demonstrates his desire to show the truth: "But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence. Nor am I ashamed of the feelings I related. They were natural and just. Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?" (*PP* 147-8). Darcy prides himself in not liking concealment because his feelings towards Elizabeth, Jane, and Wickham have been clear from the start. He does not want Elizabeth to think that he has been unjust and he writes a letter to inform her of the particulars of his declaration. He does not want to conceal anything from her and wants to show how upright he is in contrast to his rival, Wickham. In the same manner, Henry Tilney did not hide from Catherine the real reason of her rejection from the Abbey, and Colonel Brandon rectifies his situation regarding Eliza, and brings the true Willoughby to Elinor. The gentleman always wants to be truthful and to show himself worthy of the praise the other people of his surroundings bestow on him. Yet, Mr. Knightley, the gentleman of *Emma* is reproached for one lie by Jane Nardin: "The code of propriety dictates that a gentleman should never lie. But Knightley disregards this rule when he denies giving Miss Bates his last barrel of apples, because he doesn't want her to feel guilty about his sacrifice" ("Propriety" 75).

However, this white lie is forgivable, especially on the part of Mr. Knightley, who has done so much for the old woman already.

***Mansfield Park* - - Edmund Bertram**

If Mr. Darcy let his pride blind his first judgement of Elizabeth Bennet, Edmund Bertram is entirely different because he shows a great civility to Fanny at the beginning of *Mansfield Park*, even if she is common and ignorant. He includes Fanny in everything and forbids everybody to laugh at her. Indeed, at her arrival in Mansfield Park, Fanny is quite desolate because she does not feel at home in the big house. In order to make her feel better and less homesick, she decided to write to her brother, but she does not have the means to write a letter: no paper, no envelope and no money to frank it. Edmund is her saviour. He offers her the necessary material, and even takes care of applying to his father to mail the letter. "'But cousin—will it go to the post?' 'Yes, depend upon me it shall; it shall go with the other letters; and as your uncle will frank it, it will cost William nothing.' 'My uncle!' repeated Fanny with a frightened look. 'Yes, when you have written the letter, I will take it to my father to frank'" (*MP* 13). Fanny is completely frightened of her uncle and of the other people of the house because they have not greeted her as we would expect. Fanny Price is family, so modern readers would expect her to receive a warm welcome, but in the Regency period, poor relatives did not deserve to be treated in such a nice way. Moreover, Fanny was not a guest in the house. She was receiving her uncle's charity because her parents were too poor to raise her; therefore, she needed to be welcomed accordingly. This is very distressing to Fanny because she used to be the oldest and wisest in her family and she is now reduced to being the laughing stock of the house. It is quite a shock for her to be in such a strange atmosphere, but Edmund helps her to be less frightened of his family.

Because of his benevolent disposition, Edmund is another example of the generosity and respect of the typical Austen gentleman. Even though Fanny is his inferior, he instinctively knows that he must help her and care for her; a gentleman should always help the less fortunate. He has a great respect for her and her capacities:

> From the beginning, therefore, although at first their situations make them very unequal, Edmund shows respect for Fanny's mental abilities and, as she grows up, comes to value her judgement as a rational creature, in a way which marks him out as *not* holding Rousseauists views about the absence, or undesirability of reason and knowledge in women. True, he 'corrects her judgement,' but we hear of no restrictions on her reading, only encouragement of it. (Kirkham 74)

Edmund wants Fanny to learn, and he respects her capacities by letting her do so at her own pace. He does not restrict her in any way because he wants her to become as learned as any of his sisters. Of course, she would never be as accomplished as them because his parents and their Aunt Norris have decided that Fanny should be kept a little below Julia and Maria, but Edmund has decided to help her attain a similar level of education as her cousins, so that she would stop feeling rejected in Mansfield Park.

Even though Edmund is the perfect Austen hero, he has his faults as well. These are mostly related to the lack of consideration that he has had towards Fanny during his infatuation with Mary Crawford, as Margaret Kirkham notes:

> Edmund is not a 'picture of perfection,' but a mixed character, in whom good qualities predominate, but not without some faults. Austen's revision of the trope allows Edmund's faults to be associated with his falling in love with an heiress who does not share the romantic heroine's disregard for money and status, while his merits are associated with his disinterested kindness to a poor relation. (74)

His faults are therefore related to the fact that he has fallen in love with an egoistic heiress. He is blinded by her sophistication, and by the money he would acquire by marrying her. Because of Mary Crawford, he has also forgotten to be courteous to Fanny. He borrows her horse so that Mary can ride it, and forgets to bring it back in time for Fanny's ride. Yet, he can still be considered as being generally a perfect gentleman who took Fanny's defence whenever he could.

Since Edmund encourages Fanny to learn and to develop her own judgement, it is possible to argue that he is also her teacher and that he models her into the perfect woman for him. Edmund actually is the person who most helped Fanny in her learning because he is the only one who did not make fun of her. Even the governess cannot believe how ignorant Fanny is, but her most cruel critics remain Julia and Maria. "Dear Mama, only think, my cousin cannot put the map of Europe together—or my cousin cannot tell the principal rivers in Russia—or she never heard of Asia Minor—or she does not know the difference between water-colours and crayons!—How strange!—Did you ever think of anything so stupid?" (*MP* 15). This is just one of the many examples of Maria and Julia's contempt for their cousin. Edmund, however, shows her books and helps her to learn from them, in order not to let his sisters mock her anymore. Just like Austen herself, Fanny was educated at home by the books she could find on the shelves. David Nokes notes: "Mr Austen's library at Steventon opened out to her a whole world of intellectual adventures. Browsing among the several hundred volumes on her father's shelves, she fed her youthful imagination with works of history and poetry, essays, sermons, plays, and, above all, novels" (103). Fanny has the same latitude as Austen in her learning experiences. She could peruse any book she wanted. This is how Edmund helps Fanny form her mind and her own critical sense, even though she has never

thought much about anything by herself before. Edmund has shown her how to fight for herself and her own ways to such an extent that she refuses to take a part in the play *Lovers' Vows*. She also refuses Henry Crawford's offer of marriage, even though much pressure is put on her in those two instances. Fanny, who had never thought about much by herself before, becomes quite a headstrong woman. Of course, Fanny would never be an accomplished woman, but she certainly learns enough to surpass the teacher/student, brother/sister relationship with Edmund, and could become his wife. Needless to say, a gentleman would rather have a sensible woman for his wife than a frivolous creature like Mary Crawford.

It is because of Mary's calm attitude toward Maria's lack of virtue that Edmund stopped loving her. A gentleman must always be respectful of a woman's virtue: he must contain his passions and sexual impulses. Edmund's love for Fanny is the best example of the respect a gentleman has towards a young woman's virginity: "Edmund's feelings are only such as a brother might feel for a younger sister, and he continues to suffer a fraternal blindness to her sexual attractiveness, even when she matures" (Kirkham 73). Kirkham adds that their relationship is free of "sexual and emotional manipulation" (73). This type of relationship based on love rather than sexual attraction is present in nearly all of the relationships between a gentleman and a lady depicted in Austen's novels. Darcy does fall in love with Elisabeth's "fine eyes" (*PP* 26), but it is her wit and her spirit that win him over. Moreover, many gentlemen, such as Brandon, Darcy, Bingley, and Edmund, are totally shocked by the behaviour of men such as Willoughby, Wickham, and Crawford. It is not proper for a man to abuse a woman's naivety and abandon her for another woman. In novels such as *Emma*, *Persuasion*, and *Northanger Abbey*, there is no question of a young lady's virtue being lost to an unworthy man. But

there are men such as Frank Churchill, Mr. Elliot and John Thorpe who seem to attract every women they encounter. They are very sexual and attractive, and they are disapproved of by the true gentlemen, as will be shown in chapter two.

***Emma* - - Robert Martin and Mr. Knightley**

Robert Martin is different from the other gentlemen because he is a poor farmer; however, he is probably the best example of Jane Austen's vision of a gentleman. This character would not have been considered a gentleman in Austen's time since a gentleman was supposed to have land and a title. Robert Martin is only a farmer; however, his gentle disposition and his good heart are qualities that makes him a gentleman in Austen's eyes. Therefore, for Austen, being a gentleman is all about behaviour, not land and titles, although Emma does not see it this way at first. At the beginning of the novel, she embodies Austen's contemporaries' belief of what a gentleman must be, namely a person high on the social scale. Mr. Knightley tries to set her right in her prejudiced opinion of Robert Martin: "[His] manners have sense, sincerity and good-humour to recommend them; and his mind has more true gentility than Harriet Smith could understand" (*E* 59). Emma is the one who, in fact, cannot understand the gentility that he has. She is a snob and refuses to see through her prejudice to distinguish the true worth of Robert Martin. Of course, he is not very educated, but he has been given the proper education needed by a farmer. He is also learned enough to want to improve himself, and to please Harriet, by reading Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*. Regardless of his good efforts, Emma continues to believe Robert Martin unworthy of her friend. Even with all Mr. Knightley's admonitions to Emma, he can never convince her that Martin is a suitable match for Harriet: "A degradation to illegitimacy and ignorance, to be married to a respectable,

intelligent, gentleman-farmer!" (*E* 56). Even though Harriet's illegitimacy places her a little lower than him, Robert Martin and Harriet Smith are both from the same world. They were educated in the same way, are of the same social class, and consequently, Robert Martin is gentleman enough for Harriet. He arguably even proves himself more gentlemanlike than other Austen men who are rich heirs but very deceitful, as the next chapter will illustrate.

If being a gentleman is also about showing sympathy and respect for the less fortunate, then Mr. Knightley is best example of a respectful gentleman. In contrast to Emma, he is always willing to help the Bateses and the farmers in the locality. An example of his benevolence is when he sends his carriage to drive the Bateses and Jane Fairfax to a party:

> Such a very kind attention—and so thoughtful an attention!—the sort of thing that so few men would think of. And, in short, from knowing his usual ways, I am very much inclined to think that it was for their accommodation the carriage was used at all. I do suspect he would not have had a pair of horses for himself, and that it was only an excuse for assisting them. (*E* 200-1)

Even though Miss Bates is certainly annoying, and possibly one of the most ridiculous characters in Austen's fictions, Mr. Knightley is never lacking in patience nor kindness towards her. He also rebuffs Emma when she does not show proper respect to Miss Bates: "I cannot see you acting wrong, without a remonstrance. How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation?—Emma, I had not thought it possible" (*E* 339). Mr. Knightley is the only person whose opinion really matters to Emma. That is why she is

devastated by his bad opinion of her after the Box Hill episode. As Jane Nardin writes, Emma knows that Mr. Knightley and she do not have the same opinion of things:

> [Emma] knows that Knightley is a perfect gentleman, his unpretentious, even bluff manners make Emma uncomfortable. 'If any young man were to set about copying him, he would not be sufferable,' she observes. Emma does not find the benevolence of Knightley's manners to be worthy of admiration or remark—but the reader can see that *his* propriety rests on a very different foundation from *hers*. ("Propriety" 75)

It is why Emma does not see how she could have been unpleasant to Miss Bates. She thinks only of herself and she cannot conceive that Miss Bates would interpret her behaviour to be anything other than a joke because that is all it was for her. Mr. Knightley knows better than Emma, and he wants her to find in her heart the same warm feeling that he has when he is benevolent to other people. He places the most value on respect, and he believes that without it, life would be anarchy. This explains why he wants Emma to possess this quality so much.

A gentleman is usually a character who possesses some sense and who tries to make the unreasonable heroine acknowledge the rightful way of doing things. Mr. Knightley's many reproofs to Emma, which I have already noted, proves how much the heroine needs to be taught, and how the gentleman acts as her teacher. As previously mentioned, Mr. Knightley tries to teach Emma that Robert Martin is a gentleman. However, he does not only want Emma to acknowledge this fact for the sake of Robert Martin, he also wants to teach her how wrong her behaviour has been towards Harriet Smith. "You have been no friend to Harriet Smith, Emma" (*E* 56). He is right, of course, because Emma does not see things the way he does, and she has been wrong to push

Harriet into refusing Mr. Martin. After the Box Hill episode and Knightley's reproof, Emma becomes more humble:

> "Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its chance, I would not quarrel with you for any liberties of manner. Were she your equal in situation—but, Emma, consider how far it is from the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done indeed!" (*E* 339)

This speech shows Emma she was wrong and that she has badly wronged a friend. From now on, she will be more considerate of her inferiors. As Nardin states: "Knightley's manners have always expressed his benevolent feelings—and now Emma begins to imitate them" ("Propriety" 75). She has decided to become more benevolent because he has taught her that she needs to be respectful of people who are in need, and who are socially inferior.

***Northanger Abbey* - - Henry Tilney**

An intriguing parallel between *Mansfield Park*'s Edmund, *Emma*'s Mr. Knightley, and *Northanger Abbey*'s Henry Tilney, is how all three men are the heroine's teacher. This is especially interesting since the novels are so different overall. Henry is the first friend Catherine Moreland makes in Bath and he is the one who teaches her how to be more observant of life and of people's public personae in society. On their first encounter, they start chatting together very agreeably, then all of a sudden he recalls that he has not done things according to the social conventions:

> I have hitherto been very remiss, madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you

> were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether. I have been very negligent—but are you now at leisure to satisfy me in these particulars? If you are I will begin directly. (*NA* 23)

For a gentleman, it is always essential to follow the conventions. Even though Henry makes these remarks quite ironically, he knows what his society expects him to do and he is ready to conform to those expectations and show himself quite amiable and a perfect gentleman. Similarly to Edmund who has shown his interest in Fanny by permitting her to write a letter to her brother, Henry is very attentive to Catherine's comfort and he wants her to have a pleasant evening, and to enjoy Bath and its many attractions.

Mr. Knightley and Edmund Bertram are both teaching their future wives how they need to act and are almost preparing them to be their wives. Of all Jane Austen's men, Henry Tilney is the greatest artist of personality. Catherine Moreland is like a clean sheet of paper on which he can write according to his imagination. She is a sponge, ready to absorb Isabella Thorpe's absurdities, or Henry Tilney's common sense. She chooses to follow Henry because the feelings she has for him and his sister are stronger than those she has for the Thorpes. She also figures that he has more knowledge of the conventions than they do. At first, Henry teaches Catherine the importance of faithfulness by comparing marriage to a country dance. "I consider a country-dance as an emblem of marriage. Fidelity and complaisance are the principal duties of both; and those men who do not chuse to dance or marry themselves, have no business with the

partners or wives of their neighbours" (*NA* 69).[3] He is angry because Thorpe, with his lack of civility and conventional behaviour, tried to have Catherine for himself. Henry tries to show Catherine how improper their behaviour has been, since she has pledged herself to him for the whole evening.

