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| 1. TITLE: | “A SUDDEN SEIZURE OF A DIFFERENT NATURE” – ILLNESS, ACCIDENT AND DEATH IN JANE AUSTEN’S NOVELS |
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| 3. DEGREE: | MASTER OF ARTS |
| 4. SUBJECT: | ENGLISH |
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SUMMARY

Ill health, accident and death are themes common to all of Jane Austen’s novels. Some illnesses are physical, whereas some of her heroines experience excessive psychological, emotional and spiritual traumas. These references are too numerous to be either coincidental, glossed over or ignored.

Austen expressed an interest in the mind/body relationship, believing that illness could be brought upon in certain personalities by the sufferer herself, and it seems that she might have held theories similar to those advocated by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and even have anticipated those on feminine hysteria, and the effects of unconscious motives on behaviour, which were advanced by Freud in works such as *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

This study examines Austen’s novels, and the origin and purpose of physical and psychological illness in these, and looks at how Austen uses illness, accident and death, and more particularly how their roles progressively change and develop. For Austen’s handling of these common issues appears to vary and to develop in line with the order of composition of her novels. She places increasing emphasis on them, not just to further plot, but also to reflect character change and development.

Many of the parents or guardians of Austen’s heroines are inadequate. And so Austen’s heroines are often deprived of commendable models, left to find their own way, alone and in need of emotional support, to confront their youthful excesses, to work their way through these and to find their own destiny despite their handicaps.

Self-improvement is neither pleasant nor easy, especially where one is young, inexperienced and alone. And, where heroines exhibit unhealthy or excessive interests in anything that diverts them from their paths of virtue or usefulness, the correction may frequently be painful. Thus most of the novels are, to a greater or lesser degree, filled with references to both physical and psychological ill health.

This thesis examines how Austen used these illnesses, accidents and deaths in the various novels, both in the development of plot, as well as in the development of the character of the heroine in each instance.

KEYWORDS

Accident
Death
Dysfunction
Excess
Fainting
Hypochondria
Hysteria
Illness
Imagination
Manipulation
Persuasion
Prejudice
Pride
Sensibility
Valetudinarianism

“A SUDDEN SEIZURE OF A DIFFERENT NATURE” – ILLNESS, ACCIDENT AND
DEATH IN JANE AUSTEN’S NOVELS

by

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submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the subject

ENGLISH

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: Dr M J WILLIAMS

MAY 2008

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Mike Williams for his consistent interest, advice and help in supervising this project, my husband Jonathan for his patience, and both Jonathan and Jill Watson for their careful editing of the final text. Finally my thanks go to Dawie Malan, in the library, for his most valued input.

A NOTE on the TEXTS

All the novels, with the exceptions of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, were published during Austen's lifetime, although *Northanger Abbey* was in fact sold to a publisher some years before the publication of *Sense and Sensibility*.

While the dates of the first composition of each novel differ appreciably from the dates of the publication of each, the novels will be dealt with on the basis that, with the exceptions of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, publication only took place when Austen believed the novel to be in satisfactory form. In this thesis I therefore deal with the novels in the chronological order in which they were substantially completed.

Citations from the texts have been indicated with the page numbers which refer throughout to *The Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen*, ed. R.W. Chapman, 6 volumes. 1954, as reprinted in 1988. However, in certain instances reference is made to editions which have not been edited by Chapman. Full details of these texts are supplied both in the body of this work and in the Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

The quotation incorporated in the title of this study is from *Emma*, and describes the manner of Mrs Churchill's death.

The topics of illness, accident and death in the novels of Jane Austen have received some attention individually, and have also been dealt with extensively by Anita Gorman and John Wiltshire. But, whereas Gorman's and Wiltshire's comprehensive works deal with the causes and effects of physical and psychological illnesses on the bodies of the heroines of the novels and lesser characters, Gorman focuses principally on Austen's fascination with the mind/body relationship, examining phenomena such as fainting, hysteria, hypochondria and blushing in this context, and exploring how these create comedy and define the norms of living. And Wiltshire examines the bodies of Austen's characters as the sites on which cultural meanings are inscribed, revealing ill-health as a socio-cultural phenomenon, which may be manipulated by domestic, macro-social, political and cultural circumstances. The intention of the present study is rather to look more broadly at how Austen uses death, accident and illness (as manifested both physically and psychologically in the individual, in dysfunctional marriages, and in society), in each of her works, and more particularly to examine how the roles of these phenomena progressively change and develop in the completed novels.

It always comes as rather a surprise that, despite her assertions that she was writing on a small piece of ivory, and despite her advice to her niece, Anna, an aspirant novelist, to limit the number of characters to three to four families in a village, Austen gives little indication of what her heroines, or indeed any other of her characters, look like. As readers we remain ignorant as to the colour of Catherine Morland's hair, the colour of Elizabeth Bennet's 'fine eyes', or even Emma Woodhouse's stature. Moreover, except for Mrs Allen's comments to Henry Tilney about sprigged muslin, and the dirty hem of Elizabeth Bennet's dress, we are told little or nothing about the clothes that these heroines wear, either on everyday occasions or to balls.

Nor, other than for perhaps the Abbey in *Northanger Abbey*, and the park in which Mr Darcy's mansion lies, are we supplied with any detailed descriptions of the houses or villages that Austen's heroines inhabit. These are all left to the imagination of the

reader. Occasionally, however, in true Romantic style, there is a brief reference to nature: Marianne Dashwood rushes precipitously and enthusiastically down a hill; Fanny Price is left to meditate on a bench in a wood; Elizabeth Bennet walks across fields and climbs over stiles to look after her sick sister Jane, and the weather and garden echo Emma Woodhouse's sombre reflections when she realises she has done wrong.

What could the reasons be for the fact that Austen so obviously ignores both the surroundings and accoutrements of her heroines? And is it correct, as Charlotte Brontë points out in a letter to a friend, after reading *Emma*, that Austen even fails to deal with the greater passions of her heroines, saying:

I have...read it with interest, and with just the degree of admiration which Miss Austen herself would have thought sensible and suitable – anything like warmth or enthusiasm; anything energetic, poignant, heartfelt, is utterly out of place in commending these works: all such demonstration the authoress would have met with a well-bred sneer, would have calmly scorned as *outré* and extravagant. She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well; there is a Chinese fidelity, a miniature delicacy in the painting: she ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound: the Passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy Sisterhood; even to the Feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition; too frequent converse with them would ruffle the smooth elegance of her progress. Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet; what sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study, but what throbs fast and fully, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of Life and the sentient target of death – *this* Miss Austen ignores, she no more, with her mind's eye, beholds the heart of her race than each man, with bodily vision, sees the heart in his heaving breast. Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very incomplete, and rather insensible (*not senseless*) woman; if this is heresy – I cannot help it. If I said it to some people (Lewes for instance), they would directly accuse me of advocating exaggerated heroics, but I am not afraid of your falling into any such vulgar error (Fraser, 1988:363-4).

This censure is neither entirely accurate nor fair. For, on the contrary the *Juvenilia* are astonishing in their fervour and excitement. Therefore any rejoinder to Brontë's condemnation must depend in part on a brief examination of the *Juvenilia*.

Austen first experimented with melodramatic action and extreme sensibility, ardour and feeling in the *Juvenilia*, following the trends of many fashionable novels of the era. But perhaps, having read Henry MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (which she ridicules in *Sanditon*), and other similar novels, she found much lacking, or even worthy of criticism, in the excessive sensibility and the throbs of passion revealed and sustained in these novels. It follows that she might accordingly, as a more mature writer, have spent her energy on examining the very act of novel-reading and the concept of sensibility promoted in these novels, and the effects of these on an impressionable mind, preferring to demonstrate the psychological and even physical dangers of unchecked and untutored sensibility on the young and naïve.

The *Juvenilia* consist of a series of short stories, poems and plays, and even a *History of England*, some finished and some incomplete, that Austen wrote over a period of six years, from 1787 to 1793. These burlesque, melodramatic and hilarious works were written for the pleasure of her family, frequently including jokes familiar to them, and were contained within three handwritten notebooks.

Volume the First, written between 1787 and 1790, contains such short stories as *Frederic and Elfrida*, *Jack and Alice*, *Edgar and Emma* and *Henry and Eliza*. *Volume the Second* contains the somewhat longer short stories *Love and Freindship* and *Lesley Castle*, as well as *The History of England*, together with a collection of letters and some scraps. *Volume the Third* contains only *Evelyn* and *Catherine*.

In these early works the influence of the cult of sensibility on the young and impressionable author is obvious: heroines are charming, beautiful and engaging; they are either orphaned or exposed to the dominance of unreasonable parents and guardians; they exhibit excessive emotion and possess extraordinary powers, and, like Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, they frequently collapse, faint and run away. Furthermore they, and other characters in these stories, often quickly and conveniently succumb to violent accidents.

But at this early stage of Austen's writing one is often unable to distinguish irony from dramatic, enthusiastic and youthful story-telling, or to appreciate the fact that this very young author is parodying, and even exploiting, the romantic traditions to which she had been exposed, and that her stories are her attempts to ridicule the misconceptions that result from the "ludicrous literary conventions" (Gilbert and

Gubar, 2004:115) of that era, and to expose the deficiencies in the established social codes that they depict.

Thus, while it seems obvious that she is poking fun at Rebecca and Captain Roger in *Frederic and Elfrida*, when she writes that they were too young to marry at the “tender” (7) ages of thirty-six and sixty-three, this satire is not quite so blatant in *Henry and Eliza*, even if the three month old Eliza is able to verbalise most intelligently with “infantine tho’ sprightly answers” (33).

Austen’s attempts at parody become evident again in *Frederic and Elfrida* where she describes the necessary “labour” (7) that poor, greasy, hunchbacked Rebecca must endure to make herself presentable for her wedding. Elfrida’s friend, Charlotte, agrees to marry the “aged gentleman with a sallow face & old pink coat” (8), who, on first meeting her declares his attachment to her, because she does not wish to make others miserable. But when on the same day she agrees to marry a “young & handsome Gentleman with a new blue coat” (8) for the same reason, Charlotte’s sudden appreciation of the folly of the “double engagement” (9) becomes pure parody. Poor Charlotte is left with no alternative but to commit suicide, and threats of murder persuade Rebecca’s mother to agree to Rebecca and Captain Roger’s union.

Sensibility, with all its attendant feminine attributes, had been enshrined in Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling*, which was first published in 1771. In this novel Harley is the man of feeling. Typically his parents die when he is a boy, leaving his care and education to a guardian, who suggests that he goes to London to seek his fortune. Here he is exposed to a number of incidents in locations such as Bedlam and brothels, and the novel describes the effects of these on Harley’s sensibility in each instance, illustrating how charity and sympathy are evoked. But,

Harley’s notions of [beauty]... were not always to be defined, nor indeed such as the world would always assent to, though we could define them. A blush, a phrase of affability to an inferior, a tear at a moving tale, were to him...unequalled in conferring beauty (1970:150).

He is *the* man of feeling, a man of sensibility, exposed to various circumstances whose “feelings might be seen in their effect, and his sentiments occasionally delivered without the stiffness of regular deduction” (1970:xii).

Mackenzie had been iconic in his time. But by the time that Austen began writing the *Juvenilia*, his fame had declined, together with the decline of the cult of sensibility. And with this decline came the writings of a number of authors whose satiric works derided the cult.

The young Austen may be included in this group. For it becomes abundantly clear from an analysis of the *Juvenilia*, that, even at that early stage, Austen held no high regard for the cult of sensibility that had prevailed. Thus, in *Frederic and Elfrida*, when Elfrida, after postponing her marriage to Frederic for eighteen years, realises that Frederic has fallen in love with Eleanor, she faints repeatedly and dangerously until Frederic is finally persuaded to marry her. Furthermore in *Edgar and Emma: A Tale*, a two-page essay which reveals the dangers of excessive sensibility, Emma, turns pale and sinks “breathless on a Sopha” (81) when Edgar fails to visit, and, “having no check to the overflowings of her greif, she gave free vent to them, & retiring to her own room, continued in tears the remainder of her Life” (33).

Austen's parody of MacKenzie's literary style and content becomes even more evident in works such as *Memoirs of Mr. Clifford: An Unfinished Tale*, which describes Mr Clifford's trip to London, where he remains for five months under the care of a physician, who cures him of “a dangerous fever the Consequence of too violent Exercise” (43), and in *The Beautiful Cassandra*. This latter work is of interest in that each of the twelve chapters is made up of only one sentence. Cassandra, much like MacKenzie's Harley, leaves home to “make her Fortune” (45), meeting a number of people on her way, before again returning home. And the paragraph entitled *A Beautiful Description of the Different Effects of Sensibility on Different Minds* satirically describes Melissa on her death-bed, fainting, weak and sleepless, surrounded by people. Sir William remains constantly with her, resting only occasionally, and repeatedly calling out “Oh! Melissa, Ah! Melissa” (72), before sinking down and scratching his head, while the other well-wishers discuss foods and wines.

Although the *Juvenilia* cover common-place topics such as marriage proposals, elopements, broken engagements, balls and irresistible love, exaggerated sensibility, and its excesses, dominate most of the stories, with the young Austen's tone throughout remaining consistently satirical, particularly when considering these important themes.

The unfinished and complicated work, *Sir William Mountague*, relates of love, rage and murder. And *Jack and Alice* is an equally complicated and excessively violent account of a group of drunkards. This story is obviously a satirical comment on excess, indicating that Austen believed that the more outrageous the plots were, the funnier they seemed. The work begins with a masquerade, and describes the effects of “the Bottle & the Dice” (13) on the guests who all “were carried home, Dead Drunk” (14). The drunken Alice and Lady Williams, who are on their way home from the party, chance upon the lovely Lucy, whose leg has been broken in a snare. Lady Williams sets the leg *in situ* enabling Lucy to walk. But Lucy, after being rejected by Charles Adams, is poisoned and her murderer is hanged.

The *Juvenilia* also feature and deal with many of the concerns which formed part of the dominant ideology of the day, as depicted in MacKenzie’s novels. Accordingly topics such as overriding patriarchal authority and marriage as a commercial transaction, which later resurface as themes in the novels, abound in the *Juvenilia*.

Thus *The Three Sisters* reflects the social realities of the period, anticipating Charlotte’s business-like decision to marry Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*. For although Mary Stanhope is inane, she establishes that a good marriage settlement is her sole reason for marrying Mr Watts, an “old Man, about two & thirty” who is “very plain so plain that [she] cannot bear to look at him” and so “extremely disagreeable...[that she hates] him more than any body else in the world” (58).

Another probable source for Austen’s *Juvenilia* was Samuel Richardson, whom Eagleton observes was “a courageous spokesman for middle-class ideology, a properly didactic, propagandist writer” (1982:24). For Richardson helped construct “the bourgeois public sphere of eighteenth-century England...not only by his writing, but by fashioning a whole social apparatus” (1982:7). His writings reflect the surfacing of the bourgeoisie and the feminist movement during the eighteenth century, the breakdown and failure of traditional structures of kinship and the emergence of a

considerably more closed, ‘nuclear’ family, whose patriarchal structure reinforces an authoritarian state and fulfils some of the religious functions traditionally performed by the church....and the proliferating cults of ‘sentiment’ and ‘sensitivity’ (1982:14).

And so *Pamela* and *Clarissa* both draw attention to the oppression of women by their masculine protectors, reflecting a new ideological development in society at large, supporting an increase in awareness of the rights of women and children within the family unit and a loosening of the bonds of autocratic patriarchy, while at the same time demystifying sentimentalist ideology. For, as Eagleton points out, it seems that in *Clarissa* Richardson is making an important social and ideological comment, as “at this historical point, there is no ‘realist’ way in which the deathly contradictions of patriarchy and class society may be resolved...” (1982:93).

Sir Charles Grandison or The happy Man, which first came to the public eye in 1977, is Austen’s only surviving attempt at a play of any length. It was begun in the early 1790s, written to amuse Austen’s family, and was then put aside for some years and finished in about 1800. It is a light-hearted, witty and comic dramatisation of Richardson’s lengthy *Sir Charles Grandison*, reduced to a short play, which condenses the epic proportions of the novel from which it takes its name to a “*reductio ad absurdum*” (Southam,1980:21). Described by her niece Anna’s daughter as a “Betweeny between the novels”, it too is satirically burlesque, scrappy and incoherent.

But, perhaps the best known work amongst the *Juvenilia* is *Love and Freindship*, which was written in 1790. Weldon describes it as “a romp through an episode of runaway teenage life....a burlesque of Richardson’s epistolary novels *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Sir Charles Grandison*...” (in Austen,2003:ix). Perhaps more importantly though, while sending up sensibility as a condition, this story reveals Austen’s interest in the effects of sensibility on young and vulnerable minds, and the destructive effect that excessive sensibility has on their physical and emotional health. For the heroines in most of the *Juvenilia*, like Richardson’s and Ann Radcliffe’s, consistently and repeatedly faint from their sensibility; angry fathers prevent both their sons and daughters from entering into marriages that are not financially advantageous, and daughters who disobey their fathers are dramatically punished by events, often losing their lovers to illness and death, left destitute, and forced to return to and seek the forgiveness of their fathers.

Love and Freindship is an epistolary novel consisting of a collection of letters from Laura to her friend’s daughter, Marianne, which relate the story of her life and the dangers of sensibility:

A sensibility too tremblingly alive to every affliction of my Freinds, my Acquaintance and particularly to every affliction of my own, was my only fault, if a fault it could be called. Alas! how altered now!...yet now I never feel for those of an other (78).

Edward has been cruelly treated by his father because he refuses to marry a woman of his father's choice, who is "of that inferior order of Beings with regard to Delicate feelings, tender sentiments, and refined Sensibility" (84). As his suffering affects Laura's sensibility she falls in love with him and marries him, fainting repeatedly and frequently from happiness.

Sophia, Laura's friend, marries Augustus, despite the "despotic Power" (87) of their "Cruel & Mercenary Parents" (87) who attempt to force them into marriages with people they abhor. Because these "Exalted Creatures" (88) fail to pay their debts, Augustus is arrested and threatened with execution. Meanwhile Laura and Sophia continue to weep, faint and sigh, overcome by "Gentle Sensibility" (89).

Much like Harley the girls travel extensively, and even the majestic elms and blue skies, "wound [Sophia's] Sensibility" (98). After an accident in which Edward and Augustus are killed on the road in front of them, Laura "scream[s] and instantly...[runs] mad", whereas Sophia predictably "shreiked & fainted" (99). Soon afterwards Sophia falls ill with "galloping Consumption" (102) which she attributes to "fainting in the open Air as the Dew was falling" (101). And, as she dies, she warns Laura, that although fainting is "refreshing", she must

"beware of fainting-fits...they will in the end, if too often repeated & at improper seasons, prove destructive to your Constitution....One fatal swoon has cost me my Life....Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint—" (102).

The unfinished *Lesley Castle*, which is described by Heller as "satire lapsing into burlesque" (in Austen, 2005:vii), is also replete with accidents, ill health and death, and contains many references to the sensibility of the characters as well as references to marriage as an economic option to be preferred over starvation. The "old and Mouldering castle" (111) which Margaret Lesley and her sister inhabit is secluded and "dungeon-like" (123), replete with "horrid old rooms" (125) and galleries and antechambers that echo Catherine Morland's expectations of Northanger Abbey. And again an accident results in death, causing the fiancée of the deceased to suffer

extreme distress and numerous fainting fits, which in turn lead to convulsions and finally to “perfect Insensibility” (114).

Catherine or the Bower and *Evelyn* also resonate with themes already explored, introducing characters who anticipate those who are more fully fleshed out in Austen’s later novels, and demonstrating early signs of Austen’s interest in the mind/body relationship. Catherine typically is orphaned as a child and brought up by a maiden aunt who is obsessed with virtue and propriety. The aunt’s concerns presage those of Mr Woodhouse’s in *Emma*: she maintains that rheumatism is hastened by sitting out of doors, and tells of a friend’s death, which was caused by staying out late in April. And, in her proclamation that

“the welfare of every Nation depends upon the virtue of it’s individuals, and any one who offends in so gross a manner against decorum & propriety is certainly hastening it’s ruin” (232-3),

she also calls to mind the moral conflict between the Elliots and the members of the naval fraternity depicted in *Persuasion*. And *Evelyn* abounds in episodic fainting fits and descriptions of illness caused by excessive sensibility: Mr Gower falls ill from shock when he hears that his sister, Rose, has died, and his wife, Maria, is so “overwhelmed with Greif” (187) when he leaves her in search of his sister’s family, that she dies “of a broken heart” (189).

But to revert to Brontë’s criticism: as has been indicated, in many instances the concerns raised in these short stories about topics such as sensibility, health, propriety, patriarchy, marriage, (and even the titles and the names of the characters) immediately resonate, evoking characters, incidents, themes and subject matter which Austen reserves for a more in-depth examination in the later complete novels. Most importantly they point to a young mind preoccupied with matters far broader, more comprehensive, and more multi-faceted than throbs of passion, dress code and daffodils.

It would appear therefore, as if Austen does not dwell on intense passion in the way that the Brontës do, both as a result of her rejection of extreme sensibility, and her attempts to emphasise the inherent weaknesses and dangers in the cult of sensibility, and their possible risk to the unsophisticated reader. For Brontë is correct that the early drama and excessive sensibility of the *Juvenilia* are effectively

eliminated from Austen's later works. And where they are included, Austen makes it clear how damaging are the consequences that accompany them.

This is the point that is so meticulously made in *Northanger Abbey*, where her heroine nearly loses her lover because of her gullibility and untutored reading habits, and in *Sense and Sensibility*, where one of her heroines almost dies from an excess of sensibility. Consequently it comes as no surprise that in the later novels Austen's heroines exhibit fewer elements of sensibility, do not swoon, and mostly maintain their self control, with all traces of sensible behaviour relegated to the subsidiary characters.

It is also evident from the content of the *Juvenilia* that Austen, even in extreme youth, was an acute and accurate observer of people and their limitations and frailties, mental and emotional. But more importantly Austen understood the need for individuals, especially young girls, to progress towards a state of maturity from which they could aspire to their ultimate goals. Thus, although in all her work she uses certain stereotyped plots, common-place events, and predictable situations and constructs, she typically describes families which are frequently dysfunctional, as the mother has either died, leaving daughters alone, exposed or alienated, or the parents malfunction separately or jointly, and this, when combined with her appreciation of human nature, renders her novels extraordinarily complex.

Many of the mothers or guardians of her heroines depict what Mary Wollstonecraft describes as "foolish women" (1992:309). Possessed of little or no formal education, and probably suffering from a surplus of sensibility, they are inadequate role models to their charges. Furthermore the fathers, who ought to supplement the maternal guidance, which is so often lacking, have frequently either died or removed themselves in one way or another from the family. The ominous, but unverballed intimation that hangs over each text is that, unless something drastic and untoward happens to change the paths of her heroines, most of her heroines are in danger of becoming a Mrs Bennet or a Mrs Allen if they marry, and if they remain single, a Miss Bates.

In some instances heroines such as Marianne Dashwood and Elizabeth Bennet are provided with sisters who are able to either supplement or provide the support which is lacking in the parents, but sometimes, as in Anne Elliot's case, the sisters are of no assistance, while in other instances the heroine has no sister.

The heroine moreover, is frequently surrounded by people who exhibit unhealthy attitudes towards life, such as Mrs Norris, Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas in *Mansfield Park*, Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Lady Russell in *Persuasion*, or who are either particularly weak, or fail to demonstrate the correct patriarchal characteristics. These include Sir Walter Elliot, Mr Woodhouse, Mr Bennet and General Tilney. And often the heroine's only close family is a hypochondriac in the style of Lady Bertram and Mr Woodhouse.

But in all Austen's stories the heroines, despite their need of emotional support, are finally left alone to confront their difficulties, to work their way through these and to find their own destiny. For Austen seems to share Wollstonecraft's philosophy that women should become useful citizens and acquire a state of maturity which enables them to choose suitable marriage partners, and contribute to their marriages and educate their children within this framework. Therefore, in all her novels Austen's heroines have to overcome their handicaps and grow in order to marry.

However, if Austen in most instances deprives her heroines of commendable models, leaving them to find their own way, where are they then to find suitable role models? They cannot fall back on the sensibility reflected in their peers, siblings or parents, and most importantly, as we see in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's heroines cannot rely uncritically on fiction to supply the answers. Austen requires that they find and construct a path of their own. This is the point that Brontë misses, and which Laura Dabundo so succinctly makes, saying:

the interest of the reader, as choreographed and designed by the author, is not toward the revelation of love, but toward the arrangement of characters so that they are in a position toward one another and their circumstances that will enable them to accept and recognize that emotion and in their personal development so that they can properly house and maintain that affection (in Bloom,2004:273).

But self-improvement is by its nature neither pleasant nor easy, especially where one is young, inexperienced and alone. And, where heroines exhibit unhealthy or excessive interests in anything that diverts them from their paths of virtue or usefulness, the correction may also frequently be painful. Most of the novels are therefore, to a greater or lesser degree, filled with references to ill health, both physical and psychological, accident and death.

This is the topic that this present study will examine – the use of these illnesses, accidents and deaths in the various novels, and the effects that these have on both the development of the plot as well as on the development of the character of the heroine in each instance. For in Austen's completed novels the references to illness, ill health, accidents and death are too numerous to be either coincidental, glossed over or ignored, and it is these, their origin, purpose and handling, which this study attempts to examine.

CHAPTER ONE

NORTHANGER ABBEY

It is thought that the first draft of *Northanger Abbey* was written when Austen was only sixteen years old. But, although the book is known to have been submitted for publication in 1803, the first edition was only published some six months after Austen's death in 1817.

The novel deals with and dramatises the differences between individual perception, literary romance and reality, expectations and disappointments, and the relationship of these to each other. More particularly it deals with how indiscriminate or untutored reading can adversely and even unhealthily affect an overly impressionable mind. And so, while there is no reference to physical ill health, or death, other than for Mr Allen's gout and Mrs Tilney's death, the novel deals with psychological health and emotional well-being, and more specifically, the ways in which judgement and common sense are suspended, and even permanently damaged, in the indiscriminate pursuit of fiction, testifying to "the delusions created when girls internalize the ridiculous expectations and standards of gothic fiction" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:140-1). This is the focus of this chapter.

Although *Northanger Abbey* relies heavily on contemporary literary conventions for its shape – the heroine meets and marries a man of looks, rank and intellect way beyond her dreams – at the same time Austen undercuts, defies and parodies literary conventions of this nature. She presents us with an heroine who is not beautiful, clever or accomplished, implying that these are the criteria a conventional heroine must meet, but simultaneously questioning whether these criteria are either interesting or even essential in a heroine, causing Tave to comment that this is a novel that "takes the romance out of life" (1973:37). And so in the opening chapter the reader is introduced to an heroine who does not fit the assumptions of the popular literature of the time, and who effectively undermines the traditional concepts and literary conventions of the era. For, unlike Clarissa, who is described by her friend Anna Howe as more fit for the next world than herself, "noble creature" (Richardson, 1962:1:282), "charming friend" (1:252) and so perfect that no man "dares to look up to Miss Clarissa Harlowe with hope, or with anything but wishes..."

(1:64), the narrator says: "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (13). Furthermore as a young girl Catherine is depicted as being "as plain as any" (13). Nor could she "learn or understand any thing before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid" (14). Moreover she fails to achieve "true heroic height" (16) even in drawing or music. There is evidently "nothing heroic about her" (15), and her naïveté and ordinariness thus seem to preclude her from the role of heroine.

Paradoxically, despite the narrator ironically suggesting that there would probably be no advancement for this unconventional heroine, Catherine does improve with age, as "from fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine..." (15), curling her hair, and reading the appropriate poetry and literature: Pope, Gray, Thompson and Shakespeare, so that by the time she is seventeen years old, it is satirically stated that Catherine is neither more clever, nor more silly than any other seventeen-year-old girl: her mind being "as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is" (18). Catherine is thus, in Austen's ironic understanding, at the commencement of the novel, no different from any other seventeen-year-old girl, artless, unaffected, relatively untaught and extremely inexperienced. But more importantly she is also a victim of her naïveté, her limited location, her single status and her class, all of which combine to offer her a narrow scope for social contact. And, whereas the only activities commonly available to a girl of Catherine's age and position are "the usual distractions...a walk, perhaps a ball or a visit to a theatre.... [s]he can only sit, wait and hope" (Tanner,1986:58), as in the small village of Fullerton most of these simple diversions are unavailable to her.

Catherine does, however, have an interest in reading. One can therefore presume that, like many girls of her age, she would have been an avid reader of her mother's collection of novels: *Sir Charles Grandison*, which Catherine confirms having found "very entertaining" (42), or *Cecilia* and *Belinda*, wherein all heroines are traditionally beautiful, clever and accomplished. And one can also presume that much of this reading would have provided her with harmless entertainment. But, as a result of the limitations imposed on her by her position, status and age, while Catherine's imagination might have been stimulated by her reading, it must at the same time have indubitably been limited by her innocence and lack of experience, with her perceptions and responses a consequence of an uncritical reliance on the romantic and the sentimental, to which she has been exposed in fiction.

While there is no evidence that Austen ever read any of Mary Wollstonecraft's work, Wollstonecraft must have had in mind the potentially dangerous effects certain types of novels could have on impressionable, young, feminine minds, particularly where the act of reading is combined with ignorance, inexperience, and an inability in the reader to adopt a stance outside of the text, when she warns:

Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make women the creatures of sensation, and their character is thus formed in the mould of folly during the time they are acquiring accomplishments, the only improvement they are excited, by their station in society, to acquire (1992:154).

Wollstonecraft does, however, qualify this statement, limiting her censure to a certain type of book, and apparently making allowances for the harmless pleasure, fun and knowledge that most novels offer, saying that where novels are read with care and scrutinised, they are not necessarily harmful, and that accordingly her objection to novels only extends

to the whole purport of those books, which tend, in my opinion, to degrade one-half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue (1992:104).

Austen's biographer, Park Honan has suggested that *Northanger Abbey* is Austen's response to her brothers' dismissal of prose fiction (in Bloom,2004:272). If that is so, it is interesting that Austen, like Wollstonecraft, in the main fails to write off fiction as a whole in *Northanger Abbey*, but rather endorses Wollstonecraft's precepts, revealing and emphasising the deleterious effects that indiscriminate reading can have on an uninformed mind.

Not only is Catherine overly impressionable, but "[h]er situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and disposition, were all equally against her" (13). For her family also all fall far short of the classic romantic ideal of the period, literary convention, the narrator's ironic depictions of heroic status and of the reader's expectations. Neither of Catherine's parents is ill or deceased. Nor is Mr Morland an autocratic paternalist. Rather, the Morlands, as a family, are extremely healthy, and like the Crofts in *Persuasion*, represent a virtual barometer of emotional and mental health, setting a universal standard for well-being against which the

events which take place in the novel are measured. They are ordinary, well-meaning, respectable people, neither rich nor poor, who are not, unlike Clarissa's father in Richardson's novel of the same name, "the least addicted to locking up...daughters" (13), —

plain matter-of-fact people, who seldom aimed at wit of any kind; her father, at the utmost, being contented with a pun, and her mother with a proverb; they were not in the habit therefore of telling lies to increase their importance, or of asserting at one moment what they would contradict the next (65-6).

Moreover Mrs Morland is a mother "of useful plain sense, with a good temper, and, what is more remarkable, with a good constitution" (13). And, as the narrator informs us, in layer upon layer of irony, which actively engage in debunking all those traditions on which the romantic novel rests, in an era when death at childbirth and infant mortality were common, not even Mrs Morland or any of Catherine's siblings meet an early or tragic end. For,

[Mrs Morland] had three sons before Catherine was born; and instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as any body might expect, she still lived on—lived to have six children more—to see them growing up around her, and to enjoy excellent health herself (13).

Thus, although Catherine is evidently intended to be the principal character of the novel, neither she nor her parents, or even her environment evince any traces or elements of potential romance or mystery that literary convention has led readers to expect of heroes and heroines. Catherine is unquestionably a very ordinary girl from a very ordinary background, and nothing happens in her early life to disturb that situation. But, despite her obvious disadvantages, as John Bayley argues, Catherine is the prototype of all Austen's heroines, in that she inherently possesses "instinctive sense, taste, and humanity in all detailed social contexts" (in Bloom, 2004:160).

And so, having gained all her knowledge of the outside world from the fiction she has absorbed, and, being in training for a heroine, "[s]omething must and will happen to throw a hero in [Catherine's] way" (17). But, as even the neighbourhood in which she grows up is commonplace, lacking grandeur, nobility and orphans, or indeed anything that smacks of the unknown, intrigue or mystery, a change of environment is essential if any changes are to occur in Catherine's life, because, "if adventures

will not befall a young lady in her own village, she must seek them abroad..." (17). For as Tanner observes: "It was in that transitional period between the parental home and marriage that Jane Austen found her subject, and in the young lady who had to enter the world that she found her heroines" (1986:56).

It is today accepted by psychiatrists that infants progress through certain developmental stages in order to reach emotional maturity. Anna Freud, an early proponent of the school of developmental psychiatry, distinguished six basic developmental lines which affect the structure of individual personality, its relationship to its environment and its adaptation to reality (Mayes and Cohen, 1996:117-141). These six lines relate *inter alia* to eating, bowel control and the assumption of responsibility. But the line relevant to Austen and her work is that which identifies the progression from infantile dependency to an emotional maturity in which adult relationships are able to be sustained.

Anna Freud identified the stages through which the infant must successfully progress as being, firstly, a biological state of unity between mother and infant. If the infant is separated from the mother at this stage, separation anxiety ensues. The second stage determines the infant's relationship to objects and is based on the infant's bodily needs. The third stage permits the child to form stable and consistent representations that can survive disappointment and frustration. During the fourth stage the infant begins to experience ambivalence, and even conflict, between its desire for independence on the one hand and the need for security on the other. The child then enters the classical phallic-oedipal stage, as first postulated by Sigmund Freud, proceeds into the latency period when affections are transferred from parents to peers, and from there enters the adolescent stage with its associated revolt.

Erik Erikson also studied psychosocial development through the life cycle, developing his own eight-stage model (Bourne and Ekstrand, 1985:319). As a result of his research he postulated that, while each developmental stage is intertwined, each stage also has its own time of ascendancy at some period of life and represents a turning point for the individual. His research revealed that it is only during the period of twelve to eighteen years that the adolescent establishes "an identity stable enough to withstand the multiple pressures and demands" with which he/she is faced, which enables him or her to deal with confusion of purpose, unclear feedback, role confusion and identity formation.

Austen too requires all of her heroines to progress through certain developmental stages, obliging them to reach a certain state of maturity before being permitted to advance into mutually rewarding, successful marriages. She thus calls on her heroines to negotiate and transcend the difficulties which are either inherent in their various upbringings, environments or in their own emotional and psychological make up, and to overcome these in order to attain both emotional maturity and its concomitant psychological good health. In this way, Austen, to a certain degree, anticipated current psychological developmental theories.

In all her novels, with one noteworthy exception, Austen exposes her heroines to either the death of a parent and/or a lengthy separation from her parents: both Anne Elliot and Emma Woodhouse lose their mothers; Fanny Price is removed from her parents at an early stage; the Dashwood girls lose their father and Catherine Morland goes on an extended holiday with the Allens. Only Elizabeth Bennet has the dubious benefit of having two parents to guide and advise her during her difficult moments, and this may be the reason why Austen described *Pride and Prejudice* as her most light, bright and sparkling novel. For Elizabeth never has to cope with the developmental trauma of losing a parent, and more especially a mother. But a separation from her parents and her home is still required to make her understand her inherent pride and prejudice.

Typically therefore Catherine will only be able to mature if she is separated from her parents and her familiar surrounds. In other words she has to be *orphaned* in order to grow. She needs to acquire a degree of independence and maturity in order to distinguish bad suitors from good suitors, in preparation for marriage. Therefore Austen transfers her from the security of the parental home, firstly to Bath where she experiences the rather arbitrary care of Mrs Allen, and the duplicity and connivances of Isabella and John Thorpe, in contrast to the true friendship of the young Tilneys. Subsequently she travels to Northanger and the ambiguous supervision of General Tilney.

The Allens are local residents of Fullerton and good friends of the Morland family. They invite Catherine to accompany them to Bath to seek a cure for Mr Allen's gout. Illness thus, in typical Austenian style, creates an opportunity for change:

"I tell him he is quite in luck to be sent here for his health....A neighbour of ours, Dr. Skinner, was here for his health last winter, and came away quite stout" (54).

Accordingly, inconsequential as it may seem, Mr Allen's gout is the indispensable cornerstone on which this novel rests, facilitating as it does Catherine's removal from her home in Fullerton to Bath.

Sensible Mrs Morland has, of necessity, passed the age of romantic notions and susceptibility to imagination, and accordingly has no fears of the "machinations" (18) and evil intentions of lords and baronets. On parting with her daughter, she only, rather banally, warns her about sore throats and the need to keep well wrapped, and, practically cautions her to be careful of how much money she spends, focusing on the actual, the prudent and solid reality, failing to warn Catherine of the dangers of an overactive imagination, and her unrealistic "expectation[s] of pleasure" (92). And so the preparations for Catherine's first trip away from home were instead made

with a degree of moderation and composure, which seemed rather consistent with the common feelings of common life, than with the refined susceptibilities, the tender emotions which the first separation of a heroine from her family ought always to excite (19).

Consequently a very innocent, inexperienced and ill-prepared Catherine arrives in Bath under the most "unpromising auspices" (19) and the guardianship of the Allens, and more particularly of Mrs Allen, "whose vacancy of mind and incapacity for thinking were such, that as she never talked a great deal, so she could never be entirely silent..." (60), who seems more preoccupied with muslin and gossip than with either the safety of, or the company kept by her young charge. And, unlike the family of Richardson's *Clarissa*, she is not intent on "intercepting her letters, ruining her character, or turning her out of doors" (20).

There are many fictions in this novel which both Catherine and the reader need to learn to read and interpret correctly, and one of these is Bath itself, which operates in the novel largely as a fictional construct. For Bath is a location where it is expected that illness will be overcome and romantic love indulged. But neither of these expectations necessarily has a sound, sensible or valid foundation. And so, whereas the elderly and infirm spend the season in Bath addressing and gratifying their medical conditions, infirmities and frailties, and socialising, the young congregate for a single purpose: to meet and to marry. For the brutal fact is that Bath has not changed its status as a market town, but remains a marriage market for the young;

the place where good matches are made and where commercially viable marriage settlements are contrived. This unsavoury reality is, however, unacknowledged by all who participate in the conventions of behaviour and in the veneer of the pump and assembly rooms. It is thus fitting that it is in Bath that Catherine is first exposed to fiction operating in the real world.