Henry teaches Catherine about social conventions, but he also teaches her more practical things. During their walk, he gives her a lesson in art and perspective, and he also corrects her vocabulary:

> "Very true," said Henry, "and this is a very nice day, and we are taking a very nice walk, and you are two very nice young ladies. Oh! It is a very nice word, indeed!—it does for every thing. Originally perhaps it was applied to express neatness, propriety, delicacy, or refinement;—people were nice in their dress, in their sentiments, or their choice. But now every commendation on every subject is comprised it that one word." (*NA* 96-7)

Henry wants to demonstrate to Catherine that she should read more and improve her vocabulary so that she can express herself more clearly. But Catherine is the youngest of Jane Austen's heroines. She is immature, and her immaturity is arguably responsible for many of her faults. Like a child, she does not think that it would have been improper to talk to John Thorpe at the dance, and, as the above example illustrates, she often expresses herself like a child as well. Her immaturity is demonstrated once more in her reaction towards General Tilney and the "mysterious" death of his wife. Again, it is her teacher that brings her back on the right track:

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[3] In her biography of Jane Austen, Claire Tomalin underlines that Jane Austen was very fond of dancing, but she can also mock its social power, like when she makes Mrs. Bennet much too eager of what kind of frequentations would come from a dance (102). I would add that she does the same in this scene of *Northanger Abbey*. Austen demonstrates that dances are very serious even though they are fun.

> If I understand you rightly, you had formed a surmise of such horrors as I have hardly words to—Dear Miss Moreland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remembering the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you—Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspaper lay every thing open? Dearest Miss Moreland, what ideas have you been admitting? (*NA* 172)

Henry, similarly as Edmund has done with Fanny, wants to help the girl to build her own critical sense. He is very patient with her, even though she has imagined terrible things about his father. As a real gentleman, he forgives her conduct and never mentions it again because he knows how shameful she must feel for inventing such monstrosities. Because of her immaturity and foolishness, she is not Henry's equal, and Irene Collins finds it strange that he should remain interested in her: "It was taken for granted at the time that a clergyman in possession of a country parish would soon be looking for a wife. One wonders how Catherine would face up to the requirements. Let us hope that Henry continued to be amused by her. One cannot help feeling that his wit would often be wasted on her" (162). Although it is probably unfair to expect her to know as much as the other Austen heroines who are more mature and more experienced than she is, I

would imagine that she would eventually be on the same foot with her husband/teacher. Henry would teach her everything she needs to know to be a proper wife for him.

During Jane Austen's life, social conventions also dictated to people what they must read, and the gentleman can also be defined by his choice of readings. De Forest writes: "[Jane Austen's] most attractive men, like Henry Tilney, read novels, while the least attractive men, like Mr. Collins, do not" (15). It was important for a gentleman to read and to cultivate his mind.[4] Henry Tilney, for example, is well versed in history, and tries to encourage Catherine to share his passion for it. He also reads the books that Catherine enjoys, including the gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe. John Thorpe, Henry's rival, does not read Radcliffe and is not even aware that she wrote *The Mysteries of Udolfo*, a clear sign of his ignorance. On the other hand, he has read Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, a novel that was not considered quite as proper because of the sexual tension in the novel and its very detailed description of sexual intercourse and rape. "In *Northanger Abbey* it is not Henry Tilney but the loutish John Torpe who has read *The Monk*" (Collins 158), and this is a very important fact to underline since the sexuality and impropriety of the character is represented through his reading.[5] Henry Tilney would not have read such a sexual and improper book. John Thorpe can be considered as an immoral character because of his choice of literature. On the other hand, Robert Martin and Henry Tilney read Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of*

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[4] However, it is not every single one of Jane Austen's gentlemen who are caught reading a novel. Mr. Knightley, for example, is never shown reading and the narrator never mentions whether he does through references to be found in his speeches.

[5] Samuel Taylor Coleridge declared in his review that "*The Monk* is a romance, which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or daughter, he might reasonably turn pale" (375).

Udolfo which were considered the proper kind of Gothic novels, with Radcliffe's explained supernatural and society-friendly[6] endings.

***Persuasion* - - Frederick Wentworth**

The last, and probably the least interesting of Austen's heroes, is Frederick Wentworth, who is nonetheless faithful to the social conventions and to his public personae. Wentworth cares so much for Anne Elliot that he respects her decision to break off their engagement and never tries to make her elope with him. Wentworth wants things to be done as they should be and marrying without the consent of the family is out of the question. Gentlemen are always willing to save a young lady's reputation. Moreover, Wentworth is faithful to a promise that was not even stated. Everybody believed that he was in love with Louisa Musgrove, so he did not propose to Anne until Louisa became engaged to another man. Even though he did not care for Louisa in this way, he would not deceive everybody's expectations by avoiding to see her. Wentworth is a gentleman, even though Anne's father separated them because the former had no money. In this way, he is like Robert Martin; he has enough money to make a woman happy but he lacks the prestige that her family and friends expect.

In the late Regency world, a gentleman is a man who is honest and possesses integrity. He is able to acknowledge his own faults and to attempt to correct himself so that he can please the heroine. But he does not want to be the only one to improve, and he often has a lesson to teach his heroine. Such lessons include moral wisdom or ways to ameliorate her critical sense. His greater qualities lie in the respect he has for others. He cares for all people and helps the less fortunate as best he can. Austen has created some

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[6] Ann Radcliffe's endings are what society expected. After many hurdles, the two lovers are finally able to marry, and the villains are punished.

men who fit the mould of the prince charming that Regency women wanted to read about: they adhere perfectly to the descriptions of gentlemen made in the conduct books. On the other hand, her anti-heroes are not as mean as a modern reader would expect villains to be, but their faults are quite villainous for the era as the next chapter shows.

Chapter Two

Jane Austen's Anti-Heroes

> "At length the day is come on which I am to flirt my last with Tom Lefroy, and when you receive this it will be over. My tears flow as I write at the melancholy idea." (*Letters* 6)
>
> "Hobbes clearly and quite convincingly proposed that man is not essentially good or naturally social, that morality is relative, and that what is traditionally considered the worst in man is, in fact, his real nature." (Sheriff 2)

The behaviour of Austen's anti-heroes might be considered as more natural than the heroes' since the real gentleman's behaviour is arguably learned in conduct books. However, the natural behaviour of men is morally wrong. Austen makes clear that even if the anti-heroes may appear to be worthy of the label "gentleman" because their behaviour seems spotless to the other characters who are blinded by their charms, they are in fact quite corrupted. Austen's common anti-hero is a man of very little morals who refuses to live within the constraints of Regency conventions. He is a corrupted being who corrupts others; he has no respect for the people he deals with and he always introduces himself under false pretences. This man does not seem to have any integrity and he does not mind lying to meet his ends. The Austen anti-hero is a man who incarnates all that is undesirable in a Regency gentleman: he is not respectful, nor

respectable, and his unrestrained sexuality makes him corrupt young women and lie to please them.[1]

***Sense and Sensibility* - - Edward and Willoughby[2]**

None of the characters that I discuss in this thesis are easy to categorize neatly; Edward Ferrars is probably one of the characters whose personality is most difficult to classify. I have decided to discuss his case amongst the anti-heroes (even though he becomes a heroine's husband) because he encompasses many of the anti-hero's attributes. The most puzzling thing about Edward is the way he handles his engagement to Lucy Steele. As a person already engaged, he should not be paying so much attention to Elinor, acting as if he were courting her. The rules of propriety are very clear: courtship must be very open and should lead to marriage. Edward breaks these two rules. With Lucy Steele, his courtship is not open since their engagement is a secret between them. With Elinor, his attentions are not intended to lead to marriage because his hand is already taken by Miss Steele. Yet, he does behave as a gentleman when he faces his mother, and when he remains faithful to his resolution to keep his engagement to Lucy until she breaks it off herself. Edward is hard to classify since he has more good than bad in him. However, a true gentleman should not lie nor introduce himself under false pretences as he did with Elinor. So, again, it is possible to conclude that in Austen nothing ever is black or white, but that her characters are understandably complex.

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[1] Anna Bryson elaborates on this definition further: "One author has declared that the distinguishing mark of the rake was his excess: excess in drinking, gambling, wenching, duelling, rioting, and blaspheming" (245).

[2] Reading Claire Tomalin's account of Austen's infatuation with Tom Lefroy in chapter twelve of her bibliography (118) made me realize how similar their love story has been to Marianne and Willoughby's. After falling in love with Jane, Tom left her in order to please his family by marrying a richer girl. There is no evidence that Willoughby was cast on Lefroy, but the resemblance is still striking.

Willoughby's chivalric introduction to the distressed Mrs. Dashwood wins her over and makes her hope for a match between her daughter and her saviour. According to studies in social psychology, when to people meet in a romantic atmosphere, like Marianne who was rescued by Willoughby, they are bound to feel passion.[3] Mrs. Dashwood herself regards Willoughby as a man worthy of her daughter's affection. She wishes Marianne to marry him as she is well aware of the feelings this first meeting creates in her daughter and herself:

> the eyes of [Elinor and Mrs. Dashwood] were fixed on him with an evident wonder and a secret admiration [...] Had he been even old, ugly, and vulgar, the gratitude and kindness of Mrs. Dashwood would have been secured by any act of attention to her child; but the influence of youth, beauty, and elegance, gave an interest to the action which came home to her feelings. (*SS* 36)

Willoughby introduces himself very politely to the women of the house and Mrs. Dashwood is very kind to him and welcomes him to her house because he "came home to her feelings" (*SS* 36). He wins the hearts of the members of the household, and his good reputation among the townspeople manages to win over the Dashwoods.

Willoughby does not have Colonel Brandon's approval because the latter knows of Willoughby's past improper actions. Whether it is to take Marianne Dashwood on forbidden excursions, or to corrupt the virtue of a young woman like Eliza, Willoughby has no respect for the social conventions. For instance, his first breach of the conventions occurs when he takes Marianne to visit his house in an open carriage. As Catherine is taught in *Northanger Abbey*, riding in an open carriage without a chaperone

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[3] For more information on social psychology, see Myers.

is not considered proper (93).[4] Marianne explains to Elinor that there was no room for a third person, and that she never had so much fun in her life. Elinor replies: "I am afraid, [...] that the pleasantness of an employment does not always evince its propriety" (*SS* 59). Elinor wishes to remind her young sister that when something is fun, it does not mean that it is proper. In fact, in Regency society, everything that is amusing seems to be improper, so Marianne should really be careful so that she does not become a source of gossip. In fact, Willoughby's greatest transgression happens before Marianne's rescue, even though the reader learns about it much later in the novel. Colonel Brandon sums up Eliza's loss of virtue with these words:

> he had already done that, which no man who *can* feel for another, would do. 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; he neither returned, nor wrote, nor relieved her. (*SS* 182)

This passage brings forth Willoughby's egotism, as it demonstrates how he had been unfeeling towards a poor girl. It also shows his rudeness towards Colonel Brandon since Brandon took the affront personally. However, in Eliza's case, Mary Bennet's saying proves to be right: her virtue is irretrievable because Colonel Brandon learns of his ward's whereabouts too late to save her. Needless to say, the unfortunate girl's life is forever ruined because of Willoughby. This situation shows that he does not care for other people's well-being as long as his own is secure.

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[4] Even though Jane and Tom's infatuation was similar to Marianne and Willoughby's, Austen knew where the limits of conventions were. She wrote to Cassandra: "I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together" (*Letters* 2). Austen flirted along the limits of the conventions, but respected them, whereas Marianne does not pay attention to them.

Willoughby, as most of Jane Austen's anti-heroes, is a money seeker. This kind of man is willing to make an alliance solely for financial reasons and he is willing to refrain from sealing an engagement, which would be disapproved by rich relatives. On the day before his departure for London, Willoughby gives some clues to Marianne and her family of his serious intentions towards her: "I felt an immediate satisfaction and interest in the [renting of Barton's cottage], which nothing but a kind of prescience of what happiness I should experience from it, can account for. Must it not have been so, Marianne?" (*SS* 63). But then, he mysteriously leaves and does not write to inform them of his whereabouts, a situation that completely breaks Marianne's heart, especially when she learns that he is married to a rich woman. Yet, Austen's characters are never all evil or good, and Willoughby admits all the love he feels for Marianne on the night when she almost dies:

> I had determined, as soon as I could engage her alone, to justify the attentions I had so invariably paid her, and openly assure her of an affection which I had already taken such pains to display. But in the interim—in the interim of the very few hours that were to pass, before I could have an opportunity of speaking with her in private—a circumstance occurred—an unlucky circumstance, to ruin all my resolution, and with it all my comfort. (*SS* 281)

If Willoughby meant at first to entertain himself with Marianne, it seems as though he soon grew attached to her and he was keen to secure her affection; however, his need for money and his greed makes him break her heart and almost kill her. He knows he has been mistaken, but it is too late for him to repair the damage.

***Pride and Prejudice* - - Wickham**

Wickham is not much different from Willoughby in the way that he treats women. As the name Wickham evokes the word "wicked," the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of "wicked," "sinful, iniquitous, given to or involving immorality" (OED 1), certainly applies to him perfectly. One of his breaches of propriety is to entice Lydia Bennet to elope with him, and to bring her on a downward spiral resulting in the loss of her virtue. Luckily, the young woman has some friends of influence who are able to repair the harm that is likely to be done to her and her family, or she would have been shamed like Eliza. Lydia has no intention of leaving Wickham, married or not, so Darcy and Gardiner have to be quick to save her. "Since such were her feelings, it only remained, he thought, to secure and expedite a marriage, which, in his very first conversation with Wickham, he easily learnt, had never been *his* design. [...] Wickham still cherished the hope of more effectually making his fortune by marriage, in some other country" (*PP* 245). Wickham takes advantage of Lydia's infatuation with him to have some sexual pleasure with her, even though he has no intention of marrying her. This recalls Willoughby's behaviour towards Eliza. Neither man planned on marrying the girl whose virtue they had taken. Luckily, Darcy is rich enough to pay Wickham to marry Lydia and much of the harm is repaired and forgotten.

Wickham introduces himself to the Bennet family under false pretences. Just like Willoughby, who seemed to be a nice and polite gentleman, Wickham comes to Meryton with the intention of entertaining himself with the town's girls. His gentlemanly disposition fools the Bennets, so they do not see through him and are not able to prevent Lydia's elopement. Nardin writes that "The characters in the novel continually try to evaluate one another's manners and the moral worth to which they are a clue. Often

these evaluations are wrong, but it is important to note that they are never wrong because the manners of the individual in question have lied about his character" (*Decorums* 47). This is true of Darcy, who is more gentlemanly than he appears at first sight, but it is mostly true of Wickham who builds himself a much better reputation than he actually deserves. The Bennet women fall for him, and even their father surprisingly states that "[He] admire[s] all [his] three sons-in-law highly[…] Wickham, perhaps is [his] favourite" (*PP* 290). After everything is settled for three of his daughters, he quickly forgets all the pain that Wickham brought to his household, and he holds him as his favourite son-in-law. Wickham's flattery and good disposition make him the favourite, even though he almost brought shame to the whole family.

Wickham's behaviour is more or less proper at the beginning of the novel, and it becomes less appropriate as the story progresses. Conventions dictate that no man should gossip about other men, or be his own historian (Bryson 164); therefore, his confidences to Elizabeth about Darcy's father and about the way Darcy handles his father's will are very improper. Such disclosures should not have been made to someone he knows as little as Elizabeth, because it is ungrateful of him to taint the reputation of his benefactor's son. Nardin underlines this situation when she asserts:

> George Wickham makes improper communications about the Darcy family to Elizabeth on their very first meeting. Here a rule of propriety that *is* grounded on morality is at issue: Wickham owes much to Darcy's father and should therefore refrain from damaging Darcy's own reputation. But Elizabeth is already committed to the view that Darcy is an unprincipled man: she has an interest in believing Wickham's story and believing his story means believing that he is a man of good manners and good morals. ("Propriety" 73)

Elizabeth is so infatuated with Wickham and disgusted with Darcy that she readily believes this account of his character. Wickham appears to possess good morals and values, but this speech demonstrates the contrary. For one thing, this story is unfounded, and a gentleman is forbidden to lie for the same reason as it is most improper for a man to break another man's reputation: it is not socially acceptable. Of course, Wickham's story fits perfectly with Elizabeth's expectations of Darcy's character; however, the lie could really have tainted Darcy's reputation had Elizabeth been a gossip. Wickham probably hoped that Elizabeth would talk. If she did, he would finally have been rid of Darcy's undesirable presence. But, if this assumption of Wickham's character is true, then he is even more corrupted than he seems.

Wickham is also very immoral because he is on a quest for money. He is willing to do some very immoral things in order to satisfy his greed. Unlike Willoughby, his desire for money is inexcusable. Willoughby breaks Marianne's heart, but it is to please his relative, which was an excusable behaviour at the time. Wickham's desire for money is not forgivable because it is not accepted by society as is Willoughby's type of greed. Wickham actually corrupts a young woman and takes advantage of her in order to get the money he needs to pay off his debts. Willoughby would have been disowned for marrying a poor girl, whereas Wickham only has his own greed to satisfy. At first, Wickham tries to corrupt Georgiana Darcy, whose fortune is £30,000. His attempt is unfruitful because Darcy's sister tells Darcy their plan at the last minute and he is able to prevent the disaster. Georgiana's dowry is what Wickham needs to clear off his debts and live quite comfortably. His greed is best presented when he actually abandons Elizabeth for a girl who has just inherited some money. Wickham's greed and his refusal to adhere to the conventions become evident in the instance of his abandonment of

Elizabeth. Luckily, the girl is not interested in him and would not have married him for she knows what he is after. He then turns to Lydia Bennet. He does not think that he can get much money from Lydia, he only wants to amuse himself at the poor girl's expense. However, when he sees that there is much to be made there, he takes advantage of the situation. Wickham only cares for himself and his own comfort, so he does not care if he breaks a heart or destroys a reputation through his bad actions.

***Mansfield Park* - - Tom Bertram and Henry Crawford**

Apart from having extravagant expenses similar to Wickham's, Tom Bertram is not as bad as the other anti-heroes. His chief mistake lies in his lack of judgement while he oversees the house during his father's absence. He accepts his friend's scheme of performing a play during his father's absence, which is not in itself reproachable.[5] It is not the performance itself that is improper, but it is the choice of the play. Indeed, Kotzebue's *Lover's Vows* is about love and in it two couples have to swear their love for each other, i.e. Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford, and Mary Crawford and Edmund Bertram. Avowal of love and marriage proposals are not a game. It is improper for two people to profess their love for each other when they are not married. Jan Fergus underscores this fact when she writes: "Social convention permits a declaration of love only in the context of courtship. If no offer of marriage follows, the context is clearly seduction or mockery, both of which call for indignant repudiation. But convention takes no account of and offers no defence against a declaration of love in a play" (80). Even if conventions do not reproof a declaration of love in a play, Tom Bertram should have known that their choice would have been unpleasant to many people, including his

[5] Jane Austen herself used to put up private plays with her family, especially around Christmas time. For more information consult Tomalin (30) and Nokes (77).

father, because this play allowed the young people to touch each other in an improper way. Conventions state that two people should never hold hands, unless when shaking hands, and even then it is the lady who must offer hers first (Wildeblood 249). Besides, Tom should have known that his father would greatly disapprove of all the "improvements" he makes to the billiard room and to his father's room in order to put the stage together. Tom does not approve the right play, nor does he choose to perform it properly. A more humble theatre, and the right choice of play, would have been better, and would probably not have disturbed his father.

Sir Bertram's reaction to his children's play demonstrates how the conventions dictating courtship and marriage rules must not be taken lightly nor trespassed. From the beginning, Henry Crawford appears to be a very immoral character because of his forward desire to have fun with the Bertram girls. Mary knows him thoroughly and she says to their sister: "He is the most horrible flirt that can be imagined. If your Miss Bertrams do not like to have their hearts broke, let them avoid Henry" (*MP* 38). To which he solely replies that he wants to be sure of himself before he makes his choice.[6] He unfortunately sees women as toys that he can play with until he is sick of the game. He goes much too far with his playing. Some critics such as David Douglas Devlin, defend Henry and Mary Crawford's behaviour and present them as proper characters:

> Henry and Mary Crawford are (after Fanny) the most important characters in the novel, and Jane Austen's treatment of them has often been misunderstood and condemned. Mary, with her liveliness and charm, appears to many as another

[6] It is possible to believe that this is what he does when he finally decides to ask Fanny to marry him. He is sure of himself and believes that he is over his frivol flirts when he asks Sir Bertram for her hand. However, when he meets with Maria Bertram again, he forgets his good resolutions and corrupts the virtue or Mr. Rushworth's wife.

> Elizabeth Bennet, and her brother as a perfectly respectable young man who would never have run off with Maria, and who was genuinely and obviously in love with Fanny and more than worthy of her. [...] Both are thought to be more sinned against by Jane Austen than sinning. (82)[7]

Not surprisingly within the context of this chapter, I do not agree with this statement. After all, if Henry Crawford is the respectable young man Devlin describes, he never would have played with the two Bertram girls, nor ruined Maria's marriage. Even if Rushworth does not prove himself equal to his name (it was not *worth rush*ing into marriage with him), he is still a respectable man who deserves better. Their divorce is not a relief to Maria either, since it was bad for a woman to act as she did, bored or not. She is condemned to live as an exile in a remote county with her Aunt Norris, probably an even worst punishment than living her whole life with Rushworth.

Even though he has many faults, Henry Crawford is not as bad as the anti-heroes discussed so far. I believe that Devlin is right to say that he truly loves Fanny Price. Since the two Bertram girls are gone, Henry sees the true value of Fanny and falls in love with her because she finally seems worthy. "Henry Crawford encourages them long enough to destroy the sisters' friendship through their mutual jealousy; his heart, however, is not touched until, with her cousins gone, Fanny rises from her former 'humble' position" (Simpson 27). Fanny is no longer humbled or hushed by her cousins who used to take all the space available and to send her into a corner.

> Fanny's consequence increased on the departure of her cousins. Becoming as she then did, the only young woman in the drawing-room, the only occupier of that

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[7] Henry Austen, Austen's brother, really liked Henry Crawford (*Letters* 377). He would probably have agreed with Devlin that Austen was sinning against him.

> interesting division of a family in which she had hitherto held so humble a third, it was impossible for her to be more looked at, more thought of and attended to, than she had ever been before; and 'where is Fanny?' became no uncommon question, even without her being wanted for any one's convenience. (*MP* 184)

Because of her quiet nature, Fanny never asserted herself and always appeared quite invisible. However, with her cousins gone, Henry can finally discover how worthy she is to be his wife since of all the Mansfield Park girls, she is the one who has the most sense. Yet, his sincerity is still questionable since he has been such an indiscriminate flirt up to this particular moment. In spite of his flirty behaviour, the truth of his intentions finally shines though. Contrary to his intentions toward Maria and Julia, Henry truly wants to marry Fanny: he appeals to Sir Bertram for Fanny's hand in marriage. Once a man has made a formal request for a woman's hand in marriage, the process is unbreakable. Once the father's (or surrogate father in Fanny's case) approval has been given, the engagement is sealed. Therefore, Henry is faithful to his word: he amused himself with the young women until he found the right one for him. Unluckily, he does not prove himself worthy of Fanny because he slips and runs off with Maria.

***Emma* - - Frank Churchill**

Like Henry Crawford, Frank Churchill's breach of the courtship rules makes him flirt with Emma in a most improper way. As Jan Fergus has noted: "Austen is capable of a number of attitudes toward flirtation. As practiced by Frank Churchill at first with Emma or by Henry Crawford with Maria Bertram, flirtation is dangerous: one character, who is no fool, is deliberately fooling another" (72). In other words, flirting is not proper if it hurts one of the parties involved. Austen and her contemporaries condemn it if it is done this harmful way. Frank Churchill's flirting with Emma would have been bound to

hurt her if her sentiments had remained what they were at the beginning of their acquaintance. Luckily, Emma is spared the pain that Frank's flirting could have inflicted upon her: he only hurts her pride because she failed to see through his game. However, the flirtation has badly hurt his fiancée, Jane Fairfax, who makes herself sick through worrying.

Frank Churchill's second breach of the conventions lies in his secret engagement to Jane. After all, since courtship should be open, so should an engagement. It is not proven to be engaged when the engagement has not been approved by both families and by the community. Such an approval of the engagement is necessary for the well-being of society. An engagement is like a marriage: the community must know, and must agree, for the engagement to be proper. In Highbury, Frank and Jane's engagement disturbs many people because Frank seems to be such a forward young man, but it is luckily soon forgotten because his reasons are easily understandable, and since Mrs. Churchill would have done anything in her power to ruin it. Once she has passed away, the two lovers can live within the community and receive everybody's approval.

Frank is also an opportunist who uses his father's proximity to Jane in order to be close to her. Frank never comes to visit his father until Jane is back in Highbury. Always blaming Mrs. Churchill's possessiveness, he backs out of visiting each time he promises. His visit is more than welcome in Highbury. "Life is so pleasant and well-ordered in this community that it has become moribund. Nothing happens there, and nothing changes" (Monaghan 115). Frank Churchill's visit puts some life into the dead community. His arrival is quite an event and everybody talks about it. It is always a great disappointment to everyone when he promises to come and does not follow through. The first time he declines to come, Mrs. Weston is the one who is most affected because he has not come

to pay his respect to his new stepmother: "Mr. Frank Churchill did not come. When the time proposed drew near, Mrs. Weston's fears were justified in the arrival of a letter of excuse" (*E* 129). Frank seems to have completely forgotten his father, so Mr. Knightley is not wrong when he thus criticises Frank Churchill:

> I am not supposing him at all an unnatural creature, in suspecting that he may have learnt to be above his connections, and to care very little for any thing but his own pleasure, from living with those who have always set him the example of it. It is a great deal more natural than one could wish, that a young man, brought up by those who are proud, luxurious, and selfish, should be proud, luxurious, and selfish too. If Frank Churchill had wanted to see his father, he would have contrived it between September and January. (*E* 131)

Frank Churchill even changes his name to his keepers' since he is to be Mr. Churchill's heir. The sole reason why he finally decides to come to Highbury, despite Mrs. Churchill's disapproval, is so that he can spend a bit of time with Jane, and thus he uses his father's second marriage as an excuse to visit.

Frank Churchill's last breach of Regency conventions consists of the gossip that he tells Emma. In so doing, he behaves just as Wickham did with Elizabeth: he confides in her some gossip that is not true. It would have been very dangerous for Jane Fairfax's reputation if Emma would have let slip Frank Churchill's playful suppositions; the story that Frank invented to explain the gift of the pianoforte is quite improper: "I do not mean to reflect upon the good intentions of either Mr. Dixon or Miss Fairfax, but I cannot help suspecting either that, after making his proposals to her friend, he had the misfortune to fall in love with *her*, or that he became conscious of a little attachment on her side" (*E* 195). Such a statement endangers Jane's reputation, which is obviously not the proper

way to behave as a gentleman, for whom integrity and truthfulness are supposed to matter. Frank Churchill lies too much and is too tricky to be considered to be a real gentleman; rather, his lack of respect for Jane's feelings and for the conventions of his community mark him as an anti-hero.

***Northanger Abbey* - - John Thorpe and Captain Tilney**

While Churchill is rather machiavellian in his schemes, John Thorpe is not much more than a fool, as is clear from his first appearance. In his first encounter with Catherine, he points out his ignorance of Ann Radcliffe's book: "'If I read any it shall be Mrs. Radcliff[e]'s; her novels are amusing enough; they are worth reading; some fun and nature in *them*.' 'Udolpho was written by Mrs. Radcliff[e]'" (*NA* 45). John Thorpe is not as well-versed in literature as he wants to appear to be. Even more ironically, Catherine who is herself very ignorant is able to tell him that *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is in fact one of Radcliffe's novels, and she can also tell him that the other novel he is talking about is *Camilla*. Thorpe is not learned, and he is also not very interested in learning. The only thing he has read is *The Monk*, a book quite infamous for its representation of lust and religion, and not considered proper reading in Austen's society, as mentioned in the previous chapter. In fact, W.A. Speck believes that Jane Austen herself did not approve of *The Monk*:

> Though Austen teases her heroine's suggestibility, she clearly approves of her reading Radcliffe and equally clearly disapproves of Thorpe's reading Lewis. *Udolpho* is acceptable in Austen's view presumably because it retains good taste

> despite its exploitation of terror, while *The Monk* is not because it goes over the top into horror and even pornography. (155)[8]

This book choice also brings forth Thorpe's sexual interest and his desire to quickly find a wife, and Catherine is presented as good a candidate as any.

John Thorpe's ignorance is not only demonstrated by his lack of literary knowledge, but it is also shown by his lack of knowledge of society's rules. As mentioned in the first chapter, Henry is often scandalized by Thorpe's improper behaviour at dances. For one thing, he does not respect other people's partners. David Monaghan also underscores this point: "John Thorpe's rudeness at balls, which is made to appear even worse by Henry Tilney's impeccable behaviour, soon forces Catherine to come to what is, for her, the bold conclusion that, even though he is the brother of her friend and the friend of her brother, she does not like him" (118). The reason of her dislike is obvious. John Thorpe enjoys gruesome, sexual books, and he cannot remain within the limits of society's conventions, as his choice of books testifies. Yet, his rudeness at balls and his choice of readings are not the only places where he transgresses conventions. He breaks the proprieties by bringing Catherine on an open-carriage ride against her will. He lies to her, saying that Tilney would not come to walk, while he is in fact coming with Eleanor. Catherine wants to jump off the moving carriage to join her friends. Nardin writes that "John disregards all the ordinary, minor rules of civility in order to prove to himself and to others that he is in command of any social situation" (*Decorums* 65). Indeed, when he practically kidnaps Catherine to bring her on the

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[8] However, there is a disagreement among critics concerning what Austen really thought of *The Monk*. David Nokes notes that "She read and seemingly enjoyed Matthew Lewis's lurid tale of rape, incest and necrophilia, *The Monk*" (104). In my opinion, Austen probably enjoyed *The Monk,* and probably used the popular novel only as a way to demonstrate the impropriety of the character of John Thorpe because she knew that her contemporaries disapproved of it. By using this novel, she made clear that she disapproved of John Thorpe's behaviour.

carriage ride, he is breaking two rules of propriety in order to demonstrate his dominance. The first rule he breaches is that young women and young men should not go in an open-carriage ride without chaperones, and the second is that one should not force someone else to do something against their will. He is only an obnoxious coxcomb who boasts of being the best, when in fact he is far from a gentleman.