Catherine's sojourn and entry into fashionable society begins with a most unpromising ball, where the Allens know no-one and where

not one [young man]...started with rapturous wonder on beholding her, no whisper of eager inquiry ran round the room, nor was she once called a divinity by any body (23).

Once again the narrator ironically plays on and encourages the reader's expectations, anticipating that if romance cannot be found in Fullerton, for this unlikely heroine, it might yet be found in Bath. After all, this is the prime purpose of most young people's visits to Bath. The irony is that Catherine does in fact meet her hero and future husband in the Lower Rooms in Bath, even if he too fails to conform to the conventional standard of romance. For Henry Tilney, although tall and physically pleasing, with "a very intelligent and lively eye" (25), is only almost handsome.

At their first meeting Henry satirically pokes fun at the social conventions of Bath and its residents, expressing his amusement at the established etiquette and discourse followed at balls, and enters into an inane discussion with Mrs Allen about muslin. Catherine fails to understand his ironic behaviour until he begins to ask the conventional and well-versed questions expected at such first encounters. But even then she remains unsure of the proper response expected of her, not realising that her instinctive reaction to laugh at his comments is entirely appropriate. She enjoys Henry's gentle scorn, his trivialisation of the social conventions and flirtations at Bath and the satire and irony that he employs in his exposure of Bath. But she rejects Henry's gentle mockery of Mrs Allen, aware that Henry, although "polite enough to seem interested in what she said" (29), has overstepped the boundaries of politeness, albeit playfully and within the conventional parameters of social interaction. Thus although Mrs Allen fails to appreciate Henry's parody of a subject so close to her heart, Catherine reads Henry's fiction correctly.

Unfortunately though for Catherine, Henry, with his sceptical eye and critical approach to Bath, disappears, leaving Catherine alone to deal with its vagaries and superficiality. For “[e]very creature in Bath, except himself, was to be seen in the [Pump] room at different periods of the fashionable hours...and he only was absent” (31). “Every search for him was equally unsuccessful...” (35).

In Bath Catherine also meets the Thorpes, who fill the gap created by Henry’s absence. For “[f]riendship is certainly the finest balm for the pangs of disappointed love” (33). But the Thorpe siblings are immersed in a fiction of their own, to which they each enthusiastically subscribe. Both John and Isabella live lives of lies and deceit, seeing little as it is, and exaggerating all, each selfishly involved in the vigorous and egocentric pursuit of suitable marriage partners. Thus it is John who twice works his fiction of Catherine’s financial status on General Tilney, revealing Catherine first as an heiress, and subsequently as penniless, each time influencing the General’s conduct towards Catherine. But Catherine, who is still unsure of the validity of her perceptions, remains excessively gullible taking each of these new acquaintances at face value, even though she frequently finds their behaviour confusing. She has difficulty in reconciling Isabella’s avowed hatred of men, “odious” (43), “conceited creatures” (42), who “give themselves such airs” (42), and are “often amazingly impertinent” (42), with her excessive flirtatiousness in the presence of males, and Catherine is bewildered when John firmly states that he had observed the Tilneys driving a phaeton down Landsdown Road, when she has herself seen them walking around the corner of Laura-place. She is perplexed by the two very different attitudes John expresses towards the safety of James’ gig and astonished at the two versions that John proffers in regard to the safety of his horses. But even if she discerns Isabella and John’s inconsistencies and lies, she is more dangerously exposed to Isabella’s “false manner of judgement” (Tave, 1973:41).

Austen supplies little background to the Thorpes. All that is revealed is that their mother was a school friend and “a most worthy old friend” (36) of Mrs Allen’s and that their father was a lawyer. Mrs Thorpe, now widowed, is not very rich, but is very indulgent to her children. Although “good-humoured” (34) and “well-meaning” (34), Mrs Thorpe is clearly in Bath for the sole purpose of finding suitable marriage partners for her children.

It seems that Mrs Thorpe and Mrs Allen have much in common, including the trivial content of their exchanges: Mrs Allen’s main topic of conversation concerns clothing,

for “[d]ress was her passion. She had a most harmless delight in being fine...” (20), and Mrs Thorpe’s is dedicated to “the worthlessness of lords and attorneys” (34) and to her children. And so, much like Catherine, the Thorpe offspring appear to have no dependable or reliable person to point out the folly of their ways, or to guide them. Unlike Henry and Eleanor Tilney, who emanate from an old, established and “respectable family in Gloucestershire” (30), the Thorpes are, in effect, unaccompanied, unchaperoned and ostensibly answerable to no one, with Isabella, her two younger sisters and John seemingly springing from a dubious, unfixed and unsecured background.

Isabella quickly adopts Catherine as friend and protégé and the two girls spend more and more time together: “They called each other by their Christian name, were always arm in arm...pinned up each other’s train for the dance, and were not to be divided in the set...” (37). But more relevantly they “shut themselves up, to read novels together” (37). For Isabella possesses an unhealthy addiction to gothic novels, perceiving herself and all around her in gothic terms, surrounded by the sensational and melodramatic.

Although Hannah More and Wollstonecraft emanate from ideologically different foundations, with More’s instructions being based on an evangelical Christian background, and Wollstonecraft’s on proto-feminism, More, like Wollstonecraft, warns that

[n]ovels, which used chiefly to be dangerous in one respect, are now become mischievous in a thousand. They are continually shifting their ground, and enlarging their sphere, and are daily becoming vehicles of wider mischief. Sometimes they concentrate their force, and are at once employed to diffuse destructive politics, deplorable profligacy, and impudent infidelity (1974:1:31).

Interestingly, the narrator proffers some lengthy comment on novels, entering strongly into the debate on the role of the novel, and criticising novelists who forbid their own heroines the liberty of reading the works of other authors, and censure “the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding” (37), referring indirectly also to Dr John Gregory’s warning to his daughter to “shun as you would do the most fatal poison, all that species of reading and conversation which warms the imagination, which engages and softens the heart” (in Hagstrum, 1980:128). Instead authors are called upon to unite, for the narrator

advises that the task of “decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit and taste to recommend them” (37), be left to the Reviewers, suggesting that it is not the content of the novels that constitutes the problem, but the indiscriminate reading habits of the reader that merits criticism.

And so Catherine is abandoned to Isabella’s enthusiastic and indiscriminate reading habits, and left to work out for herself what and how she should read. And it soon becomes apparent that the gothic novels which dictate Isabella’s reading patterns have indeed so unhealthily possessed Isabella’s mind that her activities and emotions are dominated by gothic expressions, gothic events, gothic intrigue, despair and betrayal. Her language is layered and her speech littered with extravagant, hyperbolic expressions: Catherine is “dearest Catherine” (39), “dear creature” (40), “dear love” (52), “my beloved Catherine” (70), “my sweetest Catherine” (70). Isabella’s imagination has been so totally corrupted by her idea of being a gothic heroine that her sense of reality has been distorted. She is accordingly capable only of dangerously false and inaccurate constructions of people, events and emotions, of connivance and duplicity. And because she is Catherine’s friend, Catherine is led by her, and weaned from her customary reading habits by Isabella who introduces her to gothic novels such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, *Necromancer of the Black Forest*, *Orphan of the Rhine* and *Horrid Mysteries*, which Catherine enthusiastically devours.

Henry describes Catherine as “[o]pen, candid, artless, guileless, with affections strong but simple, forming no pretensions, and knowing no disguise” (206), and, as such Catherine has much to learn about life, needing to learn to see things as they are, to learn the art of differentiating between reality and fiction, and to discriminate between false friends and true ones. For this very inexperienced and impressionable young woman, encouraged by the attentions of her apparently sophisticated and knowledgeable friend Isabella, who is four years older than her, “and at least four years better informed” (33), is excessively vulnerable and wildly accessible to suggestions which expose her to the wanderings of her overactive imagination, and lead her into unnecessary, emotionally unhealthy, and unhappily embarrassing situations.

Catherine also needs to be weaned from her newly acquired indulgence in all things gothic. For as Tanner argues,

[Catherine] is in danger of perverting reality...one of the things she has to learn is to break out of quotations, as it were, and discover the complex differences (as well as the complex connections) between reading a book and reading the world (1986:45).

While her family has entrusted her supervision in Bath to the rather silly Mrs Allen, the naïve, young Catherine cannot be regarded as motherless in the same sense as either Emma Woodhouse or Anne Elliot, or even Emily, the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. But all the action, both in Bath and at the Abbey, takes place in the absence of either a mother or a sensible mother figure who could provide her with the guidance she requires during this critical developmental period.

Catherine's solid background, however, stands her in good stead, affording her some support in dealing with the complexities of the frivolous society in which she finds herself, and in particular with the perplexing and contradictory behaviour of the young Thorpes. Moreover she fortunately has the steady and practical influence of the Tilneys, who counterbalance Isabella's potentially disastrous influence and deceptions, and more particularly of Eleanor, who unlike Isabella,

seemed capable of being young, attractive, and at a ball, without wanting to fix the attention of every man near her, and without exaggerated feelings of extatic delight or inconceivable vexation on every little trifling occurrence (56).

For Eleanor's unyielding conventional values and manners offset and balance Isabella's artful and manipulative deceit, and her sensationalism and contrived behaviour.

Thus, although Catherine is to some extent seduced by the gothic fiction to which Isabella exposes her, she does not quite succumb to Isabella's gothic obsessions. She perceives Isabella's insinuations of betrayal, of being followed by imaginary young men, and her declarations of jealousy at Catherine's friendship with the Tilneys as strange. She notes Isabella's ambivalent attitude towards gigs, whose descriptions change from being "odious" (44) to "delightful" (44), depending upon the occupants, and she remains mystified by Isabella's chameleon-like adjustment to attract the sophisticated Captain Tilney, and John Thorpe's lies about the Tilneys' visit to Wick Rocks. But, she still fails to attach any consequence to Isabella's disloyalty, when on the one hand Isabella promises not to leave her alone at the

dance in the Upper-rooms, but then does precisely what she has promised not to do, excusing herself by saying that James has impatiently prevailed upon her to dance with him, leaving Catherine, humiliated and suffering, at the mercy of Mrs Thorpe and Mrs Allen.

Significantly Catherine also fails to appreciate that Isabella and her brother John are only attracted to James Morland and his sister while they believe that the Morlands “rolled in money” (89), and that their interest in her is based on their understanding that Catherine would inherit Mr Allen’s money. Accordingly, whereas the young Thorpes adjust their language, their morals and conduct to fit the circumstances, “manufactur[ing] reality” (Tave,1973:40), and even attempt to manipulate Catherine, Catherine remains inherently artless. For, although Catherine is frequently unable to reconcile the conflicting accounts to which she is exposed throughout her stay in Bath, particularly when faced with Isabella’s puzzling and conflicting attitudes towards men whom she appears to simultaneously wish to attract and reject, she retains her essential integrity and continues to take everything at face value. And so, while she is often confused by what she sees and hears in Bath, she remains observant and questioning, refusing to assimilate the questionable behaviour that she encounters in her friend, or to adopt it herself. For even though Catherine is inexperienced as to the ways of the world, and more particularly the ways of Bath, Gilbert Ryle points out that

[she] is quite ungullible about what is right and wrong, decorous and indecorous. Her standards of conduct, unlike her criteria of actuality, are those of a candid, scrupulous and well-brought up girl, not those of the unschooled, novel-struck girl that she also is (in Southam,1968,114).

Thus, despite the difficulties and complexities which she faces in Bath, and even though her impressionable imagination is in some danger of imbalance, instead of adopting the demeanour of her fictional heroines when confused, and “turning of a deathlike paleness, and falling in a fit on Mrs Allen’s bosom,” Catherine merely blushes, “with cheeks only a little redder than usual” (53), when Henry unexpectedly appears in the Upper-rooms. However, as the corruptive influence of her friend Isabella takes hold of her, Catherine increasingly succumbs to her overactive imagination, which enters and erodes her inherent common sense, adopting the dramatic, exaggerated language and inflated clichés of her friend, learning to love a hyacinth, rather quaintly confiding in Henry how she “never look[s] at [Beechen

Cliff]... without thinking of the south of France" (106), expecting "murder and every thing of the kind" (112) and nothing less around every corner, and confiding in Henry and Eleanor that "something very shocking indeed, will soon come out in London" (112), something "uncommonly dreadful" (112).

But even then Catherine neither submits to gothic hysteria nor falls into a gothic decline, as "[f]eelings rather natural than heroic possessed her..." (93). And so, as she watches Isabella first flirt with James, and then later with Frederick Tilney, she comes to appreciate the wrongness of her first impressions of the Thorpes; she begins to grasp that Isabella is not what she initially seems, and to understand the irrational and dangerous nature of Isabella's conduct.

For with her stable background and the dependable young Tilneys as role models, Catherine becomes increasingly "disturbed" (89) by the Thorpes' deceptions, inconsistencies and conniving. She realises that Isabella is "ungenerous and selfish, regardless of everything but her own gratification" (98), and discovers that "[t]he result of her observations was not agreeable" (149). She is astonished at Isabella's flirtations with Frederick Tilney in Bath, and ashamed at the letter which she receives from Isabella at the Abbey and its disparagement of Frederick:

Such a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine. Its inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood, struck her from the very first. She was ashamed of Isabella, and ashamed of having ever loved her. Her professions of attachment were now as disgusting as her excuses were empty, and her demands impudent (218).

While Catherine had noticed, if not understood, Isabella's deviant behaviour at the inception of their friendship, this behaviour, while strange, had appeared to her to cause no harm. Catherine now appreciates how flawed her perceptions were, and that Isabella's conduct is in fact exceedingly dangerous. She accordingly no longer finds this conduct curious, but distasteful and hurtful and she feels remorse for having condoned such aberrant behaviour in the past, and having retained Isabella as her friend and confidante.

And so, with the failings of the Thorpes set off against the strengths of the Tilneys, Catherine's reason overcomes the emotional and irrational elements that threaten to overwhelm her, permitting her to see things as they are. Sense rather than sensibility

must prevail. Catherine's practicality and good sense must eventually override passion and sentiment. For as Henry points out, neither melodrama nor gothic fiction can survive in England — There are just too many people. Moreover, while she remains in Bath her fantasies cannot pose a problem, because Bath, with its fashionable and crowded social strata, will not permit this.

But Eleanor and the General invite Catherine to the Abbey, and here the remoteness and isolation of the Abbey permit her (and the reader's) expectations to run riot and allow for the implementation and indulgence of Catherine's gothic fantasies. For "[h]er passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney..." (141), and so she hopes that

[the Abbey's] long, damp passages, its narrow cells and ruined chapel, were to be within her daily reach, and she could not entirely subdue the hope of some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun (141).

The General decides that Catherine is to take his place in the curricle for a part of the journey, leaving Henry to travel to the Abbey alone with Catherine. The General has been misled by John Thorpe to believe that Catherine is an heiress, and despite the social taboos against young men travelling alone with unchaperoned young girls, he arranges for Henry and Catherine to travel together to the Abbey, eager to encourage their budding romance. Catherine, who remembers Mr Allen's disapproval of young women being seen unaccompanied in young men's open carriages, has begun to learn something about decorum. In this instance, however, she overrules her better judgement, in deference to the General.

During this trip Henry suggests that the Abbey will have "sliding panels and tapestry" (158), dimly lit halls, windowless rooms, "gloomy chamber[s]" (158), and "purple velvet" (158), creating his own fiction for Catherine's edification, deliberately and playfully exciting Catherine's fascination for the gothic, describing even the Abbey staff in gothic terms and causing Catherine to exclaim, "'Oh! Mr Tilney, how frightful!—This is just like a book!—But it cannot really happen to me'" (159). Just as at their first meeting in Bath, where he ironically exposes and pokes fun at social conventions, at the Abbey Henry sends up the gothic, playing on Catherine's hopeful anticipations, but expecting Catherine to appreciate his irony when faced with the reality of the structure. Although she reveals her full consciousness of the differences between the world of fiction and the real world, the situation is now different, as

Catherine's mind is receptive to stimulation. However, Henry, amused by Catherine's reactions to his story, fails to complete it, leaving Catherine bereft of any guidance as to how she is to behave at the Abbey and vulnerable to her over-excited imagination. For this, and for permitting their trip to the Abbey to become a voyage into the gothic, an element of responsibility for Catherine's inappropriate conduct at the Abbey can possibly be attributed to Henry. For he appreciates just how naïve she is, saying: "Then we are on very unequal terms, for I understand you perfectly well" (132). As such he owes her a more circumspect introduction to the Abbey, rather than encouraging her in her gothic fantasies.

The narrator emphasises that despite its suitability as a framework for a gothic novel, its isolation, its medieval origins, its medieval architecture and medieval ruins, the Abbey has been modernised, to the extent that not even "an antique chimney" (161) remains. Moreover the reader is informed that there is nothing out of the ordinary about the modern lodges and offices at Northanger, or indeed anything that could possibly be objectively construed as gothic either in origin or nature, for "every modern invention...had been adopted" (183). And although the General had so carefully preserved the gothic form of the windows, the buildings are filled only with furniture in "the elegance of modern taste" (162).

The Abbey thus fails dismally to meet Catherine's expectations. Even though she is struck by this oddity, it is this important point that Catherine, "blinded by false observations and absurd possibilities" (Tave:1973:61), purposefully fails to address, and accordingly rejects. For her judgement is now totally subsumed by her vivid imagination:

It was very noble—very grand—very charming!—was all that Catherine had to say, for her indiscriminating eye scarcely discerned the colour of the satin;...the costliness or elegance of any room's fitting-up could be nothing to her; she cared for no furniture of a more modern date than the fifteenth century (182).

Faced with an obvious dearth of the extraordinary that she had anticipated, Catherine now attempts to fill the vacuum, seeking out the extraordinary to satisfy her gothic inclinations, manufacturing an imaginary reality. And so, like Isabella, Catherine now borrows from fiction, adjusts her sense of reality and superimposes on it a layer of gothic mystery. Thus, as Tave observes, at the Abbey "[Catherine] imposes her own

defined expectations and thereby creates oddity" (1973:45). She has "surrendered to an order of improbability...imported...from romance" (1973:53).

While Catherine was justifiably uncomfortable at her meetings with the General in Bath, where "it had been a release to get away from him" (129), at the Abbey she shares the discomfort of his younger children in his presence, and is "far from being at ease" (154). Accordingly she begins to indulge in ill-founded gothic speculation about the General and her surroundings. She examines the contents of the Abbey and the props in Mrs Tilney's room and incorrectly assigns gothic attributes to them, from which she then proceeds to draw further irrational, gothic conclusions: locked doors evoke Montoni's imprisonment of his wife in an upstairs attic in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Emily's incarceration within the fortress of Udolpho, with the result that Catherine's early misgivings of the General lead her to equate Montoni with the General and impute all of Montoni's airs, attitudes and evil to him. In this manner Catherine transforms the General into a classical, gothic villain, failing to separate fiction from reality, despite her understanding of the gothic novel as a fictional construct.

Catherine's blood ran cold with the horrid suggestions which naturally sprang from these words. Could it be possible?—Could Henry's father?—And yet how many were the examples to justify even the blackest suspicions!—And, when she saw him in the evening, while she worked with her friend, slowly pacing the drawing-room for an hour together in silent thoughtfulness, with downcast eyes and contracted brow, she felt secure from all possibility of wronging him. It was the air and attitude of a Montoni!—What could more plainly speak the gloomy workings of a mind not wholly dead to every sense of humanity, in its fearful review of past scenes of guilt? Unhappy man!—And the anxiousness of her spirits directed her eyes towards his figure so repeatedly, as to catch Miss Tilney's notice. 'My father,' she whispered, 'often walks about the room in this way; it is nothing unusual.' 'So much the worse!' thought Catherine; 'such ill-timed exercise was of a piece with the strange unseasonableness of his morning walks, and boded nothing good' (186-7).

Mrs Tilney's untimely demise has significant ramifications. Not only has it left the General unaided and alone to make important decisions about his family that have extensive consequences for all, including assisting in and promoting his son's romance, and then dismissing poor Catherine when she appears to be not entirely suitable. But Mrs Tilney's death also creates a vacuum which Catherine's aroused imagination needs to fill. And so the death is structurally indispensable to the story.

However, the circumstances surrounding Mrs Tilney's death are no more extraordinary than the Abbey.

Accordingly, while Eleanor later confirms that Mrs Tilney died early of natural causes, and that General Tilney felt her loss sadly, Eleanor's one short interrupted sentence, that she was going to take her to the room in which her mother died, "conveyed pages of intelligence to Catherine" (186). It causes her to adopt a sinister approach to everything surrounding this death, attributing "some deeper cause" (187) to the General's sleeplessness, and validating her faulty reasoning with Eleanor's absence at the time of her mother's death, with the untouched contents of Mrs Tilney's room, with General Tilney's frequent paces in the gallery and with his evident reluctance to enter his deceased wife's bedroom.

The suddenness of her reputed illness; the absence of her daughter, and probably of her other children, at the time—all favoured the supposition of her imprisonment.—Its origin—jealousy perhaps, or wanton cruelty—was yet to be unravelled (188).

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Emily is left motherless. After a suitable period of mourning she journeys into the Pyrenean mountains with her ailing father. In these dark and menacing mountains all manner of events occur, taking *inter alia* the form of storms and bandits, some apparently real and others apparently mystical and uncanny. Emily, however, is a realist, and, notwithstanding the seemingly irrational and supernatural mysteries that surround her, and the superstitious beliefs of her attendants, attempts to make sense of these bizarre events. Despite her father's untimely death, her Aunt Cheron's fatal marriage to Montoni, her own imprisonment in the castle of Udolpho, and the horrific things Emily both sees and experiences there, she retains her certainty in reality, with Ann Radcliffe clarifying each mysterious event at the conclusion of the novel and vindicating Emily's logic. For while certain gothic novels refer only to the bizarre and the inexplicable, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* reveals that with the application of sense rather than sensibility, all can be explained. Catherine, however, fails to appreciate the didactic message contained within this novel.

Accordingly, engrossed in Henry's fiction, and that of her own, and caught up in the narrator's ironic perspective, which at the same time plays on the reader's expectations, Catherine chooses sensibility over common sense, perceiving her environment solely in gothic and mystical terms. Whereas Emily had perceived the

dangers in the easy access to her room in the castle of Udolpho, so that the heavy chests and medieval furniture become her tools to block the danger, Catherine seeks only mystery, particularly in anything jammed or locked. Unfortunately this leads her to implausible and bizarre conclusions. And so, when her mysterious chest yields up only a counterpane, and the jammed drawer of the cabinet a laundry list, instead of perceiving the innate logic behind these very ordinary items and their location, Catherine fails to adjust her perceptions to fit the reality with which she is faced. Moreover, whereas Emily gains access to the tower in which the veiled picture and instruments of torture are kept, and in which her Aunt Cheron dies, she merely records what she sees, whereas Catherine's imagination runs riot if she is as much as denied access to a room.

Emily is frequently provoked into tears and fits of fainting by her awful experiences in Udolpho. Catherine, however, receives no similar provocation: she is not confronted with the actual horrors that Emily meets, but facing her imaginary horrors and strange and unhappy incongruities, Catherine never faints. Gorman argues that despite Austen's implied criticism of fainting as a fault, she retained the use of this fashionable ploy, for the reason that "fainting was part of the sentimental novel and of her culture" (1993:27). But Gorman notes that, while Austen permits her lesser heroines to faint, true heroines are not similarly indulged. She therefore suggests that fainting is a phenomenon used metaphorically by Austen as an index of feeling, insight and strength.

But is it correct that Austen used fainting only as an index of feeling which true heroines have the power to resist, or is this notable absence of what was, and still is, an apparently acceptable literary convention merely another example of Austen's debunking of a traditional fictional device? For, although Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* comes close to it, other than Henrietta in *Persuasion* and Harriet in *Emma*, none of Austen's women faints, heroines or not, revealing that fainting is clearly not an indulgence approved of by Austen, even if justified by literary convention.

And so Catherine does not faint. Although her judgement has been incapacitated by her overly creative imagination, and although she is in danger of assimilating Isabella's most obnoxious and dangerous tendencies, instead of resorting to hysteria and bouts of fainting to escape impossible situations, as Emily so frequently does, Catherine, unlike Emily, literally keeps her feet on the ground, and ultimately breaks

free of her particular, unhealthy, gothic fiction, grasping how inappropriate gothic interpretations are outside of the gothic novel.

Catherine, like many of Austen's other heroines, has not however reached this state of maturity on her own. For as Tanner rather formulaically comments: "All of Jane Austen's heroines have to be educated or tutored – by men, an older woman or sister, experience or themselves (never a parent)" (1986:24). Henry fills this role. He has been obliged to come to Catherine's assistance. Wollstonecraft comments on the problem thus:

The best method, I believe, that can be adopted to correct a fondness for novels is to ridicule them: not indiscriminately, for then it would have little effect; but if a judicious person, with some turn for humour, would read several to a young girl, and point out both by tones, and apt comparisons with pathetic incidents and heroic characters in history, how foolishly and ridiculously they caricatured human nature, just opinions might be substituted instead of romantic sentiments (1992:316).

As Catherine's mentor, Henry accordingly attempts to place the gothic in perspective for both the reader and for Catherine, correctly contextualising Catherine's fiction and undercutting the expectations of the reader. He asks her to "consider the dreadful nature of [her] suspicions" (197), and explains that in its inherent nature England cannot sustain gothic events, "where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where newspapers lay every thing open..." (198). And so, as a result of Henry's revelation of the true facts underlying Mrs Tilney's death Catherine first acquires insight into her "voluntary self-created delusion" (199) and becomes ashamed of her behaviour and her overly active imagination. And, as Henry gently rebukes her, Catherine recognises the force of his corrections. Her illusions finally give way to reality as Henry explains the nature and the circumstances of his mother's death, and calls upon Catherine to reconsider her opinions, saying that while Mrs Radcliffe's gothic plots might acquire relevance in the Pyrenees, the application of the gothic in England is ill-placed and incongruous:

"Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember 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" (197-8).

But as Henry accentuates his criticism, he reduces Catherine to “tears of shame” (198), becoming “the formidable Henry” (199). And Catherine fears that her emotional connection with him is threatened, as only “soothing politeness remains” (199). She appreciates where her excessive and unhealthy fantasies have led her and is filled with trepidation that “[i]t was not only with herself that she was sunk – but with Henry” (199). For Catherine’s awakening is not just to the errors of her own misjudgement, but also to the fact that the man she loves thinks her to be silly. Her misjudgement, and its consequential humiliation and anxiety, result in introspection and self-examination, balance and moderation, and an acceptance of the real and ordinary world, transforming her tears of shame into tears of honest feeling, humiliation and cleansing, leading Tanner to comment that

Catherine...goes through a learning-process, both discarding fantasies and facing facts. This kind of double process of disillusion and enlightenment is one which many Austen heroines experience (1986:48).

Butler argues that Catherine’s state of delusion is a voluntary creation, which could only arise out of a state of consistent naïveté (1975:177). On the other hand Gilbert and Gubar suggest that Catherine has escaped the imprisonment and control of her gothic “miseducation” (1979:135), and that Austen has in fact merely redefined the gothic in terms of feminine powerlessness. Whichever interpretation is favoured, Catherine recovers her composure with the application of Henry’s logical argument, and begins to assume the mantle of maturity that Austen requires for a successful marriage: “The visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened” (199). Catherine has been persuaded that

in the central part of England there was surely some security for...a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist (200).

Accordingly, “[h]er spirits became absolutely comfortable....The anxieties of common life began soon to succeed to the alarms of romance” (201).

But, leaving Catherine’s gothic fantasies aside, not everything at the Abbey can be adequately explained: the General’s conduct frequently seems totally inexplicable to Catherine, because she does not have the benefit of understanding his patriarchal

intentions, and, consequently his initial anxieties relating to her comfort, and his concern for her health, when she walks in the forest with Eleanor, conflict curiously with the haste and manner with which he later has her ejected from the Abbey.

Thus, although Henry expects to scotch Catherine's gothic expectations of the Abbey, in a way her expectations are partially met. For, despite Henry's protestations to the contrary, there is indeed much that is sinister in the Abbey; perhaps not in its architectural structures or contents, but something which can be construed in very real terms, and even perhaps in gothic terms. The threat of menace has not been left behind in Bath with Isabella's diseased mind. Catherine has not been wholly wrong. Her perceptions of malevolence in the Abbey have not been altogether unfounded, as there are elements of unease that remain present and unexplained. Whereas the General's desires for his second son to marry an heiress would have been regarded as a common patriarchal concern and normal in that era, his later conduct towards Catherine is socially unacceptable. Therefore, although his actions fail to assume gothic proportions, the reality is still disturbing.

A double irony reveals itself after Henry's explanation has so mortified Catherine. Catherine, unaware of the influential role that John Thorpe has played in first persuading the General that she is an heiress, and later exaggerating her family's poverty, still has to explain the General's incomprehensible and bizarre behaviour. He may not be the gothic villain that she has created, but he has nevertheless behaved in an extraordinary fashion, in his enthusiastic attempts to acquire her as a wife for his second son, and then in his subsequent dismissal of her as soon as he discovers that she is not an heiress.

Like Catherine, the General has created his own fiction, which although it is understandable, is still frightening, and socially indefensible. He changes his behaviour to suit the facts of which he is presently apprised, jumping from one incorrect conclusion to another, applying principles of deduction not totally dissimilar to Catherine's or Isabella's. But now that Catherine's judgement has been called into question, and shown by Henry to be fallible, she is even more vulnerable, as she is left with nothing to fall back upon in the strange circumstances in which she finds herself. For this reason Gilbert and Gubar suggest that Catherine is trapped "not inside the General's Abbey, but inside his fiction, a tale in which she figures as an heiress and thus a suitable bride for his second son" (1979:137).

Tanner too explores this concept of evil, arguing that

when it comes to the prospect of a hidden evil or horror in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine is, as it were, wrongly right. She has to address herself to the problem of General Tilney's behaviour – 'what could have provoked him to such a breach of hospitality, and so suddenly turned all his partial regard...into actual ill-will'. This is a much more problematical and painful phenomenon than anything that might be found by groping around in old cupboards and drawers. The fact – not the 'fancy' – is that General Tilney 'had acted neither honourably nor feelingly—neither as a gentleman nor as a parent' (1986:45).

Eleanor is deeply shocked by her father's uncompassionate and insensitive behaviour towards Catherine, which she believes is "without the considerations even of decent civility!" (225) and is unable to believe in the extent of her father's dramatic over-reaction, asking, "how is it possible?" (225) She fully realises the serious impact of the reality to which Catherine has been exposed, and ironically reacts to this appalling realisation in a manner traditionally assumed by gothic heroines:

Eleanor's cheeks were pale, and her manner greatly agitated. Though evidently intending to come in, it seemed an effort to enter the room, and a still greater to speak when there. Catherine, supposing some uneasiness on Captain Tilney's account, could only express her concern by silent attention; obliged her to be seated, rubbed her temples with lavender-water, and hung over her with affectionate solicitude (223).

But by this stage, having learned her lesson from Henry's admonitions, Catherine has dispensed with her gothic inclinations and reassured herself that gothic mystery and English reality could not coexist:

Among the Alps and Pyrenees, perhaps, there were no mixed characters. There, such as were not as spotless as an angel, might have the dispositions of a fiend. But in England it was not so...(200).

And so Catherine remains calm and sensible, assuming the role previously adopted by Eleanor, asking only for a rational explanation of the General's behaviour.

Catherine needs to return to the harmony of Fullerton in order to objectively assess the events that have taken place, to re-gather herself and her thoughts and to regain

her peace of mind. But significantly, along with her acquisition of insight, Catherine is now forced by the General's patriarchy to assume a gothic role, involuntarily becoming part of a gothic plot. She not only suffers from the humiliation of being sent home "in solitude and disgrace" (232), moneyless, in a hack post chaise without explanation, unannounced, alone and unchaperoned, but also from the grief, distress and unhappiness, caused by her fear that Henry might react with "calm acquiescence" (231) to her expulsion from the Abbey. She has become

the unconscious object of a deception which [the General's] pride could not pardon, and which a better pride would have been ashamed to own. She was guilty only of being less rich than he had supposed her to be (244).

And so while she initially voluntarily sought adventure, she has now been exposed to an inexplicable and implacable malevolence, and, with this unsought and unintentional exposure, and the possible loss of her lover, she at last succumbs to the ashen looks and dejected demeanour of the heroines whose roles she has in the past so admired.

Her loss of spirits was a yet greater alteration. In her rambling and her idleness she might only be a caricature of herself; but in her silence and sadness she was the very reverse of all that she had been before (240).

Significantly, Catherine returns home an altered person, albeit that she has overcome what might reasonably have been expected to develop into an obsession, and despite the fact that her common sense, which has been temporarily corrupted by her excessive imagination, has been restored.

Tanner argues that this change is fundamental for the novel:

Not only must something happen (eventfulness) but there must be some change — development, enlightenment, disillusion, increase in self- knowledge, deepened moral awareness, a rise or fall in society, a change in economic position...and this we call alteration (1986:51).

But, while they are aware that "General Tilney had acted neither honourably nor feelingly—neither as a gentleman nor as a parent" (234), the Morlands have no knowledge either of the contortions, intricacies and complications of Catherine's life in Bath, or the ill-will to which she has fallen victim at the Abbey, and accordingly

their healthy and practical approach, and pure joy at seeing her again, is of little benefit to Catherine, who has been subjected to something more sinister than anything she has ever experienced before. And, as could be expected of people of their nature, their questions as to the motives of the General's action "did not oppress them by any means so long; and, after a due course of useless conjecture, that 'it was a strange business, and that he must be a very strange man...'" (234),

they were still perfectly unsuspecting of there being any deeper evil. They never once thought of her heart, which, for the parents of a young lady of seventeen, just returned from the first excursion from home, was odd enough! (235)

For, perhaps worse than the incivility to which she has been subjected, and the absence of any logical explanation for this, Catherine is also in love and she fears that her love must now remain unrequited. Catherine is at this stage in danger of falling into a decline similar to that of Marianne Dashwood's, for like Marianne she has been shown the fallibility of her own perceptions. But fortunately for Catherine, she, unlike Marianne, remains at home under the watchful eye of her sensible mother, in this way averting illness and depression.

Mrs Morland believes that the perusal of an essay in *The Mirror* about young girls who "have been spoilt for home by great acquaintance" (241) will assist Catherine in coming to terms with her experiences at the Abbey. And so, when,

after a few minutes, [Catherine] sunk again, without knowing it herself, into languor and listlessness, moving herself in her chair, from the irritation of weariness, much oftener than she moved her needle.—Mrs. Morland watched the progress of this relapse; and seeing, in her daughter's absent and dissatisfied look, the full proof of that repining spirit to which she had now begun to attribute her want of cheerfulness, hastily left the room to fetch the book in question, anxious to lose no time in attacking so dreadful a malady" (241).

Tanner suggests that the real answer "for Jane Austen's heroines is of course marriage and domesticity....[as her] heroines have to learn their true 'duties'. They all have to find their proper homes" (1986:32-3). For Austen requires growth and maturity from all her heroines, together with the voluntary rejection of excess, and Catherine is no exception. Catherine has had to learn to live her own life and write her own 'story'. And in learning her 'true duties' Catherine has been obliged to

undergo a requisite sea change. While she has let her overly active imagination act to her own disadvantage, she has also been disciplined. She has consequently matured, and, with the restoration of her emotional equilibrium and reason, she has come to realise that, while gothic fiction cannot be applied literally and uncritically to real life, malevolence and deception are nevertheless often present.

Turned from the house and in such a way!—Without any reason that could justify, any apology that could atone for the abruptness, the rudeness, nay, the insolence of it....And all this by such a man as General Tilney, so polite, so well-bred, and heretofore so particularly fond of her! It was as incomprehensible as it was mortifying and grievous (226).

And so, unlike Isabella, who, still enmeshed in the throes of her gothic fiction, has predictably been punished by Austen, left in the unsuccessful pursuit of suitable marriage partners, Catherine, with Henry's judicious help, has managed to cut herself free from an unhealthy preoccupation with all things gothic and fantastic and to engage with reality. She has learned to perceive the dangers of indiscriminate novel reading as referred to by both Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, and has in this way achieved fulfilment of the precepts advocated by Wollstonecraft:

Make women rational creatures and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives and mothers – that is, if men do not neglect the duties of husbands and fathers (1992:306).

For, despite having been the victim of both John Thorpe and the General's malevolence, Catherine has not succumbed, but has learned that the inherent and incomprehensible uncertainties in life can be overcome by a relationship based on maturity and love. Accordingly, just as Anne Elliot regains her bloom with the attention of Captain Wentworth, so Catherine regains her mental, spiritual and emotional health with Henry's visit to Fullerton and with his proposal of marriage.

the anxious, agitated, happy feverish Catherine,—said not a word; but her glowing cheek and brightened eye made her mother trust that this good-natured visit would at least set her heart at ease for a time...(242).

Catherine has found her hero and her enlightenment, evil is vanquished and the "delusions of romance" have been replaced by "the deceptions of common life" (Tave,1973:68), and the reader is ironically advised to hope for "perfect felicity" (250)

for the happy couple, in the style of the romantic novel, even if the answer to Austen's final question as to "whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (252) is still left hanging in the balance.

CHAPTER TWO

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Although there are many instances of illness and death referred to in *Sense and Sensibility*, the primary focus in this chapter is on the sickness which lies within the extreme manifestations of both sense and sensibility.

Sense and Sensibility begins with a significant death: "The old Gentleman died; his will was read, and like almost every other will, gave as much disappointment as pleasure" (4). A litany of ill health and accidents follows, and an air of depression hangs over the middle section of the novel. Whereas the Dashwood family would not have moved to Barton if Henry Dashwood had not died, and while Marianne would not have encountered Willoughby if she had not met with an accident, and just as each of these incidents contributes to plot development, so Marianne's later prolonged and intense emotional suffering, as in Austen's other novels, also results in her character development. And it is this anguish that finally induces her to change her perceptions both about herself and others, and about her unhealthy approach to life; that leads her to emotional and religious acceptance, and enables her at last to make a sensible, if, for some readers, disappointing choice of marriage partners.

It is virtually impossible to gain a clear understanding of the novel without first understanding the meaning attributed to the word *sensibility* during Jane Austen's era. The Oxford English Dictionary offers many definitions of the word: defining it in present day meaning as the "capability of being perceived by the senses", and also providing a definition of the term in the form that it was used during the eighteenth and nineteenth century:

In the 18th and early 19th c. (afterwards somewhat *rarely*): Capacity for refined emotion; delicate sensitiveness of taste; also, readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in literature or art.

Hagstrum too provides a useful historical synopsis of the term, saying that in 1783 John Murdoch first differentiated between sense and sensibility, contrasting the two terms, and equating sense with judgement (1980:8). Hagstrum suggests:

In Austen sense is an attractive quality – dry, witty, given to understatement, clearheaded and clear-eyed, virtuous; it leads to love of cleanliness and comfort and above all to moral responsibility and an unselfishness alive to familial and civic duty. But paradoxically its finest quality is that it possesses feeling (1980:271).

Thus, even though the term sensibility derives from the word sensible, sensibility was associated more with passion than reason, while still maintaining its relationship to sense.

Hagstrum notes that after the middle of the eighteenth century the meaning of the term changed, becoming,

a central term of complex and multiple signification covering such meanings as perceptibility by the senses, the readiness of an organ to respond to sensory stimuli, mental perception, the power of emotions, heightened emotional consciousness, and quickness of feeling....The word is indeed related to fine excess or deplorable excess and in either meaning is a much stronger word than we now think of it as being....And yet the most important fact about the eighteenth-century use of the word was not that its meaning of sexual passion was fully maintained but that it was concurrently civilized and 'tenderized,'....until it became almost indistinguishable from the latest eighteenth-century meaning of 'sentimental' (1980:9).

He summarises the three most characteristic eighteenth-century emotions as being: "pathetic" which began by referring to all passions; 'sentiment', which originally signified the product of intellection; and 'sensibility', which at first included all feeling" (1980:10), saying further, that despite

all the wit and moral outrage with which Jane Austen accompanies her portrayal of sensibility, she respects it, however grudgingly, and yields to its attractiveness.... Sensibility is dangerous, no mistake about that. But it seems to grow in a soil of emotional richness, a richness that...[in Marianne] produces nectareous fruit (1980:12).

And so Hagstrum continues, claiming that Austen also perceived the cruelty of sensibility, suggesting that it could result in distorted perceptions, become dominant, and obscure sense and reason (1980:270).

It would seem therefore that during the eighteenth century sensibility was understood as capable of possessing negative characteristics alongside its positive aspects. And so it was often described as “The English Malady”, and defined in terms of over-taxed nerves.

Wollstonecraft deals with both the positive and negative aspects of sensibility in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and in particular the unhealthy effects that extreme sensibility has on susceptible females. She asks, “what is sensibility?” and supplies the answer to her question, referring to a definition of Dr Johnson’s: “Quickness of sensation, quickness of perception, delicacy” (1992:156). While this definition refers only to the positive effects of sensibility, Wollstonecraft also identifies the negative effects of the condition on women, saying, that because their senses are inflamed, and as their understanding is neglected, women consequently

become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling....Ever restless and anxious, their over-exercised sensibility not only renders them uncomfortable themselves, but troublesome, to use a soft phrase, to others. All their thoughts turn on things calculated to excite emotion...and their opinions are wavering (1992:153).

She asserts that because woman has allowed herself to become “the slave of sensibility” (1992:236), she has been overpowered by the other sex. She accordingly calls on woman to use reason “to snap her chains”, exclaiming: “They are free – who will be free!” (1992:205) And with revolutionary fervour, she demands that women re-acquire “their lost dignity...reforming themselves to reform the world” (1992:133).

For, she says, women have visited this malady on themselves by indulging in sensibility:

strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves – the only way women can rise in the world – by marriage....If, then, it can be fairly deduced from the present conduct of the sex, from the prevalent fondness for pleasure which takes place of ambition and those nobler passions that open and enlarge the soul, that the instruction which women have hitherto received has only tended, with the constitution of civil society, to render them insignificant objects of desire – mere propagators of fools! (1992:83)

It would seem thus that during the eighteenth century those who could feel deeply were thought to be “most capable of sympathy for human suffering, and therefore capable of a kind of intimacy and soul-sharing inaccessible to the vast majority of humanity” (Brodey, 1999:111), with the cult of sensibility reaching its pinnacle in the late eighteenth century, as evidenced in Henry Mackenzie’s novel, *The Man of Feeling*, (first published in 1771), and satirised by Austen in *Love and Freindship* (written in 1790).

Tanner also attempts a definition of sensibility in terms ascribed to it during the eighteenth century, saying that sensibility was equated with virtue, fineness of feeling and disposition. And so he says, that although it was removed from the world of appetite, it also carried with it its own potential dangers of self destruction and excess, leading to hysteria and collapse, instead of virtue and composure:

It was a privileged sign of superior delicacy and morality. However, it was not only too sensitive and fine to operate in the world, too frail to engage in its crude competitive struggles....It was....too exalted and committed to exquisite emotional integrity to function in the base world; or a negative desocialisation – too sick, uncontrolled and disordered to engage in any sane, sustained relationships (1986:78).

Tave mentions that Jane Austen had a special interest in sensibility “as a carefully cultivated loss of control” (1973:75). This is, however, looking at sensibility in its most simple form, as Austen does not restrict herself to this limited version. Instead she, like many other authors of her time, assigns both positive and negative elements to the emotion and portrays both sense and sensibility as occurring in varying degrees, using the term sense to denote reason and judiciousness, and sensibility to evoke feeling, heart and emotion.

Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility* incorporates elements of both sense and sensibility. Edward and Elinor both call him a “sensible man” (50 and 290), and we are told that he has “a sensible countenance” (34). But many of Austen’s characters possess only one of these attributes, and some, such as Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, lack both. Thus, whereas Mr Bennet describes Mr Collins as “quite the reverse” (64) of a sensible man, the narrator describes Mr Knightley in *Emma* as “a sensible man of about seven or eight-and-thirty” (9). We are also told that Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park* possesses both “sense and temper” (45), and that Edmund Bertram possesses “strong good sense and uprightness of mind” (21).

Furthermore in *Sense and Sensibility* Marianne describes Edward Ferrars as a “sensible man” (261), and John Dashwood remarks on “Colonel Brandon’s sense” (295).

As the title of this early novel would seem to indicate, *Sense and Sensibility*, (which in its first draft was called *Elinor and Marianne*), provides an in-depth investigation by Austen into each of these concepts. But sensibility, as opposed to sense, is not a concept unique to this novel. As indicated above, it crops up in the later novels as well. However, in these later novels sensibility, which tends to be associated with the female characters, but is not restricted to women, is balanced by positive elements. It is not just “a simple disguise under which [characters] can attain their own ends at the expense of others” (Tave, 1973:76). Accordingly in *Emma* Mr Knightley speaks “in a tone of great sensibility” (425) when he believes Emma Woodhouse to have been hurt by Frank Churchill. He also notes with approval that Jane Fairfax’s “sensibilities, I suspect, are strong” (289). And in *Mansfield Park* Edmund perceives that Fanny Price has “great sensibility of her situation” (17). Sensibility also makes Fanny glow in Henry’s eyes (235).

Thus Tave points out that

[i]n such people as these the sensibility is an accession of strength. It does not render them feebler, self-concerned and disabled for action, but makes them larger human beings, alive to more, capable of loving more fully because more understanding of others, able to do more when the need is there. This is possible only with people who are not “all sensibility,” or possessed of an excess of sensibility, but who are complete in character and possessed of sensibility among other and coordinate qualities (1973:77).

Sense and Sensibility explores both the negative and positive forms of which sensibility would seem to comprise. Elinor for example interprets sensibility as a positive force, when she says of Colonel Brandon, “I can only pronounce him to be a sensible man...” (51), acknowledging both his sensitivity and his sense. But, on the other hand, when Robert Ferrars marries Lucy, his sister Fanny suffers “agonies of sensibility” (371). And Robert enjoys “his own sensibility” (298), pitying Edward for his engagement to Lucy. But in this instance his form of sensibility is as pretentious and absurd as he is.

A cursory reading of the text would seem to indicate that sense and sensibility exist and operate in opposition to each other, and that similarly Elinor and Marianne, as the physical embodiments of sense and sensibility, metaphorically function antithetically. Moreover a facile interpretation would seem to reveal that both sense and sensibility, when possessed in isolation and in abundance, are each extremely unhealthy, leading to loss, physical and emotional ill health, and even the possibility of death.

However, in typical Austenian style, the text is not that superficial. It requires much deeper examination. For as Wiltshire comments,

though Marianne is allowed a very sufficient measure of good sense and Elinor's strong feeling and acuteness of perception is carefully touched on, there occurs an imbalance in the quality of bodily responses given to the two sisters (1992:60).

Thus, by apparently portraying the two sisters, Elinor and Marianne, as representatives of sense and sensibility, where the one seems obviously over-endowed with sense, wisdom and discretion, failing to reveal her emotions, even when under extreme pressure, and the other with passionate sensibility, Austen exposes and emphasises both the dichotomy between sense and sensibility, and the opposing qualities inherent in sensibility, its strengths and weaknesses, its dangers, and its hypocrisy and selfishness.

This story is thus not just about the antithesis of self-control and emotion. Nor is it just the story of two sisters. Nor is Elinor simply the personification of sense, reason and restraint and Marianne the personification of sensibility, spontaneity and impulsiveness. For, as has been mentioned, Marianne's sense is twice mentioned in the very first chapter. And as Hagstrum argues, Austen is "[n]o moral absolutist, pitting black against white, but a subtle explorer of the nuances of feelings and their interpenetration" (1980:272). Rather, as Deresiewicz notes, the novel is more about "the struggle between those two faculties" (2004:47), and "their dynamic interaction and its contribution to the final equilibrium" (Hagstrum, 1980:269).

On first encountering Marianne the reader is apprised of her virtues:

She was sensible and clever; but eager in every thing; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was every thing but prudent (6).

This proviso is important. For despite her many attributes, Marianne rashly and imprudently permits her effusive displays of emotion to override propriety and to flout established social conventions. And, in her unrestrained and immoderate demonstrations of emotion, she allows her negative facets of sensibility to counter her intrinsic positive qualities. Marianne's youthful exuberance therefore seems to contain something more than normal, youthful vivacity and exuberance, some insidious excess that could turn inwards, leading to harm and even self-destruction. And the narrator accordingly expresses some reservations on this excess, and emphasises this uneasiness by attributing a similar disquiet to Elinor, saying that "Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her sister's sensibility..." (7).

And it is in that subtle rider, expressed both by Elinor and the narrator that the deeper meaning of this novel would seem to lie: the need for balance in what were apparently socially endorsed emotional conditions; Marianne's personal dilemma existing in her need to acquire a balance between her extreme sensibility and good sense.

Mr Dashwood's funeral and the ensuing move of the Dashwood family from Norland to Barton understandably cause the whole family extreme unhappiness, but only Marianne and her mother exhibit unrestrained emotion:

They encouraged each other now in the violence of their affliction. The *agony* of grief which overpowered them at first, was voluntarily renewed, was sought for, was created again and again. They gave themselves up wholly to their sorrow, seeking increase of wretchedness in every reflection that could afford it, and resolved against ever admitting consolation in future (7).

This is not a description of normal grief. This is pain which is deliberately cultivated, uncontrolled and highly indulgent, a crescendo of anguish, a duet of suffering, in which mother and daughter each encourage the other, and which rises to ever-increasing heights, conveying the depths of their combined despair.

And so, despite the need for the family to find alternative accommodation, and despite her responsibilities to her family, Mrs Dashwood remained “at that time, in such affliction as rendered her careless of surrounding objects” (16).

While Marianne and her mother indulge themselves in the intensity of histrionic inertia and melancholy, “Elinor, too, was deeply afflicted; but still she could struggle, she could exert herself. She could consult with her brother...” (7). Elinor could, in other words, remain level-headed and rational, refusing to succumb to the hysteria and consequential torpor to which her mother and sister yield, and could seek alternative solutions to the problems encountered. For, as Wiltshire points out Elinor is capable of restraining her real responses, and of assuming the roles of parent, compromiser, arbitrator and sage (1992:27), remaining consistently cautious, tactful, diplomatic, pouring oil on troubled waters, and judiciously silent, with her principal concern being propriety. Consequently,

[her] advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgement, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother....her feelings were strong: but she knew how to govern them...(6).

When, however, her daughter-in-law installs herself and her family in Norland, Mrs Dashwood is forced at last to rouse herself sufficiently from her apathy to find alternative accommodation for her family:

[H]er spirits began to revive, and her mind became capable of some other exertion than that of heightening its affliction by melancholy remembrances, she was impatient to be gone, and indefatigable in her inquiries for a suitable dwelling in the neighbourhood of Norland...(14).

Despite Mrs Dashwood's emotional links to Norland, no suitable residence is able to be found in that area, and accordingly the Dashwoods move to Barton where their grief begins to subside.

The first part of their journey was performed in too melancholy a disposition to be otherwise than tedious and unpleasant. But as they drew towards the end of it, their interest in the appearance of a country which they were to inhabit overcame their dejection, and a view of Barton Valley as they entered it gave them cheerfulness (28).

While Elinor is forced to assume the role of responsibility vacated by her father and abdicated by her mother, Marianne receives her mother's full support and encouragement in embracing, valuing and cherishing (7) the extreme sensibility, from which Elinor sceptically distances herself. For Mrs Dashwood acknowledges that her emotions are generally extreme, saying that *like* is not a term that she knows, that she feels "no sentiment of approbation inferior to love" and that she is unable "to separate esteem and love" (16).

Marianne attempts to explain her restless, unrestrained emotions to Elinor:

"Oh...with what transporting sensations have I formerly seen [the leaves] fall! How have I delighted, as I walked, to see them driven in showers about me by the wind! What feelings have they, the season, the air altogether inspired! Now there is no one to regard them. They are seen only as a nuisance, swept hastily off, and driven as much as possible from the sight" (87-8).

Elinor is left to reply in character: "It is not every one...who has your passion for dead leaves" (88).

But nothing will convince Marianne of the negative aspects of her sensibility, or persuade her to question her conviction that her sensibility affords her free will an added depth of emotion. For, as Todd argues, Marianne is

a genuine young woman whose inner thought processes and perceptions of the exterior world were thoroughly permeated and shaped by sentimental language and its moral values (2006:47).

She has run in the fields "with laughing delight" (41) and she has glowed at the sight of Willoughby whose "person and air were equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story..." (43). And her sensibility means that she is more interested in Willoughby's dancing without interruption until four in the morning with "elegance, [and] with spirit" (45) than she is in the "pretty little estate of his own in Somersetshire" (44) which would give him financial independence.

Austen, however, makes it clear that Marianne's conduct is not all innocent self-indulgence. It affects all, causes pain to her family, and eventually becomes unhealthy and self-destructive. For as Tave suggests,

the potency of [Marianne's] sensibility makes her morally impotent; her small degree of fortitude is overcome, she is without any power because she is without any desire of command over herself... (1973:81).

Brodey comments that Marianne measures sensibility against self-control, seeing the two conditions as operating uniquely and independently of each other (1999:117). This is because Marianne fails to appreciate that in order to achieve a balance, sense and sensibility must coexist, both with each other, and with reason and exertion, and that sensibility ought not to be merely the narcissistic involvement in self, suffering, helplessness, passivity and resignation, in which she steeped herself.

For, while Marianne notes that Elinor's sense comes imbued with self-control, she fails to note that this control also contains a measure of emotional expression, albeit silent. It is therefore only when Elinor is finally free to describe the effort that she has been required to exercise in concealing her inner emotions, and her pain, that Marianne is brought to appreciate Elinor's immeasurable self-control:

"The composure of mind with which I have brought myself at present to consider the matter, the consolation that I have been willing to admit, have been the effect of constant and painful exertion;—they did not spring up of themselves;—they did not occur to relieve my spirits at first... *Then*, if I had not been bound to silence, perhaps nothing could have kept me entirely...from openly shewing that I was very unhappy" (264).

And so, unfortunately, Marianne's misguided understanding of sensibility does not empower her in the way that she thinks it does. Rather, it limits her and blinkers her perceptions, leaving her only able to see what she wants to see, with her powers of discernment narrowed to the point of insensibility, and her natural qualities and ingenuity consequently restricted and veiled. Accordingly Marianne unreservedly and shamelessly declares her ardour for Willoughby: "[w]hen he was present she had no eyes for any one else....and scarcely spoke a word to any body else" (53), causing Elinor to declare to Colonel Brandon: "Her opinions are all romantic" (56), and to ask Edward: "Do not you know that [my sister] calls every one reserved, who does not talk as fast, and admire what she admires as rapturously as herself?" (95)

Marianne is also unable to recognise sensibility in any form that deviates from her own established and well-versed standard, using herself and her sensibility as a term of reference against which to rate others, who seldom pass the test. Thus, whereas on the one hand she sees Elinor as cold-hearted, Edward as lacking sensibility, and Colonel Brandon as old enough to “have long outlived every sensation of [love]” (37), on the other hand Willoughby is the embodiment of everything she admires, so that when “they read, they talked, they sang together; his musical talents were considerable; and he read with all the sensibility and spirit which Edward unfortunately wanted” (48). Willoughby and the passion that they share for each other have become Marianne’s heroic creations. She has instilled in him all her notions of sensibility, and he willingly absorbs her fervour, echoing her thoughts and emotions, playing the part that she has assigned to him, and emulating her expansive phraseology:

“What...Improve this dear cottage! No. *That* I will never consent to. Not a stone must be added to its walls, not an inch to its size, if my feelings are regarded” (72).

And, like Marianne, he also disparages and ridicules Colonel Brandon, saying of him “Brandon is just the kind of man...whom every body speaks well of, and nobody cares about...” (50),

“who has every body’s good word, and nobody’s notice; who has more money than he can spend, more time than he knows how to employ, and two new coats every year” (51).

To which comments Marianne responds, saying, “[t]hat is exactly what I think of him...” (50).

They concur in everything. But all that Marianne sees in Willoughby and admires is her own creation. Whereas Catherine Morland imaginatively creates a Montoni of the General in *Northanger Abbey*, the General does not change to meet her expectations, even if he adapts his behaviour to meet his changed expectations of her. Conversely, Willoughby does actually appear to change under Marianne’s tutelage. He strips off his own identity, becoming an impostor who “acquiesced in all [Marianne’s] decisions, caught all her enthusiasm...” (47), mimicking her in most respects. He is reduced to an actor playing a part specially created for him by Marianne, filled with the theatricality of events, employing artificial and dramatic

language, exclaiming, “[t]hunderbolts and daggers!—What a reproof she would have given me!” (325)

Willoughby has been spoilt by the world which “had made him extravagant” (331) and by Marianne’s sensibility, and he has been left only with clichés to describe intense feeling. This is evident when he explains his reasons for leaving Marianne to Elinor:

“I ran away from you all as soon as I could; but not before I had seen Marianne’s sweet face as white as death.—*That* was the last, last look I ever had of her;—the last manner in which she appeared to me. It was a horrid sight!” (327)

“What I felt on hearing that your sister was dying—and dying too, believing me the greatest villain upon earth, scorning, hating me in her latest moments—for how could I tell what horrid projects might not have been imputed?” (330-1)

He is not the hero that Marianne has envisaged. His role as her hero is a self-created, shallow illusion whose part he fills for only a short while. And so eventually he is forced into admitting that Marianne has misread him, that he is not in fact filled with the sensibility that she has wished for him, but instead “hard hearted” (324), selfish, mean, cruel (320) and vain. And with this admission of his duplicity he finally arrives at the point where he is deprived of all ability to speak truly, saying, “I could not answer it. I tried, but could not frame a sentence” (327).

Marianne has fallen into a trap of her own making. She has fallen in love with a man who is not what she thinks, and who ultimately confesses that he possesses all the characteristics that she most dislikes. She has given her love to a damaged and dishonest charlatan who is irredeemably insensible.

Marianne’s problems lie in her overwhelmingly faulty and superficial perceptions, and more particularly in her determination to rely on these. For the way she sees things is not the way they are. Accordingly Elinor is often called upon to criticise her and to correct the flawed opinions, judgements and conclusions which Marianne draws from her erroneous observations, telling her “you are prejudiced and unjust” (50). And she feels obliged to correct Marianne’s attitude to Colonel Brandon when Marianne cursorily dismisses Colonel Brandon on account of his age, his taste and his flannel waistcoat, saying, “he is old enough to be *my* father...” (37) and when she says further,

“he talked of flannel waistcoats...and with me a flannel waistcoat is invariably connected with aches, cramps, rheumatisms, and every species of ailment that can afflict the old and the feeble” (38).

Elinor exclaims:

“Infirmity!...do you call Colonel Brandon infirm? I can easily suppose that his age may appear much greater to you than to my mother; but you can hardly deceive yourself as to his having the use of his limbs!” (37)

Elinor also objects to Marianne’s manner of reasoning, saying,

“I must object to your dooming Colonel Brandon and his wife to the constant confinement of a sick chamber, merely because he chanced to complain yesterday (a very cold damp day) of a slight rheumatic feel in one of his shoulders” (38).

“Had he been only in a violent fever, you would not have despised him half so much. Confess, Marianne, is not there something interesting to you in the flushed cheek, hollow eye, and quick pulse of a fever?” (38)

But Marianne becomes increasingly casual of giving offence, and even careless in her own conduct, taking great pleasure in indiscreet behaviour, illicit and unchaperoned driving, covert visits and secret correspondence. Elinor tries to convince her impulsive sister that pleasure often proceeds hand in hand with impropriety, reminding her that it was unseemly of her and Willoughby to have visited Allenham in the absence of the consent or knowledge of the owner of the property. But Marianne only defends her impetuosity, insisting that intuitive morality needs no investigation, saying that

“if there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when we are acting wrong...” (68).

Not only is Marianne’s notion of sensibility dangerously self-destructive, but with it Marianne also adopts a precarious degree of arrogance. For she believes that her sensibility has rendered her superior, and this results in her negative assessment, misjudgement and insensitivity towards others. Elinor gently chides her, attempting to persuade her to modify her extreme behaviour and to conform socially, saying,

“[m]y doctrine has never aimed at the subjection of the understanding. All I have ever attempted to influence has been the behaviour.... I am guilty, I confess, of having often wished you to treat our acquaintance in general with greater attention; but when have I advised you to adopt their sentiments or conform to their judgement in serious matters?” (94)

But Marianne becomes progressively unfeeling and unresponsive to her friends and family, in her determination to pursue a path of self-concern, lacking interest in everything but her relationship with Willoughby. Accordingly many of Elinor and Marianne’s conversations develop into debates on propriety: whether one has the duty to lie when politeness requires it: when hypocrisy becomes duplicity. Elinor stresses the need for decorum and propriety, maintaining that both deception and truth have their place, and emphasising that self-respect, good sense and pride ought to curb the tongue. Marianne, however, despises social trivia and artifice and rejects these as being anathema to genuine expression, saying,

“I detest jargon of every kind, and sometimes I have kept my feelings to myself because I could find no language to describe them in but what was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning” (97).

Predictably when Willoughby leaves Devonshire for London, Marianne responds with tears, sleeplessness and loss of appetite, and her violent afflictions and agony of grief (7) now begin to permeate the novel.

This violent oppression of spirits continued the whole evening. She was without any power, because she was without any desire of command over herself. The slightest mention of any thing relative to Willoughby overpowered her in an instant...She was awake the whole night, and she wept the greatest part of it. She got up with an headache, was unable to talk, and unwilling to take any nourishment; giving pain every moment to her mother and sisters, and forbidding all attempt at consolation from either, Her sensibility was potent enough! (82-3)

Marianne is at this point so immersed in her abundant sensibility, which has been assumed voluntarily, and from a misguided sense of what sensibility constitutes, that her emotions begin to over-power her usual good health. Consequently, Elinor notes with concern that Marianne’s excessive unhappiness is now also possibly dangerous to her wellbeing:

her sister's affliction was indubitable; and she thought with the tenderest compassion of that violent sorrow which Marianne was in all probability not merely giving way to as a relief, but feeding and encouraging as a duty (77).

As Marianne allows a single emotion to dominate her and override her virtues, she blinds herself to Elinor's unhappiness, indifferent and insensible to Elinor's predicament. And, reminiscent of her state of mind after her father's death, her responses once again become exaggerated: she loses her self-control, sinking into a state of intense depression, unaware of the concern and pain she is causing to those who love her.

Moreover, she fails to exert herself, even when she is socially required to make an effort, so that when the Middletons visit the Jennings, and Lucy Steele's conversation focuses on gossip, beaux and children, "Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion..." (122). Incapable of adopting conventional manners, she unreservedly expresses her opinions, telling Edward what she thinks of his mother; and she is obviously and openly uncivil to both Lady Middleton and the Steele sisters:

Marianne, who had never much toleration for any thing like impertinence, vulgarity, inferiority of parts, or even difference of taste from herself, was at this time particularly ill-disposed, from the state of her spirits, to be pleased with the Miss Steeles, or to encourage their advances; and to the invariable coldness of her behaviour towards them, which checked every endeavour at intimacy on their side (127).

Mrs Jennings offers Elinor and Marianne the opportunity of visiting London. Marianne is overjoyed, as this offer raises her hopes of seeing Willoughby again. And once again the narrator voices her misgivings at Marianne's extreme reaction:

Marianne's joy was almost a degree beyond happiness, so great was the perturbation of her spirits and her impatience to be gone. Her unwillingness to quit her mother was her only restorative to calmness; and at the moment of parting her grief on that score was excessive. Her mother's affliction was hardly less, and Elinor was the only one of the three who seemed to consider the separation as anything short of eternal (158).

However, despite her optimism, in London Marianne's sensibility is assaulted. For, instead of Willoughby calling on her, only Colonel Brandon visits. Marianne, who is

traumatised by Willoughby's persistent absence, is visibly disappointed by this visit, and abruptly leaves the room, leaving Elinor to cover for her rudeness to Colonel Brandon and to resort to the lies and deception which she has previously debated with Marianne:

It was too great a shock to be borne with calmness, and [Marianne] immediately left the room. Elinor was disappointed too; but at the same time her regard for Colonel Brandon ensured his welcome with her, and she felt particularly hurt that a man so partial to her sister should perceive that she experienced nothing but grief and disappointment in seeing him. She instantly saw that it was not unnoticed by him, that he even observed Marianne as she quitted the room, with such astonishment and concern, as hardly left him the recollection of what civility demanded towards herself. "Is your sister ill?" said he.

Elinor answered in some distress that she was, and then talked of head-aches, low spirits, and over-fatigues; and of every thing to which she could decently attribute her sister's behaviour (162).

In London it also becomes evident how great a distance Marianne has placed between herself and Elinor. She criticises Elinor for her secrecy, failing to appreciate the true depth of Elinor's feelings for Edward, and attempts to elicit details of Elinor's romance from a now necessarily duplicitous Elinor who declares

"indeed, Marianne, I have nothing to tell."

"Nor I," answered Marianne with energy; "our situations then are alike. We have neither of us any thing to tell; you, because you communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing" (170).

Eventually though, Willoughby does leave his card, raising Marianne's hopes, but he still fails to visit.

This event, while it raised the spirits of Elinor, restored to those of her sister, all, and more than all, their former agitation. From this moment her mind was never quiet...(169).

And, as feared by Elinor, Marianne's sensibility and her enthusiastic espousal of it now render her not only extremely insensitive and insensible, but also inert and excessively vulnerable, so that her sensibility assumes proportions that become a hazard to her mental, emotional and physical health. For Marianne is so dismayed by

Willoughby's continued absence that she abandons all that remains of good manners. Consequently, when they are invited by Lady Middleton to accompany her to a party, "Marianne, wholly dispirited, careless of her appearance, and seeming equally indifferent whether she went or staid, prepared, without one look of hope, or one expression of pleasure" (175).

It is, however, at this party that Marianne eventually catches her first glimpse of Willoughby in London. Acting on impulse she ignores convention, having to be restrained by Elinor:

she would have moved towards him instantly, had not her sister caught hold of her. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "he is there—he is there—Oh! why does he not look at me? why cannot I speak to him?" "Pray, pray be composed," cried Elinor, "and do not betray what you feel to every body present. Perhaps he has not observed you yet." This however was more than she could believe herself; and to be composed at such a moment was not only beyond the reach of Marianne, it was beyond her wish. She sat in an agony of impatience, which affected every feature (176).

But Elinor will not permit Marianne either to react impulsively or to expose herself to ridicule and gossip. And, characteristically, Austen will not permit her heroine to faint.

Willoughby on the other hand observes all the necessities of convention, but virtually ignores Marianne's desperate pleas to shake hands, holding her hand "only for a moment" (177), greeting her on being called upon to do so, and avoiding all eye contact with her. He addresses his civilities to Elinor, rejects Marianne's advances with embarrassment, and eventually turns away from her to join a friend, causing Marianne to collapse into her chair.

Marianne, now looking dreadfully white, and unable to stand, sunk into her chair, and Elinor, expecting every moment to see her faint, tried to screen her from the observation of others, while reviving her with lavender water....for Marianne continued incessantly to give way in a low voice to the misery of her feelings, by exclamations of wretchedness....Marianne was in a silent agony, too much oppressed even for tears...(177-8).

Many critics comment on this screening tactic of Elinor's which assumes the metaphorical and essential divide between the two sisters; the point where the salient

difference between the two sisters emerges. Marianne refuses to participate in any “social masquerade” (Tanner, 1986:84), remaining adamant that outward forms must portray inward feelings, refusing to conceal her outrage, anger and contempt for malicious manners. But when her strong feelings are restrained, they disrupt and undermine her body, reducing her to a robot-like machine, until they finally erupt in the celebrated scream of agony (182).

For this reason Elinor, the screen-painter, is called upon time and time again to screen her sister, in order to protect her, to cover for her, to lie to others, and to mitigate and conceal some of the ugliness and abrasiveness of society so as to prevent any potentially socially disastrous behaviour on Marianne’s part. In this way Elinor becomes Marianne’s foil, adopting behaviour which is necessitated by her sister’s conduct, but of which she cannot necessarily approve.

Tanner argues that the struggle in the book “is between the proper use and the misuse of language” (1986:92). But screening also involves camouflage and misreading, which result in confusion on many levels. Thus Elinor notes the ring that Edward wears and assumes the lock of hair in it to be hers, when it is in fact Lucy Steele’s. In her ensuing attempt to draw her family’s attention away from the ring she only causes further confusion. And, despite all Marianne’s pronouncements about artificial behaviour, even Marianne assumes a mask of her own, screening her emotions at the ball when Willoughby snubs her. Social conventions, propriety, decorum and Elinor’s intervention will not permit her to make the moves that her impulsive nature calls for, and so her pain at his rejection is internalised, ultimately causing faintness, which she does not try to hide.

After this disastrous party Marianne receives a letter from Willoughby in which he informs her of his engagement and returns the lock of her hair which she had given him. The tone of the letter and its content are shocking, not only to Marianne, but also to Elinor, and the reader, even though Marianne still absolves Willoughby of all responsibility for the letter and its contents.

Elinor, who saw as plainly by this, as if she had seen the direction, that [the letter] must come from Willoughby, felt immediately such a sickness at heart as made her hardly able to hold up her head, and sat in such a general tremour as made her fear it impossible to escape Mrs. Jennings’s notice. That good lady, however, saw only that Marianne had received a letter from Willoughby...(181).

Elinor's sensibility has been exposed. And it is acute, overpowering her usual physical composure. Predictably Marianne succumbs to an agony of violent and excessive grief: "With an hasty exclamation of Misery, and a sign to her sister not to follow her, she directly got up and hurried out of the room" (193). But in this instance the grief is shared between the sisters, with Elinor completely sensitive to her sister's distress, so that Marianne, "brooding over her sorrows in silence, gave more pain to her sister than could have been communicated by the most open and most frequent confession of them" (212). And so,

Elinor drew near, but without saying a word; and seating herself on the bed, took [Marianne's] hand, kissed her affectionately several times, and then gave way to a burst of tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne's. The latter, though unable to speak, seemed to feel all the tenderness of this behaviour, and after some time thus spent in joint affliction, she put all the letters into Elinor's hands; and then covering her face with her handkerchief, almost screamed with agony (182).

Marianne is faced with the fact that Willoughby, as the writer of this letter, is not the romantic lover with whom she fell in love. She is also faced with the realisation that he is totally lacking in true sensibility. She is accordingly forced to attempt a reconciliation of her memories, her emotions and the facts, refusing to believe the man whom she had loved, and whom she had believed loved her, to be capable of writing this letter, and in such terms, crying, "Willoughby, where was your heart, when you wrote those words?" (190) and asking, "Beyond you three, is there a creature in the world whom I would not rather suspect of evil than Willoughby, whose heart I know so well?" (189)

Not only has she been forced into an awareness that her trust in Willoughby has been abused, that he is not the man she thought him to be, but she is at the same time also confronted by the fact that her reliance on sensibility has been misjudged and unfounded. "She felt the loss of Willoughby's character yet more heavily than she had felt the loss of his heart..." (212).

Thus Elinor confides in Colonel Brandon, saying,

“I have been more pained...by her endeavours to acquit him than by all the rest; for it irritates her mind more than the most perfect conviction of his unworthiness can do” (211).

Marianne is called upon to appreciate that her sensibility is fallible. But Marianne’s sensibility has been at the foundation of her existence. She is consequently not only unable to easily relinquish it, but is also left with a vacuum in its stead. With nothing to replace it, and now also physically vulnerable, her health deteriorates.

Elinor...returned to Marianne, whom she found attempting to rise from the bed, and who she reached just in time to prevent her from falling on the floor, faint and giddy from a long want of proper rest and food; for it was many days since she had any appetite, and many nights since she had really slept; and now, when her mind was no longer supported by the fever of suspense, the consequence of all this was felt in an aching head, a weakened stomach, and a general nervous faintness (185).

For,

no attitude could give her ease, and in restless pain of mind and body she moved from one posture to another, till growing more and more hysterical, her sister could with difficulty keep her on the bed at all, and for some time was fearful of being constrained to call for assistance. Some lavender drops, however, which she was at length persuaded to take, were of use; and...she continued on the bed quiet and motionless (191).

At Elinor’s insistence though, Marianne makes an effort to control herself, and with time she recovers her peace of mind, even if “it was settled in a gloomy dejection” (212), and Elinor and Marianne leave London to stay with the Palmers, where “[i]n such moment of precious, of invaluable misery, [Marianne] rejoiced in tears of agony to be at Cleveland” (303).

But it seems that Marianne has not yet rejected her excess of sensibility. Nor is she as yet either sufficiently or actively governed by much sense. Her language and her perceptions are still regulated by her sensibility, with the result that at Cleveland, despite her weakened physical and emotional state, she ill-advisably takes herself on a long walk in wet grass,

not merely on the dry gravel of the shrubbery, but all over the grounds, and especially in the most distant parts of them, where there was something more of wildness than in the rest, where the trees were the oldest, and the grass was the longest and wettest, had—assisted by the still greater imprudence of sitting in her wet shoes and stockings—given Marianne a cold so violent, as, though for a day or two trifled with or denied, would force itself by increasing ailments on the concern of every body and the notice of herself (305-6).

In her already debilitated state this is a perilous move and she falls dangerously ill.

Poor Marianne, languid and low from the nature of her malady, and feeling herself universally ill, could no longer hope that to-morrow would find her recovered....The next day produced little or no alteration in the state of the patient; she certainly was not better...(308).

And so “[h]our after hour passed away in sleepless pain and delirium on Marianne’s side, and in the most cruel anxiety on Elinor’s...” (312).

Wiltshire suggests that Marianne’s ideology, ideas and convictions are physiologically conditioned or determined. He argues that Marianne’s previous reliance on her sensibility to determine her existence is not the result of language or opinion, as suggested by Tanner, but sincere, authentic and unconventional, a property of her self. Thus he comments:

Her belief in intuition, her trust in feeling rather than in rational appraisal, her love of the wild and romantic: these ideas are underwritten, as one might say, by her bodily nature (1992:31).

Accordingly he concludes that “it is the interplay between the ideology and her nature that this novel has seized upon” (1992:31).

It might be argued that rather than Marianne’s ideology being determined by her bodily nature, the converse is more true. Her body is subservient to her ideology, and so when her ideology fails, her body fails her too. For faced with the revelation of her misjudgement and its extent, Marianne realises that her notion of her innermost self is flawed. And it is this awareness, that her reasoning has been faulty, and that she has been mistaken in both her understanding and in her application of sensibility, that ultimately reduces her to illness, almost destroying her. With the failure of her

sensibility, everything that she depends on collapses about her, and her *raison d'être* fails her too. No part of her has been left either intact or trustworthy. For with her emotions and her body so inter-linked and dependent on each other she has few reserves left. She is unable to exert herself beyond her emotional and physical cores, which have both failed her, and only one alternative seems likely. Nor are her friends and family unaware of this possible outcome:

Mrs. Jennings had determined very early in the seizure that Marianne would never get over it, and Colonel Brandon, who was chiefly of use in listening to Mrs. Jennings forebodings, was not in a state of mind to resist their influence....The rapid decay, the early death of a girl so young, so lovely as Marianne, must have struck a less interested person with concern (309-13).

Marianne's misguided idea of sensibility has brought her to a state of total physical collapse, made her dangerously ill, even to the point of death, and estranged her from her world. But Marianne cannot be permitted to abandon herself to the dangerous depths of the dejection into which she has sunk.

However, in order for Marianne to survive Austen typically requires a sea change of her: she requires her to review her perceptions and widen the narrow perspective with which she views and interprets the world.

Fortunately Marianne has the vigour of youth in her favour, and at first, although

[t]he fever was unabated; and Marianne only more quiet—not more herself—remained in an heavy stupor....About noon, however, [Elinor] began...to fancy, to hope she could perceive a slight amendment in her sister's pulse...(313-4).

For Marianne also fortunately possesses the necessary inner resources to survive, including the "mental and physical exertion, altruism, and activity" (Gorman,1993:51) so recommended by Wollstonecraft. And so she recovers: "Marianne was in every respect materially better, and [Mr Harris] declared her entirely out of danger" (314) She thus returns home with "an apparent composure of mind, which, in being the result as [Elinor] trusted of serious reflection, must eventually lead her to contentment and cheerfulness" (342).