Whereas Thorpe's behaviour in the novel results mostly from his lack of proper education in the manners of his time, Captain Tilney has good knowledge of the conventions and proprieties. Nevertheless, he openly flirts with Isabella Thorpe, a young lady engaged to Catherine's brother. Catherine is quite scandalized by Captain Tilney's behaviour but, as Henry points out to her: "The fairness of your friend was an open attraction; her firmness, you know, could only be understood by yourself" (*NA* 119). What Henry means by this is that it is very natural for his brother to pay attention to a pretty girl and to ask her to dance, what is wrong is that Isabella does not refuse the offer considering her engagement. I agree with Catherine that it is not quite proper of him to ask her since he knows her dispositions, but Isabella is indeed mostly to blame for accepting another man's attentions. She accepts his compliments and returns his attentions; therefore, Captain Tilney can hardly be blamed for keeping up with it. As Henry warned Catherine, his brother has a tendency to flirt anyway, and he finds a good match in Isabella. Even though she says at the beginning of the novel, "I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not my nature. My attachments are always excessively strong" (*NA* 37), and "Where the heart is really attached, I know very well how little one can be pleased with the attention of any body else" (*NA* 38), she acts otherwise. She eventually only gets what she deserves when Catherine's brother breaks off the engagement.

***Persuasion* - - William Elliot**

Similarly to the other men who introduced themselves under false pretences, Mr. Elliot creates a false impression on Anne, and on many other people.

> It was now proved that he belonged to the same inn as themselves; and this second meeting, short as it was, also proved again by the gentleman's looks, that he thought hers very lovely, and by the readiness and propriety of his apologies, that he was a man of exceedingly good manners. (*P* 94)

On their first meeting, Anne is mislead by her cousin's good looks and expressions. She thinks him a proper gentleman because he appears to be one, although the novel later demonstrates how appearances can be deceiving. All through the book, the narrator keeps on vaunting his appearance until he is finally discovered to be a selfish man. "[H]is manners [are] so exactly what they ought to be, so polished, so easy, so particularly agreeable" (*P* 128). But his good manners hide his true personality that is brought to light by Anne's good friend in Bath, Mrs. Smith.

Mr. Elliot also uses his charming manner to be a flirt. Anne acknowledges it as the narrator says that she thought him "*too* agreeable" (*P* 144). In fact, Austen regularly uses the trope of the facade of the perfect gentleman who is really hiding something from the heroine and other characters. Elliot uses his good manners to try to make Anne fall for his game. He plays the mystery card telling her that he has known her much longer than she thought (*P* 166). It is not improper to let her know this detail, because it is a true fact, later acknowledged by Mrs. Smith herself. What is improper is what he intends to do with this statement: he is only attempting to create an aura of mystery around himself in order to make Anne increasingly curious about him. This interest of hers could lead her to marry him and assure his inheritance of the title. But at the same

time, Anne is aware that the intentions he has towards her are improper, since he has lost his wife only a little more than six months before. She says: "My dear Mrs. Smith, Mr. Elliot's wife has not been dead much above half a year. He ought not to be supposed to be paying his addresses to any one" (*P* 173). Anne is not likely to be married to her cousin because she refuses all his attentions, and it is because she does not care for him that she learns who Mr. Elliot truly is. This piece of news distresses her as she becomes aware of how he abused her father and her family, no matter how silly they are, and no matter how much she disapproves of them.

Similarly to Wickham and Willoughby, whose true personalities were brought to light by Darcy and Colonel Brandon, Mr. Elliot's real character is revealed by Mrs. Smith, Anne's friend. Mr. Elliot turns out to be no different from Austen's other anti-heroes: like the rest of them, he is a selfish money-seeker. Mac Donagh insightfully asserts that: "The seeds of the family disease were present in William Elliot from the beginning. His initial defiance of Elliot grandeur sprang from his need of immediate money. But it also expressed the resentment of the heir presumptive who might not succeed for years or even ever" (100). As soon as Mrs. Smith learns that Anne has no intention to marry her cousin because she hopes for someone else's affection, she reveals all the truth about his character: "Mr. Elliot is a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; who, for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character" (*P* 176). Mrs. Smith knows him very well and even admits to have also been fooled by his good manners and looks. She also informs Anne that he has married for money, and that he has once boasted that he would have sold his baronetcy if he could. However, he has changed his mind, and needs to use

his cunning in order to be reintroduced into the family and to prevent the remarriage of the actual Baronet. Indeed, if the Baronet remarries, he could produce a son with his new wife and this son would be entitled to the estate. The best way to prevent this marriage is to marry his daughter. As a son-in-law, he would have some leisure to offer some tips to the Baronet on whom to marry, and consequently prevent a marriage with Mrs. Clay. Interestingly, he is the one who ends up marrying her after Anne chooses Wentworth. Anne provides the most succinct and accurate description of Elliot when she declares: "Mr. Elliot is evidently a disingenuous, artificial, worldly man, who has never had any better principle to guide him than selfishness" (*P* 183). By marrying Mrs. Clay, he gets her out of the way but he obviously would not be able to remove the threat of every attractive woman in this way. Only his friendship with the Baronet would prevent the Baronet's next marriage.

As the above discussion demonstrates, Austen's anti-heroes entirely refuse to adhere to conventions. Their multiple transgressions are not always the same, but they always amount to the same breach of Regency conventions. The anti-hero is first and foremost a money-seeker willing to make his fortune by marriage or to fool other people in order to get money. He is also a flirt and he shamelessly courts women, and even corrupts their virtue. Even though he has some very bad attributes, it always takes a certain amount of time before he is discovered, since he always introduces himself under false pretences and always presents himself as a gentleman. This intervention mostly happens before much harm is done to the heroine and to the other characters. The anti-hero often does not care for anybody else's feelings but his own, which is a characteristic he has in common with the figure of the patriarchs, the subject of my next chapter.

Chapter Three

The Jane Austen Patriarch and Heir

> "Quite unlike the barbarous fathers whom she so loved to ridicule in all her juvenile sketches, Mr[.] Austen did not demand of her what she meant by idling her time away on such ephemeral nonsense. On the contrary, he pronounced himself so pleased with [*First Impressions*] that he thought it should be published." (Nokes 173)

The patriarch is never represented in a good light in Austen's novels. Indeed, he always possesses some defects of temper or disposition. David Douglas Devlin writes that "The child is father to the man in Jane Austen and Locke; the man is never father to the child" (18). This is certainly true of most of her novels' fathers. In fact, they are either deceased or absent, have no authority over their households, and their interventions in the heroines' lives are totally ineffective. Some of them are also proud, greedy and conceited. Because of their many faults, their daughters are at the mercy of dangerous situations, such as the Dashwood's poverty, Lydia's elopement, Maria's wedding to Mr. Rushworth or the Elliot's fall. Even though all of Austen's biographers state that Austen admired her father and had a great relationship with him, she tends to ridicule patriarchs in her writing in order to criticize primogeniture and patriarchal England.[1]

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[1] Claire Tomalin notes how Jane Austen was sorrowful when her father died (187-188). She even stopped writing *The Watsons* because she had planned to kill Mr. Watson, and could no longer write it (184). Austen's relationship with her father was very different from her heroines since he always provided her

***Sense and Sensibility* - - Henry and John Dashwood**

On his deathbed, Henry Dashwood wants to make sure that his daughters will be well provided for after his death. However, he should have saved more money for them or should have made some clearer request to John Dashwood's charity. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator explains the Dashwood sisters' financial situation very clearly. After the death of his uncle, Mr. Dashwood tries to live economically and save money for his daughters. However, his sickness and his early death prevent him from fulfilling his plan, and he must leave his daughters in the care of their stepbrother. We cannot blame him for deserting his family since he cannot be responsible for his own death. However, he should have been more financially responsible instead of foolishly counting on his uncle's legacy to help his daughters financially. In fact, the uncle could only dispose of his fortune and estate through the male lineage, but he arranges for it to go to John Dashwood's son. It was irresponsible of Henry Dashwood to suppose that his daughters would get a share of the inheritance. His irresponsibility and his premature death ensure the ruin of his wife and daughters, since John Dashwood is too blind with love for his greedy wife to help them very much.

John Dashwood is ready to provide rather generously for his stepmother and stepsisters, but on his greedy wife's advice, he leaves them to fend for themselves with very little means. The whole of chapter two presents a very shocking account of what Moreland Perkins names "the economics of personal caprice" (120), since his wife suggests that "[taking] three thousand pounds from the fortune of their dear little boy, would be impoverishing him to the most dreadful degree" (*SS* 6). In her biography,

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with what she needed (a writing desk, his library, subscriptions to Fanny Burney and Ann Radcliffe's works), and even tried to sell the manuscript of *First Impressions* on her behalf.

Claire Tomalin also underlines the cunningness of Fanny Dashwood and the cleverness of the novel's second chapter when she writes: "Chapter 2 alone stands as a masterpiece of dramatic writing, as Austen makes Fanny Dashwood, in thirteen speeches, turn her husband through 180 degrees without his once being aware of what was happening; a perfectly engineered piece of manipulation, and a *tour de force* of dialogue" (159). Even though John does not clearly see the manipulation, he realises that he is not being fair to his father's memory and he is then torn between his desire to fulfill his father's dying wishes and his desire to please his wife. Of course, the living wins over the dead and Fanny finally convinces her husband to only do a little for the women she despises. John Dashwood is thus shown as a man who cannot defend his opinion.

Fanny Dashwood's cunning plan demonstrates the deepness of her dislike for her sisters-in-law and how she does whatever she can to keep them away from her, even if it means that their own brother lacks in civility towards them. The greatest proof of his uncivility to his sisters does not lie in his financial negligence; the moment when he neglects them the most is when he refuses to invite them to London, and invites the Steeles instead on Fanny's request: "Mr. Dashwood was convinced. He saw the necessity of inviting the Miss Steeles immediately, and his conscience was pacified by the resolution of inviting his sisters another year" (*SS* 221). Even if it would be more natural for Fanny Dashwood to be seen in the company of her sisters-in-law, she takes a liking to the low and vulgar Steeles whose company she favours. John is totally dominated by his wife who knows how to arrange every situation to her advantage.

At the beginning of the novel, when Fanny invades Norland Park after Mr. Dashwwod's death, her rudeness and the power that she has over her husband are made

clear, since this cruel invasion is probably all her doing. She never was keen on the family and they never liked her much either:

> So acutely did Mrs. Dashwood feel this ungracious behaviour, and so earnestly did she despise her daughter-in-law for it, that, on the arrival of the latter, she would have quitted the house for ever, had not the entreaty of her eldest girl induced her first to reflect on the propriety of going, and her own tender love for all her three children determined her afterwards to stay, and for their sakes to avoid a breach with their brother. (*SS* 4)

This rude arrival brings forth Fanny's bad attitude, and it is possible to suppose that John Dashwood does not want it this way. Indeed, he would probably have let them find a decent living before taking possession of his property, but Fanny's anxiety and lack of decorum make her come uninvited and unannounced. As the narrator cleverly underlines, she has every right to do so since the house is her husband's, yet she should have had the decency to announce her coming. This shows how Fanny has a strong character and that her husband cannot dissuade her and restrain her within the limits of civility.

***Pride and Prejudice* - - Mr. Bennet and Mr. Collins**

As opposed to Mr. Dashwood's relationship to his wife, Mr. Bennet is not Mrs. Bennet's little puppet, but he is nonetheless ineffective because he dislikes his wife and his three silly daughters so much that he locks himself up in his study and misses everything that is going on.[2] At first sight, Mr. Bennet seems to be a rational man who

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[2] The 1995 film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, directed by Simon Langton, made me realize how like their mother Lydia and Kitty are. In the novel, it does not seem to be that obvious, but in the movie mother and daughters are as silly and get excited over the same trifles. Elizabeth and Jane seem to take after their

makes some very interesting comments about life, yet, when considered carefully, he is a man who is lost. He is caught between life as he would like to live it, and life as his bad spousal choice has lead him to endure. Audrey Hawkridge discusses this defect of his character:

> One would have thought Mr[.] Bennet would always have been too sensible to let himself be taken in by a wool-brained martyr to self-centred vapours, however a pretty girl she may have been, but sadly he has condemned himself to spending the rest of his life smiling at his own ironic philosophizing, with only one of his five daughters completely able to understand what he is talking about. (132)

In other words, Mr. Bennet is one of those men who married for good looks, money and social standing without considering whether his choice would keep him happy for his whole life. He has made himself quite miserable, since after Elizabeth's departure he is left with two daughters who do not have enough brains to understand him, and a wife who is even more pathetic than they are. Yet, as long as his daughters remain with him, he should take better care of them and ensure their well-being, but rather he is quite negligent in his parental obligations.

Indeed, Mr. Bennet never has the inclination to save some money for his girls. Even though Mr. Dashwood's attempt to provide for his daughters proved unfruitful, he at least tried, whereas Mr. Bennet never thinks of doing it. The latter is "an intelligent man, but selfish and lazy, regarding with sardonic humour his wife's attempts to marry off their daughters, when in fact marriage is a stark necessity for them all [...] it is made

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father, whereas Mary traces the line between the youngest and oldest of the family. She possesses some sense, but is also quite ridiculous.

clear that with care and economy he could have provided for his daughters" (Gibbs 47). The truth is that Mr. Bennet is an idealist who always cherished the hope of producing a male heir who would have inherited Longbourn, but he stopped dreaming after his fifth daughter was born. By the time Lydia was born, it was too late to put aside enough money for his five daughters. He may laugh off his wife's attempts to marry them, but they need marriage badly and for once she is the parent with the most sense.

Mr. Bennet's bad habit of locking himself up in his study makes him ignore the truth about Lydia's wild behaviour. Even if Elizabeth attempts to make him understand her apprehensions about the trip to Brighton, he is not convinced: "If you were aware [...] of the very great disadvantage to us all, which must arise from the public notice of Lydia's unguarded and imprudent manner; nay, which has already arisen from it, I am sure you would judge differently in the affair" (*PP* 176). Elizabeth is right to warn her father that Lydia might become the cause of all the Bennet sisters' ruin. Fortunately, Lydia's elopement ends in a manner that does not damage the Bennet sister's reputation. Mr. Bennet claims that Lydia's exposition would not endanger her sisters, but it is possible to suppose that he does not think that she would actually elope. Rachel Brownstein qualifies him rightly as being a "lax, irresponsible father who invited disaster by allowing Lydia to follow the soldiers to Brighton" (33). Even if, as Mr. Bennet says, "We shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia does not go to Brighton" (*PP* 177), he should be more severe, especially with his wildest daughter. Offering her the opportunity to follow the soldiers is almost like condoning her flirty behaviour. Ultimately, Mr. Bennet should have listened to Elizabeth's worries and taken them more seriously.

If Mr. Daswood and Mr. Bennet are misguided in their actions, they at least do not come across as ridiculous as Mr. Collins does. Indeed, even though he is not quite a father yet, he stands out amongst the patriarch figures as the best example of the lack of personality amongst heirs and patriarchs in Austen's novel. After all, Mr. Collins is totally without conversation, and lacking in personal thinking. Anna Bryson states that "If the listener is not to be offended or embarrassed, he is also not to be bored by conversation of a tedious, personal nature" (160). Ivor Morris underlines how tedious he can be because of his lack of conversational skills:

> Amidst the social routine it is soon evident that, despite his formality of utterance, Mr Collins has little to say. His talk with his young cousins is full of pompous nothings, and he is carried away from the Philipses at Meryton unceasingly affirming indifference to his losses at whist, enumerating all the dishes at supper, and apologising for the room he is taking up in the coach. (*Mr. Collins* 9)

All Mr. Collins talks about is the dull details of trivial events, and he does not seem to be able to decide anything by himself. In fact, he overtly acknowledges that it is Lady Catherine who urged him to marry. She was probably fed up with his dull conversation and hoped that "an active, useful sort of person" (*PP* 81) would come to brighten up Mr. Collins' dull visits. The only thing that Mr. Collins does by himself is to choose the best of the Bennet sisters for a wife. In every other instance, his actions are tainted by Lady Catherine's thinking. Even the letter he writes on the occasion of Lydia's elopement is full of her personality and opinions.

Because of his lack of personal skills and independent thinking, Mr. Collins is under the obligation to be overly pleasant and compliment immoderately the people

around him. Of course, complimenting is part of the social conventions: most of the characters offer compliments to others on many occasions. Mr. Collins however goes beyond the expected amount of praise. Even Lady Catherine, who is the kind of person who likes receiving praise and compliments, is tired of hearing him: "After sitting a few minutes, they were all sent to one of the windows, to admire the view, Mr. Collins attending them to point out its beauties, and lady Catherine kindly informing them that it was much better worth looking at in the summer" (*PP* 125). In this excerpt, we see how Lady Catherine cannot suffer Mr. Collins's talking and praising. She just wants to shut him off by telling the visitors that the view is not at its best. Mr. Collins is annoying to everybody and will probably be an absent father, since he and Charlotte have trouble staying in the same room together.

***Mansfield Park* - - Mr. Price and Sir Thomas Bertram**

Fanny's father is not the most important patriarch in *Mansfield Park*. However, it is necessary to mention him in order to understand the fate of poor women in the novel. Fanny is lucky to be sent away from her family because "[h]er own father is lazy and a drunkard, utterly uninterested in the females of his family except insofar as they cater to him" (Gibbs 47). Mr. Price does not want to be disturbed by his children, especially his daughters, as he reads his paper. Daughters of large and poor families have no dowry and can only expect to marry a man as bad as their fathers and have several children as their mothers did before them. Fanny and Susan are lucky to be adopted by Sir Bertram because this enables them to escape this fate. Of course, Sir Bertram has his faults as a patriarch but he is nevertheless more caring than is Mr. Price.

The first defect of Sir Bertram's character is that he is decidedly absent from his children's lives. When he is at home, he cares for them and sees that they are not lacking

anything that they would need.[3] In spite of this, he seems to be at his plantations quite often, and he is absent for the most part of volume one. The fact is, his behaviour is quite puzzling and leaves us to wonder whether Sir Bertram cares for his plantations more than he does for his family. Of course, his conduct is understandable since these plantations are his sole source of income. His son's irresponsible expenses force him to ensure that his plantations are working for the well-being of his family. Yet, this situation forces him to be absent from home for about one third of the novel.

Maria's engagement to Mr. Rushworth is a situation where Sir Bertram proves himself quite deficient as a patriarch. At first, he hears of the pending engagement by letter. He decides to give a conditional approval of it since he knows the young man's reputation, and he decides that he will give his approval once he has an opportunity to see the couple together. When he does, he is not sure if it is really a good match, but he gives his consent because both his pride and his greed are flattered by such an alliance: "It was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain" (*MP* 181). However, other fathers would have looked deeper than Maria's lying about her partiality to the young man. For example, Mr. Bennet asked Elizabeth about her engagement with Darcy. He wonders why she would accept a man that she claimed she hated. Sir Bertram is aware that his daughter is cold to Mr. Rushworth since the narrator says that : "Little observation there was necessary to tell him that indifference was the most favourable state they could be in" (*MP* 180). Knowing his daughter, he knows that she is cold to Rushworth, still he accepts the match because the Rushworths are a valuable alliance.

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[3] Except for Fanny Price. However, since Fanny is too shy to ask him anything because he does so much for her already, he cannot possibly know that she is missing something until he is either told by Edmund or confronted to the situation himself. When he finally takes notice, he takes action.

Even though Sir Thomas has been quite neglectful of his family in the first part of the novel, he tries to make amends in the months that follow. However, his kindness is mostly directed towards Fanny since Maria as Mrs. Rushworth is no longer under his care, and Julia leaves to be in town with her sister. He thinks that it is time for Fanny to "come out," so he organises a ball at Mansfield Park in her honour: "Miss Price, known only by name to half the people invited, was now to make her first appearance, and must be regarded as the Queen of the evening" (*MP* 241). This ball not only brings Fanny "out," it also triggers Henry Crawford's feelings for her, and ultimately his marriage proposal.

When Sir Bertram comes to discuss Fanny's obstinate rejection of Crawford, he acknowledges that her room has no fire and he makes sure that she always has one in the future. This good deed leaves critics quite ambivalent. Devlin thinks that it makes him good: "The trivial affair of the fire shows that Sir Thomas can be thoughtful and kind," but he also adds that it is wrong since it makes Fanny feel ungrateful for being reticent to her uncle's wish to marry her to Crawford (104). It is true that he seems thoughtful on that particular occasion, because from that moment on she has a fire waiting for her when she enters her room. But, on the other hand, this scene underscores his overlooking her well-being until then. It is only at this moment that the reader fully understands Sir Bertram's character. He is a very generous patriarch, but he is not proactive and cannot see that people are in need of anything until the truth jumps out at him. It is why other critics have claimed that "he is often simultaneously a benefactor whom [Fanny] loves and a monster that she fears" (Simpson 28).[4] She is afraid to ask him for anything and in

[4] Speck even mentions that Sir Bertram rules over his household like a despot who inspires fear instead of love (162).

return he does not see that she needs something before someone, or a situation, makes the truth plain to him. Therefore we can conclude that it is because of his neglect and his difficulty to recognize his daughters' needs that they turned out badly.

In the third part of the book, he starts to see his failings as a father and has consideration for Fanny's comfort. It is why she turns out beautifully. Fanny has learned from Sir Bertram that she needs to be content with what she has, and to be grateful if she receives more. On the contrary, Maria and Julia turn out to be two spoilt children who are never happy with what they have and who have no respect for anything or anybody. Fanny's difficult upbringing and Sir Bertram's occasional presents make her realise how lucky she is, and thus make her be happy with her situation in life. Even if Sir Bertram has trouble understanding her kind of respect and tries to force her to marry Henry Crawford, we cannot blame him for it because he has not yet seen through the young man's disguise. As a result, he thinks Crawford would be a perfect prospect for Fanny. He can also be forgiven for sending Fanny back to Portsmouth since it is the contrast between her hometown and Mansfield Park that finally makes her see how comfortable a place Mansfield is. It also teaches her all the gratefulness and respect she owes to its patriarch.

***Emma* - - Mr. Woodhouse**

If Fanny has an active father figure in Sir Thomas, Emma certainly has a suffocating one in Mr. Woodhouse. Indeed, he is certainly the patriarch whose presence is most disturbing to Emma and the people of Highbury. He figures as a patriarch for the whole community since he is the one whom the characters ask for advice, and sometimes even permission, before they decide upon a course of action. In fact, because of his age, he is the figure of wisdom in the community. Ted Bader writes about him that

"Those who care for the elderly will recognize many common characteristics of aging" (3). Indeed, he is afraid of dances in draughty inns and of going out of the house for fear of catching a cold. But mostly he is afraid of changes and evolution, especially if they impact on his way of life. Moreover, the marriage of his younger child is a catastrophe because she is the last person who cares for him. If she leaves, he will be left quite alone since he does not pay any visits to people in the neighbourhood. These people would stop visiting him since their visits would never be returned. While Emma lives at her father's, he never lacks in visitors since she returns the visits for him. But if she left, he would be alone and quite desolate.

Idleness made Mr. Woodhouse become old before his time. Most upper class people never worked, but they occupied their time otherwise, by taking care of their investments, hunting or visiting friends. For instance, Mr. Knightley does not hesitate to help his tenant farmer. Mr. Woodhouse remained idle and he always had his health and that of others as his sole occupation. He takes great pain to inquire about diseases and their treatments from Dr. Perry. Needless to say, even Dr. Perry sometimes thinks that Mr. Woodhouse is going a tad overboard in his concerns. This makes Mr. Woodhouse a laughable character. In fact, Mr. Woodhouse lives in a bubble:

> [Mr. Woodhouse] has never been forced to be active or useful and his life, though he is basically a kind man, has been marked by his increasingly sterile preoccupation with protecting his health. Cut off from all but the most minimal contact with others, basing all his ideas on his own preferences and sensations, Mr. Woodhouse lives in a world that bears little resemblance to ordinary reality. (Nardin "leisure" 136)

Indeed, Mr. Woodhouse has created for himself a world that does not exist, where nothing ever happens or changes. This world is a boring and dull place where people cannot get married and where he is the sole centre of attention. Even though his care for other people's health makes him considered to be generous and kind by the people of Highbury, he remains an egocentric being who only cares for others when his own well-being is granted.

As I mentioned before, Mr. Woodhouse is suffocating to the people of the little town, but he is especially so toward his daughter, and he almost prevents her from marrying. It is quite ironic for a man who wants to preserve his health and that of others to try to block all that is positive in life. John Wiltshire acknowledges that his "depressive fussiness inhibits and shuts down opportunities and possibilities of life" (71). This questions the value of his quest for the preservation of everybody's health. Young people like Emma or Mr. Knightley do not want to be preserved from illnesses by being cooped up inside their homes inquiring about the lives of visitors. They want to be the visitors, to walk outside and even become parents themselves. But in order to do that, they have to convince the old fussy man that their union would be a good idea. Remaining at Hartfield is the only way to convince him. It is why Emma is happy to have found a partner in Mr. Knightley. "Such a companion for herself in the periods of anxiety and cheerlessness before her! — Such a partner for all those duties and cares to which time must be giving increase of melancholy!" (*E* 408). Besides, Mr. Knightley is probably the only man who would accept to leave a beloved home in order to care for his wife's hypocondriac father. Indeed, no other man than Mr. Knightley could endure this situation. Gibbs underlines this in her essay about absent fathers:

> [Mr. Woodhouse] is in fact a stupid, selfish hypocondriac for whom Emma has had to double in the roles of wife and mother. His timidity and dislike of change have isolated him and everyone close to him in a kind of time-warp in which nothing ever happens, with the result that Emma's horizons are pathetically limited, both physically and socially. (48)

Class-wise, she can only marry Mr. Knightley because she is not able to have any other man. If she could have visited London or Bath, she could have met with many eligible candidates, but her horizons are narrowed through her father's worries. Her hopes are limited, so her marriage to Mr. Knightley is a blessing for her. In him, she found a man of her own social class who would be patient enough to live with her father because she cannot bring herself to leave him.

***Northanger Abbey* - - Colonel Tilney**

Colonel Tilney, similarly to Sir Bertram and Mr. Woodhouse, is the kind of patriarch who suffocates his children, as Catherine herself remarks. And if Catherine, who is not a very shrewd observer of life and who knows so very little, is able to see the difference in her friends when Colonel Tilney is in the room, the change is therefore quite obvious. However, conduct books underline the behaviour that children should have around the master of the house: "Children could indulge their playful fancies among themselves, but in the presence of their parents and elders it was expected that they should observe strict rules of decorum" (Wildeblood 211). At the beginning of her stay, Catherine learns that punctuality to every meal is expected. She always dreads the general's presence and wonders why he has to accompany them on their walk in the garden. "[She] had hoped to explore it accompanied only by his daughter" (*NA* 153) but she goes nonetheless because she is too afraid to displease the general by refusing him

anything. The climate of their walk is not the same with Colonel Tilney: he keeps on boasting about all the attractions of his house to the young woman, whereas her walks with his children alone are more pleasant and full of interesting conversations and discoveries. It is hard to blame Catherine for imagining atrocities about the General. He presents himself as someone whose upright and strict behaviour could hide some dark evil doings.

Henry never blames Catherine for what she imagines about his father because he is well aware that the latter could seem to be like a maniac to people who do not quite know him.[5] After the lecture he offers her on the improbability of his father being like a Gothic villain,[6] "[he] makes no real attempt to defend his father's character; he does not claim that his father is a good man who would not wish to commit murder under any circumstances" (Nardin, *Decorums* 77). The fact that Henry does not make any excuses for his father's behaviour demonstrates his knowledge of his father's unconventionality. Colonel Tilney is not the Gothic villain that Catherine has imagined, yet his neglect of manners almost endangers her physically and morally. Patricia Meyer Spacks underlines this aspect of his personality when she writes that General Tilney supports the gospel of self interest (171-2). It makes him act like a monster because he endangers others by his lack of care for them.

At the beginning of her visit to Northanger Abbey, the General's behaviour is almost a threat to Catherine's reputation. Indeed, on their departure for the Abbey, he

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[5] For a more thorough discussion of Henry's gentlemanlike behaviour to Catherine when he discovers what kind of ideas she has invented concerning his father, see the part on Henry Tilney in Chapter One (page 20).

[6] The Gothic villain is able to do anything in order to prevent something disagreeable to him from happening. A good example of a Gothic villain parent is Lorenzo's mother in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*. She is ready to lock up Elena in an Abbey or even to send someone to kill her in order to prevent her marriage to her son. Colonel Tilney proves not to be so different from this when he sends Catherine off alone and tries to prevent Henry from seeing her again.

has her ride alone with his son in the carriage, something that Catherine has learned to be improper.[7] "The sexy General is commanding, and when he instructs Catherine to ride in Henry's open curricle she agrees, even though she has already learned — and managed to get Mr. Allen to acknowledge — that it is improper for a young lady to ride alone with a gentleman in an open carriage" (Brownstein 39). Rachel Brownstein also argues that the General is attracted to Catherine, and that Catherine is also attracted to the General, and that her imaginings are a way of denying her feelings. It is true that she cannot resist his wishes and that she is keen on pleasing him, but the truth is that she wants to please the son through the father by proving that she was well brought up and able to show proper respect to adults. She desires to have Henry like her and is willing to do anything for that, even to disregard a convention about rides in carriages.

At the end of the novel, the General lacks consideration for Catherine by sending her home without money and without an escort. Even modern readers can understand how dangerous it was for a woman to travel alone. Her lack of companionship makes her vulnerable and easy prey for thieves and other villains. Catherine has trouble understanding why the General treats her this way: "And all this by such a man as General Tilney, so polite, so well-bred, and heretofore so particularly fond of her!" (*NA* 197). But he was more fond of her imaginary fortune than he was of her. Brownstein qualifies his behaviour as: "Insensitive, inhospitable, and selfish, obsessed with marrying his children for money, he is a villain of 'common life,' not romance" (40). Therefore it is possible to conclude that General Tilney really is a villain, someone who lets his greed, instead of his common sense, rule his behaviour.

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[7] For a more thorough discussion of this, see the section on John Thorpe in Chapter Two (page 39).