Jocelyn Harris has pointed out the obvious resemblances between Marianne and other literary heroines: the two Eliza's of Colonel Brandon's story, and Richardson's Clarissa, and between all of their destinies. In his Preface to *Sir Charles Grandison* Richardson warns young women "against preferring a man of Pleasure to a Man of Probity upon that dangerous, but too commonly received Notion *That a reformed Rake makes the best Husband*" (in Harris, 1989:63). And it is this that all four young girls have in common: they all succumb to men of pleasure. For Willoughby is nothing more than a much gentler incarnation of the rakish Lovelace, even if Marianne does not see this, and Marianne's possible future echoes that of Eliza Williams, who, seduced by Willoughby, has been left with an illegitimate child and hopeless prospects. Fortunately Marianne escapes this desperate predicament.

But the resemblances and interchangeability between Marianne, and the two Eliza's, and Clarissa are both more marked and more remarkable. When Clarissa is raped her doctor notes that "[h]er heart [is] broken", and warns: "she'll die...there is no saving her" (Richardson, 1962:1V:177). Thereafter Clarissa declines physically, wishing for death, living only to appreciate the time given for preparation: "I have some few preparations still to make, and would not...undertake more than is likely I shall have time lent me to perform..." (1V:178). The first Eliza, after her seduction, also prepares for her death: "Life could do nothing for her, beyond giving time for a better preparation for death; and that was given..." (207), and, after Willoughby's desertion, Marianne seems pre-ordained for a similar fate.

Neither Clarissa nor Marianne's fate are brought about by their personal misconduct, as Colonel Brandon confirms, saying, "[Marianne's sufferings] proceed from no misconduct, and can bring no disgrace" (210). But even if Marianne is not entirely blameless in this impasse, she shares the destiny of the other young girls: caught in intricate webs by conniving men, with their greatest sins lying in their clandestine meetings and illicit correspondence with their lovers.

Neither the first Eliza nor Clarissa has any wish to live. For although Clarissa assures her friends, "you may be assured that I will do nothing wilfully to shorten my life..." (1V:179), she welcomes death, sells her dresses to buy a coffin, composes her will and prepares letters for her relatives, crying out, "[y]et how this *body* clings! How it encumbers!" (1V:201). And Captain Morden attends Clarissa's death bed, in the same way as Colonel Brandon watches over Marianne's sick-bed when Marianne,

like the first Eliza, is imbued with “hollow eye”, “sickly skin” and “reclining weakness” (340).

There are more resemblances between the stories than are relevant to this chapter, giving rise to the question as to whether *Sense and Sensibility* is merely a thematic rewriting of *Clarissa*: Willoughby for example rushes to Marianne’s sickbed and explains his conduct to Elinor; and Elinor is just as deeply moved by his story as Anna Howe, when she meets Lovelace, who drugged and raped her friend, leaving Harris to comment on how remarkably alike the two scenes are (1989:64).

But, although there are many obvious similarities, there is also one remarkable difference in the stories of all these jilted heroines, and this is perhaps where the lesson of *Sense and Sensibility* lies. For, rather than being a story about the opposite and contrasting virtues of sense and sensibility, the message lies not in the similarities that exist between the lives of Marianne on the one hand, and Clarissa on the other, and with the two Eliza’s of Colonel Brandon’s tale, but at that point where the stories all diverge.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, unlike *Clarissa*, exertion is a major theme. It does not restrict itself to activity, but operates at every level in various forms, even becoming a central core of character: Lady Middleton, like Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, is all indolence; John Dashwood adopts passivity as a defence against the exertions of his wife, and Willoughby too becomes passive before his intended wife, succumbing to her exertions, writing a letter, which is possibly the most important letter of his life, but which is dictated by her. Most importantly Marianne deals with her difficulties by withdrawing from them. On the other hand Elinor and Colonel Brandon, despite their emotional setbacks, chose rather to exert themselves when faced with adversity than to despair. And it is these exertions made by both of them on Marianne’s behalf that eventually rouse Marianne to understand that which she must learn to see. For recovery entails “the direction of a mind awakened to reasonable exertion...” (342). And so Elinor frequently calls on Marianne to wake up to her intemperance, to rouse herself from the despair and state of insensibility into which she has sunk and to amend her way of thinking, and her perceptions of sensibility.

“Exert yourself, dear Marianne,” [Elinor] cried, “if you would not kill yourself and all who love you. Think of your mother; think of her misery while *you* suffer; for her sake you must exert yourself” (185).

Marianne has been close to death. ““Her sufferings have been very severe”” (199), Elinor tells Colonel Brandon. She has, like Clarissa and the two Eliza's, been “plagued lately with nervous head-aches” (219), “lost her colour, and...grown quite thin” (227), her heart has been “wounded” (236), and her looks “altered” (242). She nearly dies. In the process, in Austen's typical style, her beauty has also been damaged, revealing Austen's fascination with the “close connection between mind and body, between beauty and health” (Gorman,1993:54), causing Marianne's brother to remark to Colonel Brandon

“Poor Marianne!...She has not such good health as her sister,—she is very nervous,—she has not Elinor's constitution; and one must allow that there is something very trying to a young woman who *has been* a beauty, in the loss of her personal attractions” (237).

During this critical period Marianne, unlike Clarissa and the two Eliza's, receives the ministrations and support of her concerned sister, and Colonel Brandon, and, with their assistance and the benefit of her youth and intelligence, exerts herself to retain a hold on life.

But Marianne undergoes her transformation, not because Willoughby leaves her, nor because her ensuing grief makes her ill, but because, like Tom Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, her illness affords her an opportunity to reflect. And during her convalescence her mind is “awakened to reasonable exertion” (342) and to the self-destructive element inherent in her predilection towards sensibility. Accordingly, unlike Clarissa and the first Eliza, Marianne finally exerts herself and focuses her mind on living. And with this she adopts Elinor's tone, using a phraseology that could belong to Elinor, to express what she has experienced:

“My illness has made me think—It has given me leisure and calmness for serious recollection. Long before I was enough recovered to talk, I was perfectly able to reflect. I considered the past; I saw in my own behaviour since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself, and want of kindness to others. I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave. My illness, I well knew, had been entirely brought on by myself, by such negligence of my own health as I felt even at the time to be wrong. Had I died,—it would have been self-destruction. I did not know my danger till the danger was removed....How should

I have lived in *your* remembrance!—My mother too! How could you have consoled her! —I cannot express my own abhorrence of myself. Whenever I looked towards the past, I saw some duty neglected or some failing indulged. Every body seemed injured by me....But you,—you above all, above my mother, had been wronged by me. I, and only I, knew your heart and its sorrows; yet, to what did it influence me?—not to any compassion that could benefit you or myself.—Your example was before me: but to what avail?—Was I more considerate of you and your comfort? Did I imitate your forbearance, or lessen your restraints, by taking any part in those offices of general complaisance or particular gratitude which you had hitherto been left to discharge alone?—No;—not less when I knew you to be unhappy, than when I had believed you at ease, did I turn away from every exertion of duty or friendship; scarcely allowing sorrow to exist but with me, regretting only *that* heart which deserted and wronged me, and leaving you, for whom I professed unbounded affection, to be miserable for my sake....The future must be my proof. I have laid down my plan, and if I am capable of adhering to it, my feelings shall be governed and my temper improved, They shall no longer worry others, nor torture myself. I shall now live solely for my family....my spirit is humbled, my heart amended....As for Willoughby to say that I shall soon or that I shall ever forget him, would be idle. His remembrance can be overcome by no change of circumstances or opinions. But it shall be regulated, it shall be checked by religion, by reason, by constant employment....If I could but know *his* heart, everything would become easy” (345-7).

We have been acquainted with Marianne’s intelligence early in the novel. Hence, with the opportunity and respite that her illness now affords her, she becomes aware of how much and how dangerously she has indulged herself in an extreme version of sensibility, which she has so narrowly managed to evade, and how it has threatened her. She recognises how egocentric she has been, how selfishly she has neglected the needs of both her body and her family, and how hurtful her lack of consideration has been to Elinor. She appreciates how she has rejected her family’s offers of friendship and love, and instead pandered to the apathy arising out of her disillusionment.

Therefore in this soliloquy Marianne acknowledges that she must recover her sense and dispense with her sensibility. She determines that she will no longer remain a burden to others. And with this insight a sense of calm replaces her earlier anguish. She adopts plans to adapt to the future which integrate religion, reason and exertion, and with her rejection of the excesses of sensibility that have impacted on her so negatively, she reaches out towards equilibrium, becoming more like Elinor and closer to Wollstonecraft’s ideal of usefulness. Extreme sensibility has given way to

moderation and sensitivity, enabling her at last to accept the foibles and shortcomings of others.

It would seem that Marianne has also learned something about self-control, for when she hears from Elinor about Willoughby's visit,

Marianne said not a word.—she trembled, her eyes were fixed on the ground, and her lips became whiter than even sickness had left them. A thousand inquiries sprung up from her heart, but she dared not urge one (347).

But it is not until she hears of Willoughby's engagement that she converts her resolutions into practice, that she begins to practise moderation and balance, acquires strength, and exercises self-control, and, like Elinor, makes an effort to manage her sensibility.

Deresiewicz makes an interesting point that could be applied as equally to the earlier novels as to the late ones. It merits some examination:

What is new in [Jane Austen's] late novels – and maybe new in the European novel altogether, although it is at least as old as Homer – is the idea of home as a psychic necessity, together with the correlative idea of the loss of home as an irreparable psychic wound. That home is vital to the emotional health of each of the heroines...needs little emphasis (2004:24).

It seems that Catherine Morland, in *Northanger Abbey*, and Marianne are both able to keep their excesses in check while remaining under the influence of a stable home environment. But when they leave home their excesses take advantage of the additional space in which they find themselves. While Catherine's imagination is stimulated in Bath by her initiation into the gothic novel, her thoughts run riot at the Abbey. Marianne succumbs to excessive grief at Norland when her father dies, but quickly recovers from this in Barton Cottage, only to have her emotional breakdown in London and to experience a physical decline at Cleveland. Both Catherine's and Marianne's homes have been the "shaper[s] of self" (Deresiewicz, 2004:24). But as soon as they venture away from these familiar bases their frailties expose themselves, becoming uncontrolled and dangerous.

It follows that it is only on her return to her home, and amongst those who love her, that Marianne comes to understand how risky her hysterical behaviour has been and becomes able to exchange the malady of sensibility for reason, real love, health and safety. Thus for the first time she is capable of revisiting the place where she first met Willoughby, and looking back on the development of her love for him, with perceptiveness and some composure:

“There, exactly there”—pointing with one hand, “on that projecting mound—there I fell; and there I first saw Willoughby....I am thankful to find that I can look with so little pain on the spot!—shall we ever talk on that subject, Elinor?....Or will it be wrong? I *can* talk of it now, I hope, as I ought to do” (344).

Although her illness has been physical, her cure has been more than medical. For in her recovery Marianne has also learned the inaccuracy of her perceptions of people and events, and of her faulty pronouncements and judgement. And most importantly she is brought to realise that her death would have amounted to self-destruction. Her initial view that the aging, rheumatic Colonel Brandon, and his flannel waistcoats, were antithetical to romantic love has been modified by her experience of disappointed love with Willoughby, enabling her to reject her once-held conviction that it would be right to die for unrequited love. With this development she softens when she hears of Colonel Brandon’s experiences and sufferings. But, says Tanner, “Marianne does, in effect, die” (1986:101). She is not the same woman at the end:

Whatever the name of the automaton which submits to the plans of its relations and joins the social game, it is not the real Marianne, and in the devitalised symmetry of the conclusion something valuable has been lost (1986:101).

Tanner is correct – Marianne is not the same person and something has indeed been lost in the transformation. For Marianne’s choice evokes, and distantly echoes Charlotte Lucas’s rather shocking decision in *Pride and Prejudice*: to settle on a marriage to Mr Collins without love. But there is a difference: whereas the marriage of the Collins is devoid of love, and whereas Charlotte’s future accordingly seems rather bleak, Colonel Brandon has always loved Marianne, and there are indications that Marianne has begun to love him in return. And so, whether security is the reason for Marianne’s acceptance of Colonel Brandon’s proposal or not, this is not spelled out in the terms that Charlotte spells it out – Marianne’s reasons are left in the air, and it seems that security is probably not the rationale behind Marianne’s decision.

There is, nevertheless, something very unsatisfactory in the way that Marianne compromises on her expectations of life, even if this compromise is necessary to save her life. And it seems that marriage to Colonel Brandon is also a compromise in Austen's eyes, who herself insisted "I consider everybody as having a right to marry *once* in their Lives for Love, if they can" (*Jane Austen's Letters*, 1979:240, hereinafter referred to as *Letters*).

Todd, together with every reader of *Sense and Sensibility*, questions why, even if it is necessary for Marianne to reject her sensibility, Marianne settles for a middle-aged man in a flannel waistcoat, for whom she appears to feel no more than esteem. She answers this question in terms of addiction, suggesting that as the melancholy Colonel Brandon was romantically thwarted in his youthful love for the older Eliza, he has let this incident direct his life, allowing it to reduce him first to despair, and later into settled depression, because he remains astonished that Eliza did not die of love for him, but lives until she meets her ignominious end. Todd argues that Colonel Brandon reincarnates his early love for the first Eliza in the form of Marianne, who has also been thwarted in her love, and observes that "[r]ather chillingly he then routes his new passion through memory" (2006:57). He sees each of the Eliza's as a Marianne, in which sensibility and sexuality are combined. He watches as the "lovely, blooming, healthful girl" (207) is brought to disgrace, sickness and death as a result of her thwarted passion, and he follows the path of the older Eliza in Marianne, in her "altered looks" (242) and "pale hand" (340). And he waits for her to die.

"So altered—so faded—worn down by acute suffering of every kind! hardly could I believe the melancholy and sickly figure before me, to be the remains of the lovely, blooming, healthful girl, on whom I had once doated....That she was, to all appearance, in the last stage of a consumption, was—yes, in such a situation it was my greatest comfort. Life could do nothing for her, beyond giving time for a better preparation for death; and that was given. I saw her placed in comfortable lodgings, and under proper attendants; I visited her every day during the rest of her short life; I was with her in her last moments....Your sister, I hope, cannot be offended...by the resemblance I have fancied between her and my poor disgraced relation. Their fates, their fortunes cannot be the same; and had the natural sweet disposition of the one been guarded by a firmer mind, or a happier marriage, she might have been all that you will live to see the other be" (207-8).

Accordingly, when Marianne recovers, even although the older Eliza had refused his offers of guidance, he offers Marianne in turn the advantages of a “firmer mind or an happier marriage” (208), reconciling his failure to guard the second Eliza from a similar fate.

As has been stated Austen remains silent on Marianne’s decision to marry Colonel Brandon, supplying no evidence in the text which may serve to elucidate the enigma. Todd’s theory may thus well explain Colonel Brandon’s attraction to the bright and beautiful Marianne. But Marianne’s position remains inexplicable. Is it enough that “[Colonel Brandon’s] exertion had produced an increase of good-will towards himself...” (216).

Unless one has recourse to Wollstonecraft, Marianne’s decision remains unfathomable. While there is no evidence that Austen ever read any of Wollstonecraft’s work, some of Wollstonecraft’s many comments on how sensibility interferes with natural emotions and rationality merit attention:

These pretty superlatives, dropping glibly from the tongue, vitiate the taste, and create a kind of sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth; and a deluge of false sentiments and overstretched feelings, stifling the natural emotions of the heart, render the domestic pleasures insipid, that ought to sweeten the exercise of those severe duties, which educate a rational and immortal being for a nobler field of action (1992:82-3).

Mankind seem to agree that children should be left under the management of women during their childhood. Now, from all the observation that I have been able to make, women of sensibility are the most unfit for this task, because they will infallibly, carried away by their feelings, spoil a child’s temper. The management of the temper...requires the sober steady eye of reason; a plan of conduct equally distant from tyranny and indulgence: yet these are the extremes that people of sensibility alternately fall into; always shooting beyond the mark (1992:163).

Wollstonecraft insists on a useful life. But in pursuit of this Marianne is obliged to forego her love of pleasure and her adherence to sensibility, and to assume a life dominated by rationality and exertion. She must “labour to obtain the sober pleasures that arise from equality” (1992:146). For, as Austen has given Marianne exceptional qualities, she cannot afford to be one of Wollstonecraft’s “short-lived queens” (1992:146).

In the passage that follows, Wollstonecraft describes in detail her idea of the ideal wife and mother:

Let fancy now present a woman with a tolerable understanding, for I do not wish to leave the line of mediocrity, whose constitution, strengthened by exercise, has allowed her body to acquire its full vigour; her mind, at the same time, gradually expanding itself to comprehend the moral duties of life, and in what human virtue and dignity consist.

Formed thus by the discharge of the relative duties of her station, she marries from affection, without losing sight of prudence, and looking beyond matrimonial felicity, she secures her husband's respect before it is necessary to exert mean arts to please him and feed a dying flame, which nature doomed to expire when the object become familiar, when friendship and forbearance take place of a more ardent affection (1992:139).

It seems that this is the path that Marianne, who could “never love by halves” (379) has chosen for herself: one of morality, prudence, friendship and mutual marital respect:

She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favourite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give her hand to another! (378)

Perhaps one also has to look to Austen herself for an explanation of Marianne's compromise, and in particular to a letter of Austen's wherein she tells her niece Fanny Knight that “[s]ingle Women have a dreadful propensity for being poor – which is one very strong argument in favour of Matrimony” (*Letters*:483)

Marianne has been disappointed in her first opportunity of loving truly. Could the love of a good man, his money and his offer of a good home and financial and emotional security resolve the mystery of why Marianne marries Colonel Brandon? Or is Mrs Jennings's earlier comment that “*he* was rich and *she* was handsome” (36) sufficient explanation? There seems to be no single answer to this multilayered and complex question.

And what of Elinor? Are her feelings “incomprehensible” (78) as alleged by her mother? Is she devoid of sensibility, “cold-hearted! Ashamed of being otherwise” (21) as maintained by Marianne? Apparently not, as it would seem that Austen’s message is that neither sense nor sensibility exist in isolation. Nor are these conditions antithetical, or uniquely and separately apart from each other, but are found in the novel to exist in combination with each other, varying in degree, and functioning symbiotically.

Elinor would seem to bear a greater resemblance to the level-headed Jane Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, and to the rational Eleanor Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* than to her highly strung and irascible sibling. But, as has been stated, *Sense and Sensibility* is not about opposites but about degree.

Elinor is therefore not devoid of sensibility, despite Marianne’s assertions that “Elinor has not my feelings” (18). She is frequently filled with feelings that “require...some trouble and time to subdue” (104), although it is possible that she suffers less than Marianne, because she refuses to indulge her suffering. And so, when Willoughby visits the family unexpectedly in Cleveland while Marianne is ill, it is Elinor who starts back and “with a look of horror at the sight of him, obeyed the first impulse of her heart in turning instantly to quit the room...” (317), and when Edward returns unexpectedly to Barton, Elinor is humiliated by his coldness, but “she avoided every appearance of resentment or displeasure, and treated him as she thought he ought to be treated from the family connection” (89). Moreover when Willoughby suddenly leaves Allenhurst at Mrs Smith’s command, Elinor’s uneasiness matches her mother’s. It is therefore also not surprising that of the two sisters it is Elinor who remains sensitive to Edward’s “low spirits” (96) on his return to Barton, the “dejection of mind that frequently attended him” (22), and the undercurrent of unhappiness that runs through Colonel Brandon. For “Elinor’s compassion for him increased, as she had reason to suspect that the misery of disappointed love had already been known by him” (55). And she is reduced to weeping as intensely and as copiously as Marianne when Marianne receives Willoughby’s final letter. Furthermore when she hears that Edward is free to marry her,

Elinor could sit it no longer. She almost ran out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease (360).

Both sisters are tested equally with adversity. For both Marianne and Elinor have similar expectations of life, and, in pursuit of these, they both endure comparable experiences: each hopes to marry the man that she loves; both are waylaid by the unscrupulous actions of others; and each loses the lover to whom she is devoted, through no fault of her own, even if Elinor's loss is only temporary. But Elinor, when tested by Lucy, retains her self-control through "an exertion of spirits, which increased with her increase of emotion" (130), saying "I will be calm; I *will* be mistress of myself" (358). And so when Lucy reveals her possession of Edward's miniature, despite her extreme distress, Elinor spoke "with a composure of voice under which was concealed an emotion and distress beyond anything she had ever felt before. She was mortified, shocked, confounded" (135).

Accordingly, whereas, Marianne succumbs to her idea of sensibility, Elinor remains apparently intact and in command of her senses. For, as Elinor is also knowledgeably compliant with the demands of society and propriety, she has learned for the most part to manage her emotions, to maintain appearances, and arrange, modify and reconcile these to fulfil expectations.

The essential difference between Marianne and Elinor lies in Elinor's ability to maintain a balance between her sensibility and her reason, using reason to make sense of the circumstances with which she is faced, to maintain her composure, to control her emotions, and subdue her feelings, regardless of the intolerability of the situation. Thus when Lucy Steele swears her to secrecy, Elinor believes it would not be appropriate to disclose to her family the grief and despair which she is enduring. And, whereas Marianne has difficulty in restraining her excessive emotion, her nervous irritability, her agitation and desperation, which all lead to her illness, Elinor's attempts to remain prudent, calm and composed, assist her in remaining healthy even when she is faced with the loss of her lover. Therefore, when she is exposed to Lucy's shocking disclosure of her secret engagement to Edward, despite her astonishment and despair, Elinor retains her composure, concealing her considerable emotion and distress: "Elinor's security sunk; but her self-command did not sink with it" (131):

she wept for [Edward] more than for herself....she thought she could even now under the first smart of the heavy blow, command herself enough to guard every suspicion of the truth from her mother and sisters. And so well was she able to answer her own expectations, that when she joined them at dinner only two hours after she had first

suffered the extinction of all her dearest hopes, no one would have supposed from the appearance of the sisters, that Elinor was mourning in secret over obstacles which must divide her for ever from the object of her love...(140-1).

Although she experiences the same grief and despair as Marianne does, Elinor restrains her sensibility for the greater part of the novel so that her emotions are unaccompanied by the violence and affliction in which Marianne indulges herself. And so when Edward leaves, under circumstances similar to Willoughby's departure, Elinor feels despondency and pain, but instead of resorting to hysterics as Marianne does, when faced with the same situation, Elinor exerts herself, keeps herself busy, and forces herself to become involved in domestic activities:

[She] did not adopt the method so judiciously employed by Marianne, on a similar occasion, to augment and fix her sorrow, by seeking silence, solitude, and idleness. Their means were as different as their objects, and equally suited to the advancement of each. Elinor sat down to her drawing-table as soon as he was out of the house, busily employed herself the whole day, neither sought nor avoided the mention of his name, appeared to interest herself almost as much as ever in the general concerns of the family, and if, by this conduct, she did not lessen her own grief, it was at least prevented from unnecessary increase, and her mother and sisters were spared much solicitude on her account (104).

However, Elinor's version of sensibility is so constrained by her extreme self-control that this prevents her from externalising her feelings, with the result that she tends to turn speechless when faced with great emotion: "She would have given the world to be able to speak...but she had no utterance..." (358). And it is this imbalance that Marianne picks on when she says "you communicate, and I...I conceal nothing" (170).

Nor is Elinor "cold-hearted" (21) as alleged by Marianne:

Elinor for a few moments remained silent. Her astonishment at what she heard was at first too great for words; but at length forcing herself to speak....[she showed] an exertion of spirits which increased with her increase of emotion...(130).

Brodey has pointed out that Elinor's self-control increases in proportion to her emotion rather than as the result of lack of emotion. Thus, when faced with Lucy's extraordinary and unexpected revelation,

[Elinor] turned towards Lucy in silent amazement, unable to divine the reason or object of such a declaration, and though her complexion varied, she stood firm in incredulity, and felt in no danger of an hysterical fit or a swoon....but at length forcing herself to speak, and to speak cautiously, she said with a calmness of manner, which tolerably well concealed her surprise and solicitude—"May I ask if your engagement is of long standing?" (129-30)

Elinor is at first stunned into silence by the revelation of Edward's engagement to Lucy. But, when faced with this devastating disclosure, unlike Marianne, she is unable to resort to or rely on the props of sensibility: fainting or hysterics. Accordingly she adopts the only defences which work for her, and with which she is familiar: she stands her ground, speaks carefully and deliberately, retains a calm exterior, responds with the utmost propriety and indicates nothing of her astonishment or inner turmoil. The screens to which Elinor devotes such meticulous attention have become a metaphor for her psychological make up and smiles and silences conceal "very agitated feelings" (150).

She tries to convince Marianne to adopt similar defence mechanisms, warning her not to openly reveal her feelings and asking her only to exercise discretion in her relationship with Willoughby. For Elinor neither condemns nor shows any surprise at Marianne and Willoughby's relationship. "She only wished that it were less openly shewn, and once or twice did venture to suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne" (53). But although Elinor is imbued with "discretion" (26) and "wisdom" (26) she cannot convince Marianne of the advantages of her "plan of general civility" (94).

Nor does Elinor inflict her sufferings on her family in the way that Marianne does. When faced with Lucy's revelations, she maintains her protective stance towards her mother and her siblings. She screens them from the distressing news she has received, and her own unhappiness, forcing herself to perform her normal roles. And in this manner she avoids the violent solicitations that such a disclosure would evoke from her family.

She was stronger alone, and her own good sense so well supported her, that her firmness was as unshaken, her appearance of cheerfulness as invariable, as with regrets so poignant and so fresh, it was possible for them to be (141).

Predictably when she hears from her brother of the drastic changes that he and his wife have made to the family home she “kept her concern and her censure to herself; and was very thankful that Marianne was not present, to share the provocation” (226).

Elinor’s reason dictates that she bears her pain and unhappiness alone. But the screens do not alleviate the pain. And so when Lady Middleton invites the Miss Steeles to dinner with the Dashwood sisters, and Elinor realises that Edward might also be present “she hardly knew how she could bear it!” (231) Therefore, it is only when Mrs Dashwood finally sees behind the screen, which Elinor has so meticulously erected and maintained, that she realises the depth of Elinor’s anguish, seeing “that in Elinor she might have a daughter suffering almost as much, certainly with less self-provocation, and greater fortitude” (356) than Marianne.

Tanner maintains that the two sisters do not constitute “a simple dualism”, arguing that they “are *not* simply ciphers for passion and reason, impulse and restraint, feeling and form, poetry and prose” (1986:99). Instead he perceives the two sisters as together adding up to one divided self.

Is it not however more plausible that each sister possesses elements of both sense and sensibility, merely in varying degrees? Is it not also possible, bearing in mind the close relationship of the sisters with one another, that as and when one sister is dominated by sensibility, the other, in an attempt to retain balance within a socially prescribed perspective, is forced to subjugate her own sensibility and substitute this with sense and *vice versa*? Thus, rather than constituting a single divided self, the two sisters could be viewed as creating a see-saw effect, with each riding high either on sense and reason, or on sensibility and passion, with only one attribute in the ascendancy at a time, but with both ultimately striving after equilibrium – pivoting between the two extremes. Excess is just as hazardous as deficiency, and on this premise each sister needs to learn from the other, to feel and express her feelings with dignity and self-control, to adapt, to compromise, and to acquire a balance of sentiments that work together.

Austen makes stringent demands of Marianne and Elinor, challenging each of them to develop and to acquire symmetry, if not perfection. For, as she says of her niece Fanny’s father, “He & I should not in the least agree of course, in our ideas of Novels

and Heroines;—pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked” (*Letters*:486).

Neither Marianne nor Elinor is a “picture of perfection”. Just as Marianne is finally compelled to review and revise both her ideology and her conduct in order to survive, to modify her extreme overt and physical reactions in compliance with convention, and to relate to the unhappiness of her sister, so too is Elinor required to change, in order to restore communications with her sister and to voice her emotions:

“And all this has been going on at a time when, as you too well know, it has not been my only unhappiness.—If you can think me capable of ever feeling—surely you may suppose that I have suffered *now*. The composure of mind with which I have brought myself at present to consider the matter, the consolation that I have been willing to admit, have been the effect of constant and painful exertion;—they did not spring up of themselves;—they did not occur to relieve my spirits at first—No Marianne. *Then*, if I had not been bound to silence, perhaps nothing could have kept me entirely—not even what I owed to my dearest friends—from openly shewing that I was *very* unhappy” (264).

And so, as Marianne begins to assume control of her emotions, Elinor for the first time starts to exhibit hers, dropping the screens which mask her feelings, unburdening herself to her now receptive and sympathetic sister, revealing how she has had to forcibly restrain herself, and deny herself the luxury of expressing her extreme unhappiness because of her commitment to secrecy.

Her narration was clear and simple; and though it could not be given without emotion, it was not accompanied by violent agitation, nor impetuous grief.—*That* belonged rather to the hearer, for Marianne listened with horror, and cried excessively (261).

A number of critics refer to the desirable state of equilibrium between reason and emotion, pointing out the frequent instances of disequilibrium in this novel, and saying that Austen clearly saw balance as a prime virtue to be aimed at. Moreover even Wollstonecraft touches on this, observing that

Women subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life... (1992:313).

There can be no argument that a balance is required between extreme sensibility and extreme judiciousness. But in Austen's novels such a balance does not come easily. It is often achieved only with a degree of anguish. And sometimes it is only inferred or hoped for. Tanner comments:

What is implied in all [Austen's] work is that human society ought to be very good indeed to justify the inroads made on 'nature' – the feelings within us as well as the trees around us – to erect and secure it. To this end sense and sensibility should work together as closely as possible. But – it is another lesson of her novels – the work is not easy and there is the chance of pain at every step of the way. For a perfect balance between the two must remain an artist's dream... (1986:102).

However, in *Sense and Sensibility* this balance is finally achieved when Elinor is advised of the marriage of Robert Ferrars to Lucy. Under the mistaken impression that it is Edward and not Robert whom Lucy has married, Elinor now takes her turn to turn pale and Marianne "falls back in her chair in hysterics" (353) in sympathy with her sister. Elinor no longer needs to screen her emotions, but adopts responses appropriate to her grief. In turn Marianne, who is well on the way to recovery and no longer dependent on Elinor's support, is able to empathise with her sister, using her sensibility in its most positive, understandable and acceptable form.

And so, having achieved some sort of healthy equilibrium between sense and sensibility, with the apportionment of the two emotions between the two sisters no longer quite so clearly delineated, and with their excesses purged, each sister is given the opportunity of pursuing happiness, with the promise of "no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity" (379).

Wollstonecraft called on society to "[m]ake women rational creatures and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives and mothers" (1992:306). And it would seem as if both Marianne and Elinor at last have an opportunity of fulfilling this precept.

CHAPTER THREE

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Austen considered this novel, which was originally named *First Impressions*, to be her lightest, describing it as “rather too light, and bright, and sparkling” (*Letters*:299). It is, however, not without serious elements.

Moreover, even though it contains certain structural elements and stylised personalities in common with the other novels, and constitutes a comment on marriage, it is less overtly schematised when compared with its predecessor *Sense and Sensibility*.

As in *Sense and Sensibility*, two sisters, Jane and Elizabeth, occupy central roles, each counterbalancing the other, and together counterbalancing the unrestrained passions and follies of their younger sisters; Mrs Bennet is another of Austen’s stereotypic, ineffectual, yet conniving mothers, a neurotic who is largely preoccupied with the effects of events on her own nerves; Lady Catherine de Bourgh is reminiscent of Mrs Churchill in her snobbishness and self-interested controlling behaviour, and Wickham bears a strong resemblance both to Willoughby and to Mr William Elliot.

Furthermore Austen once again focuses to a degree on illness and accident. But although Mrs Bennet is obsessed with her nerves, and her fears of Mr Bennet’s death, highlighting the non-physical dimension of her ill health, and although the story could not proceed in the absence of Jane’s illness, and its consequent exposure of Elizabeth to Darcy, and Jane to the Bingley household, physical illness appears to play no significant role in character growth in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Austen, in this novel, just as in *Sense and Sensibility*, also distinguishes between illnesses that merely further plot, and illnesses that either lead to changes in her characters or to their emotional growth: Jane’s fever is central to the plot, for even though Bingley is struck by her beauty at their first meeting, if Jane had not caught a cold, Bingley might never have had an opportunity to fall in love with her. This illness thus becomes the base on which Jane is able to further her acquaintance with

Bingley, in his own home, at closer quarters than would have normally been permissible. But Jane's illness does not bring about a change in either her outlook or in her personality, and for this reason Jane's cold more resembles Marianne's accident, in *Sense and Sensibility*, which facilitates her meeting with Willoughby, than Marianne's subsequent emotional illness.

While Austen fails to include illnesses of a life-defining nature in *Pride and Prejudice*, other than for the timely death of Miss King's grandfather, apparently restricting the role of ill health to plot development, this is not to say that every character in the novel is physically, mentally and emotionally healthy. For Mrs Bennet and her daughters all exhibit interesting, unhealthy traits that require scrutiny, and even Mr Bennet's conduct as a husband and a father is worthy of attention.

It is well documented that Austen had read and was familiar with novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, Charlotte Smith's *Ethelinde*, Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, and plays such as Sheridan's *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*. She accordingly knew and understood excessive sensibility and its connection with hypochondria and hysteria.

The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology provides a useful definition of hypochondria (Reber, 1986:335):

A condition characterized by imagined sufferings of physical illness or, more generally, an exaggerated concern with one's physical health. The hypochondriac typically displays a preoccupation with bodily functions such as heart rate, sweating, bowel and bladder functions, and the occasional minor problems like pimples, headaches, a simple cough, etc.

Bourne and Eksktrand also define hypochondriasis, commenting that this illness reveals itself as "a preoccupation with physical health, usually pertaining to a single organ or disease". Thus they argue that hypochondriacs

distort the meaning of minor aches and pains, imagine discomfort in various parts of their bodies, and constantly complain of ill health, although a physician can seldom find anything physically wrong (1985:428).

And on testing for hypochondria, Groth-Marnat has shown that typically hypochondriacs

not only show a high concern with illness and disease, but are likely to be egocentric, immature, pessimistic, sour, whiny, and passive aggressive. Their complaints are usually related to a wide variety of physical difficulties. An important purpose of these complaints is to manipulate and control others (1990:200).

It seems therefore that hypochondria is generally understood as being a rather non-specific, diffuse condition, which appears to follow no logical pattern, which involves “general areas of the body” (Shroth and Sue, 1975:287), and is diagnosed only through certain characteristic behaviour patterns.

On the other hand, Groth-Marnat’s tests reveal that hysteria, that other psychosomatic illness, is diagnosed through its more specific symptoms, which include

fitful sleep, nausea, vomiting, headaches, and heart or chest pains....[Sufferers] simultaneously report specific physical complaints but also use a style of denial in which they may even express an exaggerated degree of optimism. One of the important and primary ways in which they deal with anxiety and conflict is to channel or convert these difficulties onto the body. Thus, their physical complaints serve as an indirect expression of these conflicts....[They] demand affection and social support but do so in an indirect and manipulative manner. They are also likely to be socially uninhibited and highly visible. They can easily initiate relationships, yet their relationships are likely to be superficial. They will approach others in a self-centred and naïve manner....[They] have a convenient lack of insight into either their underlying motives or the impact they have on others (1990:202).

Gorman offers a useful and unusually clear set of distinctions which relate to these illnesses in the manner in which they are manifested in Austen’s novels, suggesting that

hypochondria or valetudinarianism remains a static phenomenon, something that defines certain (mostly comic) characters, both male and female, a personality trait that finds expression in action every now and then, but more often in speech which records worries and advice. By comparison, hysteria...contains dynamic

properties...increased emotion and debility and reach[es] a climax in outward behaviour... (1993:7).

Thus, while Mary Musgrove, in *Persuasion*, Mr. Woodhouse, in *Emma*, and the Parker sisters, in *Sanditon*, would all seem to fall squarely within the grouping of hypochondriacs, in their silliness, and their preoccupation with their imaginary illnesses, Marianne Dashwood, Jane Fairfax, Mrs Bennet and Lady Bertram, as well as a number of other characters, both male and female, exhibit a broad range of ill-defined symptoms which seem to exclude them from this classification, tending more towards hysteria. And whereas Lady Bertram and Mr Woodhouse, appear to indulge themselves in their physical disorders, their ill health and its underlying aetiology differs vastly from Marianne's, Louisa's and Jane Fairfax's, who do not deliberately cosset themselves.

Eighteenth century authors were fascinated by the mind/body relationship, and Austen shared that interest; but more particularly Austen revealed her curiosity about the effects of emotional stress on the body, using health and illness in their unembellished sense, as well as metaphorically and thematically, to describe characters and develop plot. For while Austen recognised the body's susceptibility to illness, she also perceived of health as partly governed by attitude, and as a way of life, with healthy minds usually, but not always, occupying strong bodies. Accordingly the illnesses of her characters "expose behavioural as well as physical debility...suggest[ing] both overtly and obliquely the proper components of both physical and emotional health" (Gorman,1993:1).

Austen was also well aware of how people indulged themselves in their various, often imaginary, illnesses, as a result of her personal experiences with her mother, and her many references to her mother's illnesses in her letters to her sister Cassandra indicate that her mother's hypochondria was a source of both humour but also of exasperation to her:

My Mother continues hearty, her appetite & nights are very good, but her Bowels are still not entirely settled, & she sometimes complains of an Asthma, a Dropsy, Water in her Chest & a Liver Disorder (*Letters*:39).

It began to occur to me before you mentioned it that I had been somewhat silent as to my mother's health for some time, but I thought you could have no difficulty in divining

its exact state—you, who have guessed so much stranger things, She is tolerably well—better upon the whole than she was some weeks ago. She would tell you herself that she has a very dreadful cold in her head at present; but I have not much compassion for colds in the head without fever or sore throat (*Letters*:57).

While Austen may appear to have been unsympathetic to, sceptical, and even dismissive of both hypochondria and of hysteria as manipulative and imaginary self-induced conditions, used to elevate standing, and to manipulate care givers, both proved to be useful components of her story telling.

Austen attaches great significance to physical and emotional equilibrium, applying this both to individual characters, their marital unions and to some extent to the social grouping and environment in which they find themselves. Interestingly, happy and rewarding marriages are noteworthy exceptions in the novels: the Morlands in *Northanger Abbey*, the Crofts in *Persuasion* and the Heywoods in *Sanditon* are some of the few that spring to mind.

The novels seem to indicate that marriages are only likely to be successful once excesses have been checked, and that where excesses remain those marriages affected by these are likely to be unsatisfactory. The marriages of Mary Musgrove and Mrs Bennet are therefore problematic as a consequence of the extreme manipulative tendencies inherent in both women.