***Persuasion* - - Sir Walter Elliot**

Sir Walter Elliott is another character who lets his greed dominate his common sense. What is most striking about Sir Walter's personality is his pride and vanity, even though he really has nothing about which to be proud or conceited. The narrator states that "vanity [is] the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and situation" (*P* 6). He is a real baronet, but his title is only one in name since he lost all his fortune and almost lost his domain, Kellynch Hall. In order to live decently and to hire some high-average rooms in Bath he needs to rent out the property. Therefore he is a baronet without a baronetage. Considering how he lost the power of his estate, it becomes clear that Sir Walter is a very negligent man. Indeed, he let his wife take care of his budget. "While Lady Elliot lived, there had been method, moderation, and economy, which had just kept him within his income; but with her had died all such right mindedness, and from that period he had been constantly exceeding it" (*P* 10). Lady Elliot held the property together, but after her death her husband's vanity and useless expenses ruined the efforts she made to remain within the limits of their budget. It is strange for the time that a woman holds such a powerful place within the financial situation of the household; but, Sir Elliot is really unable to take care of his own finances. His eccentricities brought about the ruin of his estate and name. He has nothing left, but an almost worthless title.

Sir Walter lives in his own world of vanity and forgets to consider the people who are below him in rank and money. He offers no pity whatsoever for the poor or the afflicted. Juliet McMaster writes that "Sir Walter is enraptured by the prestige of his position, but neglects the responsibilities" (119). Indeed, Sir Walter would really need a lesson in humility similar to the one Mr. Knightley gave Emma after the Box Hill

episode. He ridicules the poor and forgets the respect that his position should inspire him to have towards those more unfortunate. In his conversation with Anne when she refuses to attend a meeting with his other greedy and snobbish friends, he proves the shallowness of his character:

> "Westgate-buildings!" said he; "and who is Miss Anne Elliot to be visiting in Westgate-buildings?—A Mrs. Smith. A widow Mrs. Smith,—and who was her husband? One of the five thousand Mr. Smiths whose names are to be met with everywhere. And what is her attraction? That she is old and sickly.—Upon my word, Miss Anne Elliot, you have the most extraordinary taste! Everything that revolts other people, low company, paltry rooms, fouls air, disgusting associations are inviting to you." (*P* 140)

This passage underscores Sir Elliot's lack of compassion. He should actually be happy that his daughter behaves like a baronet's daughter; in contrast, he does not deserve his rank since he does not uphold the social responsibilities that come with such a title.

Anne Elliot is the most unhappy of Jane Austen's heroines and she owes her unhappiness to her father. In chapter four, the narrator provides a detailed description of what happened eight years before. Sir Walter's pride and greed made him prevent Anne from marrying the man she loved because the latter had no money. Anne agreed to break off her engagement, which consequently broke her heart and made her lose her beauty because of her sadness and bitterness. Even eight years later she is still suffering from this. She is also hurt because her father and sister snub her, as Oliver MacDonagh notes: "In so far as Anne Elliot was unhappy (or melancholy or sad, as one may choose), her family was principally the cause. She was unvalued and carelessly degraded by both her father and elder sister" (98). As the previous quotation indicates, Sir Elliot does not

agree with anything Anne does because he thinks that her actions are degrading. Obviously, Elizabeth Elliot takes after her father and also considers her sister to be strange, and she believes that she forms associations with people who are beneath her. Both of them would like her to marry Mr. Elliot, the family's heir. However, she finds that he is no different from her family.[8] Anne is determined not to let her family ruin her happiness again so she turns down Elliot and chooses Wentworth no matter what her family thinks. Needless to say, the fact that he has money greatly helps him to win over Sir Walter.

Jane Austen portrays her patriarchs as silly, greedy, contemptuous men. They are not good examples for the heroines to follow, and in fact offer by contrast, a vivid picture of patriarchal society at the turn of the century. Austen's patriarchs are often absent from the lives of the heroines and they are ineffectual. Whether they shut themselves up in their study or have a silly obsession with their health, they do not know what is good for their children. In fact, most of the heroines need to find their own way in life and to shut off their fathers' ways of thinking in order to finally be happy. The patriarch is also thoroughly ridiculed by the narrator who often presents him as even worse than he actually is. Overall, there is no positive father figure in Austen's writing. Austen thus comments quite negatively on the system in place during the Romantic period. She ultimately argues for a change, or at least a recommendation of the values of the patriarchal system based on primogeniture.

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[8] See discussion of Mr. Elliot in Chapter 2 (page 42).

Chapter Four

Harlequin Romances and Jane Austen

"I am read & admired in Ireland too." (*Letters* 368)

Over the last two decades, many critics have underlined the link between Austen's novels and Harlequin romances. Deborah Kaplan goes so far as to state that modern film adaptations of Austen's novels tend to be a "Harlequinization" (178) of her writing. Austen is an inspiration to Harlequin novelists even if their fiction is not on the same literary scale as her work. After explaining that Silhouette publishes a "tip sheet" for writing romances, which says that the heroes must be a cross between Heathcliff and Mr. Darcy, Kaplan writes: "The tip sheet thus makes explicit that Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the models for the late twentieth-century's Mass-Market romance" (177). Using a collection entitled Harlequin Historical, a series whose books encapsulate a faint attempt to recreate past times and past customs, this chapter illustrates the similarities and differences between the male characters found in Austen and those in Harlequin books. The latter features headstrong women (who are much more daring than their society allowed) moving in a circle of men who resemble the anti-heroes and failed patriarchs of Jane Austen's world. Interestingly enough, there is no gentleman comparable to Austen's in Harlequin novels since the heroes of these novels do not encompass the qualities she thought important in the heroes of her stories: respect towards women, no gambling, and no sexual promiscuity. Still, compared to the anti-hero, even those failed men would pass for gentlemen. Therefore, I believe that the strongest failure of Harlequin Historical is to try to ascribe to gentlemen from the past,

qualities that are undeniably modern, no matter how unacceptable they were for the time when the action takes place.

The Devil Earl

Deborah Simmons, the author of this novel, once said in interview that the period that interests her the most is the Regency Period: "I just love the clothes and the manners and the great houses of the era" (anon, n. pag.). *The Devil Earl* takes place in 1818 in Cornwall, England. Prudence Lancaster is a writer of gothic novels and uses for her inspiration a mysterious dark house neighbouring her little cottage: Wolfinger Abbey. The mysterious place's name obviously connotes Northanger Abbey, and the three first chapters bring forth a great resemblance between Prudence and Austen's Catherine. Prudence imagines all kinds of atrocities happening at the abbey, like rape and murder. She is very eager to go visit it and see what the mysterious place hides. Even if this is where the resemblance between the two novels ends, Deborah Simmons admits on her official website that the resemblance is purposeful: "Her own title, *The Devil Earl*, pays homage to Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* as well as all those beloved gothics of her youth" (anon, n. pag.).

The action of the novel begins on a stormy night. James Penhurst, the Earl's brother disappeared in mysterious circumstances after a fight with his brother. Sebastian Penhurst believes that Prudence and her sister Phoebe might be hiding the gentleman. Unfortunately, it is not so and the Devil Earl acquires the reputation of a murderer because of the uncanny way his younger brother disappeared. Prudence never believed that gossip. However, she used Sebastian and his house as inspiration to write her next Gothic novel, *Bastian of Bloodmoor*, which tarnished his reputation even more because Prudence might have been a bit too excessive in her borrowing. In a desire to clear the

damage she did to Sebastian's reputation, she started appearing in public with him to show that he is not as bad as he seems. He finally invites her to Wolfinger because she argues that if she is there, she could find how James disappeared, and she did. He was kidnapped by smugglers who dealt on the shore of the abbey. Then, her cousin Hugh Lancaster appears and explains to Prudence that her sister eloped with Mr. Darlington, one of her London admirers. Sebastian starts looking for Phoebe with Prudence and they finally find her married to James. He saved her from Darlington, who had no intention of marrying her and who was about to rape her. Since the two had fallen in love at the beginning of the novel, they married, and Sebastian and Prudence also marry right after Sebastian and his brother help the authorities to arrest the smugglers.[1]

Sebastian Penhurst, Earl of Ravenscar, nicknamed the Devil Earl by the population, is a Gothic monster similar to those Prudence Lancaster likes to imagine. He has the appearance and reputation of the Devil incarnated. He is said to have committed two murders, the murder of his uncle in a duel and that of his brother, who he supposedly pushed off the cliff beside the abbey. The rumours also claim that he is a ravisher of women and enjoys tarnishing their reputation. Even though he "[finds] a kind of perverse enjoyment in his own wicked reputation" (Simmons 50), most of these allegations are unfounded. His uncle taught him to seduce women, not to rape them. Therefore, his real sins are as bad as those of Wickham or Willoughby. He enjoys women who are stupid enough to give themselves to him. In *Pride and Prejudice* it is

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[1] In her book entitled *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, Janice A. Radway explains that physical strength in a hero is his most essential quality. He must be able to defend the heroine no matter what the situation (81). In the three Harlequin Historicals discussed in this chapter, the hero is effectively very strong and saves the heroine. Prudence in *The Devil Earl* is saved by Sebastian from the invasion of the Abbey by the smugglers. His brother also saves the virtue of Phoebe. Elizabeth in *Fool's Paradise* is safe from Sir Robert's abuse because of Tarleton's intervention. In *The Pearl Stallion*, Dina escapes rape because of Captain Saurage's intervention.

made clear that Lydia followed Wickham and did not mind losing her virtue to him even if he had made no promise of marriage whatsoever. "Though Lydia's short letter to Mrs. F. gave them to understand that they were going to Gretna Green, something was dropped by Denny expressing his belief that W. never intended to go there, or to marry Lydia at all" (*PP* 207). Unlike Wickham, Sebastian takes women who know what they might be losing to him. However, like Henry Crawford who corrupted the supposedly virtuous Maria Rushworth, he admits to having corrupted a few bored wives. It is implied in *Mansfield Park* that Maria is undeniably bored with her husband, and it is probably the reason why she left him for Crawford. Sebastian's sins are the same as Austen's anti-heroes. However, in Harlequin, these sins are forgivable because in today's society they are.

Even though he is apparently not very virtuous and seems to be the perfect Gothic villain, Sebastian turns out to be very different from his reputation.[2] On her part, Prudence is not the equal to her name, however. She lets Sebastian kiss her passionately, she rides with him in his coach with the curtains down, and she goes to the abbey even if she knows what is going to happen there. He hires very few employees because "all employees carried tales" (Simmons 200) and he wants to be able to have his way with Prudence without too many people knowing. Indeed, servants always liked to tell juicy gossip concerning their masters. Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* sums up this idea well: "was there a servant belonging to [the house], who did not know the whole story before the end of the day?" (*PP* 221). Very often, the servants of the house are witnesses of personal things, which is a situation that renders the masters of the house

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[2] Similarly to Prudence, it is only Elizabeth Bennet's proximity to Darcy that opened her to his real personality.

uncomfortable. Sebastian intends to sleep with Prudence and having only two servants in the house helps him keep it secret. Strangely, after sleeping with Prudence, Sebastian is no longer the brute that he used to be. He realises that he has fallen in love with her because she makes him feel alive. He no longer wishes to tarnish her reputation, but to preserve it. He is nice to her and lets her visit the abbey, her life-long dream. He is also a great help when her sister elopes. The Devil Earl no longer lives up to his reputation. Just as in a Austen novel, the heroine teaches the hero a lesson and he is only the better for it.

James Penhurst, even though he has the default of accumulating gambling debts, acts in a gentlemanly manner towards Phoebe Lancaster. In fact, he is the only one of all Harlequin men who really acts as an Austen gentleman should. Mr. Darlington, this novel's anti-hero, lies to Phoebe about being a lord with an estate and pledges his eternal love to her, enticing her to elope with him. The truth about Mr. Darlington is what Hugh discovered when he talked to some of Darlington's acquaintances: "when I cornered one of his closest acquaintances, I was told that Mr. Darlington possessed no property. It was all a sham!" (Simmons 227). So, it seems as though Mr. Darlington planned ahead in order to abuse Phoebe. At first, during their journey, he tries to look like a gentleman and hires two rooms for them, but then he wants to enjoy her because she cost him too much already. He relegates her to the rank of a vulgar prostitute. James saves her from Darlington: he is almost beating her up in an effort to get her into the room. At that moment, he does not know that it is Phoebe. He is only a real gentleman who is willing to save the reputation of a damsel in distress. He is quite chivalric and proves himself to be quite the opposite of his brother. Instead of ravishing young women, he saves them. He is therefore comparable to Mr. Darcy or Colonel Brandon who fought to save

Lydia's and Eliza's reputation.[3] He is also very careful not to leave the young woman he has saved in more trouble than she already is:

> To Phoebe's shock, her rescuer then knelt down and searched the unconscious man's pockets, removing what little money he had. Just as she was about to squeal in fright at the theft, the pirate stretched an arm toward her. For a long moment, she simply stared at his upraised palm, which was golden and callused, before realizing that he was offering her Darlington's coin. (Simmons 236)

James acts as a gentleman; he saves the lady who is abused by a worthless man and he gives her the means to escape by giving her a bit of money. James knows Darlington well because the latter is a smuggler affiliated to a hoard of pirates who are responsible for James' disappearance. Even though Darlington appears to be the perfect gentleman in London, he is not so. He lies wickedly and betrays a naïve innocent woman. Fortunately, James was there to rescue and marry her.

Hugh Lancaster, the girls' cousin who was supposed to take care of them during their stay in London, proves himself worthless of the trust that is bestowed on him. Indeed, when Prudence writes letters to him from Cornwall, he seems to be a very respectable and respectful person. However, when they arrive in London, reality is otherwise. He is an utterly boring man and he tries to dominate the sisters instead of being their guide to London. Prudence is not able to stand this because she is used to living in her own cottage with her sister and to have things her own way. "While you are in London, I feel responsible for you. You are, after all, staying with me, and as your nearest male relation, it is my task to protect you from the more unsavoury characters" (Simmons 78). But this protection is ineffective. When Phoebe runs away, it is his fault

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[3] See Colonel Brandon and Mr. Darcy in Chapter 1 (pages 7-8).

because he sends her into a family where he thought that she would be well taken care of, but she leaves, leaving a silly, little note, much as Lydia has done in *Pride and Prejudice*. When he goes to Wolfinger and sees the state of debauchery in which Prudence has fallen with Sebastian, he proposes to marry her: "That is, dash it all, I am willing to accept soiled goods, Prudence, just to get you out of the clutches of that fiend and restore you to respectable society" (Simmons 229). However, Prudence will not become Hugh's plaything. He wants a submissive wife whereas Prudence is used to getting her own way, and she will not accept such a proposal. She would rather be Sebastian's "soiled goods" than Hugh's plaything.

The other patriarch in *The Devil Earl* is Sebastian's uncle, his surrogate father. However, the uncle has nothing in common with an Austen patriarch because his teaching is not what a respectable patriarch would teach his offspring. He taught Sebastian to gamble and seduce women: "My uncle was no role model for a young boy. [...] When my father died, he snatched me out of the fields of Yorkshire and tossed me into the depths of London's world of vice" (Simmons 132-3). Then, he explains how he was initiated into gambling and brothels. His uncle was not a good role model but as a young child, Sebastian had no idea that what his uncle was doing was bad. Moreover, it is his uncle who entirely destroyed his reputation. Feeling himself dying of the pox, he fought a duel with Sebastian who killed him. He would have died one way or the other, only he chose the way that would destroy Sebastian's reputation: "He did not give a damn what would happen of me afterward. It probably suited his warped sense of humour to imagine his heir hanging for murder" (Simmons 134). The Earl did not mind what would happen to Sebastian as long as he would not die of the pox. Despite his

being discharged for the crime, Sebastian is left with those horrible memories for the rest of his life.