Tanner comments:

The good marriage is also indispensable for the renewal of society. That there are so many bad, or bleakly empty marriages in Jane Austen, revealing different degrees of failed mutuality, non-reciprocation and myopic egotism or frivolous self-gratification, only underlines the imperative of finding a good marriage no matter what the obstacles, in the form of the different fragments of authority, prohibition, interdiction and coercion which circulated in that small – at times claustrophobic – society, or the difficulties and risks of opportunities and gestures of initiation and approach which were not within the power, or under the control, of the heroine (1986:10).

It is interesting that all the novels end very shortly after the marriage of the heroine: Austen does not follow her heroines into their marriages, dedicating one or two pages at the most to descriptions of the events that transpire after the wedding ceremony.

Furthermore many of the parents of her heroines are widowed, thus providing Austen with an opportunity of examining and addressing the inadequacies inherent in single parents and the effects of this on children. Such parents include Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion*, Mr Woodhouse in *Emma*, and Mrs Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*. And this examination of parental failure is extended to include the failures of guardians such as the Bertrams in *Mansfield Park*, and the Allens and General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*.

Mr and Mrs Bennet may be added to the list of inadequate parents. But the Bennets differ from all the other parents in Austen's completed novels, in that, excepting the Morlands, they comprise the only married couple entrusted with the task of raising one of Austen's heroines. However, despite their combined efforts as a couple, they function just as badly as all the inadequate parents in Austen's other novels, as each of the partners is separately dysfunctional, and their combination is lethal.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following definition of one meaning of the term dysfunctional:

Exhibiting or characterized by dysfunction; (of social interactions, family relationships, etc.) disruptively aberrant or abnormal, esp. when harmful to the emotional well-being of those involved; (of a person, group, family, etc.) incapable of forming or conducting normal social relations; maladjusted.

This definition hints at the core of *Pride and Prejudice*. For Mr and Mrs Bennet's relationship presents itself as the very opposite of the conjugal bliss and domestic happiness which one anticipates for Austen's heroines. Furthermore most of the members of the Bennet family are inconsistent and unpredictable, reflecting dysfunctional tendencies, habitually exhibiting a lack of empathy towards each other and resorting to extremes in times of conflict. As a result of poor communication messages are often mixed, clear boundaries are mostly absent, and existing boundaries are regularly transgressed. Accordingly Longbourn, the noisy and disordered Bennet home, symbolically reflects the inner confusion of its emotionally troubled and psychologically unhealthy inhabitants. Even Jane, who is almost to a fault, immersed in "her own myopia" (Tanner, 1986:111), seeing only the best in everyone and her world, and Elizabeth, with her persistent indulgence in her

misguided pride and prejudice, are in some danger of risking happiness while they remain in this unwholesome environment.

Mr Bennet has largely divested himself of both his role as parent and as husband. He maintains his distance from his family by either literally removing himself to his library, where he is mostly encountered immersed in a book, seldom venturing out of this retreat other than to set traps for others which expose their follies (Tave,in Bloom,2004:207). Or he resorts to mockery. But his laughter at his friends and neighbours, although frequently understandable, and his calculated teasing of Mrs Bennet and his daughters, only assist in the creation of a family which is ultimately “hopeless of remedy” (213).

Nonetheless Mr Bennet’s behaviour is surprisingly ambiguous, as, although there is little that is natural in his attitude towards his family, he still mostly does the right thing: he calls on Netherfield to introduce himself to Bingley; he attends the ball at Netherfield, an event that is of importance to his family; and he ventures as far as London to extricate Lydia from Wickham’s clutches.

These excursions from his library seem out of character until one realises that each is linked either to the introduction of his many daughters to various possible suitors or to his attempts to protect them from harm. Thus, despite the facade that he has so meticulously erected, and despite his many protestations to the contrary, it would seem that Mr Bennet is not wholly emotionally distanced from the hazards of his daughters remaining unmarried. And while he is not obsessed with their marital futures, he is genuinely and deeply involved in his daughters’ welfare. Consequently he becomes very much engaged in the ramifications of Lydia’s elopement and its dangerous repercussions. But, despite his underlying concerns for his daughters, his disengagement from the supportive domestic roles that society requires from him, his quick repartee, his frequent self-exclusion from familial events and his easy acquiescence to the demands of his wife and daughters makes him more than partly responsible for the dysfunctionality of his home.

It appears as if his cleverness at the expense of others might be a protective mask, resulting from his attempts to counteract Mrs Bennet’s foolish effusiveness. But even then his comments to his family are often unnecessarily sceptical, and sometimes even cruel: he points to, acknowledges, and sardonically makes fun of Mary’s vulnerabilities, saying, ““you are a young lady of deep reflection I know, and read

great books, and make extracts” (7); and when his wife and daughters visit the assembly room, although he is curious about “the event of an evening which had raised such splendid expectations. He had rather hoped that all his wife’s views on the stranger would be disappointed...” (12).

Furthermore Mr Bennet’s communication with Mrs Bennet is seriously impaired, and the couple thus fail to communicate effectively on any level. For he is made up of

so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character (5).

Moreover Mrs Bennet is not Mr Bennet’s intellectual equal. His interests are literary, while hers are purely social:

Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper...The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news (5).

While Mr Bennet is not openly rude to his wife, his speech is frequently provocative, teasing and even occasionally disapproving, despite being couched in relatively polite terms. Thus he says to her, when she rhetorically asks why Mr Collins should inherit Longbourn, “I leave it to yourself to determine” (130), and he often leaves the room when he is “fatigued with the raptures of his wife” (8). So, when Elizabeth refuses Mr Collins’s offer of marriage, he tells Mrs Bennet,

“I have two small favours to request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room. I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as may be” (112).

Mr Bennet has been disillusioned by his personal experience with love and marriage, but, like Charlotte Lucas, he is able to maintain a civil facade by carefully demarcating his space. However this effectively limits his ability to use any form of speech which would necessarily reveal his feelings. Consequently he seems to belittle Jane’s feelings for Bingley, when Bingley leaves Netherfield for London:

“So Lizzy...your sister is crossed in love I find. I congratulate her. Next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed in love a little now and then. It is something to think of, and gives her a sort of distinction among her companions” (137-8).

And, in similar vein, he light-heartedly teases Elizabeth, asking her “[w]hen is your turn to come?...Let Wickham be *your* man. He is a pleasant fellow and would jilt you creditably...” (138). He continues, saying, “it is a comfort to think that, whatever may befall you, you have an affectionate mother who will always make the most of it” (138), ironically revealing his keen understanding, empathy and perceptiveness of the situation in which both Jane and Elizabeth find themselves. Mr Bennet is thus neither as insensitive as he appears to be nor how he would like to be perceived. And so, when Elizabeth departs for Hunsford, “he told her to write to him, and almost promised to answer her letter” (151).

He is, however, excessively dismissive of Charlotte, when she accepts Mr Collins’s offer of marriage, saying that “it gratified him...to discover that Charlotte Lucas, whom he had been used to think tolerably sensible, was as foolish as his wife, and more foolish than his daughter!” (127)

Charlotte is twenty-seven years old, and only one of a number of Lucas children likely to inherit from Sir William Lucas. But Charlotte is also intelligent and practical. And desiring the security that marriage will afford her, she realises that in her circumstances she ought not to lose any “opportunity of fixing [a lover]” (21). However, despite Mr Bennet’s misgivings, Charlotte’s marriage is likely to function more successfully than the Bennets’ own marriage, as she has few expectations of her marriage and has set very limited parameters for herself.

Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband.—Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want (122).

Moreover Charlotte has no illusions about marital relationships and romance, realistically believing that

“[h]appiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar before-hand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life” (23).

And so Charlotte makes few demands of her marriage:

“I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr.Collins’s character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state” (125).

Accordingly she arranges the Parsonage at Hunsford so as to keep Mr Collins in “his own apartment” (168) and out of her way. And Elizabeth notes on visiting her that her principal interest lies in her “home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all the dependent concerns...” (216).

It would seem that Mr Bennet is in fact not insensitive to Charlotte's predicament as a possible spinster, and that his comment is not a criticism of Charlotte's calculated, pragmatic choice, in favour of a marriage of convenience, but is based both on his judgement of Mr Collins as a pompous fool, and on his personal experience of marriage. Charlotte's decision is made within the framework of the dominant ideology which required women of small means to seek security in marriage in order to avoid the inevitable and unenviable fate of domestic employment. Consequently Mr Bennet's strong condemnation of a person whom he has previously admired could be the consequence of his personal disappointment in marriage and his comment on marriage in general. There is, however, no easy explanation for Mr Bennet's censure of Charlotte, and the reader is therefore left to rely on an examination of Mr Bennet's responses to other similar circumstances.

When Lydia pleads with her father for the family to spend the summer in Brighton,

Elizabeth saw directly that her father had not the smallest intention of yielding; but his answers were at the same time so vague and equivocal, that her mother, though often disheartened, had never yet despaired of succeeding at last (223).

Mr Bennet adheres to his decision. But when the Forsters invite Lydia to accompany them to Brighton, he rejects Elizabeth's entreaties to him to “take the trouble of

checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life..." (231-2). He allows Lydia's determination to prevail over his initial good sense and Elizabeth's wise counsel, typically relinquishing his paternal role of responsibility by default, saying in his characteristically ironic, yet highly perceptive manner, "Do not make yourself uneasy....Let her go....she cannot grow many degrees worse..." (232).

Lydia's elopement, however, becomes an acute test of Mr Bennet in his role as a father: for the first time we see him appropriately aroused from his torpor. For as Jane tells Elizabeth, "I never in my life saw him so affected" (275). In his attempts to trace Lydia's steps through London "he was in such a hurry to be gone, and his spirits so greatly discomposed..." (293). Yet, even then, he returns home having re-assumed "all the appearance of his usual philosophic composure" (299).

Butler suggests that

Mr. Bennet, with his satirical view of human folly, his irresponsible detachment from it as it is manifested in his own family, is shown to be morally very defective indeed (1975:209).

It could be argued instead that this detachment, although apparently morally indefensible and dangerous for his family, is rather both a facade and a reversion to his characteristic mode of behaviour. For, although Mr Bennet, on his return to his home, again conceals himself behind his cloak of scepticism, qualifying his emotions in his customary, sardonic manner, he exhibits his awareness that allowing Lydia to go to Brighton was a serious lapse on his part, and he acknowledges that his mistake has had serious consequences, saying,

"let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough" (299).

Initially he is unable to accept Lydia's frivolous approach to her marriage, and so he refuses her re-entry to his house, and money for clothes, although Jane and Elizabeth quickly persuade him to change his mind. But he still teasingly warns Kitty "you are never to stir out of doors, till you can prove, that you have spent ten minutes of every day in a rational manner" (300).

Although he makes ironic comments about most of his acquaintances, Mr Bennet's assessment of people is usually correct. When Elizabeth asks whether Mr Collins could be regarded as a sensible man, he replies:

"No, my dear; I think not. I have great hopes of finding him quite the reverse. There is a mixture of servility and self-importance in his letter, which promises well. I am impatient to see him" (64).

Predictably Mr Collins turns out to be as self-important and ridiculous as Mr Bennet had so perceptively forecast.

His cousin was as absurd as he had hoped, and he listened to him with the keenest enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute composure of countenance...(68).

And he perceptively identifies Wickham's flaws, recognising his "impudence and hypocrisy" (364), saying of him:

"He is as fine a fellow...as ever I saw. He simpers, and smirks, and makes love to us all. I am prodigiously proud of him. I defy even Sir William Lucas himself, to produce a more valuable son-in-law" (330).

He has learned much about marriage from his personal experience. For he is aware of the inherent flaws in his marriage, and his own role in the creation of these, admitting to Elizabeth that he had misguidedly followed a conventional path, marrying for beauty and passion. He therefore demands more of the marriages of his older daughters, and attempts to dissuade Elizabeth from making a match based on money alone, establishing happiness as his principal criteria for a successful marriage, saying, "[Darcy] is rich, to be sure, and you may have more fine clothes and fine carriages than Jane. But will they make you happy?" (376)

Love was often not regarded as an essential component in marriage at that time, but Austen affords it some significant stature, alongside the more usual applicable standards of mutual respect, financial security and moral and social equality. Hence Mr Bennet is quickly reconciled to the idea of Elizabeth marrying Darcy once he realises that their relationship is founded on the love that the couple has for one

another, and he accepts Jane's love for Bingley once he appreciates that they will be happy together. For when Jane accepts Bingley's proposal, Mr Bennet confirms that

[t]here was nothing of presumption or folly in Bingley, that could provoke his ridicule, or disgust him into silence; and [Mr. Bennet] was more communicative, and less eccentric than the other had ever seen him (346).

And rather pragmatically, if reluctantly, he is even brought to accept Lydia's relationship with Wickham.

Whereas Mrs Bennet gauges Bingley's suitability on his income and his looks, Mr Bennet says to Jane, perceptively, and for once, without irony,

"I have great pleasure in thinking you will be so happily settled. I have not a doubt of your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike" (348).

He amplifies, saying that Jane and Bingley are both so compliant, so easy and so generous that "nothing will ever be resolved" (348), they will be cheated by their servants, and they will "always exceed [their] income" (348). But it becomes apparent that in his opinion their similitude in outlook and their likeness in temperament may well be the most important requirements for a successful and happy marriage. For Mr Bennet has been taught by his long and bitter experience that marriage should be approached with the utmost caution and should only be entered into on a foundation of mutual respect.

If this father is after all so fundamentally concerned about the emotional and physical welfare of his daughters, why are the Bennets generally considered not only to have an unsatisfactory marriage, but also to be unsuccessful parents?

Tanner explains that the ideal marriage requires a balance of property and propriety:

Jane Austen's heroines often have the requisite sense of 'propriety' but – being women – no property...Thus the ideal marriage at the end of a Jane Austen novel is not simply a conventional happy ending, an easily available tactic of narrative closure. It offers itself as an emblem of the ideal union of property and propriety – a model to be emulated, a paradigm for a more general combination of the two on which the future of her society depends. Marriages in her work which lack either or both are, by the same token, admonitory failures (1986:19).

And Hannah More would seem to endorse the need for propriety in marriage when she both defines it and emphasises its necessity in women, saying,

Propriety is to a woman what the great Roman critic says action is to an orator; it is the first, the second, the third requisite. A woman may be knowing, active, witty, and amusing; but without propriety she cannot be amiable. Propriety is the centre in which all the lines of duty and of agreeableness meet. It is to character what proportion is to figure and grace to attitude. It does not depend on any one perfection; but it is the result of general excellence. It shows itself by a regular, orderly, undeviating course; and never starts from its sober orbit into any splendid eccentricities; for it would be ashamed of such praise as it might extort by any aberrations from its proper path...I would make it the criterion of true taste, right principle, and genuine feeling, in a woman, whether she would be less touched with all the flattery of romantic and exaggerated panegyric, than with that beautiful picture of correct and elegant propriety which Milton draws of our first mother (1974:1:6-7).

While the Bennets for the time being have sufficient property to satisfy the equation, Mrs Bennet, and even Mr Bennet at times, seem to be entirely deficient in propriety. Darcy confirms this saying,

"[t]he situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters and occasionally even by your father" (198).

Elizabeth's "sense of shame was severe" (209) at his observations. "The justice of the charge struck her too forcibly for denial" (209). However, as so astutely observed by Darcy, the absence of propriety in the Bennet's home does not lie solely on Mrs Bennet's shoulders. It would seem rather that the responsibility ought to be apportioned jointly, arising out of Mr and Mrs Bennet's mutually unsatisfactory relationship to each other and their unsuccessful marriage.

Although Mr Bennet admits that he has married for the wrong reasons, and while Mrs Bennet seems to be a hopelessly inadequate mother, whose only interest is in marrying daughters off (a very genuine concern bearing the entailment in mind), Mrs Bennet is also not entirely well. For whether hypochondria and hysteria are classified as imaginary or fantasy, these disabilities remain very real for the person concerned,

and the consequent illnesses that they visit upon themselves, are seldom sought after and rarely make them happy.

Mrs Bennet takes no exercise, neither walking nor riding. She does not read, as Mrs Morland does, and even the usual domestic pursuit of embroidery, with which the indolent Lady Bertram occupies herself, does not appear to interest her. Mrs Bennet is therefore yet another Austenian representation of Wollstonecraft's "foolish women" (1992:309), who, "[c]onfined, then, in cages like the feathered race...have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch" (1992:147).

Brown suggests that in *Pride and Prejudice* Austen creates an acute awareness of the important relationship between education and marriage:

The conflicts are explicit in the differences between the Bennet sisters, in the parents' incompatible attitudes towards their own roles as mother and father, and in the spirited debate on "female accomplishment" at Netherfield. And in this discussion of female education Jane Austen's scepticism places her closer to Mary Wollstonecraft...than has usually been assumed (1973:328).

Mrs Bennet, an attorney's daughter, possessed of little education, has married into the gentry. And with little to do, and not much to occupy her mind, she socialises, gossips and worries, and most importantly she fills her time with thoughts and schemes of how to get her daughters married. Ironically, despite her daughters' marriages being crucial, as Darcy points out, her nervous attacks and lack of propriety inhibit the advances of suitable suitors. Mrs Bennet is "marvellously incompetent at her business, simply by being herself" (Tave,in Bloom:2004:200). Accordingly, despite her apparent concern for the welfare of her children, Mrs Bennet fails in her maternal role, inasmuch as Mr Bennet does as a father.

In an era when health was tenuous and consumption rife, and in which there were no effective cures, her readiness to exploit her daughter's ill-health, in the promotion of Jane's relationship with Bingley, is interesting.

Jane had not been gone long before it rained hard, Her sisters were uneasy for her, but her mother was delighted...."This was a lucky idea of mine, indeed!" said Mrs Bennet more than once, as if the credit of making it rain were all her own (31).

It is ironic that, having originally wished for Jane to be caught in the rain so as to prolong her stay at Netherfield, when Jane returns home her mother expresses her concern that her early return from Netherfield could have led to her catching another cold! It is evident that her dominant concern is for Jane and Bingley to have the time to become properly acquainted, and not for Jane's health:

"Oh! I am not at all afraid of her dying. People do not die of little trifling colds. She will be taken good care of. As long as she stays there, it is all very well" (31).

Predictably, when Jane is so unhappy after Bingley's apparent desertion, Mrs Bennet foolishly comments thus: "Well, my comfort is, I am sure Jane will die of a broken heart, and then he will be sorry for what he has done" (228).

Similarly Kitty, who appears to be smaller and more delicate than her sisters, and who has an unremitting cough, is told by her mother to control her cough as it irritates her nerves:

"Don't keep coughing so, Kitty, for Heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces."

"Kitty has no discretion in her coughs," said her father; "she times them ill."

"I do not cough for my own amusement," replied Kitty fretfully (6).

From the beginning of the novel the reader is alerted to the fact that Mrs Bennet's nervous condition impacts on the whole family, and that her outer lethargy reflects her inner mental apathy. For when she is distressed she retires to bed, where she takes refuge in her legendary nerves. Her existence is dominated by two central concerns: her nerves and her daughters' marriages and it seems that these two interests might be inextricably interrelated, even if her nerves take precedence, and even if, as Mr Bennet reveals, Mrs Bennet has been susceptible to her nervous illnesses for at least twenty-three years.

Pride and Prejudice opens with the statement: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (3). This pronouncement to some extent clarifies Mrs Bennet's confusing, maternal attitude towards her daughters. For it implies that the Bennet family, amongst others in their neighbourhood, concur in this sentiment. However, the irony of this statement lies in

the more important fact that single women of that period, and that class, who were without financial independence, held a most ignominious position, and that accordingly it was more essential for women to find husbands than *vice versa*. Because the dominant ideology of the day was maintained through the practice of patrilineal transfer of property, permitting women to own and exercise control over property only in exceptional circumstance, most single women, and more particularly widows, were consequently completely dependent upon their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers for their continued financial welfare, particularly where estates were entailed.

Austen's novels reflect this state of affairs. Thus, for example, in *Emma*, Jane Fairfax and her aunts accept that unless Jane marries, she will be obliged to earn her own keep, as an employee in someone else's home, and John Dashwood inherits his father's entire estate in *Sense and Sensibility*, leaving his sisters in relative poverty. It is for this reason that Mrs Bennet exclaims that Miss de Bourgh, as an heiress, "is better off than many girls" (67), even though she suffers from a "sickly constitution" (67).

Mrs Bennet's limited vision is thus only able to encompass the futures of her daughters as wives, indifferent to the success of their marriages. However, Tanner suggests that, although Austen recognised the ideology, she goes beyond it by permitting her heroines, and some of her lesser characters, to escape this fate, by not just entering into suitable marriages, but by marrying men who are eminently suited to bring each heroine happiness: "If in *some* ways Jane Austen's vision is complicit with the dominant ideology of her class, in other ways it very clearly transcends it..." (1986:6).

He argues further that Austen's "heroines need a propertied man" (1986:17). But both of these comments oversimplify the issue. While Elizabeth may well "need a propertied man", she is neither compliant, deferential nor obedient when it comes to the question of marriage, declining the proposed marriage with Mr Collins and confronting Lady Catherine de Bourgh on the subject of Darcy. For not all the young girls of Austen's novels are that easily persuaded that marriage is the only method of obtaining financial security. Charlotte's "pure and disinterested desire of an establishment" (122) may well override her emotions, reflecting the economic realities of the society in which she lives. But, unlike Charlotte, neither Elizabeth, nor Fanny Price, or even Emma have any interest in entering into marriages that offer

them less than what they demand from marriage. They all require men who will love, honour and respect them.

And so, while there is evidence in all Austen's novels of situations in which men are economically favoured, there is also evidence in all the novels that Austen does not necessarily recognise the ideology, that she questions it, and only affords it her qualified acceptance, merely describing things as they are and leaving the reader to draw his/her own conclusions as to the satisfactoriness of this ideology. Thus Elizabeth refuses two separate offers of materially advantageous marriages, which would in the first case have secured Longbourn, and in the second have offered her wealth, independence and social standing way beyond her expectations – turning the ideology on its head. Paradoxically while Elizabeth is not prepared to exchange love and respect for financial security alone, she eventually acquires all three.

For all the aforementioned reasons it is essential to Mrs Bennet that her five daughters be married off at any cost, and Mr Bennet confirms Mrs Bennet's attitude, teasingly commenting as follows:

“if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of illness, if she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr Bingley, and under your orders” (31).

Mrs Bennet has been aware, since she married Mr Bennet that, as a result of his estate being entailed, its inheritance is not secure, and that unless she produces a son the estate will pass on to the nearest male heir in the family.

When first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless; for, of course, they were to have a son. This son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for. Five daughters successively entered the world, but yet the son was to come; and Mrs. Bennet, for many years after Lydia's birth, had been certain that he would. This event had at last been despaired of...(308).

Mrs Bennet is also cognisant that her five daughters will inherit very little from their father, and she is well aware of the fate of spinsters who have no father or brother to look after them. And it would therefore seem reasonable to propose that this concern is intrinsically related to the tenuous state of her nerves, aggravating, if not actually inducing her hysterical behaviour.

Wiltshire suggests that Mrs Bennet's nerves function in two ways:

as real distress, the result of anger, humiliation and powerlessness – and as modes of recuperation – an attempt to rescue herself as a centre of attention, if not of actual authority. Illness becomes a vehicle whereby the ego-gratification that her youth and spirits once brought her can be salvaged as the consideration now due to the injured parent (1992:20).

We know that Mr and Mrs Bennet neither relate to each other, nor communicate with each other on any authentic level. Moreover Mrs Bennet appears to have no meaningful relationships with any of her daughters, other than perhaps with Lydia, whose behaviour would seem to resemble her mother's at the same age. While Mrs Bennet complains that Mr Bennet has no compassion for her nerves, a rough calculation indicates that Mrs Bennet's nerves have troubled her (and Mr Bennet) more or less since the commencement of their marriage. It is reasonable to speculate that she was neurotic from the start, but that her neuroses were perhaps masked by her physical beauty. But it may also be possible to reasonably infer that, being aware of the entailment of the estate from the date of her marriage, the emotional pressure of producing a son and heir might have been just too much for her, transforming her fears and unhappiness into physical symptoms such as hysteria and hypochondria, with the birth of each successive daughter exacerbating her nervous condition.

On the very first page of the novel Mrs Bennet informs her husband, that although she has not met him and does not even know Bingley's name she is "“thinking of his marrying one of [her girls]” (4). When, however, Mr Bennet expresses his disinclination to visit Bingley, the first mention is made of Mrs Bennet's nerves: “When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous” (5). And it is at this point that Mr Bennet informs his wife of his “high respect for [her] nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least” (5). Predictably she erupts emotionally when Mr Bennet teases her about the Bingley visit. However, she soon recovers her equilibrium once she understands that he has called on Bingley, saying “I knew that I should persuade you at last. I was sure you loved your girls too well to neglect such an acquaintance” (7).

Mrs Bennet's aspirations for her daughters are unambiguous and her opinions of potential suitors are coloured by their interest in her daughters. Accordingly when

Bingley finds himself unable to accept the “honour of their invitation” (9) Mrs Bennet’s uneasy state of equilibrium is once again disturbed:

She could not imagine what business he could have in town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear that he might be always flying about from one place to another, and never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be (10).

Similarly, when Mr Darcy is perceived to have slighted Elizabeth by not dancing with her, Mrs Bennet reacts most strongly, calling him a “disagreeable, horrid man” (13), condemning him “with much bitterness of spirit and some exaggeration” (13) for his conceit and his silences.

And conversely, as Bingley pays Jane more and more attention, so Mrs Bennet becomes euphoric, telling Mr Bennet

“we have had a most delightful evening, a most excellent ball...Jane was so admired, nothing could be like it...and Mr. Bingley thought her quite beautiful, and danced with her twice” (12).

She voices her surprise at Mr Bennet’s constant criticism of his girls, saying,

“I am astonished, my dear...that you should be so ready to think your own children silly. If I wished to think slightly of any body’s children, it should not be of my own...” (29).

For ironically, with complete lack of insight, she maintains that even if Mr Bennet should not “expect such girls to have the sense of their father and mother” (29), “they are all of them very clever” (29). But by adopting this uncritical attitude she creates the space for Lydia’s indiscretions when the militia is posted to Merryton, reminiscing about “the time when I liked a red coat myself very well”, confirming that “so I do still at my heart”...(29), and establishing her own emotional immaturity: “if a smart young colonel, with five or six thousand a year, should want one of my girls I shall not say nay to him...” (29).

Elizabeth’s refusal to entertain Mr Collins’s proposal of marriage becomes cause for another nervous outburst. For whereas Mrs Bennet had previously referred to Mr Collins as “that odious man” (61), she comes to accept him with composure the

moment that he reveals himself as a suitor for one of her daughters. And so she “trusted that she might soon have two daughters married; and the man whom she could not bear to speak of the day before, was now high in her good graces” (71). She had persuaded herself that

she should undoubtedly see her daughter settled at Netherfield, in the course of three or four months. Of having another daughter married to Mr. Collins, she thought with equal certainty, and with considerable, though not equal, pleasure (103).

But she is unsuccessful in her attempts to persuade Elizabeth to marry this most affected man, and, as Elizabeth demurs, Mrs Bennet becomes increasingly forceful, saying “Lizzy, I *insist* upon your staying and hearing Mr. Collins” (104). Because Elizabeth’s marriage to Mr Collins would end the entailment, “a subject on which Mrs Bennet was beyond the reach of reason” (62), she perceives Elizabeth’s refusal as “undutiful” (113) and threatens not to see Elizabeth again if she refuses to marry Mr Collins, coaxing and bullying her, and finally falling back on her usual defence, saying,

“nobody is on my side, nobody takes part with me, I am cruelly used, nobody feels for my poor nerves....People who suffer as I do from nervous complaints can have no great inclination for talking. Nobody can tell what I suffer!—But it is always so. Those who do not complain are never pitied” (113).

Consequently when she discovers that Mr Collins is to marry Charlotte, she denounces Elizabeth and her perversity as thwarting her ambitions, saying,

Elizabeth was the real cause of all the mischief...she herself had been barbarously used by them all....Nothing could console and nothing appease her....A week elapsed before she could see Elizabeth without scolding her, a month passed before she could speak to Sir William or Lady Lucas without being rude, and many months were gone before she could at all forgive their daughter...She hated having visitors in the house while her health was so indifferent....Mrs Bennet was really in a most pitiable state. The very mention of any thing concerning the match threw her into an agony of ill humour, and wherever she went she was sure of hearing it talked of. The sight of Miss Lucas was odious to her. As her successor in that house, she regarded her with jealous abhorrence. Whenever Charlotte came to see them she concluded her to be anticipating the hour of possession; and whenever she spoke in a low voice to Mr. Collins, was convinced that they were talking of the Longbourn estate, and resolving

to turn herself and her daughters out of the house, as soon as Mr. Bennet were dead (127-130).

Eventually Mrs Bennet recovers from this “pitiable state” (129). But she remains obsessively concerned with marital possibilities and preoccupied with the disappointment that Jane has suffered. And so when her sister-in-law arrives,

Mrs. Bennet had many grievances to relate, and much to complain of. They had all been very ill-used since she last saw her sister. Two of her girls had been on the point of marriage, and after all there was nothing in it (139).

Mrs Bennet’s spirits, however, become fortified at the thought of Lydia’s going to Brighton, and with the contemplation of all the introductions that might be made there. Accordingly some sort of equilibrium is re-established and she is “restored to her usual querulous serenity” (238). But when Lydia elopes with Wickham, living with him in an unmarried state, Mrs Bennet’s mental health again deteriorates, so that Jane reports: “My poor mother is really ill and keeps her room. Could she exert herself it would be better; but this is not to be expected...” (275).

Elizabeth returns home to find her mother “incapable of exertion, and requiring constant attendance; and...the misery of her impatience was severe” (280). On this occasion Mrs Bennet’s nervous fears extend to and include her husband’s death, being turned out of the house by Mr Collins, and the effects of dire poverty.

“I am frightened out of my wits: and have such tremblings, such flutterings, all over me, such spasms in my side, and pains in my head, and such beating at heart, that I can get no rest by night nor by day” (288).

However, her spirits soon revive on hearing that her brother intends forcing the couple to marry. And with this, despite the fact that Lydia has committed a social impropriety that marriage will never erase, Mrs Bennet’s emotions now shift from anxiety about the scandal that Lydia has caused, to concern about the wedding clothes that are to be got ready.

Predictably on hearing of the impending marriage,

her joy burst forth, and every following sentence added to its exuberance....To know that her daughter would be married was enough. She was disturbed by no fear for her

felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of her misconduct....“But the clothes, the wedding clothes! ...How merry we shall be together when we meet! ... Well! I am so happy! In a short time I shall have a daughter married. Mrs Wickham! How well it sounds. And she was only sixteen last June...”.No sentiment of shame gave a damp to her triumph. The marriage of a daughter, which had been the first object of her wishes, since Jane was sixteen, was now on the point of accomplishment, and her thoughts and her words ran wholly on those attendants of elegant nuptials, fine muslins, new carriages, and servants (305-10).

Thus, despite the indiscretions committed, and the improbability of future, fine muslins, new carriages and servants, Lydia's homecoming becomes a happy event for both Mrs Bennet and her insensitive young daughter, filled with parties, visits and celebrations.

Mrs Bennet's spirits are lifted even further when she hears of Bingley's return to Netherfield. When Bingley pre-empts her dinner invitations by unexpectedly calling on Jane, the visit is such a success that “Mrs Bennet, in short, was in very great spirits; she had seen enough of Bingley's behaviour to Jane, to be convinced that she would get him at last...” (343). Mrs Bennet's is convinced that her conniving and manipulation have borne fruit. She is ecstatic over Jane's engagement to Bingley, the four or five thousand pounds a year that they will have, and the carriages and servants that they will be able to afford. “Wickham, Lydia, were all forgotten. Jane was beyond competition her favourite child. At that moment she cared for no other” (349).

When in turn Elizabeth informs her mother that she is to marry Darcy, one could expect that Mrs Bennet's happiness would have reached its zenith. And unsurprisingly “its effect was extraordinary; for on first hearing it, Mrs Bennet sat quite still, and unable to utter a syllable” (378). However, she does not remain silent for long: “She began at length to recover, to fidget about in her chair, get up, sit down again, wonder, and bless herself” (378). Not for her the concerns as to Elizabeth's happiness, that Mr Bennet has voiced, only an ecstatic account of the riches that such a match will bring: the jewels, the pin money, the house in town and the carriages. Jane has been supplanted by Elizabeth in the same way as Lydia was by Jane: “Jane's is nothing to it—nothing at all. I am so pleased—so happy. Such a charming man!—so handsome! so tall!” (378) Unsurprisingly Darcy's wealth, together with his looks and height seem to be Mrs Bennet's sole requirements for a

suitable marriage. While Mr Bennet has acquired some insight as a result of Lydia's elopement, Mrs Bennet appears incapable of such development, happy only to have three of her daughters married, unconcerned with the bases of these marriages, and more importantly, unconcerned that any of these might repeat the pattern of her own unfulfilled life. She declares that only when her five daughters have found husbands is she likely to find any contentment. The narrator suggests, however, that contentment is not likely to ensue as Mrs Bennet remains incorrigible, and with it her marriage to Mr Bennet must remain irredeemable.

And what of the Bennet girls? Are they able to emerge unscathed from this damaged environment, or are they also susceptible to emotional ill-health, and psychologically impaired as a result of the dysfunctional home into which they have been born and raised? It would seem that this is partly the case.

Jane cannot be described as physically, emotionally or psychologically unhealthy. For she is at all times "possessed of good sense" (14), and consistently "candid without ostentation or design" (14). However Elizabeth points to an imbalance in Jane's inordinate goodness and sometimes unwarranted gullibility, telling her sister,

"you are a great deal too apt you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life" (14).

She says further: "*You wish to think all the world respectable, and are hurt if I speak ill of any body*" (135). For Jane even defends Darcy's rudeness to Elizabeth in the assembly room, and when Elizabeth tells her of the extraordinary meeting between Darcy and Wickham, "Jane would have defended either or both had they appeared to be wrong..." (74). Moreover when Wickham's story about Darcy is told to her, Jane reserves her judgement, saying only: "One does not know what to think" (86).

Jane possesses much of the self-control inherent in Elinor Dashwood, so that unlike her more impulsive sister Elizabeth, "whatever she felt she was desirous of concealing" (129). And much in the same way that Elinor asks Marianne to hide her emotions, Jane warns her younger sister not to "give way to such feelings as these. They will ruin your happiness" (135). But again, like Elinor, this concealment does Jane no favours, creating the space for Bingley to be influenced by his friend and sister and his consequential return to London. Jane's only comment is: "He will be

forgot, and we shall all be as we were before....it has done no harm to any one but myself” (134). And when Elizabeth upbraids her for her lack of criticism of Darcy’s influence over Bingley she replies:

“By supposing such an affection, you make every body acting unnaturally and wrong, and me most unhappy. Do not distress me by the idea....Let me take it in the best light, in the light in which it may be understood” (137).

Jane’s “mild and steady candour always pleaded for allowances, and urged the possibility of mistakes...” (138). Accordingly after Miss Bingley’s visit to her in London Jane says “I will endeavour to banish every painful thought, and think only of what will make me happy...” (149). Unfortunately though her discretion and her “loveliness and goodness” (186) are not sufficient on their own to assist her in retaining her hold on her lover. As a result some outside intervention on the part of Darcy is finally required to sort out the mixed messages and the misreading, at last affording Jane and Bingley the opportunity of re-establishing their relationship.

Mary has more serious problems. For she is as dysfunctional as her parents and her two youngest sisters. While she is claimed to be “the most accomplished girl in the neighbourhood” (12), she is also the only plain one amongst the Bennet girls. Mary, however, also needs to catch a husband, and so, just as Lydia and Kitty buy ribbons to adorn themselves, and raise their voices to capture attention, she publicly airs her accomplishments and knowledge, trite, pompous and clichéd as it is. She is “always impatient [to] display” (25) her rather limited musical abilities and the extracts, quotations and “new observations of thread-bare morality” (60) that she so assiduously collects. But unfortunately “Mary’s powers were by no means fitted for such a display; her voice was weak and her manner affected” (100), leaving her sisters to suffer agonies of embarrassment in her performances:

Mary had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than she had reached (25).

Unfortunately Mary also has no insight, and accordingly believes herself competent to comment on Mr Collins’s letter, rather pompously observing that “[i]n point of composition...his letter does not seem defective. The idea of the olive branch perhaps is not wholly new, yet I think it is well expressed” (64). And when her limited

abilities are combined with her short-sighted arrogance, her grandiose but utterly meaningless pronouncements on subjects such as “the other sex” (289), “evil” (289), irretrievable virtue and brittle reputations (289) assume banal proportions. For her lofty phraseology consists only of vacuous platitudes. Accordingly when Lydia elopes with Wickham Mary offers neither cure nor consolation to the family, commenting thus:

“This is a most unfortunate affair; and will probably be much talked of. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other, the balm of sisterly consolation” (289).

Mary frequently finds herself wishing “to say something sensible, but knew not how” (7), as she is only able to reproduce what she has read, lacking both the emotional depth and the experience required to translate it into meaningful practice. One is left to wonder why Mr Collins did not settle on her as a partner, as their collective verbosity and insensitivity would seem to make them ideally suited to each other. But, instead,

Mary was the only daughter who remained at home....[She] was obliged to mix more with the world, but she could still moralize over every morning visit; and as she was no longer mortified by comparisons between her sisters’ beauty and her own, it was suspected by her father that she submitted to the change without much reluctance (386).

Mary’s upbringing has left her irredeemably ill-equipped and ill-prepared for any mutually satisfactory type of marriage and so, just as she remains as incapable of insightful development as her mother, her destiny accordingly also remains mired in the further pursuit of her trivial accomplishments, in the company of her mother.

We are informed that Lydia and Kitty’s “minds were more vacant than their sisters, and when nothing better offered, a walk to Meryton was necessary to amuse their morning hours and furnish conversation for the evening...” (28). Accordingly the two girls seem to spend most of their time traversing the streets of Meryton, in the hopes of captivating an officer: “They could talk of nothing but officers” (29). Mr Bingley’s large fortune “was worthless in their eyes when opposed to the regimentals of an ensign” (29), and Mr Collins is of no interest to them because it was “next to

impossible that their cousin should come in a scarlet coat" (64). This causes their father to say: "'You must be two of the silliest girls in the country'" (29).

Whereas Lydia is strong, "self-willed and careless" (213), Kitty is sickly, "weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydia's guidance" (213). But both sisters are "ignorant, idle, and vain" (213), with manners so embarrassingly brash, and voices so unashamedly loud that they confidently describe how "any body might have heard [them] ten miles off" (222). What little they have received in the way of education, they make up for in their "high animal spirits...which [with] the attentions of the officers...had increased into assurance" (45).

They were hopeless of remedy. Her father, contented with laughing at them, would never exert himself to restrain the wild giddiness of his youngest daughters; and her mother, with manners so far from right herself, was entirely insensible of the evil. Elizabeth had frequently united with Jane in an endeavour to check the imprudence of Catherine and Lydia; but while they were supported by their mother's indulgence, what chance could there be of improvement? (213)

They are obsessed with handsome young men, dancing, flirting and other social trivia. For Lydia

"has never been taught to think on serious subjects; and for the last half year, nay, for a twelvemonth, she has been given up to nothing but amusement and vanity. She has been allowed to dispose of her time in the most idle and frivolous manner, and to adopt any opinions that came in her way....nothing but love, flirtation, and officers, have been in her head" (283-4).

Nor has it as yet become necessary for either of them to acknowledge the painful and "mortifying" (150) economic reality that "handsome young men must have something to live on" (150) just as plain men do.

When Lydia's trip to Brighton is finally sanctioned by her father Elizabeth rues "[t]he mischief of [her parents'] neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl" (280). For Elizabeth "had no difficulty in believing that neither [Lydia's] virtue nor her understanding would preserve her from falling an easy prey" (280), as "Lydia had wanted only encouragement to attach herself to any body" (280).

With her elopement, contrary to her father's expectations, Lydia does in fact grow much worse. The reader is left to infer that, with her head full of trivial ambitions, she is about to repeat her mother's marital history. But Lydia's marriage is likely to be even more dysfunctional than that of her parents in that, even if her reasons for marriage are the same as her mother's, her choice of Wickham as a partner is far more disastrous than her mother's choice of a seemingly suitable husband.

By contrast we are told that Kitty, who was of "not so ungovernable a temper as Lydia" (385), once removed from Lydia's influence, improves greatly in the society of her two married sisters, becoming "by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid" (385). It would accordingly seem that there is hope of Kitty acquiring some balance in her life.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was published in 1792. As has been mentioned there is no evidence that Austen read Wollstonecraft's treatise, which was regarded by many of her contemporaries as outrageous in its submissions, *inter alia*, that in the absence of reason, virtue and knowledge, the only way in which middle class women of that period could rise in the world was by way of marriage (1992:83).

Wollstonecraft asserts:

Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, *outward* obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives (1992:100).

She argues that women are "taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison" (132). And she suggests that women have either become despots or have been enslaved by their mistaken notions which have denigrated them to the level of "playthings" (107), and reduced them to "mere ciphers" (107) "subservient to love or lust" (110),

the wanton solace of men, when they become so weak in mind and body that they cannot exert themselves unless to pursue some frothy pleasure, or to invent some frivolous fashion (264).

She accordingly calls for a “revolution in female manners” (133), exhorting women to escape their bondage by foregoing pleasure, exercising reasoning and expanding their minds “to comprehend the moral duties of life, and in what human virtue and dignity consist” (139), calling upon women to become part of the human species “by reforming themselves to reform the world” (133).

Let us, my dear contemporaries, arise above such narrow prejudices. If wisdom be desirable on its own account, if virtue, to deserve the name, must be founded on knowledge, let us endeavour to strengthen our minds by reflection till our heads become a balance for our hearts; let us not confine all our thoughts to the petty occurrences of the day, or our knowledge to an acquaintance with our lovers’ or husbands’ hearts, but let the practice of every duty be subordinate to the grand one of improving our minds, and preparing our affections for a more exalted state (193).

Even if Austen had not read Wollstonecraft, she would probably have read Hannah More’s exhortations calling on women to pursue education, and in particular Christian education,

[in order] to attack and destroy vanity, selfishness and inconsideration, that triple alliance in league against female virtue....But if the immaterial and immortal mind; if the heart, out of which are the issues of “life”, be the main concern; if the great business of education be to implant ideas, to communicate knowledge, to form a correct taste and a sound judgement, to resist evil propensities, and, above all, to seize the favourable season for infusing principles and confirming habits; if education be a school to fit us for life, and life be a school to fit us for eternity; if such, I repeat it, be the chief work and grand ends of education, it may then be worth inquiring how far these ends are likely to be effected by the prevailing system (1974:1:56-7).

Austen characteristically retains a critical stance towards those types of marriages to which Wollstonecraft refers, in which reason, virtue and knowledge are absent, as well as to marriages such as the Bennets, where the parties marry for the wrong reasons. Accordingly none of her heroines, other than perhaps Catherine Morland, emulates the marriage of her parents. Instead, each has to learn her “true duties” (Tanner, 1986:33), and each has to find her proper home. It is therefore not sufficient for Elizabeth to merely “use [her] boasted power over mankind to no higher purpose than the gratification of vanity or the indulgence of pleasure...” (More, 1974:1:3). She

must also acquire insight and develop to meet the standards set by both Wollstonecraft and More.

Brown has commented on the intellectuality that Elizabeth displays at Netherfield, saying this “is a striking indication of the similarities between Jane Austen’s heroine and Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideal woman” (1973:332). For, unlike Lydia, Elizabeth is in no danger of becoming either a “plaything” or a “despot”. Nor does she in any way resemble her mother because she possesses the innate wit and astuteness of her father. And she is also in no danger of becoming like her father because she lacks his degree of sceptical detachment. But she still needs to understand the world and her place in it. For as she says: “The more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it...” (135). Elizabeth has inherited both her father’s intelligence, and his ability to laugh at the silliness of others. But, despite “delight[ing] in any thing ridiculous” (12), and laughing at “follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies” (57), she says, “I hope never to ridicule what is wise or good” (57). And, perhaps because Elizabeth has been less exposed to her indulgent mother, receiving rather more of her father’s attention than her other sisters, she exhibits healthier emotions than her three younger sisters.

But Elizabeth is not yet an ideal woman. She is still inclined towards certain faults and excesses which require attention and even alteration: for despite her acute powers of observation, she remains susceptible to ill-considered first impressions, blinded by her vanity, and her pride in her powers of discernment, courting “prepossession and ignorance and driv[ing] reason away, where either were concerned” (208). At her first meeting with Wickham, “Elizabeth went away with her head full of him” (84), and she seeks him out again “among the cluster of red coats” (89) at the ball at Netherfield. Furthermore she is influenced by Wickham to “sketch [Darcy’s] character” (94), drawing conclusions about him from accounts that are most inaccurate, and which result from her earlier prejudice. For as Tanner comments, “her observation proves to be too quick....she is putting too much confidence in unverified and, as it turns out, completely false, evidence” (1986:112).

Elizabeth, however, like Marianne Dashwood, exhibits an inherent potential to develop insight. She is neither bound by the conventions of society, nor the primary concerns of position and elegance, nor by the limitations imposed by her family, possessing “quickness of observation” (15), a critical and amused eye and independence of spirit and intelligence. But, despite her incipient strivings towards

independent thought, Elizabeth also needs to struggle for a “wholeness” within herself, (to borrow a notion from Baker), to react “against the female conventions accepted by her society” (Baker, 1984:30), to rid herself of her pride in her over-hasty first impressions and her unfounded prejudice, so as to arrive at her own individuality and play an inclusive role in both her marriage and in society.

At Elizabeth and Darcy’s first meeting in the assembly room Darcy attracts the attention of all, with his “fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien” (10) and his estimated “ten thousand a year” (10). However, opinion soon changes when he is discovered to be proud, “above his company, and above being pleased” (10), and slights Elizabeth, refusing to dance with her, describing her as “tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*” (12). Although Elizabeth finds his rudeness “ridiculous” (12), she retains “no very cordial feelings towards him” (12), acquiescing in the general condemnation of his character. And so, after only a single meeting his “character was decided” (11): he was “the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and every body hoped that he would never come there again” (11), and even Elizabeth is “resolved against any sort of conversation with him” (89).

Consequently she chooses to believe Wickham’s account of his treatment at Darcy’s hands, dismissing Jane’s warnings of misrepresentations and mistakes. For whereas Jane admits that she does not know what to think of Darcy’s alleged conduct towards Wickham, Elizabeth prejudges Darcy on the basis of her limited exposure to him, confidently asserting that “one knows exactly what to think” (86). And even when Miss Bingley tells Elizabeth of Wickham’s infamous behaviour towards the Darcy family, Elizabeth dismisses this as “wilful ignorance” (95) on Miss Bingley’s part.

Thus, when at Netherfield Elizabeth is persuaded by Miss Bingley to “take a turn about the room” (56), Elizabeth remains bound by her convictions. She informs Darcy “*your* defect is a propensity to hate every body” (58). But, by this stage Darcy is very much aware of Elizabeth, attracted by her playful liveliness and “the beautiful expression of her dark eyes” (23). He appreciates how he has erred in his first impressions of her. And so he smilingly replies her that her error is “wilfully to misunderstand [every body]” (58).

In these circumstances, when she receives Darcy’s letter, Elizabeth is tested to the extreme, forced into deciding on which version of the Wickham story to believe, into

distinguishing between “appearance and reality” (Tanner,1986:114), and into reconsidering and assessing her integral convictions about Darcy.

Consequently when she reads Darcy’s letter, in which he sets out his reasons for separating Jane and Bingley, and his relationship with Wickham, she begins to appreciate the fallibility and bias of her initial perceptions, seeing how “blind, partial, prejudiced and absurd” (208) she has been, exclaiming:

“How despicably have I acted!....I, who have prided myself on my discernment!—I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust.—How humiliating is this discovery!—Yet, how just a humiliation!—Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly.—Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself” (208).

Elizabeth may well have begun to acquire an understanding of the unreliability of her first impressions, but, as has previously been noted, Austen requires her heroines to move away from their homes in order to develop, to acquire insight and to consequently mature. And so, while Jane remains either at home or in London, Elizabeth travels from Longbourn, where all is simultaneously chaotic and static, to Netherfield, where the preoccupation is with appearance and social convention. She visits the Collins at Hunsford, where she is afforded the opportunity of observing a marriage based on economic grounds. And she spends time with the Gardiners in London. In each location she is exposed to different types of marriage.

Finally she travels to Pemberley, where “she stood several minutes before [Darcy’s] picture in earnest contemplation” (250), fully understanding the errors in her perceptions. She hones in on the natural dignity of the grounds, on the house, the miniature and finally on its owner, whose “valuable qualities” (265) she now appreciates. At this point she realises the importance of what she might have lost. For it is at Pemberley, where, contrasting the tasteful order and beauty of the house and its grounds, with the chaos of Longbourn, and standing before Darcy’s portrait, listening to the housekeeper’s “extraordinary” (248) praise of Darcy, she discards her

initial impressions, permitting her experiences and reason to fuse and to indicate the direction of her destiny.

Butler notes that

Pemberley is significant in this inward process, but not because it means money and status. Darcy's grounds teach Elizabeth that his taste is 'neither formal, nor falsely adorned', and thus refute her preconceived notion of his pomposity (1975:215).

Pemberley has thus become both a metaphor for, and the embodiment of, its owner.

She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste....and at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something! (245)

Butler suggests that at Pemberley Elizabeth therefore "emerges from a period of introspection concluding that, partly through a wrong upbringing, she has consistently over-valued herself" (1975:210).

The confrontation between these two central characters naturally brings about mutual illumination, not because one has opposite qualities which the other must learn to adopt, but because each discover the other to be worthy of respect: the very admission of the value of an opponent forces both Elizabeth and Darcy to be more humble about themselves (1975:208).

Accordingly when she meets Darcy on the lawns, she notes his civility and gentleness with amazement, observing that "his behaviour [is] so strikingly altered" (252). And with her acquisition of self knowledge, and the appreciation of how he has surreptitiously intervened in Lydia and Wickham's marriage, Elizabeth acknowledges that she has fallen in love for all the right reasons. Her choice has neither been based on economic motives, like Charlotte's, nor on passion like her parents, but on reason, knowledge and personal experience, and on these bases her marriage is likely to be a success. For Tanner observes that in Austen's novels "the individual needs to be *both* an experienter *and* a reasoner: the former without the latter is error-prone, the latter without the former is useless if not impossible" (1986:110). Elizabeth has through her experiences finally learned to reason most rationally.

But Elizabeth is not the only person who has been misled by her convictions and prejudiced by her wrong upbringing. Darcy too possesses a false and harmful type of pride, instilled in him by his parents during his early childhood. He confesses to Elizabeth that, despite his parents being good people, his upbringing was emotionally and mentally unhealthy, encouraging excessive selfishness and arrogance in him. For, as a child he was so spoilt that, although he was brought up with good principles to appreciate “what was *right*” (369), he was never taught to check his temper, his pride or his conceit, but persuaded rather to believe in his own superiority. He now admits that his earlier attitudes and perceptions required correction, saying to Elizabeth: “By you, I was properly humbled....You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased” (369). Both have dispensed with their respective excesses, leading Butler to suggest that the manner in which the two central couples have progressed towards matrimony “shows what the state ideally means” (1975:213). And accordingly Elizabeth now reveals to Darcy that “her sentiments had undergone so material a change...as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure, his present assurances” (366).

Mr Bennet initially voices his misgivings to a marriage which he believes might come to resemble his own dysfunctional one:

“I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life” (376).

But when he is apprised of the “change which [Elizabeth’s] estimation of [Darcy] had undergone” (377), and how her decision is the culmination of the experiences of many months, even he is finally convinced of the suitability of the marriage, saying, “I have no more to say. If this be the case, he deserves you. I could not have parted with you, my Lizzy, to any one less worthy” (377).

CHAPTER FOUR

MANSFIELD PARK

Mansfield Park differs in many respects from the earlier novels, more particularly in its treatment of the heroine. But at the same time it retains many of the elements common to all Austen's novels: the novel, for example, contains its fair share of illness, accident and death. And, like Catherine Morland, and Charlotte Heywood, Fanny Price finds herself removed from her home, unprotected by maternal guidance, alienated, vulnerable, and exposed.

In *Mansfield Park* we are also presented with a collection of recognisable characters, some being the forerunners of characters in Austen's later novels, and some bearing a resemblance to characters already portrayed in the early novels. Lady Bertram, described by many critics as a valetudinarian, bears some resemblance to the extraordinary Mrs Bennet, but more importantly seems to be the precursor of the hypochondriacal, self-indulgent and pampered Mr Woodhouse, embodying many of the elements which are fleshed out in *Emma*. And Tom's dissolute lifestyle results in an illness which could be described as self-willed, to some degree anticipating Louisa Musgrove's self-indulgent fall on the Cobb.

Mansfield Park, as the ancestral estate and home of Sir Thomas and his family, is metaphorically represented as teetering on the edge of collapse. While the walls, pillars and foundations which support this edifice remain physically intact, the social values on which its inhabitants base their lives have been proved to be crumbling and lacking in relevance. Sir Thomas and his daughter Maria Rushworth are both married in accordance with the social *mores* then in place: Sir Thomas marries for looks as Miss Maria Ward "had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram" (3), and Maria Rushworth is considered "well married" (38) in that her marriage is believed to be "an alliance so unquestionably advantageous" (40) to all parties. It had become Maria's "evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could" (38), even if it is obvious that she "does not care three straws for him" (45), because this beneficial marriage would bring her family "an addition of respectability and influence" (201), consolidate two important estates, and provide Maria with a large house in town, and an income larger than her father's. It follows, however, that as both marriages are

entered into for all the wrong reasons, the one is terminated because of immorality and adultery and the other is in many respects a failure.

Moreover, the heir to Mansfield Park has discarded all claims to responsibility, preferring to lead a dissolute life in London, “born only for expense and enjoyment” (17), compounding Mansfield Park’s decline. And not even its permanent inhabitants, Lady Bertram and Mrs Norris, are able to claim any modicum of generosity of spirit, both being self indulgent to the core. It is this general state of dis-ease present in Mansfield Park that is the focus of this chapter.

Fanny Price is of particular interest, differing as she does from all of Austen’s other heroines. For in addition to her emotional vulnerability, Fanny is revealed as being truly delicate in constitution, to the point of debilitation. Whereas in Austen’s novels good health and looks typically tend to reflect the inner state of being in heroines and the interconnectivity of mind and body, Fanny lacks the good health and vivacity of heroines such as Emma, Elizabeth and Catherine, and is comparable in her consistent and continued physical frailty only to Marianne Dashwood after her failed love affair, to Louisa Musgrove after her fall, and to Jane Fairfax.

Fanny, however, unlike Austen’s other heroines, never really has to be shown the correct way of performing her duties. Nor does she require intervention from a masculine mentor. For more often than not she assumes the role of mentor herself, even if she receives some guidance and advice from Edmund, who, in early childhood helps form her mind, recommending reading material and praising her good taste in literature, correcting her judgement and giving her her “taste for nature in early life” (113). For Fanny is mostly virtuous, and as Austen’s heroines are not normally paragons of virtue, one is therefore left to wonder about the reasons for the different treatment meted out to a heroine whose “perverse integrity and her unprepossessing virtues prompt the ambivalence and dissatisfaction [that many critics] feel in regard to the text as a whole” (Parker, in Bloom, 2004:230).

Fanny’s aunts, Lady Bertram and Mrs Norris, the sisters of her mother, who ought to act as gentle substitutes for the lack of maternal presence and guidance at Mansfield Park, together combine the worst of Mrs Bennet’s attributes. They are selfish, silly and ineffectual, concerned only with their own material comforts, frequently using their ill health and that of others as tools of manipulation, the one entirely indolent and the other hyperactive. Moreover Lady Bertram seems to be a hypochondriac,

using and abusing her health to suit her emotional needs. And unfortunately Sir Thomas's frequent and lengthy absences from home fail either to negate or cushion the adverse effects that the behaviour of both her aunts have on Fanny.

An extensive definition of hypochondria has been provided in the chapter on *Pride and Prejudice*, which emphasises the unspecific and diffuse nature of this condition.

Hysteria, that other common, psychosomatic disease, was originally acknowledged and defined by the ancient Greeks. Whereas Robert Burton, a seventeenth century Oxford don, also attempted a definition of this illness, describing it as "a disease of idleness rather than of industry" (1621:1:479), saying that marriage is a remedy for hysteria and that fulfilling work prevents it, Shroth and Sue offer a much more up-to-date and more precise definition, suggesting that

hysterics seem to enjoy their illness and appear to be indifferent to their symptoms. Although the hysteric is not deliberately pretending to be ill, it is apparent that these symptoms serve a useful purpose by removing the person from unpleasant situations and conflicts (1975:284-285).

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Gorman observes that Austen distinguishes between hypochondria and hysteria, and argues that in Austen hypochondria is a static phenomenon that defines certain characters, whereas hysteria consists of dynamic emotions, which surface and exhibit themselves in outward behaviour.

It would seem, however, that in Austen the division between hypochondria and hysteria is not all that clean cut. Whereas Mr Woodhouse and the Parker sisters are easily diagnosed as hypochondriacs, Mrs Bennet's condition is not that simply classified, and Lady Bertram, "[t]he happiest subject in the world for a little medical imposition" (429), also appears to fall somewhere between the two psychosomatic conditions, which are not necessarily always completely contained, distinctive or unique. For, as The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology says of hysteria:

The problems with a general classification like this with such an array of symptoms are enormous....there is no single disorder here at all. In all likelihood what we have is a variety of maladaptive behaviours each of which exists more or less independently of the others with the hysterical syndrome existing only in the minds of the diagnostician (Reber, 1986:337).

Since the various definitions all reveal that hypochondriacs typically adopt a state of helplessness, while ensuring that their care is guaranteed, this may explain why Gorman classifies Lady Bertram as more of an indolent hysteric retreating from life, revealing “an inability and unwillingness to confront life” (1993:68), than a hypochondriac.

Lady Bertram does, however, at times show signs of some activity, finally roused from her indolence to a state of some agitation by Tom's illness:

The sufferings which Lady Bertram did not see, had little power over her fancy; and she wrote very comfortably about agitation and anxiety, and poor invalids, till Tom was actually conveyed to Mansfield, and her own eyes had beheld his altered appearance. Then, a letter which she had been previously preparing for Fanny, was finished in a different style, in the language of real feeling and alarm....The real solicitude now awakened in the maternal bosom was not soon over. Tom's extreme impatience to be removed to Mansfield, and experience those comforts of home and family which had been little thought of in uninterrupted health, had probably induced his being conveyed thither too early, as a return of fever came on, and for a week he was in a more alarming state than ever. They were all very seriously frightened (427).

Wollstonecraft examines the subject of female indolence in some detail, raising a number of questions, asking: “Do passive indolent women make the best wives....And have women, who have early imbibed notions of passive obedience, sufficient character to manage a family or educate children?” (1992:119) She poses the question: “should it be proved that woman is naturally weaker than man, whence does it follow that it is natural for her to labour to become still weaker than nature intended her to be?” (1992:128) And she asks, “if strength of body be with some show of reason the boast of men, why are women so infatuated as to be proud of a defect?” “Why do they “boast of their weakness?” (1992:126)

She concludes that certain women are destined to be indolent as a direct result of the inadequacy of their education combined with their own volition, and it would seem that Lady Bertram falls into that bracket.

For Lady Bertram does not often stir from the sofa. While ever-present, she remains distant, immobile and incompetent. She has relinquished almost all her domestic responsibilities to her husband, her sister and her children.

From about the time of [Fanny] entering the family, Lady Bertram, in consequence of a little ill-health, and a great deal of indolence, gave up the house in town, which she had been used to occupy every spring, and remained wholly in the country, leaving Sir Thomas to attend his duty in Parliament, with whatever increase or diminution of comfort might arise from her absence (20).

She permits Mrs Norris to usurp her role, to bring up and educate her children, and to abuse Fanny, revealing little interest in her husband's welfare or duties or her daughters' very mediocre and superficial accomplishments. She reclines on her couch, accompanied by her pug and her sewing, mostly silent, (as if even the effort of speaking would be too much for her), "[t]oo indolent even to accept a mother's gratification in witnessing [her daughters'] success and enjoyment at the expense of any personal trouble" (35). Believing "exercise to be as unnecessary for every body as it was unpleasant to herself" (36), and shutting her mind off from any emotional experience to which she is exposed, she allows herself to think only vague, unspecific thoughts about her dog.

To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter, when it did not put herself to inconvenience (19-20).

She is the epitome of Wollstonecraft's indolent uneducated women who "only live to amuse themselves" (1992:81), who

spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves...by marriage....Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio! Can they be expected to govern a family with judgement, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world? (1992:83)

And so Lady Bertram has become both "slave" (1992:145) to her indolence and "listless inactivity and stupid acquiescence"(1992:154), and "short-lived queen" (1992:146) within her home, "an example of folly, not to say vice ...to her innocent daughters" (1992:145): the quintessence of Wollstonecraft's "foolish women"

(1992:309), who, in exchange for security, “are provided with food and raiment, for which they neither toil nor spin; but health, liberty, and virtue are given in exchange” (1992:147).

Characteristically Lady Bertram’s outer physical state mirrors her inner condition: just as her body remains immobile, her mind remains equally vacuous. And just as she chooses to be physically indolent, she is also morally so, failing to censure her children on their questionable activities during their father’s absence, requesting them merely not to “act any thing improper” (140).

For as Tave suggests:

The traditional moral failure of idleness, a wrong in itself and a cause of other wrongs, is of particular interest to Jane Austen as it signifies a mind utterly without direction, empty, making no use of time. By default it does harm, allows itself to be used by others, or, most importantly, becomes the victim of the false busyness that inevitably fills the vanity of its mind” (1973:168).

And so, much like Mr Woodhouse, Lady Bertram’s self indulgent torpor is predictably not without its consequences. For with her silence she sanctions the events which transpire around her, over which she has either lost control or no longer wishes to control, employing and manipulating her state of weakness to her benefit, but still permitting her effective absence to influence her surroundings.

Southam submits that as a consequence of being so “[u]tterly inert, unaware, and entirely incapable of volition, effort, or independent judgement” (1968:144), Lady Bertram is useless as both a parent and a guardian. But, despite her inertia, she still remains culpable. For her indolence is pivotal in Mrs Norris’s ascendancy and tyranny, in Fanny’s neglect, in Julia’s elopement, and in Tom’s dissolute life. Accordingly her prone position, by default, provides the foundation for her dysfunctional household. Yet despite her neglect of her own family and her ignorance as to their doings, she assumes command over many of Fanny’s comings and goings, initially refusing to let her accompany the other young people to Sotherton, and, like Mr Woodhouse, even attempting to exercise control over Fanny’s marriage to Edmund: “she could not be parted with willingly by her. No happiness of son or niece could make her wish the marriage” (472). And in this way, much like Mr

Woodhouse, she becomes the silent “despot” (Wollstonecraft, 1992:145) of the story, sharing much of the blame for the events that ensue.

However, whereas on Sir Thomas’s return from Antigua “[s]he had been *almost* fluttered for a few minutes, and still remained so sensibly animated as to put away her work...” (179), with Fanny’s final return to Mansfield Park, Lady Bertram undergoes a sea change:

By one of the suffering party within, they were expected with such impatience as she had never known before. Fanny had scarcely passed the solemn-looking servants, when Lady Bertram came from the drawing room to meet her; came with no indolent step; and, falling on her neck, said, “Dear Fanny! Now I shall be comfortable” (447).

For once on her feet, and taking her first steps, it seems that Fanny’s return to Mansfield Park offers some hope of an improved life for her, and with this, one presumes a somewhat more active and involved future.

Mrs Norris, on the other hand, imbued with “a spirit of activity” (4), positions herself at the other end of the continuum from her lethargic sister. She is filled with both the energy that her sister lacks and the need to make her presence both heard and felt. But her health and energy belie Austen’s usual belief in inter-connection between healthy body and healthy mind. And therefore we see that, like her indolent sister, and despite all outer appearances, Mrs Norris is far from healthy. Her emotions are stunted: she possesses no obvious feelings for either her husband or any member of her family, other than Maria, and despite years of living close to the small, motherless Fanny, she acquires no maternal feelings for her. Moreover, like Lady Bertram, she frequently uses illness, if not her own, as a means of justifying her selfish decisions.

Mrs Norris was sorry to say, that the little girl’s staying with them, at least as things then were, was quite out of the question. Poor Mr. Norris’s indifferent state of health made it an impossibility: he could no more bear the noise of a child than he could fly; if indeed he should ever get well of his gouty complaints, it would be a different matter... (9).

And so, even when Mr Norris dies, no opportunity (fortunately) is created for Fanny to move in with her, for Mrs Norris chooses then to live alone in a small house of Sir Thomas’s in the village,

consol[ing] herself for the loss of her husband by considering that she could do very well without him, and for her reduction of income by the evident necessity of stricter economy (23).

Consequently when it is suggested that she should consider taking Fanny in to live with her she refuses, saying,

“Dear sister! If you consider my unhappy state, how can she be any comfort to me? Here am I a poor desolate widow, deprived of the best of husbands, my health gone in attending and nursing him, my spirits still worse, all my peace in this world destroyed, with barely enough to support me in the rank of a gentlewoman and enable me to live so as not to disgrace the memory of the dear departed—what possible comfort could I have in taking such a charge upon me as Fanny! If I could wish it for my own sake, I would not do so unjust a thing by the poor girl. She is in good hands, and sure of doing well. I must struggle through my sorrows and difficulties as I can” (29).

But Mrs Norris “had no affection for Fanny, and no wish of procuring her pleasure at any time...”(79). Thus while Mrs Norris indicates that she is concerned about Fanny’s welfare, and insists that if Fanny were to live with her this would be for her own selfish reasons, it is evident that this is a lie. Her concerns, like her sister’s are all self-seeking, dictated partly by her “love of money” (26), her “wish to be richer” (30), and partly by her stunted emotional capacity. She is not at all concerned about not being good company for Fanny in her reduced state. Nor does she desire any share in the responsibility of raising Fanny.

Yet Mrs Norris frequently makes apparently generous gestures, which create the impression of selflessness: she, who arranges for Fanny to come to Mansfield Park, although she subsequently has little time for the vulnerable child, and she, who has little time for even her own husband, exhibits concern for animals and servants, saying,

“when we got to the bottom of Sandcroft Hill, what do you think I did? You will laugh at me—but I got out and walked up. I did indeed. It might not be saving them much, but it was something, and I could not bear to sit at my ease, and be dragged up at the expense of those noble animals. I caught a dreadful cold, but *that* I did not regard. My object was accomplished in the visit” (189).

While on this occasion Mrs Norris voices her anxiety for the “poor old coachman” (189) and the horses who were struggling in the snow, her words belie her thoughts and emphasise her parsimonious tendencies. For her concern is not for the animals but the waste of their energy. And simultaneously, and characteristically, she draws attention to the sacrifice she has made in dismounting, and the discomfort she has experienced in getting Maria and Mr Rushworth together.

She also paradoxically produces “supernumerary jellies to nurse a sick maid” (283), and thoughtfully concerns herself with the rheumatism of the Bertram’s coachman. Are these incongruities merely a ploy on her behalf to provide evidence of her warm-heartedness, as suggested above, or is this the narrator’s ironic perception of her true character? Or does the explanation to these strangely uncharacteristic actions on her part lie in the fact that Mrs Norris demonstrates charitable feelings only when these are noticeable, or where personal advantage may be gained, or when her self importance is reflected? She is too busy making curtains to give Julia the emotional support she needs when Henry expresses a preference for Maria’s company, and she hurries tea, rather than welcoming Sir Thomas back from his extensive travels, “trying to be in a bustle without having anything to bustle about, and labouring to be important where nothing was wanted but tranquillity and silence” (180). The narrator reveals nothing, saying only that Mrs Norris believed herself to be “the most liberal-minded sister and aunt in the world” (9), leaving the ironic overtones to speak for themselves.

Mrs Norris must be one of the most unpleasant of all the manipulative characters that one encounters in Austen’s novels, giving Tanner cause to suggest that she instigates most of the problems suffered by the inhabitants of Mansfield Park through her “arid selfishness, and her stupid and vicious interferences and meddlings” (1986:152). Whereas Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mrs Bennet and Mr Woodhouse all act with some justification, no such excuses are proffered for Mrs Norris’s extremely self-centred behaviour. The vacuum created by her sister’s indolence has given her both the space and opportunity to take over the management of Mansfield Park, and she remains a stupid, interfering and scheming bully, residing in her little house in the village, but continuing to direct her malevolent energy at Mansfield Park and its occupants, asserting and noisily exhibiting her worth through meddling, and managing and manipulating people in favour of her designs.

Thus, when Edmund joins the rest of the family in the breakfast room,

he found Mrs. Norris trying to make up her mind as to whether Miss Crawford's being of the party were desirable or not, or whether her brother's barouche would not be full without her (77).

And when Mr Rushworth invites Henry Crawford to Sotherton to advise him on improvements,

Mrs. Norris, as if reading in her two nieces' minds their little approbation of a plan which was to take Mr Crawford away, interposed with an amendment. "There can be no doubt of Mr. Crawford's willingness; but why should not more of us go?—why should not we make a party? Here are many that would be interested in your improvements, my dear Mr. Rushworth, and would like to hear Mr. Crawford's opinion on the spot..."(62).

Lady Bertram's ineffectuality may well be the root cause of many of the cracks exposed in the way of life at Mansfield Park, but Mrs Norris's intervention and selfishness almost cause its collapse. For it is she who provides the girls with the "neglected education" (1992:79) of which Wollstonecraft so disapproves, who actively encourages the performance of the theatrical, and who promotes Maria's disastrous marriage for all the wrong reasons.

However, it would seem that even she is changed by the events that take place at Mansfield Park, and by Maria's indiscretions. But is she capable of learning from her mistakes?

[T]he match had been her own contriving, as she had been wont with such pride of heart to feel and say, and this conclusion of it almost overpowered her.

She was an altered creature, quieted, stupefied, indifferent to every thing that passed. The being left with her sister and nephew, and all the house under her care, had been an advantage entirely thrown away; she had been unable to direct or dictate, or even fancy herself useful. When really touched by affliction, her active powers had been all benumbed; and neither Lady Bertram nor Tom had received from her the smallest support or attempt at support. She had done no more for them, than they had done for each other. They had been all solitary, helpless, and forlorn alike; and now the arrival of the others only established her superiority in wretchedness. Her companions were relieved, but there was no good for *her* (448).

One could of course argue along the lines set out above that Maria's immoral behaviour has put paid to Mrs Norris's hopes of future security, and that it is this disappointment that effects her so greatly, to the extent that even "her active powers had been all benumbed" (448). Or one could argue that her fall from ascendancy changes her, providing her with an element of insight, as suggested by the text. Moler, however, proposes that she is altered because "her 'management fantasy' is destroyed" (1983:147), and that there is accordingly nothing left for her at Mansfield Park. This remains a question for debate. In any event, after the scandals involving the Bertram daughters, the extent of her mismanagement of Mansfield Park becomes evident, and she accordingly removes herself, predictably following Maria and Henry to assist them in the management of their establishment, presumably to wreak her particular type of havoc on their future offspring.

What is clear though, is that while Mrs Norris compensates for the inactivity inherent in her indolent sister, she is also the counterbalance to Fanny. For the two characters contrast in almost every material respect, and operate in opposition to each other physically, emotionally and morally. Whereas Mrs Norris is a loud, active manipulative woman who controls Mansfield Park and directs all activities there in Sir Thomas's absence, Fanny is completely retiring, quiet and frail. And while Mrs Norris holds power at Mansfield Park, Fanny remains her voiceless victim, so that throughout her childhood she remains at the mercy of Mrs Norris's "tyranny...ridicule, and neglect"(152). But interestingly enough as Mrs Norris's power declines, so Fanny's position and status is elevated, with Mrs Norris eventually removing herself from Mansfield Park to leave Fanny to manage it. Mansfield Park thus metaphorically becomes the fulcrum of a seesaw which permits only one person ascendancy at a time. And so, as any person ascends, the others automatically decline. Thus when Sir Thomas, on his return to Mansfield Park, pronounces Fanny to be "every thing [he] could wish" (187), he silences Mrs Norris, saying that "her advice might have been interposed to prevent what her judgement must certainly have disapproved" (188). And when Sir Thomas insists that Fanny joins Edmund at the Grants for dinner, Mrs Norris is compelled to reluctantly remain home with Lady Bertram to make her tea, and to act as Fanny's substitute.

Mrs Norris's unwholesome and morally dubious behaviour and style of management has been demonstrated to be unquestionably detrimental to the residents of Mansfield Park, and to lay the base for the consequences that follow. But there are

also factors external to Mansfield Park that play their roles in determining the plot. For, much like in *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*, a seemingly insignificant death, once again, assumes a pivotal role, bringing the Crawfords to live with Mrs Grant.

As children, their sister had been always very fond of them; but, as her own marriage had been soon followed by the death of their common parent, which left them to the care of a brother of their father, of whom Mrs. Grant knew nothing, she had scarcely seen them since....The Admiral delighted in the boy, Mrs. Crawford doated on the girl; and it was the lady's death which now obliged her *protégée*, after some months further trial at her uncle's house, to find another home (40).

With the arrival of the Crawfords the *status quo* at Mansfield Park is altered dramatically. For being imbued with the atmosphere of London, its animation and turmoil, the Crawfords bring with them the moral and sexual laxity and promiscuity rife amongst the upper classes of Regency London.

Tanner argues that London represents liberty, amusement, glamour, excitement, activity and fashion. And, as the Crawfords bring distraction, seduction and ensnarement with them, so he says London perverts Mansfield Park (1968:150), throwing its elegance and fragile tranquillity into imbalance, and accentuating its relative instability. For the Bertram progeny are seduced by the attractive forces that these vibrant visitors introduce, Fanny's frailty becomes more pronounced as her emotional state becomes unbalanced by the threat of Mary Crawford, and even insensitive Mr Rushworth notes the disruption that accompanies them, commenting: "We did very well without them" (102).

Can Mansfield Park resist the attractions of what London offers and the restless hyperactivity and pain and suffering that accompany the Crawfords? Edmund says: "We do not look in great cities for our best morality"(93). And it would seem that the Crawfords are indeed in need of moral therapy. Mary Crawford lives only for what money can buy, maintaining that "everything is to be got with money" (58). Moreover Mary says that she only feels alive when busy, saying "[n]othing ever fatigues me" (68), and "I am not born to sit still and do nothing" (243). And in similar vein her brother Henry states "I do not like to eat the bread of idleness" (229). They both thrive on and therefore require the excessive activity and bustle to which they have been used, failing to appreciate either the rural charms that the country house has to

offer, or its rural priorities, going so far as to interfere with the harvest in order to satisfy Mary's capricious desire for her harp.

Mrs Grant suggests that "Mansfield shall cure them both" (47). But can Mansfield Park cure the London in them? Can Henry become transformed from a "most horrible flirt" (43) into a reformed rake? At one point it seems that this might indeed be possible: that Henry might marry Fanny, that Mary could have married Edmund, and that Fanny's stubborn tenacity will prevent the destruction of the world of Mansfield Park and all its inhabitants. But it transpires that Mary's "blunted delicacy and...corrupted, vitiated mind" (456) which perceives Henry and Maria's immoral conduct as mere folly, are beyond redemption. Edmund's condemnation of Mary is harsh indeed. But it is obvious that, despite her attempts to fit into the rural framework of Mansfield Park, she will never succeed while she adheres to the values that she endorses. Moreover the narrator infers that it is highly unlikely that such a cure could take place at the parsonage, for the Grant's home is almost as dysfunctional as Mansfield Park, with Dr Grant "an indolent selfish bon vivant, who must have his palate consulted in every thing, who will not stir a finger for the convenience of any one" (111).

Mary's make-up and background thus largely precludes her from successfully filling the role of a country vicar's wife. She needs to "marry well" (42), firm in her convictions that "[a] large income is the best recipe for happiness" (213), and that "every body should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage" (43). She declares that "she never has danced with a clergyman...and she never *will*" (268). As such Edmund is unlikely to satisfy her expectations of a husband.

Another seemingly insignificant death brings John Yates from Ecclesford to stay at Mansfield Park.

He came on the wings of disappointment, and with his head full of acting, for it had been a theatrical party; and the play, in which he had borne a part, was within two days of representation, when the sudden death of one of the nearest connections of the family had destroyed the scheme and dispersed the performers. To be so near happiness, so near fame, so near the long paragraph in praise of the private theatricals at Ecclesford...which would of course have immortalized the whole party for at least a twelvemonth! and being so near, to lose it all, was an injury to be keenly felt, and Mr Yates could talk of nothing else (121).