Fool's Paradise

This novel tells the story of Lady Elizabeth Hayward, Queen Elizabeth's goddaughter. Her father betroths her to Lord Robert La Faye, a violent man whom she despises. On the day after their betrothal party, Lord Hayward is supposed to break off their engagement because Lady Elizabeth could not bear to marry Lord Robert. However, Lord Hayward is poisoned with some mushrooms offered to him by Lord Robert. Then, he tries to force Lady Elizabeth to marry him, and when she refuses, he slaps her across the face and locks her up in her chamber. She is able to escape from her room and run away, putting herself in the care of Richard Tarleton, the queen's fool. Tarleton disguises her as a boy and is able to get her out of many dangers, including a meeting with Sir Robert. However, they fall in love and Tarleton makes up a scheme to be with her. He is one of the court spies and knows that Lord Robert is involved in some illegal business. Therefore, he has to disappear in order to make Lord Robert believe that he is rid of him and can marry Lady Elizabeth. Tarleton gets convicted for treason and is hung, but they pull him down before he is dead. That night, Lord Robert marries Lady Elizabeth, but he is arrested right after and convicted for the murder of Lord Hayward and for treason to the Queen. From then on, Lady Elizabeth and Tarleton live in a little cottage, very happily with their children.

Tarleton is the hero of this novel. Like Robert Martin in *Emma*, Tarleton is a gentleman in action, not in title. He is a poor beggar but he has good morals.[4] When he

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[4] Margaret Ann Jensen writes that Barbara Cartland, a famous Romance writer of the 80's, always wrote her novels within the same pattern that seems to be the standard for Harlequin Romances: "Her books are

first meets Lady Elizabeth Hayward, she is helpless and needs assistance badly because her horse is tired and she is far from Hampton Court, the Queen's residence. He makes her tell her story of how Lord Robert hit her and locked her up. Tarleton believes this behaviour to be unforgivable. He says to Lady Elizabeth: "Forgive my boldness, Lady Elizabeth, but methinks Sir Robert La Faye is in desperate need of a sound horsewhipping" (Phillips 18). As a result, he decides to impose himself as her protector. Throughout the journey, Lady Elizabeth sees that Tarleton has better morals than she thought it possible for a man of his class to have. In fact, he only sleeps with women who beg him to have sex with them, he does not seduce them in any way. Even though he is not abusing them, Lady Elizabeth is quite shocked by his behaviour and by the number of women who would be willing to have him. She always questions him as to why women would do this, to which he replies: "For money, mostly. And perhaps for a bit of pleasure, as well" (Phillips 56). This behaviour is far from the upright behaviour of gentlemen such as Mr. Darcy or Mr. Knightley, but he still saves Lady Elizabeth from trouble, just as a gentleman should. As for his lack of moral value, I conclude that it is possible to excuse him with the argument that this novel is a Harlequin Romance, in which we find heroes who are not so virtuous, but who are changed by the contact with the heroine.

Lord Robert, the anti-hero of this tale, is known to be debauched but this is not his worst crime. He is betraying the queen by plotting with the Scots, he is responsible for the death of Lord Hayward, and he is violent towards Lady Elizabeth. At the

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melodramatic plays in which the virginal heroine defends her honour from the lecherous rake long enough to be rescued by the sexually-experienced-but-pure-in-spirit hero" (60). Even though the three Harlequin heroes discussed in this chapter are sexually experienced, they are still pure and care for a virgin who wants to remain one.

beginning of the novel, Lady Elizabeth's rendering of the conditions in which she left her father's house proves that Lord Robert is undeniably violent. When he finally finds her singing with Tarleton in Oxford, he almost murderers her. Before plunging his sword into her elbow, aiming her heart, he says: "If I can't have you, my pet, no one else will, I swear!" (Phillips 241). He intends to kill her because she will not be his possession. What he wants from Lady Elizabeth is similar to fortune hunters such as Austen's Mr. Elliot or Willoughby: he wants the money he could get through marrying a rich woman. Lord Robert wants the estates Elizabeth inherited from the death of her father, because selling them would enable him to clear his gambling debts. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Wickham elopes with Lydia in order to pay for such debts: "His debts are to be paid, amounting, I believe, to considerably more than ten thousand pounds," (*PP* 246). All anti-heroes are after the heroines for their money or the prestige that the heroines could bring them. Another reason why Lord Robert wants to use this money is to mount a rebellion against the queen and place Mary Queen of Scots on the throne. Fortunately, Tarleton found out about his scheme before it was too late and Lord Robert received his just reward: he is hung at the end of the novel. Lord Robert is only a gentleman in title. His behaviour, which is not gentlemanly, shows him to be a villain.

The patriarch is definitely absent from the story because he was murdered, however, from what we know of him, he seems to have been a very serious father who had his child's well-being at heart: "Though Sir Robert was all smiles, I did not like him much. I told my father of my dislike after the betrothal feast. My father who was kind and loving, said he would break off the match. But before he could do so, he … he was gone" (Phillips 17). Lord Hayward is like Mr. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* who would not let his daughter marry a man that she did not like. Mr. Bennet knows that a whole

life without love or respect for one's partner is very long and dull. He wants Elizabeth Bennet to marry well and to her taste, just as Lord Hayward wants his own Elizabeth to marry well. Of course, an alliance with Lord Robert would have flattered his ego, just as the marriage between Mr. Rushworth and Maria Bertram flattered Sir Bertram in *Mansfield Park*. However, Lord Hayward does not let his ego predominate over the well-being of his daughter. He would break off the engagement, but he dies before he is able to do it. It is impossible to blame Lord Hayward for dying even though he was gullible in accepting the mushrooms that Lord Robert offered him, "an interesting gift" (Phillips 17) as Tarleton puts it. However, Lord Robert is so powerful that it is possible to wonder if Lord Hayward would have been able to break off the engagement even if he would have survived the poisonous present. It seems to be standard for romance fathers to want their daughter to marry a man they do not care for, just as it is the case for the heroine of the next novel.

The Pearl Stallion

Lady Endine Wilmount, Dina, is an orphan in the care of her uncle, Mr. Mason. After trying to marry her off in three London seasons, he brings her to India in a final attempt. The problem with Lady Endine is that she hates men. But she is not alone since most of the romance heroines share this characteristic. As Jensen notes: "[Romances] use generalized gender antagonism (he is suspicious of all women; she hates all men) as an obstacle between the two main protagonists" (77). At her first outing, she becomes infatuated with a ship captain of low repute whereas her uncle wants her to marry Freemantle, a friend of his. The day her uncle plans to be the engagement day, she runs off to hide as a stowaway on The Pearl Stallion, Captain Saurage's ship. She thinks that he will take care of her and help her since he warned her that her uncle and Freemantle

were doing illegal trading in Calcutta's port. She knows that the Captain will not marry her, but she hides herself on the boat because she thinks it will be a safe way to get to London. However, the Captain's voyage is planned for Russian America and the Sandwich Islands, so he keeps her aboard for the whole voyage. She proves herself useful in many instances, especially when the navigator makes navigational mistakes with the sextant, as a result of which they would have smashed on the shore's rocks. When they come back to India after their trip, her reputation is ruined but Freemantle is still willing to marry her, even though she spent a whole year on the ship. But she does not want him and a fight ensues, in which she has three ribs broken because Freemantle kicks her with his big boots. Captain Saurage comes to rescue her and they get married aboard the ship, just before embarking on their next journey to America.

Mr. Mason, the heroine's uncle, figures as her father since her real one is deceased. He is not a good patriarch because he has many unforgivable defaults. First, he wants to force Dina to marry even though she is afraid of men and does not want to marry at all. It is the desire of every patriarch to marry off his daughters; however, no Austen father would have forced the hand of his daughter. Mr. Mason's real breach in behaviour is the illegal trading he does with Freemantle. It is because of it that his life falls apart. He says he went to India in the hope to marry off his two nieces, but the truth is that he wants to do illegal trading with Freemantle who is in charge of the shipyard. At the beginning of the novel, there are many strange conversations about Captain Saurage and what he knows of their trading between the two men. Finally, the full implication of the conversations is clear when Saurage warns Dina of the trouble ahead:

> I wish to warn you Lady Endine. Get out of your uncle's house. Find a man to marry and leave this house, and warn your cousin that she should do likewise.

> […] Your uncle, together with the superintendent of the shipyard […] will be involved in a scandal. (Muir 41)

While Saurage and Dina are gone on their journey, other people learn about the illegal trading that went on in the shipyard, and Mason and Freemantle have to kill a man and hide him under the banyan tree—an action that drives Mrs. Mason crazy. Rendering his wife neurotic and killing people who learn about his illegal business is not the conduct of a respectable man. He adopts his two nieces who were in need and tries to find them proper husbands, but he hides something truly despicable under his spotless image.

Lord Wilmont, Dina's father was also a murderer: he killed his wife. While on the ship, Dina had nightmares. She saw the Captain bending over her with a cane, about to strike her. Then, in one of her nightmares everything becomes clear. "*The corridor was cold, and the stone floor beneath her feet uneven. She should not be there.* […] *The scream was thin, riding to a peak, then cut off. She stood paralyzed.* […] *Dina clasped her hands tightly over her mouth, watched the fair body writhe under the blows of the heavy cane, and listened to her mother's screams*" (Muir 246; original emphasis). Dina knows what her father did to her mother. He pretended that she fell down the stairs but the truth was that he beat her to death before throwing her down the stairs. Dina's father grew tired of her mother and killed her in order to get rid of her. Whereas Austen depicts some very normal characters, the heroines in Harlequin Romances are involved with psychopaths or very bad men.

From what is known of Saurage's father, he is not any better than those other patriarchs. He does not kill anyone but he abuses women badly. The best example that Saurage gives as he speaks of his father's sins is how he abused his wife, Saurage's mother. He had impregnated his chambermaid and married her to legitimize the child

because his heir issued of a prior marriage seemed to be dying. Unfortunately, his first son recovered and the father left the maid with her two children: Saurage and his sister. His father was a very selfish man, like most of Austen's patriarchs. He cared not for the well being of these children, nor of his second wife. He left them without any money and Saurage and his sister were the laughing stock of London society. Even if they were the children of a Lord, they could not pass as such because of their low income and the origins of their mother, who was probably Indian. In the Harlequin world, authors underscore the selfishness of the characters to an extreme and create some very neurotic and unbalanced children such as Captain Saurage. However, he is the gentleman of that story, and he deserves his title.

Because of his father's behaviour, Saurage decided that he would not behave like him. At the beginning of the novel, Dina does not know the ways of India, and she flirts shamelessly with Saurage, which only leads to trouble. In India, meetings are arranged between men and women to have sex, and the women become a sort of prostitute, as they are passed between men until they become pregnant.[5] Then, the men find the pregnant woman a husband. Dina flirts with the Captain hoping for a wedding proposal, but instead she is given to him as a treat. She is frightened even if he does not touch her when he finds that she had no such designs. He even gives her a piece of advice on how to survive in India: "I find no pleasure in forcing a woman. But a word of advice. Stop flirting, if you don't intend to carry through. Every man in Calcutta sees your beauty,

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[5] This kind of practice seems quite improper when we compare it to the set of conventions in England. However, it was sadly the real ways of India. In his bibliography of Jane Austen, David Nokes writes that Philadelphia, Jane's aunt, had an arranged marriage in India. He even adds that she was afraid that she would need to do that with her daughter Eliza, but her father refused. He wrote to his wife: "Debauchery under the polite name of gallantry is the reigning vice of the settlement" (Qted in Nokes 31). Rae Muir's explanation of the meeting between Dina and Saurage is probably far fetched; however, women still went to India in order to marry, and sometimes got in trouble like Dina would have with another man than Saurage.

and not all will be willing to end such a meeting harmlessly. Even I have my limits. Stay away from me, and if we appear in the same room, cast down your eyes modestly" (Muir 32). She learns only later aboard the ship that he did this because of his father's behaviour towards women. Although he has no scruples in sleeping with willing women of the foreign countries he visits, or even with willing women in India, he would not force himself on a woman. Just like the other Harlequin heroes, he might have had several sexual experiences, but he does not want to enforce the virtue of a virgin.

Saurage is also chivalric in ways that evoke Austen's chivalric men who try to save the virtue of young women, like Darcy or Colonel Brandon. In *The Pearl Stallion*, Saurage saves Dina from rape in California and from possible death in India. In the former location, they have to find a way to trade for food because they will later need to exchange that food for skins in Russian America. Dina thinks that talking to a man she knows from London who happens to be in California would help their cause. Instead she almost gets raped by her supposed friend. It is Saurage and Charley, a member of their crew, who come to her rescue. And the same rescue squad comes to her aid once they are back in India. They save her from Freemantle who is trying to kick her to death. Saurage and Charley, even though they do not fit the common conception of a gentleman, still behave as one most of the time.

Clearly defined against the heroes of the story, Freemantle is the brain of Mason's illegal deals. He is also responsible for the murdered man buried under the banyan tree. He has evil designs such as poisoning Saurage and his crew by polluting the water barrels of the ship. He also beats up Dina to make her tell what she learned while she was aboard Saurage's ship: what he knew exactly about the illegal trading, and the place where he trades to make so much money. Dina is faithful to Saurage and remains

silent even if it almost kills her. The sins of the anti-heroes in Austen are small compared to those of the men in the Harlequin novels. Debauchery, gambling and excessive pride are not very vicious crimes. Those that the anti-heroes are guilty of in Harlequin Romances are very dark crimes. These crimes mostly come from today's society's expectations, not from Austen's time. Even though they try to re-create her world, it is just a weak attempt since only one who lived in that period, or studied it thoroughly, can really depict the reality of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Even if they were to try to accurately depict the style and time, it is not what Harlequin readers want. In her research on women and romances, Radway asked women if they were interested in reading Austen. Many replied that they like her characters, but her language is much too complicated for them. In short, it is "hard work" to read Austen (197). Both Radway and Jensen agree that romance is an escapist literature written for working women who are tired and need a diversion from reality (Radway 61; Jensen 17-18). These novels are a way for them to imagine a perfect world even though they are well aware that such perfection does not exist.

In the three novels, the place where Austen's spirit lives best and shines through is in the lessons the heroine and hero teach each other. Mostly, the women teach the hero that love exists. The heroes are tired of the emptiness of their own lives and they do not know how to fill it and fulfill themselves. Some men, of which Sebastian is an example, almost feel dead because of the lack of love in their lives. The heroines teach them that sex is not just sex, that one can actually make love to someone else. These lessons are not the same as the ones Austen's heroines teach the heroes. For example, Elizabeth taught respect to Darcy, and Fanny Price and Anne Elliot showed their respective hero what love is about. Even though they try to copy Austen, the Harlequin world is very

different. Yet, the heroines are capable of changing the lives of the heroes for ever. In the three novels discussed in this chapter, even though the three heroes slept with many women, they admit that it is the first time they actually made love: "And, he thought in wonder, for me it is also the first time. The first time I've made love to a woman I truly love" (Muir 250). They all learn that they are not dead to the world, as they first thought they were. The heroine also learns something from the hero. Just as Emma learned to be more humble because of Mr. Knightley, or Elizabeth learned to be less prejudiced because of Darcy, or Catherine to be less naïve and foolish because of Henry, Lady Elizabeth and Dina learn to be less capricious and become less interested in worldly things, whereas Prudence learns that, at twenty five, she is not yet too old to feel love. But, mostly what the characters learn from each other is how not to trust their first impressions: "I've tried to reassure him that our first impression of people is often very wrong" (Muir 107). Little comments like this one come often in the three Harlequin novels, and the characters turn out to be very different than the surface image they project. Captain Saurage, who is called "Savage," certainly is not savage, and the Devil Earl is not as devilish as he seems. The men all seem to be anti-heroes, but as the story advances, they prove their worth as they become contrary to their reputation, a little like Darcy who seemed proud and distant, but who changed to become quite amiable.