He insensitively complains about the inconvenience of the death:

“The poor old dowager could not have died at a worse time; and it is impossible to help wishing, that the news could have been suppressed for just the three days we wanted” (122).

John Yates is the instigator of the play, *Lovers Vows*, which turns order on its head at Mansfield Park. As such, much like the young Crawfords, he not only brings with him “the infection from Ecclesford” (184), which “spread as those things always spread” (184), but also an insensitive, amoral and generally unhealthy determination to stage his play, regardless of sensitivities and propriety.

The rehearsals of *Lovers Vows*, with its duplicitous and dissolute characters and scenes, soon introduces discord, predicting the dissonance that is to follow, beginning with the physical disruption of the house and its rooms, the arguments over who is to play which role, and the eventual collapse of moral behaviour. And Mary’s words to Edmund and Mrs Grant metaphorically reflect this disorder and anticipate the more chilling chaos that is to follow.

“Upon my word... you are two of the most disappointing and unfeeling kind friends I ever met with! There is no giving you a moment’s uneasiness. You do not know how much we have been suffering, nor what chills we have felt!” (212)

Tave suggests that the rearrangement of the contents of Sir Thomas’s “own dear room” (181), and the removal of the book case and the billiard table, reflect the grave changes made, the damage done and the lack of respect shown to Mansfield Park by the visitors (1973:193). But Tanner suggests that the choice of that particular play reveals more: that it is also an indication of the social turmoil outside the novel, since “Jane Austen could see that a world of frantic change was about to supplant the world of peaceful fixity she knew” (1968:173). *Lovers Vows* was however performed six times in Bath in 1801 without any noteworthy censure, and it would seem rather therefore, that the combination of the amoral content of the play, and its effects on the untutored minds of its performers, was more likely to have been responsible for the devastating consequences that ensue.

Illness causes Mrs Grant to miss the final rehearsal of *Lovers Vows* obliging Fanny to take her part in the play.

[T]here was no Mrs. Grant. She could not come. Dr. Grant, professing an indisposition, for which he had little credit with his fair sister-in-law, could not spare his wife. 'Dr. Grant is ill,' said she, with mock solemnity, 'He has been ill ever since; he did not eat any of the pheasant to day. He fancied it tough—sent away his plate—and has been suffering ever since' (171).

Fortunately for Fanny the role that she is selected to play never comes to fruition, as the performance of the play is prevented by her uncle's timeous return from Antigua. And, with his arrival John Yates and Henry Crawford leave Mansfield Park and Sir Thomas restores the house to "its proper state" (187), making Mansfield Park "an altered place" (196), destroying all evidence of the play and attempting to re-establish the former state of "domestic tranquillity" (186).

But despite this apparent return to order, the Bertram family is not able to escape the illness that surrounds it. For as Parker says, the faults running through "the seemingly solid edifice of Mansfield Park" (in Bloom, 2004:242) remain insidiously present. Rather than themselves being cured by Mansfield Park, the Crawford siblings lower the Bertrams resistance to the moral infection that they have brought with them from London. Their amoral tendencies have been obscured by their liveliness and attractiveness, with only Fanny, and to a limited degree, Edmund, perceiving the danger that these pose to Mansfield Park. And so, whereas Maria's marriage to Mr Rushworth had affirmed the social values that supported the *status quo*, her subsequent adultery and elopement with Henry shred the fabric on which the traditional social values and structures of Mansfield Park are founded.

With the withdrawal of Henry Crawford and John Yates, notwithstanding the apparent restoration of order, Maria and Julia remain subdued and distressed by the absence of their friends. The house is filled with gloom and all social activities with the family at the parsonage cease. Sir Thomas, wanting only to be alone with his family, mistakenly believes that by ousting these extraneous and undesirable *persona*, and their influence, he will re-establish the earlier harmony of Mansfield Park. But, while the animation has been replaced with calm, nothing has been resolved. Maria remains obsessed with Henry while "careless and cold" (200) to her fiancé; Julia remains envious of her sister's attraction to Henry; Edmund remains more than

favourably disposed towards Mary, and Lady Bertram and Mrs Norris remain unchanged in their ways.

Sir Thomas perceives the flaws in Maria's future marriage and, anticipating their possible consequences, offers to intervene in her engagement to Mr Rushworth, but as Henry fails either to return to the parsonage or to write to her, Maria reveals that she has no intention of averting the marriage, despite the absence of love between the couple, seeking "all the comfort that pride and self-revenge could give". For while Henry "had destroyed her happiness", she was not about to permit him to erase her hopes of prosperity and splendour. Accordingly, adopting Mary's beliefs, and sticking to conventional reasoning, she misguidedly seeks her "consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world" (202).

Tom Bertram is the heir to Mansfield Park. But, he, like his sisters, has been insufficiently and inadequately educated to fulfil the role that he will eventually be required to assume, making it necessary for Edmund, as younger brother to "help to pay for the pleasures of the elder", and causing Sir Thomas to exclaim "I Blush for you, Tom" (23). In the interim he leads an extravagant and decadent style of life, filled with "races and Weymouth, and parties and friends" (114), which finally leads to an illness caused by his excessive drinking and self-indulgence. Like Louisa's accident this almost fatal illness is pivotal to the plot.

Tom had gone from London with a party of young men to Newmarket, where a neglected fall, and a good deal of drinking, had brought on a fever; and when the party broke up, being unable to move, had been left by himself at the house of one of these young men, to the comforts of sickness and solitude, and the attendance only of servants. Instead of being soon well enough to follow his friends, as he had then hoped, his disorder increased considerably, and it was not long before he thought so ill of himself, as to be as ready as his physician to have a letter dispatched to Mansfield (426).

It is no coincidence that Tom first falls ill in Newmarket, a dissolute place, rife with drinking, gambling and immorality, an extension of the corrupt and vitiated life of London, a place of immoral appeal where London society went to gamble on the horseracing. His infection though, unlike that of John Yates and that of the Crawfords, is corporeal.

Tom's complaints had been greatly heightened by the shock of his sister's conduct, and his recovery so much thrown back by it, that even Lady Bertram had been struck by the difference, and all her alarms were regularly sent off to her husband... (451).

And when he finally manages to overcome this fever, Tom then succumbs to "strong hectic symptoms, which seemed to seize the frame on the departure of the fever" (429), and force him to return home to Mansfield Park, where he suffers a relapse. His condition worsens, seeming so hopeless that Miss Crawford writes to Fanny:

"One should be a brute not to feel for the distress they are in—and from what I hear, poor Mr. Bertram has a bad chance of ultimate recovery. I thought little of his illness at first. I looked upon him as the sort of person to be made a fuss with, and to make a fuss himself in any trifling disorder, and was chiefly concerned for those who had to nurse him; but now it is confidently asserted that he is really in a decline, that the symptoms are most alarming, and that part of the family, at least, are aware of it...To have such a fine young man cut off in the flower of his days, is most melancholy. Poor Sir Thomas will feel it dreadfully. I really am quite agitated on the subject....Poor young man!—If he is to die, there will be *two* poor young men less in the world..." (433-4).

But, installed at Mansfield Park Tom does eventually recover, even if his "amendment was alarmingly slow" (430).

Austen's characters typically grow under stress induced by illness. Critics suggest that this is because intensified emotions in the sickroom, together with all its purging and bloodletting, permitted a breakdown of social barriers, allowing for the expression of ideas and emotions that were not normally permitted, and, in this interchange, the acquisition of insight. Exhaustion from fever thus provides Tom with the necessary quiet moments to reflect and brings about changes, cleansing him of the "thoughtlessness and selfishness of his previous habits" (462). And as Tom recovers at home, he reforms, discarding his previous life-style and friends, becoming more like Edmund, learning to consider others and to assume the mantle of responsibility and usefulness which must soon be his.

But what of Sir Thomas? If the Crawfords arrive at Mansfield Park with an illness that requires a cure, and if John Yates is guilty of introducing an infection to Mansfield Park, can it be presumed that Sir Thomas also introduces disease on his return from Antigua? He has been away from Mansfield Park for some time, returning to the

chaos introduced by the visitors from London and Ecclesford. Can the analogy be extended this far?

Sir Thomas is an apparently benevolent and responsible guardian, even if he frequently incorporates shades of Mr Bennet in his retreats to his “own dear room” (181). He is mostly absent from domestic life at Mansfield Park – either in his room, or in Antigua, or in parliament, relegating important decisions at home to those who are ill-equipped to make them in his absence. And he, like Mr Bennet, has also chosen an empty-headed wife. But his situation is worse than that of Mr Bennet’s in that Lady Bertram actively chooses not to participate in the management of Mansfield Park, whereas Mrs Bennet, although frequently misguided, manages her home.

Moreover, like Mr Bennet, Sir Thomas’s judgement is faulty. For, whereas “elegance and accomplishments” (463) are essential to him, he neglects unhealthy moral issues: he permits Mrs Norris to manage Mansfield Park; he agrees to Maria’s marriage with Mr Rushworth, and as the traditionally authoritative patriarch, he rather dictatorially advises Fanny to marry Henry Crawford. It would seem though that his return to Mansfield Park provides him with some insight, with the result that he offers Maria a release from her engagement to Mr Rushworth. But, while he perceives the pitfalls in Maria’s proposed marriage, he fails to make a similar connection in Fanny’s case, urging her to enter into a marriage which is materially advantageous, but offers her questionable happiness.

Only after Tom’s recovery, and the opportunity and space that this illness affords all at Mansfield Park, does Sir Thomas realise how badly he has erred in his judgement of Mrs Norris, his daughters, his wife and even of his role as head of the family. He perceives how superficial his views on marriage and education have been, stating that he is “[s]ick of ambitious and mercenary connections” (471), and acknowledges his personal responsibility in all that had gone wrong at Mansfield Park.

Sir Thomas, poor Sir Thomas, a parent, and conscious of errors in his own conduct as a parent, was the longest to suffer. He felt that he ought not to have allowed the marriage, that his daughter’s sentiments had been sufficiently known to him to render him culpable in authorising it, that in so doing he had sacrificed the right to the expedient, and had been governed by motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom.... the anguish arising from the conviction of his own errors in the education of his daughters, was never to be entirely done away....Here had been grievous

mismanagement; but, bad as it was, he gradually grew to feel that it had not been the most direful mistake in his plan of education. Something must have been wanting *within*, or time would have worn away much of its ill effect. He feared... that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments—the authorised object of their youth—could have had no useful influence that way, no moral effect on the mind (461-3).

For the first time Sir Thomas admits to the imbalance between Mrs Norris's indulgence of his girls, his own severe discipline and Lady Bertram's excesses and absences. He realises how, in his failure to counteract Mrs Norris's faults by not recognising them, his children have been raised without principle, self denial, humility, or discipline of their "inclinations and tempers" (463).

As Sir Thomas acquires insight, Tom recovers, and order is more or less restored to Mansfield Park, with Sir Thomas finally recognising that what has been absent at Mansfield Park, and what is required, is the virtue of consistent morality. And with this flash of insight he realises that "Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted" (472).

Fanny is the one of the most interesting characters in *Mansfield Park*, because, as has already been pointed out, not only does she lack the qualities of typical Austenian heroines, but she is also weak and sickly,

timid, silent, unassertive, shrinking and excessively vulnerable....almost totally passive....She sits, she waits, she endures...and when she is finally promoted, through marriage, into an unexpectedly high social position, it seems to be a reward, not so much for her vitality, as for her extraordinary immobility (Tanner,1986:143).

Inspid and incapacitated by ill health throughout the novel, "small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty" (12) at ten years old, frail in her early teens, and not much improved in health at eighteen, her frailty mirrors her debilitated status at Mansfield Park.

Todd attempts to explain Fanny's incongruities as a heroine by saying that she "is in training for goodness, examining herself and repeatedly struggling against wayward impulses and poor health" (2006:90). But Fanny's struggle stops short of physical

activity. Whereas Mrs Norris, the bully, is capable of “walking all day” (36), and Mary Crawford, whose moral strength is at times questionable, is robust and strong, asserting frequently that “resting fatigues me” (96), Fanny is exhausted by any type of exercise.

But while Fanny is the complete antithesis to Mrs Norris and Mary, both physically and emotionally, her inactivity and fatigue also differs from Lady Bertram’s indolence. Other heroines might stroll in the garden or pace the floor in an attempt to resolve indecision or unhappiness, but for the greater part of the novel Fanny remains seated. She sits on the sidelines of the play *Lovers Vows* long enough to be saved from committing herself to acting, on chairs at balls, and on benches in gardens, or in window seats, watching others, shocked by them and worrying about them, but persistently stationary: “Fanny sighed alone at the window till scolded away by Mrs Norris’s threats of catching cold” (113). For all exercise exhausts her.

Fanny, not able to refrain entirely from observing them, had seen enough to be tolerably satisfied. It was barbarous to be happy when Edmund was suffering. Yet some happiness must and would arise, from the very conviction, that he did suffer. When her two dances with him were over, her inclination and strength for more were pretty well at an end; and Sir Thomas having seen her rather walk than dance down the shortening set, breathless and with her hand at her side, gave his orders for her sitting down entirely (279).

Despite her physical limitations Fanny is at the beck and call of both aunts and the victim of their whims, performing errands for the one and cutting roses for the other: “either [sitting] at home the whole day with one aunt, or [walking] beyond her strength at the instigation of the other...” (36). And each aunt selfishly fails to take cognisance of her infirmities, almost conspiring against her. When Edmund notices Fanny’s headache, he asks Mrs Norris:

“has she been walking as well as cutting roses; walking across the hot park to your house, and doing it twice, ma’am?—no wonder her head aches.”

Mrs. Norris was talking to Julia, and did not hear.

“I was afraid it would be too much for her,” said Lady Bertram; “but when the roses were gathered, your aunt wished to have them, and then you know they must be taken home...”.

"If Fanny would be more regular in her exercise" [says Mrs Norris], "she would not be knocked up so soon. She has not been out on horseback now this long while, and I am persuaded, that when she does not ride, she ought to walk, If she had been riding before, I should not have asked it of her. But I thought it would rather do her good after being stooping among the roses; for there is nothing so refreshing as a walk after a fatigue of that kind; and though the sun was strong, it was not so very hot. Between ourselves, Edmund," nodding significantly at his mother, "it was cutting the roses, and dawdling about in the flower-garden, that did the mischief."

"I am afraid it was, indeed," said the more candid Lady Bertram, who had overheard her, "I am very much afraid she caught the headache there, for the heat was enough to kill any body. It was as much as I could bear myself. Sitting and calling to Pug, and trying to keep him from the flower-beds, was almost too much for me" (71-4).

Tave states that "Fanny Price, quiet, easily fatigued, supine, shrinking, creepmouse, is the least 'lively' of heroines" (1973:158). But this is not entirely correct, as like Tom, her inactivity gives her time to reflect and to develop her moral principles. Consequently it could be said rather that while Fanny is shy and retiring, her vigour lies in her strength of character and firm moral principles. For, as Edmund confirms, throughout the developments that take place both at Mansfield Park and in Portsmouth, Fanny is "the only one who has judged rightly throughout, who has been consistent" (187). She notes Mary's faults, even though she tries "to be rational, and to deserve the right of judging Miss Crawford's character and the privilege of true solicitude for them by a sound intellect and an honest heart" (265), and she mostly sees things in perspective, ironically and perspicaciously warning Maria, while she sits unhappily on her bench, that Maria is "in danger of slipping into the ha-ha" (99), and of hurting herself against the spikes if she accompanies Henry into the woods. But critics note the physical and moral dimensions of her predicament, gazing at the couple in their amorous pursuits and filled with "disagreeable musings" (100).

Ballaster describes Fanny as an immovable object both physically and emotionally: "A watcher, an observer, a discriminator" (2001:36) and suggests that this is the reason that Fanny refuses to be stirred into re-evaluating Henry, or indeed into changing her mind about anything once she has made a decision. And while Tanner concurs on Fanny's immobility, he glosses over the jealousy which taints both her virtue and her perceptions, and results in the marsh of fallacious observations within which she becomes mired. For it is not only the exposure to the sun that gives Fanny her headache: her unassailable and consistent virtue is tainted by her unhappiness

at Edmund's neglect of her, her secret love for him and her marked and obvious jealousy towards Mary. All of these concealed emotions are inextricably linked and interdependent, revealing a part of Fanny which is no longer wholly virtuous. Fanny is thus not entirely flawless, but, unlike the rightful heirs and incumbents of Mansfield Park, her recognition and appreciation of "heroism of principle" (265), "high notion[s] of honour" (294) and propriety remain constant. For,

since the day at Sotherton, she could never see Mr. Crawford with either sister without observation, and seldom without wonder or censure; and had her confidence in her own judgement been equal to her exercise of it in every other respect, had she been sure that she was seeing clearly, and judging candidly, she would probably have made some important communications to her usual confidant (115).

It is interesting that, despite her constantly debilitated state, although she frequently blushes and cries, Fanny never collapses from illness, becomes hysterical or faints. While events are often out of her control, and while she often feels intense emotions, and although, like Marianne Dashwood, Fanny frequently comes close to fainting, as an Austenian heroine, she never submits to this urge. Instead Fanny remains fully conscious. And even when her "nerves [are] agitated" (150) and when she "hardly know[s] how to support herself" (74), she "struggles and endures as the others cannot" (Tave, 1973:181). But her inner turmoil is reflected in her physical reactions leaving her uncomfortable both in and out of doors (Gorman, 1993:66), as revealed in her conversation with Edmund:

"You look tired and fagged, Fanny. You have been walking too far."

[Fanny replies] "No, I have not been out at all."

"Then you have had fatigues within doors, which are worse. You had better have gone out"(267).

Kleinman asserts that illness is merely "a dialectic between social world and person, cultural values and physiology" (1986:171), and Wiltshire pursues this line of thought, saying that Fanny's body reflects her power relations with the Bertrams, her submissive standing within the family and the larger community, and the social tensions that she encounters (1992:14). And this is reflected in the anxiety that she experiences when she incurs her uncle's wrath by refusing to marry Henry on Sir Thomas's return to Mansfield Park:

Her agitation and alarm exceeded all that was endured by the rest, by the right of a disposition which not even innocence could keep from suffering. She was nearly fainting: all her former habitual dread of her uncle was returning, and with it compassion for him and for almost every one of the party on the development before him... (176).

She is distressed at Henry's proposal and "for some moments unable to speak" (301), agitated, astonished and confused. Worse still she is unable to convince her uncle of her reservations about Henry. But Sir Thomas only perceives her refusal as ungrateful, "wilful and perverse" (318).

Sir Thomas came towards the table where she sat in trembling wretchedness, and with a good deal of cold sternness, said, "It is of no use, I perceive, to talk to you. We had better put an end to this most mortifying conference. Mr Crawford must not be kept longer waiting" (318).

And so she incurs the wrath of the uncle whom she both loves and trusts by refusing his advice and guidance in favour of her own sense of propriety. Her strong feelings for Edmund and her adherence to her principles and moral integrity get in the way of the interests of her family, the advantages that such a marriage would bring and Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram's perception of her duty.

Finally Sir Thomas calls on her to go downstairs to explain her reasons to Henry and to give him her answer.

But Fanny shewed such reluctance, such misery, at the idea of going down to him, that Sir Thomas, after a little consideration, judged it better to indulge her. His hopes from both gentleman and lady suffered a small depression in consequence; but when he looked at his niece, and saw the state of feature and complexion which her crying had brought her into, he thought there might be as much lost as gained by an immediate interview. With a few words, therefore, of no particular meaning, he walked off by himself, leaving his poor niece to sit and cry over what had passed, with very wretched feelings.

Her mind was all disorder. The past, present, future, every thing was terrible, But her uncle's anger gave her the severest pain of all....it was all wretchedness together (320-1).

Fanny is distraught at the thought that her uncle believes her to be obstinate, selfish and ungrateful, and this awareness pains her. But it is her fear of her uncle's changed opinion of her, and his reproaches, that distress her most, and cause her such pain; for she believes that she has failed in her duty to him as well. However, her idea of where her duty lies conflicts with his.

[W]hen she considered how much of the truth was unknown to him, she had no right to wonder at the line of conduct he pursued. He who had married a daughter to Mr. Rushworth. Romantic delicacy was certainly not to be expected from him. She must do her duty, and trust that time might make her duty easier than it now was (331).

When Henry pays her an unsolicited surprise visit in Portsmouth she is again tempted to faint: "The terrors...of what this visit might lead to, were overpowering and she fancied herself on the point of fainting away" (399). But once more her inner strength prevails over her physical demands, and she does not succumb.

Fanny realises that she is obliged to either tell Henry what she thinks of him or accept his proposal of marriage. In each instance she is called upon to act, but both actions are contrary to her individual sense of propriety. For, even though Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas see it as her duty "to accept such a very unexceptional offer" (333), and despite Henry's assistance in having William promoted, and the apparently overwhelming advantages of marrying Henry, Fanny is not ready to be persuaded or pressured into a marriage which she sees as beneficial neither to her nor to Henry. And because her judgement and principles are in conflict with her sense of duty, and she is unable to rely on her strong inner core or to conform to her ideal standards of feminine behaviour, fainting comes close.

Fanny's dilemma lies in the fact that none of the people for whom she cares, and whom she respects, recognises or understands her principles. Instead they all perceive Fanny's duty in a similar manner: Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram both believe that it is Fanny's duty to set aside her principles in favour of Henry's proposal; Mary and Mrs Grant fail utterly to understand Fanny's refusal to marry advantageously, and even Edmund is willing to promote Henry's cause.

Surrounded as he is with emotional illness, Sir Thomas believes that Fanny's steadfast and determined refusal to marry Henry has more to do with mental illness than with rational thought. He has assumed a paternal and patriarchal role in wishing

to see her advantageously married, and accordingly Sir Thomas hopes, in his somewhat heavy-handed way, that he will remedy Fanny's views by sending her to Portsmouth to reconsider her decision, perceiving his intervention to be "a medicinal project upon his niece's understanding, which he must consider as at present diseased" (369).

For Sir Thomas trusts that

a little abstinence from the elegancies and luxuries of Mansfield Park, would bring her mind into a sober state, and incline her to a juster estimate of the value of that home of greater permanence, and equal comfort, of which she had the offer (369).

And so Fanny returns to her home in Portsmouth, expecting to recover her personal equilibrium, to recover from her wretchedness, and hoping to discover a confidante in her mother.

The remembrance of all her earliest pleasures, and of what she had suffered in being torn from them, came over her with renewed strength, and it seemed as if to be at home again, would heal every pain that had since grown out of the separation.... What might have been hard to bear at Mansfield, was to become a slight evil at Portsmouth (370).

But Portsmouth is even more dysfunctional than Mansfield Park. It is not the home after which she has hankered. It is a noisy, bewildering, chaotic place. She finds a drunken father who is more pleased to welcome William home than his long-absent daughter, and a mother and siblings who appear to be more interested in the departure of the *Thrush* than in her.

Fanny was almost stunned. The smallness of the house, and thinness of the walls, brought every thing so close to her, that, added to the fatigue of her journey, and all her recent agitation, she hardly knew how to bear it....[she] was glad to have the light screened from her aching head, as she sat in bewildered, broken, sorrowful contemplation (382).

Fanny's memory has failed her: "Nobody was in their right place, nothing was done as it ought to be" (388). The house was "the scene of mismanagement and discomfort from beginning to end..." (390). It is "in almost every respect, the very reverse of what she could have wished. It was the abode of disorder and impropriety"

(388). Whereas she seeks a true home in Portsmouth, in Portsmouth she realises that this home has always been at Mansfield Park: "Portsmouth was Portsmouth; Mansfield was home" (431).

Portsmouth is therefore not conducive to her health or happiness: "Fanny was beginning to feel the effect of being debarred from her usual, regular exercise; she had lost ground as to health since her being in Portsmouth..." (409). She cannot exercise; she cannot keep Mr Crawford away; the memories of the death of a younger sibling remain, and even the weather is oppressive. Thus, once again seated on a bench, her inner emotions echo her outer perceptions. While she misses the lush countryside of Mansfield Park, her melancholy at having received Mary's ambiguous note and her disappointment in there being no *sequitur* to it are reflected in the harsh heat and dust to which she is exposed: "There was neither health nor gaiety in sun-shine in a town. She sat in a blaze of oppressive heat, in a cloud of moving dust..." (439).

Nor, despite her anxiety to be of use to her family, is she able to make a difference. For,

after being nursed up at Mansfield, it was too late in the day to be hardened at Portsmouth; and though Sir Thomas, had he known all, might have thought his niece in the most promising way of being starved, both in mind and body, into a much juster value for Mr Crawford's good company and good fortune, he would probably have feared to push his experiment farther, lest she might die under the cure (413).

At times Fanny's marriage to Henry seems an attractive possibility, and even William and Edmund support the marriage. Despite his initial superficiality Henry seems to express genuine concern for Fanny, and in Portsmouth even Fanny's "heart was softened for a while towards him..." (365). "She was willing to allow he might have more good qualities than she had been want to suppose. She began to feel the possibility of his turning out well at last" (405). "She had never seen him so agreeable—so *near* being agreeable..." (406).

"I am considering your sister's health," said he, addressing himself to Susan, "which I think the confinement of Portsmouth unfavourable to. She requires constant air and exercise. When you know her as well as I do, I am sure you will agree that she does, and that she ought never to be long banished from the free air, and liberty of the

country.—If, therefore, (turning again to Fanny) you find yourself growing unwell, and any difficulties arise about your returning to Mansfield—without waiting for the two months to be ended—*that* must not be regarded as of any consequence, if you feel yourself at all less strong, or comfortable than usual, and will only let my sister know it, give her only the slightest hint, she and I will immediately come down, and take you back to Mansfield....I wish you were not so tired,”—said he, still detaining Fanny after all the others were in the house; “I wish I left you in stronger health.—Is there any thing I can do for you in town?” (410)

Just as Tom is given time to think during his illness, so it is suggested by the narrator that extreme inactivity in Portsmouth grants Fanny the time to think and to re-establish her strength of will. However, while Fanny remains in Portsmouth Mary writes to her inferring at a scandal which Fanny subsequently discovers to be Maria’s elopement with Henry.

Fanny seemed to herself never to have been shocked before. There was no possibility of rest. The evening passed, without a pause of misery, the night was totally sleepless. She passed only from feelings of sickness to shudderings of horror; and from hot fits of fever to cold. The event was so shocking, that there were moments even when her heart revolted from it as impossible—when she thought it could not be. A woman married only six months ago, a man professing himself devoted, even *engaged*, to another—that other her near relation—the whole family, both families connected as they were by tie upon tie, all friends, all intimate together! (441)

Fanny is especially astonished that the elopement could occur when Henry had so recently declared his love for her. But she is more affected by the unrestrained passions which she realises are inherent in human nature, and the “evil let loose” (443) by these. And interestingly she is also concerned about the consequences that the immorality will have on both families. There can be no doubt that Maria and Henry’s adultery offends against all sense of propriety. But while Fanny almost faints when faced with her uncle’s wrath, the fever that now consumes her is unduly excessive. She is shocked beyond reason by Maria and Henry’s conduct. And her physical reactions to this emotion increase as she realises that what she had previously regarded as extreme thoughtlessness and carelessness has been replaced by immorality.

Edmund too reveals an unbalanced response to Maria and Henry's behaviour. As a brother he is justified in his "misery" (444), and as a clergyman he is entitled to his "upright principles" (440). But the self-righteous indignation that he demonstrates when he cries "Fanny, think of *me!*" (446), is unwarranted, selfish and overly moralistic.

Fortunately, however, his disappointment in his unhappy relationship with Mary leads a duly chastened Edmund to find and fetch Fanny from Portsmouth from where "she was dismissed...as hospitably as she had been welcomed" (445), to become "the preserver of the values represented by Mansfield Park" (Tanner, 1968:157).

Tomorrow! to leave Portsmouth to-morrow! She was, she felt she was, in the greatest danger of being exquisitely happy, while so many were miserable. The evil which brought such good to her! She dreaded lest she should learn to be insensible of it. To be going so soon, sent for so kindly, sent for as a comfort, and with leave to take Susan, was altogether such a combination of blessings as set her heart in a glow, and for a time, seemed to distance every pain, and make her incapable of suitably sharing the distress even of those whose distress she thought of most (443).

And so, having lived in "solitary wretchedness" (287) for most of her young life, Fanny at last wins her hero through her unchanging faithfulness, loyalty, steadfastness, fortitude and resilience. Fanny equates usefulness with love, and as such believes that inasmuch as "she was useful, she was beloved" (461). Her usefulness and her sense of duty have finally been validated and rewarded for she has fulfilled her demands of herself as an exemplary woman. Consequently Edmund and Fanny, having each suffered deeply, are finally able to realise and fulfil their love for each other.

Both Wollstonecraft and More suggest that if women are trained only to attract men, once trained in that art they will continue to do so, perhaps even after marriage as Maria does. Maria and her gown may be "alive and well" (100) after her experience in the ha-ha, but this is not sufficient. Far more is required to salvage the social system from immorality and to cleanse Mansfield Park of its dis-ease. And in the same way as this is hinted at in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen again infers that this recovery could be by way of religion. Fanny, and Edmund as a clergyman, are accordingly cast as the instruments of salvation of Mansfield Park and its future; and with them the threat of evil, in the physical form that Maria and Henry represent, is to be

expelled, and traditional values restored. For “[w]ith so much true merit and true love, and no want of fortune or friends, the happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be” (473).

CHAPTER FIVE

EMMA

There are possibly more references in *Emma* to emotional and physical ill health than in any other of Jane Austen's completed novels. While Mr Woodhouse and Mrs Churchill would at first glance appear to be the least healthy of all the characters, this is not necessarily so: Jane Fairfax suffers from both emotional and physical weaknesses, Harriet from fevers and toothache, and Emma herself, while not physically ill, exhibits a most unhealthy obsession with the management of other people's most intimate affairs, which is made all the more dangerous because of her independent and accordingly influential position in the small society in which she resides.

Nor is ill health limited to gender, class or money: males and females, the powerful and the poor all suffer alike. For as Wiltshire says, there is a "plethora of medical talk and incident in *Emma*" (1992:114).

The novel is littered...with para-medical paraphernalia and talk, from Isabella's claims about the favourable air of Brunswick Square, to Harriet's treasured court-plaister, to the Hartfield arrowroot dispatched for Jane, to Emma's speculations about that special 'constitution' of Frank Churchill's which makes him cross when he is hot (1992:113).

Illness and death are manipulated to further the plot: Harriet's cold helps provide Mr Elton with an opportunity to express his feelings for Emma, Harriet's toothache removes her to London and her sore throat causes her to miss the Christmas Eve party:

[Harriet] had gone home so much indisposed with a cold, that, but for her own earnest wish of being nursed by Mrs. Goddard, Emma could not have allowed her to leave the house. Emma called on her the next day, and found her doom already signed with regard to Randalls. She was very feverish and had a bad-sore throat; Mrs. Goddard was full of care and affection, Mr. Perry was talked of, and Harriet herself was too ill and low to resist the authority which excluded her from this

delightful engagement, though she could not speak of her loss without many tears (108-9).

In addition the weakness and fainting fit brought on by Harriet's confrontation with the gypsies introduces Frank Churchill as a possible suitor. It is significant that each time Harriet falls ill, the plot changes direction, often through Emma's manipulation of the illness, and that only once Harriet re-establishes her relationship with Robert Martin does she become wholly well.

Similarly, Mrs Churchill's pivotal illnesses determine Frank's whereabouts until after her death, when Frank is finally released from Enscombe to marry Jane. And Jane's near accident at sea and subsequent rescue by Mr Dixon add additional mystery, suspense and drama.

Moreover, as Wiltshire points out, the characters frequently use their ill-health as red herrings and as ploys:

Jane Fairfax arrives in Highbury supposedly to try the effect of her native air on a long-standing cold (caught early in November, as it happens, in the first phase, the first strain, of her secret engagement). Frank uses his fixing of the spectacles of the deaf, sleepy – and presumably now also blinded – Mrs. Bates as a cover for dallying with Jane by the piano, or rushes out with umbrellas on the excuse that 'Miss Bates must not be forgotten' to welcome Jane to the ball. Emma, finding Harriet's disappointed presence too uncomfortable after accepting Mr Knightley's proposal, remembers that she has a bad tooth, and has long wanted to see a dentist – a convenient excuse for shipping her off to Isabella in London (1992:113).

Characters also reveal themselves through their reactions to illness – Mr Elton pays no great attention to Harriet's illness – the arrangements for the dinner party at Randalls interest him more:

[I]t seemed all at once as if he were more afraid of its being a bad sore throat on [Emma's] account than on Harriet's—more anxious that she should escape the infection, than that there should be no infection in the complaint....“She wanted me to nurse my cold by staying at home to-day, and yet will not promise to avoid the danger of catching an ulcerated sore throat herself!” (124-5)

And, unusually for Austen, even fainting has a role to play in this novel. For when the gang of gypsies accost Harriet, demanding money from her, she is totally overcome by her shock:

The iron gates and the front-door were not twenty yards asunder they—they were all three soon in the hall; and Harriet immediately sinking into a chair fainted away (333).

There are perhaps more deaths referred to in *Emma* than in any other of Austen's novels, and Restuccia comments on this, saying that "bodies pile up (or evaporate) as the novel unfolds" (1994:6). Mrs Woodhouse and Mr Weston's first wife die before the novel begins. Jane and Miss Hawkins are orphans, and Harriet, although she finally finds a link to her father, appears to have no mother.

Death also plays a particularly noteworthy part in the plot of the novel, affecting the principal characters both positively and negatively: the death of his mother leaves Frank to be reared by the Churchills,

for when [Captain Weston's] wife died after a three years' marriage, he was rather a poorer man than at first, and with a child to maintain...The boy had, with the additional softening claim of a lingering illness of his mother's, been the means of a sort of reconciliation; and Mr. and Mrs. Churchill, having no children of their own, nor any other young creature of equal kindred to care for, offered to take the whole charge of the little Frank soon after her decease (16).

Mrs Churchill's death releases Frank from her manipulating clutches; as a result of his widowed status Mr Weston is in due course able to marry Miss Taylor and to remove her from Hartfield, and the death of Emma's mother in her infancy leaves the heroine bereft of maternal guidance from a very young age. For, Mrs Woodhouse "had died too long ago for [Emma] to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses..." (5), with the result that, as Mr Knightley says,

"ever since she was twelve, Emma has been mistress of the house and of you all. In her mother she lost the only person able to cope with her. She inherits her mother's talents, and must have been under subjection to her" (37).

Thus in *Emma*, just as in all her other novels, references to illness, ugliness, accident or death, are neither random nor accidental. Gorman suggests that this indicates that

Austen's universe holds meaning and order, and demonstrates her belief that illness can be "endured with dignity" (1993:123).

Whereas both Jane and Harriet bear their illnesses with fortitude, Mr Woodhouse, like Mrs Bennet, is never actually physically ill, but is described as a hopeless, although likeable, hypochondriac. He is filled with trepidation at the ill effects that food, illness, the weather and even outings might have both on him and on those he loves, apprehensive of every event that could possibly lead to either illness or accident.

Wiltshire remarks that physicians of the day recommended "a frugal diet, exercise and fresh air to relieve [nervous disorders]" (1992:118). And, even if Mr Woodhouse does his utmost to avoid fresh air and being out of doors, he seems to follow the balance of these recommendations obsessively. He views most foodstuffs with suspicion:

He loved to have the cloth laid, because it had been the fashion of his youth; but his conviction of suppers being very unwholesome made him rather sorry to see anything put on it; and while his hospitality would have welcomed his visitors to every thing, his care for their health made him grieve that they would eat. Such another small basin of thin gruel as his own was all that he could, with thorough self-approbation, recommend...(24).

He also advises his guests on what they should and should not eat:

"I would not recommend an egg boiled by any body else—but you need not be afraid, they are very small, you see—one of our small eggs will not hurt you . Miss Bates, let Emma help you to a *little* bit of tart—a *very* little bit. Ours are all apple tarts. You need not be afraid of unwholesome preserves here. I do not advise the custard. Mrs. Goddard, what say you to *half* a glass of wine? A *small* half-glass—put into a tumbler of water? I do not think it could disagree with you" (24).

Moreover trips anywhere are perceived as fraught with danger, with the result that "Mr Woodhouse could not bear the idea of [Isabella] stirring out of her house in the fogs of December" (49), and expresses his concerns about Isabella's long journey from London to Hartfield:

“And how tired you must be after your journey! You must go to bed early, my dear—and I recommend a little gruel to you before you go—You and I will have a nice basin of gruel together. My dear Emma, suppose we all have a little gruel” (100).

Despite the doctors’ recommendations of fresh air, the weather and the outdoors are particularly threatening to Mr Woodhouse, and he accordingly ironically and comically expresses his fears for Harriet’s health, merely because Emma’s portrait of Harriet features her out of doors.

“The only thing I do not thoroughly like is, that she seems to be sitting out of doors, with only a little shawl over her shoulders—and it makes one think she must catch cold....it is never safe to sit out of doors, my dear” (48).

And when others eat outside, this too is guaranteed to make him sick. Accordingly Mr Knightley makes arrangements for his guests to eat indoors at Donwell, as he appreciates that “to have any of them sitting down out of doors to eat would inevitably make [Mr Woodhouse] ill” (356).

Carriages and travel hold their own particular risks:

“He was afraid they should have a very bad drive. He was afraid poor Isabella would not like it. And there would be poor Emma in the carriage behind. He did not know what they had best do. They must keep as much together as they could” (128).

And the risks of driving increase as and when the familiar James is replaced by unfamiliar coachmen:

There [Emma] was welcomed, with the utmost delight, by her father, who had been trembling for the dangers of a solitary drive from Vicarage-Lane—turning a corner which he could never bear to think of—and in strange hands—a mere common coachman—no James...(133).

Interestingly Mr Woodhouse is well aware of his frailties, frequently referring to himself as an invalid, even though he shows no obvious symptoms of ill health. He revealingly says: “We invalids think we are privileged people” (57), “it shews what a sad invalid I am!” (280) and, “[y]ou will say that I am quite an invalid, and go nowhere, and therefore must decline their obliging invitation...” (209). For Mr Woodhouse has fashioned his own form of valetudinarianism. His illnesses are

neither real nor life threatening, yet, displaying typical hypochondriacal conduct he surrounds himself with an aura of neurotic fear, permitting his unjustified and misplaced apprehensions of being ill to dictate his way of life.