The representation of the father has not changed much since Austen. In Harlequin Romances, he is usually deceased, like in *Sense and Sensibility*. When the heroine of a Harlequin romance has a surrogate father, like Endine in *The Pearl Stallion*, he is ineffective and has no authority over her. Since Harlequin Historicals are a copy of Austen's time, the heroine has a conduct toward her father that would have been unacceptable in the patriarchal society in which Austen lived. The father was lord of the

house and needed to be obeyed. That is why Fanny's rejection of Henry's proposal is so scandalous. The lord of the house is supposed to dominate both wife and children, even if it is not the case in Austen's novels. She was ahead of her time in this aspect.

However, Harlequin Romances mix the past and the present creating a blend that is quite surprising and novel. The authors write to make people believe that they are reading a historical novel but the characters are so emancipated from their proper role in past societies that they have obviously been modernized for a specific audience. The heroes are actually closer to Austen's anti-heroes, since they are sexually active and they do not mind a good drink. Harlequin Romances are made to reach a mass market who want to read about romance intertwined with the thrill of action and sexual relationships. The Regency did not want to read about these things that were considered to be improper. It is only in the Victorian era that this kind of thrilling romances started to be produced with the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Since then, readers have been wanting to be kept "on the edge" until the end.

Harlequin Romances resemble Austen's novels in their fairy tale like plots. The two heroes meet, dislike each other at first, then fall in love and marry. In fact, there is a similarity between the obstacles to love one finds in Harlequin and Austen:

> These difficulties include age differences, pressing family responsibilities, conflicting loyalties or, occasionally, social class differences. By the end of the story, however, these difficulties have either been redefined as unimportant or the hindering conditions have changed. (Jensen 77)

Yet, there are some great differences between this type of romance and the ones Austen wrote. In the Harlequins, the authors transpose today's expectations on the characters of another time period. So, the gentlemen are sexually promiscuous, the ladies are very

headstrong, and they both do not mind losing their virtue before they get married. In the Regency period, women would have been punished for such bold behaviour, but this is not the case for twentieth and twenty-first century readers of Harlequin romances. The Harlequin romance heroines are always spared the public disgrace of losing their virginity before marriage by marrying the man who had taken their virginity. Contrarily to Wickham, Harlequin heroes do not need to be bribed in order to marry. Yet, when we think of Elizabeth Bennet's unconventional walk through the countryside to visit her sister's sickbed, we can understand why women in Harlequin romances are such headstrong characters. Harlequin writers are only pushing the behaviour a bit further. As for the men, this chapter demonstrates that they are faithful to the three categories that Austen used. There is a proud hero who proves himself a gentleman in spite of his faults; there is a wicked anti-hero who abuses women and beats them; and there is a worthless patriarch, even worst than Jane Austen could imagine. Mostly, the spirit of Austen lives in the interpretation of the first impressions. As she tried to demonstrate in all her novels, what we see at a surface glance is not what truly is, and it is so of Harlequin characters as well.

Austen represented her society's expectations in the same way as those modern romances represent today's. One can argue that they are certainly related since Austen was quite revolutionary for her time. She targeted women readers, and modern romances keep on targeting women. They are the ones who want to read about gentlemen who defeat the anti-hero so that love ends with "happily ever after." As long as women will be brought up to believe in the princesses of fairy tales and their wonderful Prince Charming, there will always be room for Austen or a good adaptation of her writings. And once general readers can look deeper into Austen's socio-historical critique of her

society, they will learn to enjoy the full range of her ability as one of England's best writers.

Epilogue

Bridget Jones's Diary

> "It's the truth universally acknowledged that the moment one area of your life starts going okay, another part of it falls spectacularly to pieces." (*Bridget Jones's Diary*)

Popular romantic comedies have many things in common with Austen's fiction on the surface. They have funny lovable characters and a hero and heroine that the audience desperately wants to see together by the end of the story. In romantic comedies, such as *Bridget Jones's Diary*, or *You've Got Mail*, the male characters resemble the men that Austen created. There always is a nice hero that the public loves, an anti-hero whom it loves to hate, and a patriarch who is absent, ineffective or simply stupid. These characters all show why Austen is still very much enjoyed today, and how her writing is timeless. There is, however, more to it than only those surface similarities. The screenwriters and directors of some of these movies openly admit to have adapted, modernized, or to have been inspired by her works. This is certainly the case with Helen Fielding, the writer of the novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Directed by Sarah Maguire, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) is the film adaptation of Helen Fielding's novel of the same title. Fielding admitted to enjoy Jane Austen so much that she wanted to write a novel that would be a modernized version of *Pride and Prejudice*. She wanted to show the struggle that today's women face everyday. That is, having a career, trying to find a man who loves them, and facing the jeers of their "Smug Married" friends. This would be today's version of Caroline Bingley's disobliging

remark to Elizabeth about her family desperately needing the soldiers to make a decent alliance.

Bridget Jones, played by Renee Zellweger, is a woman in her thirties looking for a man to share her life. The movie is her struggle to find the "one," whom she thinks that she has found in her boss, Daniel Cleaver, played by Hugh Grant. The latter turns out to be an unfaithful man who enjoys sex and drinking. In fact, he incarnates everything that Bridget swore she did not want in a man. Bridget is constantly hesitating between Daniel and Mark Darcy, played by Colin Firth, not knowing which one is really honest. In the meantime, she has to comfort her father from her mother's desertion, and seems to believe that it is impossible for true love to exist. When she discovers that Darcy really is the good guy, her hero, it is almost too late. Still, with a bit more public humiliation and a love avowal barely disguised, she finally wins her Darcy.

Daniel Cleaver, this film's anti-hero, is a very modernized version of Wickham. Stephen Hunter, a movie critic at *The Washington Post*, qualifies him in these terms: "He's a crude, manipulative cad, hiding behind the male god's countenance that he knows all too well" (n.pag.), which is exactly what Wickham does in *Pride and Prejudice*. Daniel Cleaver impersonates all that is undesirable in a man today. He is exactly what Bridget is not looking for. She asserts early in the film: "Will find nice sensible boyfriend to go out with and not continue to form romantic attachments to any of the following: alcoholics, workaholics, commitment-phobics, peeping toms, megalomaniacs, emotional fuckwits or perverts. And especially will not fantasize about a particular person who embodies all these things." She nevertheless has a relationship with Daniel, thus showing how impossibly stupid and naïve she is when love is in

question.[1] Daniel Cleaver encourages lax sexual habits, just like Wickham, who enticed Lydia to elope with him. Both men have little or no moral value and they do not mind leaving the heroine for another girl. In Austen, Wickham leaves Elizabeth to flirt with Miss Smith who has inherited money, whereas Daniel leaves Bridget for today's riches: a ferocious (and rich) business woman who also possesses youth and beauty, and is thin. Even though *Bridget Jones's Diary* does not possess the charming wit of an Austen narrator, the scene in which Bridget watches a documentary on lion's sexuality is quite entertaining and demonstrates the irony of the situation: "The male penetrates the female and leaves. Coitus is brief and perfunctory."

Like Wickham, Daniel Cleaver also invents a story to explain why he does not get along with Darcy, and he tries to make his rival appear even more detestable to the already prejudiced Bridget: "I was best man at his wedding. Knew him from Cambridge. He was a mate. [...] Many years later, I made the somewhat catastrophic mistake of introducing him to my fiancée. And, hum... I couldn't say, in all honesty, I've ever quite forgiven him." It is as improper for Wickham as for Daniel to tarnish another man's reputation. But encouragement on the part of the two heroines, who claim the man to be no friend of theirs, makes both men go even deeper in their vice. The fact that Daniel really is a modernized version of Wickham is also claimed by Elisa Solender when she writes that "Like Wickham, Daniel transfers his own sins onto the soul and reputation of his rival" (115). Daniel Cleaver proves to be a liar most of the time. He finds an excuse not to attend the family picnic with Bridget. He says that he needs to work with some American who wants to close down the London office. It turns out that it is true, he

[1] Indeed, if the men in the movie resemble the men Jane Austen portrayed in her novel, it is impossible to find any similarities between Bridget Jones and Elizabeth Bennet. Bridget would, in fact, resemble more the young Lydia Bennet who is entirely uninhibited and wild.

would indeed work with a business partner, but one who turns out to be his fiancée and business rival. The only thing that he does not lie about is his love for Bridget. He never says that he has any feelings for her. She is the one who stupidly mistakes sex for love.[2] He is always clear about his intentions, starting with their first date after the disastrous book-launch: "How about a drink at my place? Totally innocent, no funny business, just full sex." And when she asks him if he loves her during their long week-end escapade, he tells her to shut up or else he would have sex with her again. And that is what he does. She is only too naïve (or maybe too stupid) to be able to see through him, even if his hints are very clear.

Mark Darcy, as not only his name suggests but also because Colin Firth played the character of Mr. Darcy in the 1995 BBC TV-adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, is the Mr. Darcy of *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Like Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, Mark Darcy is not of the same social milieu as Bridget:

> Bridget Jones is no Elizabeth Bennet on paper or on film, even if Colin 'Darcy' Firth did play Mark Darcy, the human rights lawyer presented as her putative soul mate and potential passport to the uppermost echelons of contemporary London's meritocracy, as elitist a class as the Regency gentry. (Solender 115)

Because she is not genteel enough, he is very proud and snobs her badly. When he first meets her after many years since they last saw each other,[3] he encounters a very shy person who has no idea how to introduce herself, and who is atrociously dressed by her

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[2] Stephen Hunter rightly claims that "Bridget is so besotted by her boss's Pepso-blast smile that she catapults into the delusion that it's true love, not just hot sex" (n. pag.).

[3] She had played naked in his paddling pool when she was four, as shown during the end credits.

mother.[4] Consequently, he says to his own mother "Mother, I do not need a blind date. Particularly not with some verbally incontinent spinster who smokes like a chimney, drinks like a fish and dresses like her mother." This prejudiced comment about Bridget's appearance echoes the one Mr. Darcy makes on Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*: "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no honour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men" (*PP* 7-8). He finds the Jones's party, which can be compared the Meryton assembly, very dull. Both Darcys are irremediably bored at the two parties, and both men are incontestably disagreeable at both, although the viewer discovers at the end of the movie that Christmas time is a hard time of the year for him because his Japanese wife left him on Christmas Day. Therefore, his bad temper and atrocious behaviour are quite forgivable on this occasion.

Mark Darcy's love declaration to Bridget echoes the marriage proposal in *Pride and Prejudice*, minus the insults. Even though they do not start insulting each other, Darcy makes a very harsh critique of Bridget and her mother:

> I don't think you're an idiot at all. I mean there are elements of the ridiculous about you. Your mother's pretty interesting. And you really are an appallingly bad public speaker. And you tend to let whatever's in your head come out of your mouth without much consideration of the consequences. I realize that when I met you at the Turkey Curry Buffet that I was unforgivably rude and wearing a reindeer jumper that my mother had given me the day before. But the thing is,

[4] Darcy seems to have forgotten the fact that he is himself atrociously dressed by his mother who knit him a green reindeer shirt that makes him look as stupid.

> um, what I'm trying to say, very inarticulately, is that, um… in fact… perhaps, despite appearances I like you very much […] just as you are.[5]

Despite his bad beginning, Mark tries to make it up to Bridget. He first saves her from a total disaster and from being fired by giving her an exclusive interview with his client. When he comes to congratulate her, he proves himself quite helpful in the kitchen and teases Bridget for the disaster she created with dinner. "We can have blue soup to start, orange pudding to end and well, for main course, uh, congealed green gunge." Like the "real" Darcy, he learns because of the heroine that he need not be so conceited and so proud. He makes himself entirely worthy of Bridget when he swallows his pride over her diary and buys her a new one to make a new start. The new diary marks a new life both for him and for her.

Even though Bridget's parents "are mismatched" (Solender 115), Mrs. Jones is a version of Mrs. Bennet, neurotic and silly. Mr. Jones is a very laughable character even though we cannot quite associate him with Mr. Bennet since he does not quite possess Bennet's wit. When his wife leaves him, he is as helpless as a child. Bridget comes to her father's house and he is watching his wife on television. The house is upside-down and he is absolutely pitiful. It is obvious that he cannot live without her. However, when she returns she blames him for having neglected her, just as Mr. Bennet had neglected his silly wife: "I mean, obviously, with some effort to pay a bit more attention to me. I do realize what I'm like sometimes. It doesn't help that you and Bridget have your lovely grown up club of two and always saying 'What's silly old Mommy gone and

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[5] Darcy's love declaration to Elizabeth is quite similar, except that his critique of Elizabeth's family is neither as nice nor as diplomatic as Mark Darcy's: "He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride" (*PP* 145).

done this time?' You used to be mad about me. You couldn't get enough of me." It is still the case, only it is not as obvious as when they were younger. He admits it to her "Pam, I just don't work without you." Mr. Jones is a man who could not possibly live without his wife, whereas Mr. Bennet would have probably been relieved if his silly wife had left him. The two men are not entirely alike, whereas the two women are. Yet, Mr. Jones is a perfect example of the ineffective patriarch. Therefore, Fielding's attempt to modernize Elizabeth Bennet's surroundings is quite a success, and her way of writing the novel pays homage to Austen without being a copy of her story and characters.

Austen's portrayals of men, even though she ridiculed them to a deep degree, are quite a vivid portrayal of what men were then. Her image of the male character transcended generations in order to come to us as a contemporary view of what men are now, almost two hundred years later. The three types of men are present in the newer version, challenging Austen's vision of things, and illustrating the modern image of manly expectations. Martine Voiret explains why Austen is so often adapted:

> Austen adaptations have been popular among filmmakers and moviegoers, in great part, because Austen's novels provide scenarios addressing contemporary postfeminist concerns. With their complex tales of romance, their diverse cast of male and females characters, they offer scripts that can be used to capture the anxieties, fantasies, and contradictions many men and women experience in the domain of gender and gender relations. (229)

The gentleman did not change, he only evolved. He is still willing to save the woman he loves from a whole lot of trouble, like Mr. Darcy who saves Bridget from public humiliation by according her an interview with his client. This is not that different when read within a specific historical context from Austen's Darcy saving an unvirtuous

sister from an immoral soldier. Also, in the modern versions, the gentleman keeps on learning from the heroine, who is able to make him change in order to have him finally be worthy of her. It is the case of all the heroes of the Harlequin romances and also of the movies, and most of them learn that they need not be so proud and that they should accept women as they are. The insight into human nature that romantic comedies offer us today is similar to the spirit of Austen's writing. Those movies represent our values and expectations as Austen's novels represent hers.

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