The problem is that Mr Woodhouse's hypochondria, and its ensuing acute anxiety, not only restricts his life, but also governs the lives of those with whom he is surrounded. For he is not only concerned about the health of his daughters, their friends, Mrs Weston and Mr Knightley, but he also re-creates them in his invalid mould, perceiving them all to be as delicate as himself, saying,

"Emma is not strong. She would catch a dreadful cold. So would poor little Harriet. So you would all. Mrs. Weston, you would be quite laid up; do not let them talk of such a wild thing. Pray do not let them talk of it. That young man" (speaking lower) "is very thoughtless. Do not tell his father, but that young man is not quite the thing. He has been opening the doors very often this evening, and keeping them open very inconsiderately. He does not think of the draught. I do not mean to set you against him, but indeed he is not quite the thing" (249).

Furthermore he even imposes illness on distant acquaintances, who are perfectly well, insisting that their supposed ill health be respected, using their imaginary illnesses to further manipulate his family:

"You would not think it to look at him, but he is bilious—Mr. Cole is very bilious. No, I would not be the means of giving them any pain. My dear Emma, we must consider this. I am sure, rather than run the risk of hurting Mr. and Mrs. Cole, you would stay a little longer than you might wish. You will not regard being tired. You will be perfectly safe, you know, among your friends" (210).

Health has become his method of control, his hobby, his insurance and his defence against the terror lurking outside Hartfield's walls. But although he is well-meaning, and bears no malice, Mr Woodhouse is not the seemingly harmless, old man that he appears to be. His attitude towards Emma is based on extreme selfishness and tyranny, softened with flattery, with the result that he has entangled his daughter in the trap of his chronic mental disability, from which Miss Taylor has been fortunate enough to escape. And even the lives and activities of his friends and acquaintances are prescribed and consequently curtailed by his neurotic concerns about their health. Thus he says to Jane Fairfax:

“Young ladies are delicate plants. They should take care of their health and their complexion. My dear, did you change your stockings?....My dear Miss Fairfax, young ladies are very sure to be cared for.—I hope your good grandmamma and aunt are well. They are some of my very old friends. I wish my health allowed me to be a better neighbour” (294).

In similar vein he reins Emma in, refusing the invitation of the Coles to dinner, saying, “I am not fond of dinner-visiting....No more is Emma. Late hours do not agree with us” (209). And he tells a disappointed Emma, “You will not like staying late. You will get very tired when tea is over....You will not like the noise” (210).

Gorman argues that while Mr Woodhouse’s valetudinarianism is

outwardly comic, connot[ing] duplicity, self-centeredness, and manipulation....[it] is described in this novel as rather more egocentric, a coping device that often succeeds in the goal of manipulating and controlling others (1993:80).

Austen deals with Mr Woodhouse’s hypochondria in much the same way as she describes her own mother’s imagined illnesses, as simultaneously comic and serious; revealing her ambivalent belief that whether illness is physical, emotional or psychosomatic, it should never be lightly dismissed, as it is always accompanied by very real suffering and pain. Thus she writes in one of her letters to her sister Cassandra:

My mother continues hearty, her appetite & nights are very good, but her Bowels are still not entirely settled, & she sometimes complains of an Asthma, a Dropsy, Water in her Chest & a Liver Disorder (*Letters*:39).

While Mr Woodhouse’s hypochondria, with its indulgence in ill-health and inertia, has paradoxically become his way of ensuring his well-being and his equanimity, it also becomes a dominant theme of this novel, with his concerns central to the plot. For, while he seeks to influence and control others, he himself remains self-centred, child-like and dependent, incapable of either change or growth. And it is this dependency that keeps Emma shackled to him, even to the end. For Mr Woodhouse indulges his neurotic fear of change, at Emma’s expense, apprehensively forbidding her from thinking of marriage, begging her to “not make any more matches,” (12), and requesting her not to “foretel things, for whatever you say always comes to pass” (12).

His spirits required support. He was a nervous man, easily depressed; fond of every body that he was used to, and hating to part with them; hating change of every kind. Matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable...(7).

Emma seems to share her father's views on the advantages of her single state. However she reserves this privilege for herself, commenting and reassuring Mr Woodhouse as follows: "I promise you to make none for myself, papa; but I must, indeed, for other people" (12).

In such circumstances, despite Mr Woodhouse's love for Emma and his concern for her welfare, it seems unlikely that Emma will ever marry.

Matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable; and he was by no means yet reconciled to his daughter's marrying, nor could ever speak of her but with compassion, though it had been entirely a match of affection, when he was now obliged to part with Miss Taylor too; and from his habits of gentle selfishness and of being never able to suppose that other people could feel differently from himself, he was very much disposed to think Miss Taylor had done as sad a thing for herself as for them, and would have been a great deal happier if she had spent all the rest of her life at Hartfield (7).

Accordingly Emma is particularly apprehensive of breaking the news of her engagement to her father. For the engagement in her mind assumes the equivalence of a sin that requires confession, and possibly even absolution.

There was a communication before [Emma], one which *she* only could be competent to make—the confession of her engagement to her father; but she would have nothing to do with it at present....No additional agitation should be thrown at this period among those she loved—and the evil should not act on herself by anticipation before the appointed time (452).

It follows that, despite his high regard for Mr Knightley, Mr Woodhouse sinks into a decline once the happy news is broken to him. He has consistently denied that a married woman might require "a house of her own" (8), and is only able to be roused from his distress by the theft of Mrs Weston's turkeys, which forces him to acknowledge his vulnerability and his dependence on others, and to consent to what

he believes to be the lesser of the evils – the wedding, only because Emma and Mr Knightley agree to continue living with him at Hartfield.

When first sounded on the subject, he was so miserable, that they were almost hopeless.—A second allusion, indeed, gave less pain.—He began to think it was to be, and that he could not prevent it—a very promising step of the mind on its way to resignation. Still, however, he was not happy. Nay, he appeared so much otherwise, that his daughter's courage failed, She could not bear to see him suffering, to know him fancying himself neglected; and though her understanding almost acquiesced in the assurance of both the Mr. Knightleys, that when once the event were over, his distress would be soon over too, she hesitated—she could not proceed (483).

And so Wiltshire comments that

Mr Woodhouse is never so clearly a nursling in the novel as he becomes now when his whole family concert its efforts to break to him the news of the impending event which will make him finally an impotent and superannuated figure....Still, however, Mr Woodhouse's 'nervous system' dictates postponement of the wedding day (1992:149).

Unlike Emma, Mr Woodhouse's daughter Isabella Knightley shares her father's hypochondriacal traits.

She was not a woman of strong understanding, or any quickness; and with this resemblance of her father, she inherited also much of his constitution; was delicate in her own health, over-careful of that of her children, had many fears, and many nerves, and was as fond of her own Mr. Wingfield in town as her father could be of Mr. Perry (92).

Consequently some particularly amusing exchanges, which are somewhat predictive of the exchanges between Diana Parker and her sister in *Sanditon*, take place between Isabella and her father and illuminate their consensus on all topics relating to health.

Mr Wingfield, says Isabella, “recommended [the sea] for all the children, but particularly for the weakness in little Bella's throat...”.

“I have been long perfectly convinced,” [replies Mr Woodhouse,] “though perhaps I never told you so before, that the sea is very rarely of use to any body. I am sure it almost killed me once.”

“Oh! good Mr. Perry—how is he, sir?” [interjects Isabella]. “Why, pretty well; but not quite well; Poor Perry is bilious and he has not time to take care of himself...” [replies her father].

Mr Woodhouse, after a discussion on the Perrys’ health in general, reverts to Bella:

“It is not very likely, my dear, that bathing should have been of use to [Bella]—and if I had known you were wanting an embrocation, I would have spoken to—...”.

Isabella then changes the topic to Mrs Bates: “Poor Mrs. Bates had a bad cold about a month ago...”.

“But colds were never so prevalent as they have been this autumn...” [replies her father]. “Mr. Wingfield told me that he has never known them more general or heavy—except when it has been quite an influenza...”.

And he continues:

“Perry says that colds have been very general, but not so heavy as he has very often known them in November. Perry does not call it altogether a sickly season.” [Isabella responds:] “No, I do not know that Mr. Wingfield considers it *very* sickly, except—”. [And Mr Woodhouse replies:] “Ah! my poor dear child, the truth is, that in London it is always a sickly season. Nobody is healthy in London, nobody can be. It is a dreadful thing to have you forced to live there! —so far off!—and the air so bad!”

“[B]ut I assure you’ [replies Isabella], ‘excepting those little nervous head aches and palpitations which I am never entirely free from anywhere, I am quite well myself...” (101-3).

“Any thing of ill health was a recommendation to [Isabella]” (451). Thus, even though neither the narrator nor Isabella ever refer to Isabella as an invalid, Gorman classifies her as a hypochondriac and an hysteric, for she is “never completely well” (1993:74):

Like her father, she cannot fully participate in life, because she focuses on her own ailments, her bodily processes, her heartbeat itself....[It] gives her something to do in her idleness, a mental activity that validates her existence...(1993:74).

While Mr Woodhouse, with all his neuroses, exercises compelling control over all at Hartfield, Wiltshire suggests that Mrs Churchill, the other valetudinarian in this novel, “exerts an even more powerful hold on events in Highbury” (1992:120). For, although Mr Weston dismisses Mrs Churchill’s illnesses as “all nothing of course” (304), it seems that Mrs Churchill’s illnesses “never occurred but for her own convenience” (258), and that “even when days were fixed, and invitations accepted, it was an even chance that Mrs. Churchill were not in health or spirits for going...” (221).

Accordingly Mr Weston says,

“The evil of the distance from Enscombe...is that Mrs. Churchill, *as we understand*, has not been able to leave the sofa for a week together. In Frank’s last letter she complained, he said, of being too weak to get into her conservatory without having both his arm and his uncle’s! This, you know, speaks a great degree of weakness—but now she is so impatient to be in town, that she means to sleep only two nights on the road.—so Frank writes word. Certainly, delicate ladies have very extraordinary constitutions, Mrs. Elton; you must grant me that...Besides she is out of health now; but *that* indeed, by her own account, she has always been. I would not say so to every body, Mrs. Elton; but I have not much faith in Mrs. Churchill’s illness” (306).

Gilbert and Gubar describe Mrs Churchill as “the always absent origin of the novel’s events” (1979:173), as “[h]er demand for attention originates a cascade of incidents” (Wiltshire:1992:123). For Mrs Churchill’s concerns lie behind Frank’s duplicity, allowing a secret engagement to Jane, and providing him with opportunities to flirt with Emma and undermine Jane’s happiness.

It does seem though as if there might indeed be some valid grounds for Mrs Churchill’s concern about her health, and Mr Weston is the first to acknowledge this possibility:

“I hope,” said he presently, “I have not been severe upon poor Mrs. Churchill. If she is ill I should be sorry to do her injustice; but there are some traits in her character which make it difficult for me to speak with the forbearance I could wish” (309).

And even Frank is not convinced that Mrs Churchill's hysterical manipulations are without physical grounds:

it was to be inferred that Mrs. Churchill's removal to London had been of no service to the wilful or nervous part of her disorder. That she was really ill was very certain; he had declared himself convinced of it, at Randall's. Though much might be fancy, he could not doubt, when he looked back, that she was in a weaker state of health than she had been half a year ago. He did not believe it to proceed from any thing that care and medicine might not remove, or at least that she might not have many years of existence before her; but he could not be prevailed on by all his father's doubts, to say that her complaints were merely imaginary, or that she was as strong as ever.

It soon appeared that London was not the place for her. She could not endure its noise. Her nerves were under continual irritation and suffering; and by the ten days' end, her nephew's letter to Randall's communicated a change of plan. They were going to remove immediately to Richmond. Mrs. Churchill had been recommended to the medical skill of an eminent person there, and had otherwise a fancy for the place (316-7).

But whether imaginary or not, manipulative or not, there is no doubt that, just as Mr Woodhouse's neurotic anxieties dominate Emma's existence, so Mrs Churchill's anxieties frequently limit and determine Frank's way of life and his whereabouts. For, as Mrs Weston confirms, "Mrs. Churchill rules at Enscombe, and is a very odd-tempered woman; and [Frank's] coming now, depends upon her being willing to spare him" (121). And so, when the Churchills move to Richmond, Frank writes to say "that his aunt felt already much better for the change, and that he had no doubt of being able to join them for twenty-four hours at any given time..." (318). Furthermore when Frank is conspicuously absent at Donwell, he later explains that he

had been detained by a temporary increase of illness in [Mrs Churchill]; a nervous seizure, which had lasted some hours—and he had quite given up every thought of coming, till very late...(363).

And he adds: "As soon as my aunt gets well, I shall go abroad" (364).

Wiltshire also suggests that Mr Woodhouse's and Mrs Churchill's dominating presences run in parallel, with Mrs Churchill being "the covert double of Mr Woodhouse" (1992:123). For both are the parents of unmarried children, and both

use their apparently imaginary, and for the most part, self-invoked illnesses to manipulate and control these children, and more particularly both connive to prevent their marriages. In this manner they determine many of the events that take place in the novel:

A letter arrived from Mr. Churchill to urge his nephew's instant return. Mrs. Churchill was unwell—far too unwell to do without him; she had been in a very suffering state (so said her husband) when writing to her nephew two days before, though from her usual unwillingness to give pain, and constant habit of never thinking of herself, she had not mentioned it; but now she was too ill to trifle, and must entreat him to set off for Enscombe without delay (258).

And even when “Mrs Churchill was recovering...[Frank] dared not yet, even in his own imagination, fix a time for coming to Randalls again” (266).

However, while Mrs Churchill is eventually and fortuitously carried off by “[a] sudden seizure of a different nature from any thing foreboded by her general state...” (387), there is an unresolved mystery about her death. For this illness is ironically neither anticipated by her nor anyone else. Moreover it lacks the manipulative qualities of all those illnesses previously indulged in, and for the first time it seems that her illness is out of her control.

But more importantly, as Mrs Weston points out, Mrs Churchill's death leaves Frank free to marry Jane.

“Most favourably for his nephew—[Mr Churchill] gave his consent with scarcely a difficulty. Conceive what the events of a week have done in that family! While poor Mrs. Churchill lived, I suppose there could not have been a hope, a chance, a possibility—but scarcely are her remains at rest in the family vault, than her husband is persuaded to act exactly opposite to what she would have required. What a blessing it is, when undue influence does not survive the grave!—He gave his consent with very little persuasion” (398).

Unfortunately, Frank, while “knowing how to please” (191), seems to have inherited much of Mrs Churchill's unwholesome ability and tendency to control and manipulate others, and it is this capacity, combined with Mrs Churchill's distant influence, that leads to real illness.

Jane has been induced by Frank to place herself in a situation of extreme difficulty, wherein she is required to keep her relationship with Frank a secret while mixing socially with him. This causes her both a degree of embarrassment and acute distress, and she eventually confesses to Emma that her spirits “are exhausted” (363). But despite Jane’s delicate state of health, Frank facetiously, and at best thoughtlessly, comments on his fiancée’s looks, involving Emma in a game which might have had extreme consequences.

“And how did you think Miss Fairfax looking?” [Frank asks Emma.]

[He continues:] “Ill, very ill—that is, if a young lady can ever be allowed to look ill. But the expression is hardly admissible, Mrs Weston, is it? Ladies can never look ill. And seriously, Miss Fairfax is naturally so pale, as almost always to give the appearance of ill health. —A most deplorable want of complexion.”

Emma would not agree to this, and began a warm defence of Miss Fairfax’s complexion. “It was certainly never brilliant, but she would not allow it to have a sickly hue in general; and there was a softness and delicacy in her skin which gave peculiar elegance to the character of her face.” He listened with all due deference...but yet he must confess, that to him nothing could make amends for the want of the fine glow of health. Where features were indifferent, a fine complexion gave beauty to them all; and where they were good...(199).

Only as Jane approaches a state of emotional and physical collapse, does Frank finally acquire some insight into the mischief he has caused, and the misery and intense suffering that he has exposed Jane to, as a result of his diversions, writing,

“No; do not pity me till I reached Highbury, and saw how ill I had made her. Do not pity me till I saw her wan, sick looks”....he had suffered and was very sorry (440).

Mr Knightley, the sensible commentator in the novel, is the first to criticise Frank, noting early on, how, despite possessing the necessary time and money, Frank fails to visit his father:

“Your amiable young man is a very weak young man....It ought to have been a habit with him by this time, of following his duty, instead of consulting expediency” (148).

And Mr Knightley remains critical of Frank’s “disingenuousness and double-dealing” (348), observing later, perhaps somewhat enviously, that

“Frank Churchill is, indeed, the favourite of fortune. Every thing turns out for his good.—He meets with a young woman at a watering-place, gains her affection, cannot even weary her by negligent treatment—and had he and all his family sought round the world for a perfect wife for him, they could not have found her superior. His aunt is in the way.—His aunt dies.—He has only to speak.—His friends are eager to promote his happiness.—He has used everybody ill—and they are all delighted to forgive him.—He is a fortunate man, indeed!” (428)

The role that illness plays in this novel, however, becomes particularly evident in Jane, who seems defined by her illnesses. Jane, who was orphaned as a child, arrives in Highbury, to live with her poverty-stricken grandmother and her elderly aunt. She, like Fanny Price, is delicate:

[Jane] had never been quite well since the time of [the Campbell's] daughter's marriage; and till she should have completely recovered her usual strength, they must forbid her engaging in duties, which, so far from being compatible with a weakened frame and varying spirits, seemed...to require something more than human perfection of body and mind to be discharged with tolerable comfort (165).

But it appears as if Jane's state of ill health is determined more directly by the absence of emotional well-being, the uncertainties caused by Frank's insensitive behaviour, and the insecure and dependent position in which she finds herself, than by physical causes.

She had been particularly unwell, however, suffering from headache to a degree which made her aunt declare, that had the ball taken place, she did not think Jane could have attended it; and it was charity to impute some of her unbecoming indifference to the languor of ill-health (263).

Wiltshire argues that Jane's relatively unknown past makes her

the obscured antithesis to the heroine, and her story contributes much to the chiaroscuro of this picture of health. Jane's health is frail, and her beauty, unlike Emma's, is no assurance of vitality (1992:135).

Unlike Emma, Jane is disempowered. She has neither wealth, nor standing in the community, and even lacks the power to determine the course of her own life. Moreover the situation in which she finds herself in Highbury requires her to shroud

herself in secrecy, rendering her virtually mute, providing her with little or no opportunity to speak freely. Accordingly Wiltshire suggests that as a result of this enforced silence, the only way of understanding Jane's predicament is through a reading of her body, which "necessarily becomes the site for the construction of meanings..." (1992:116).

For nothing is known about Jane's inner life, other than for the fact that she is an accomplished musician and that she can sing in Italian. And so, when a piano arrives from an anonymous source, Emma is left to interpret Jane's silence from the only facts she has available to her, assuming the existence of a mysterious lover, in the form of the enigmatic Mr Dixon, who had fortuitously saved Jane from drowning, and filling the gaps with her fertile imagination. Miss Bates reveals that Jane

"would have been dashed into the sea at once, and actually was all but gone, if [Mr Dixon] had not, with the greatest presence of mind, caught hold of her habit – (I can never think of it without trembling!)—But ever since we had the history of that day, I have been so fond of Mr Dixon....Jane caught a bad cold, poor thing! So long ago as the 7th November, (as I am going to read to you), and has never been well since. A long time, is not it, for a cold to hang upon her? She never mentioned it before, because she would not alarm us. Just like her! So considerate!—But, however, she is so far from well, that her kind friends the Campbells think she had better come home, and try an air that always agrees with her; and they have no doubt that three or four months at Highbury will entirely cure her—and it is certainly a great deal better that she should come here, than go to Ireland, if she is unwell. Nobody could nurse her as we should do....If it was not for the drawback of her illness—but I am afraid we must expect to see her grown thin, and looking very poorly" (160-1).

Whereas Miss Bates, who notices Jane's decline in Highbury, attributes this to the absence of Jane's "native air" (166), Emma intuitively feels that there is more to Jane's illnesses than just delicate health.

"As to the pretence of trying her native air, I look upon that as a mere excuse. In the summer it might have passed; but what can anybody's native air do for them in the months of January, February, and March? Good fires and carriages would be much more to the purpose in most cases of delicate health, and I dare say in hers" (217).

Emma is as usual correct in what she perceives, but her need for sensation leads her to incorrect conclusions. For Emma is no friend to Jane. She fails to understand

Jane's predicament, has limited sympathy for her situation, and comments only that Jane "tires [her] to death" (86).

In all fairness to Emma, Jane discloses nothing of her background, and only at the end of the novel is it revealed that Frank is in fact her mysterious lover. But by this stage Jane has reached breaking point, succumbing to the strains of keeping her romance a secret from Mrs Churchill and the residents of Highbury, and the mental stress she is exposed to through her dislocation in Highbury. Jane, who requires honesty from Frank, loving "every thing that is decided and open" (460) has been obliged by him to deceive the people she cares for, exhibiting only "coldness" (269) and "reserve" (203). Like Elinor Dashwood, when faced with Lucy Steele's engagement to Edward, she has, against her better nature, been forced to adopt a mantle of secrecy, and accordingly she becomes more and more stressed as the novel progresses, overcome by colds, headaches, poor eating and finally depression and physical weakness, causing Miss Bates to tell Jane when Emma calls, "'Well, my dear, I shall say you are laid down upon the bed, and I am sure you are ill enough'" (378).

[W]hen Mr. Perry called at Hartfield, the same morning, it appeared that she was so much indisposed as to have been visited, though against her own consent, by himself, and that she was suffering under severe headaches, and a nervous fever to a degree, which made him doubt the possibility of her going to Mrs Smallridge's at the time proposed. Her health seemed for a moment completely deranged—appetite quite gone—and though there were no absolutely alarming symptoms, nothing touching the pulmonary complaint, which was the standing apprehension of the family, Mr. Perry was uneasy about her (389).

Frank's obvious and deliberate flirtation with Emma at Box Hill, in front of Jane, further aggravates the position. All the camouflage and deception that Frank calls for has destroyed both Jane's comfort, and her composure, with the result that she even begins to doubt Frank's love for her.

It seems that Jane's destiny must lie in the traditional role of governess assumed by single women with no inheritance: "the very few hundred pounds which she inherited from her father making independence impossible" (164). But Jane is fortunate and avoids her fate of "penance and mortification" (165) as a result of the timely death

of Mrs Churchill, who has up till this point remained the primary obstacle to her happiness.

Austen's interest in propriety seems to reflect a concern prevalent during the period. For as Tanner suggests,

good manners and morals were seen as essential to the preservation of order in society....they became England's answer to the French Revolution....Jane Austen's profound concern with good manners was thus not simply a reflection of a cloistered gentility: it was a form of politics – an involvement with a widespread attempt to save the nation by correcting, monitoring and elevating its morals (1986:27).

And Wollstonecraft warns that unless women acquire

that soberness of mind, which the exercise of duties, and the pursuit of knowledge, alone inspire...[they] will still remain in a doubtful dependent situation, and only be loved whilst...[they] are fair! (1992:243)

She also cautions

that unless the understanding of woman be enlarged, and her character rendered more firm, by being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have sufficient sense or command of temper to manage her children properly (1992:272).

Her contemporary, Hannah More, takes this idea further, calling for reasoning, reflection, feeling, judgement, discrimination and discourse. But none of Austen's heroines possess these ideal attributes at the inception of the various novels, or even come close to either Wollstonecraft's or Hannah More's recommendations. For, as has been said before, they all still have to recognise their true duty to be good wives and mothers, and "to find their proper homes" (Tanner,1986:33). And in most instances, as a result of parental absence or failure, they require assistance in the attainment of these goals.

Jane, however, is the epitome of both Wollstonecraft's and More's feminine aspirations. She is educated, elegant, graceful, reserved, self-controlled, responsible, dignified and rational. As such Wiltshire suggests that she is more than the physical antithesis of Emma (1992:135). For she not only counterbalances Emma in her feminine attributes, but also reflects and magnifies Emma's flaws. Consequently

Emma both dislikes and envies Jane, especially in the light of Mr Knightley's express and unreserved approval of her, and attempts to find fault with her: "Emma could not forgive her" (169) her "cloak of politeness" (169), her "disgustingly" suspicious reserve (169), her "superiority both in beauty and acquirements" (165), and her discretion.

Unlike Catherine Morland, who in *Northanger Abbey* is posited as an inauspicious and unlikely heroine and is at best only in training to be a heroine, Emma is introduced as most eminently suited to be a heroine. For Emma is "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition" (5). But, typically, the narrator is again quick to alert the reader to Emma's apparent flaws. For despite her heroic suitability, Emma lacks a mother, has suffered the loss of her governess and only companion, and has been left unrestrained in the company of an overly indulgent, inadequate and neurotic father, to do "just what she liked...directed chiefly by her own [judgement]" (5), and "accountable to nobody" but her father" (40). Consequently Emma has "rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (5), without anyone other than Mr Knightley to check or balance her excesses.

Even if, unlike most of Austen's other motherless heroines, Emma has fortunately had Miss Taylor as a governess and maternal stand-in, Miss Taylor, much like Mrs Allen and Mrs Bennet, only rather ineffectually guides and instructs Emma in her childhood, with her efforts in child-rearing described as more like those of an over-fond sister than those of a mother. Thus with little authority or discipline exerted over her by either Miss Taylor or her doting father, clever, headstrong Emma has grown up to be spoiled and manipulative, alluding to herself playfully as "a fanciful, troublesome creature!" (10)

With Miss Taylor's marriage and consequent departure from Hartfield Emma is left bereft of company.

She had many acquaintance in the place, for her father was universally civil, but not one among them who could be accepted in lieu of Miss Taylor for even half a day. It was a melancholy change; and Emma could not but sigh over it and wish for impossible things, till her father awoke, and made it necessary to be cheerful (7).

But Emma is not only lonely. More importantly she has been abandoned to the rather minimal stimulation that Highbury has to offer. For it “afforded her no equals” (7).

She is therefore also

in great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude. She dearly loved her father, but he was no companion for her. He could not meet her in conversation, rational or playful (7).

Characteristically Austen once again emphasises that the outward appearances of her characters mirror the inner person: good looks equate with physical and mental well-being, and physical health accompanies moral strength. Accordingly, although not all of Austen’s heroines tend at first sight to be outwardly or obviously beautiful, most of them blossom when their love is returned, suggesting that they are in bud, awaiting the right circumstances in which to bloom. Moreover all the heroines, with the noteworthy exception of Fanny Price, are healthy, possessing that inner moral strength which affords them the capacity to become physically beautiful. And in each instance their inner beauty is accorded more importance than their external beauty. Thus whereas Emma’s looks are generally admired, rather like Anne Elliot’s bloom, they await the perfection that insight and maturity will give her.

But Tanner suggests that, although Emma is described in terms of perfection,

“faultless in spite of her faults”, and many more enchanting things besides....she is also, underneath the rank and money, a curiously displaced person, a centre without a circle, a figure-force of perpetual restlessness. In fact, although Emma is the centre of the novel, neither Hartfield nor she are actually at the centre of Highbury (1986:189).

In the same way as the external appearances of the characters reflect their inner strengths and weaknesses, so too does the content of the conversation at Highbury reflect the inner boredom and restrictions of its society, with the result that the conversation of the residents is limited to trivia. And much like the inactivity in Sleeping Beauty’s castle, the inhabitants of Hartfield remain virtually stationary and consistently quiescent, with Mr Woodhouse refusing to participate in any physical activity, “resist[ing] all walks, outings, late nights, dances, trips, expeditions, excursions, engagements, marriages on the pretext that these activities endanger health” (Wiltshire,1992:126), and forbidding these to Emma. Consequently, while

Hartfield, and its occupants, remain in an apparently comfortably dormant state of equilibrium until outer forces intrude, it is in reality an island of static ill health mired in a sea of tedium.

A number of critics have discussed the problems that Emma experiences with her restrictive environment: Tanner suggests that “the real ‘evil’ or terror in *Emma* is the prospect of having no one properly to talk to, no *real* community, in fact” (1986:203). Wiltshire stresses that Emma’s problem is that she is located within a community preoccupied with ill health (1992:150). And Todd observes that Emma’s social isolation arises out of “intellectual solitude” (7). But Todd also submits that, despite being offered more choices than any other Austenian heroine, Emma chooses social isolation for herself out of a fear that modernisation will reduce her status in the feudal world, which she knows and understands, and where she reigns supreme (2006:90).

The actuality, as Todd argues, is that Emma is virtually housebound, both physically and emotionally, residing in a house which is devoid of action, and in an environment diminished by the hypochondriacal fears of her neurotic father (2006:102). For although Mr Woodhouse is “fond of society in his own way” (20), “his horror of late hours and large dinner-parties made him unfit for any acquaintance, but such as would visit him on his own terms” (20). It is therefore only at Highbury, with Miss Bates’s gossip, Donwell, with its strawberry picking, Box Hill and the Crown Inn, where things happen. But Emma never even leaves the periphery of Highbury, has no friends other than the rather inadequate Harriet, no suitors, and nowhere even to walk, admitting “how very, very seldom [she is] ever two hours from Hartfield” (312). Moreover her sister and Mrs Weston live some miles away.

The only relief in this tedium are the regular visits of Mr Knightley, “a sensible man” (9), who is able to perceive and acknowledge Emma’s faults and who “never flatter[s] her” (11). Thus, while on the one hand Emma remains at the pinnacle of Highbury society, on the other hand she exists in an intellectual and social vacuum, which provides the space in which her imagination and matchmaking tendencies, when combined with her boredom, must flourish. And as Mr Woodhouse is not at all “reconciled to his own daughter’s marrying” (7), even marriage offers no hope of escape to Emma.

Emma is, however, endowed with a fertile and productive imagination, the only source of vitality in this place of stasis, on which she relies to ward off her inactivity, loneliness and boredom. But, notwithstanding her imagination, Emma is not much healthier than the community in which she lives. For as Tave argues, Emma's "imagination creates a world of its own...a world made to a boundless perfection by desire" (in Bloom,2004:205), so that much in the same way as Emma, the artist, paints Harriet outside, her limitless imagination and flawed logic, combined with her obsession for matchmaking, recreate and reshape her world and its inhabitants according to her need for excitement. Emma's dilemma therefore lies in the fact that she needs to discover that, despite the very real restrictions of her environment, the beauty of the world lies in truth, and not in the faulty and unhealthy contortions of her imagination. But as Mr Knightley observes: "She will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding" (37).

The emptiness of Emma's life and her fascination with matchmaking, linked to her somewhat misguided belief that she can do no wrong, and her "ungoverned wilfulness" (Tanner,1986:179) lead her into situations over which she has no control, and which she frequently does not desire. For Emma allows her imagination to dominate her judgement, and her impetuosity, impulsiveness and unreliable thought processes to prevail over her rationality, manipulating reality to fit her imagination. And Mr Knightley, the consistently sensible commentator observes this, advising her: "Better be without sense, than misapply it as you do" (64).

She completely misconstrues the affiliation that exists between Frank and Jane, misunderstands the depth of Robert Martin and Harriet's relationship, and misjudges both Jane and Mr Elton in many important respects. Her misconstructions pile up, eventually culminating in her moral lapse on Box Hill.

Seeing matchmaking as "the greatest amusement in the world" (12), vicariously excited by the prospect of marriage for others, and, not yet wishing to marry herself, she imprudently plays with the relationships of others. She, who has a great deal of time to fill, "fills [her 'in-betweens'] with 'schemes'. She has to fill them with something" (Tanner,1986:182).

She would notice [Harriet]; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions

and her manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming in her own situation in life, her leisure and powers (23-24).

She accordingly tries to establish Harriet's parentage, and then turns to matters of love, dismissing Mr Martin as not being a suitable marriage partner for Harriet:

"A young farmer...is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is therefore in one sense as much above my notice as in every other he is below it" (29).

Her flawed perceptions blind her to Mr Martin's potential as a gentleman farmer, leading her to predict thoughtlessly that he "will be a completely gross, vulgar farmer—totally inattentive to appearances...thinking of nothing but profit and loss" (33), and to erroneously recommend the "good humoured, cheerful, obliging and gentle" (34) Mr Elton to Harriet.

It ought not to be forgotten that Austen admitted that Emma was her favourite heroine. Accordingly, although Emma has many obvious faults, she is also endowed with multiple virtues. In particular Butler notes that she possesses a "natural affinity with the truth" (1975:266), and "real moral superiority" (1975:267), even if at times these virtues are fallible or become distorted by her imagination and her need for excitement, as exhibited in her unforgivable rudeness towards Miss Bates at Box Hill.

Emma is also the embodiment of health, which metaphorically reveals much of her inner strength:

She had an unhappy state of health in general for the child of such a man, for she hardly knew what indisposition was; and if he did not invent illnesses for her, she would make no figure in a message (336).

Wollstonecraft and More expound at length on the virtues of usefulness and it seems that Austen might endorse this precept. For, as has already been mentioned, her heroines tend to enter married life only once they have discarded their youthful excesses, frivolity and superficiality, and worked through their deficiencies to acquire a modicum of reason and compassion.

Emma, though, differs from most of Austen's heroines in that she has the financial means to contribute economically to the society in which she lives. And as the first lady of Highbury, Emma is useful. She takes her social duties seriously, showing compassion to the poor and paying charitable visits to sick families, indicating her potential suitability for the position to which she must one day succeed, and exhibiting her inherent capacity to balance her need for excitement with her social commitments:

Emma was very compassionate; and the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her patience, as from her purse. She understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those, for whom education had done so little; entered into their troubles with ready sympathy, and always gave her assistance with as much intelligence as good-will (86).

But Emma is also a snob. She initially believes that the Martin family expects to be elevated in status through its association with Harriet, even if later she

would have given a great deal, or endured a great deal, to have had the Martins in a higher rank of life. They were so deserving, that a *little* higher should have been enough... (187).

She considers Mrs and Miss Bates as "tiresome women" (155) who associate with "the second rate and third rate of Highbury" (155). She determines to find out who and what Miss Hawkins is, noting with satisfaction that she "brought no name, no blood, no alliance" (183). And at the Coles's dinner party, she is gratified to be "received with a cordial respect, which could not but please, and given all the consequence she could wish for" (214), recollecting afterwards that "[s]he must have delighted the Coles—worthy people, who deserved to be made happy!—And left a name behind her that would not soon die away" (231).

Crucially, therefore, Emma is not perfect, even if her father and Mrs Weston screen themselves from her flaws. Her self-deception has blinded her to the reality of her world, and only Mr Knightley acknowledges this:

Mr Knightley, in fact, was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them: and though this was not

particularly agreeable to Emma herself, she knew it would be so much less so to her father, that she would not have him really suspect such a circumstance as her not being thought perfect by every body (11).

Accordingly Mr Knightley “prophetically” (402) predicts the perils that lie in waiting in Emma and Harriet’s friendship, warning, “I think they will neither of them do the other any good” (36), and later admonishing Emma, telling her: “You have been no friend to Harriet Smith, Emma” (63).

Emma believes herself to be the instigator of the Weston marriage. Mr Knightley just shakes his head, saying sagely that any interference from her would have been “more likely to have done harm...than good...” (13). But Emma remains undeterred by his remarks.

Like Catherine Morland, Emma delights in mystery and intrigue. But paradoxically, her preference for associations that enchant her, over associations that make sense, impairs her imagination. She ignores the actuality with which she is faced, misreading the signs, characters and situations before her, excluding important evidence and drawing incorrect conclusions which result in disastrous consequences. Wiltshire comments thus:

The reader certainly notices, and delights in, the subterfuges of Emma’s thinking here – in the agility of the transition from ‘very good sort of people’ to ‘bad acquaintance’ and hence to ‘good society’, for example...(1992:132).

Accordingly armed with a dearth of evidence, she reaches an “ingenious and animating suspicion” (160) that Mr Dixon and Jane are lovers, and consequently deduces that the piano that arrives in Highbury is a gift from Mr Dixon to Jane. Closing her eyes to the facts actually before her, she attributes Jane’s feelings for Frank as feelings for Mr Dixon and therefore unwittingly becomes a partner in Frank’s duplicitous charade. And when the true situation is revealed of Frank’s involvement with Jane, “Emma even jumped with surprise;—and, horror-struck, exclaimed, “Jane Fairfax!—Good God! You are not serious? You do not mean it?” (395)

Moreover, in the mistaken but romantic belief that Harriet is the daughter of a gentleman, Emma attempts a remake of Harriet. But instead Harriet becomes “a false ‘Harriet’ who now threatens to act beyond the control of her ‘maker’”

(Tanner, 1986:183). She plans Harriet's future, insensitively manipulating situations and people much in the same way as Mrs Norris does in *Mansfield Park*, frequently exposing Harriet to emotional harm, tutoring her in faulty observations, encouraging her to adopt these and to misread the facts in the same way that she herself does, and causing her to completely misinterpret Mr Elton's intentions and Mr Knightley's kindly behaviour. Consequently, as Tanner argues,

when Mr Elton offers his charade, Harriet is persuaded into reading it the way Emma wants it to be read....'Emma spoke for her.' Harriet is not allowed to write or speak for herself; just as she is not allowed to express her real, if inchoate, feelings for Robert Martin – just as, indeed, she is not allowed to live her own life....In addition to whatever real 'kindness' there may be in her attentions to Harriet, there is also the inclination to experiment on her. It is a dangerous and always potentially cruel game (1986:183).

Emma also misconstrues Mr Elton's approbation as esteem for Harriet when he admires her likeness of Harriet, saying, "the attractions you have added are infinitely superior to what she received from nature" (42), and interprets his admiration as "raptures for Harriet's face" (43). Furthermore, when even John Knightley observes that Mr Elton is infatuated with Emma, she dismisses this perception as "absurd" (118), erroneously attributing Mr Elton's charade as being directed at Harriet, and his alarm at her catching Harriet's sore throat as concern for Harriet's health. For Emma is "too eager and busy in her own previous conceptions and views to hear [Mr. Elton] impartially, or see him with clear vision" (110). Although "he had fancied [Emma] in love with him" (136), Emma is so convinced of his love for Harriet, and so blinkered to Mr Elton's advances to herself, that when he makes "violent love to her" (129), she is affronted and angry: "her mind had never been in such perturbation" (133).

Characteristically she acknowledges her error and the mortifying consequences that this has for both Harriet and herself: "The first error and the worst lay at her door" (136). However, even then Emma explores her personal misery first, only subsequently thinking of Harriet and acknowledging the repercussions of what she has done. And while she investigates and examines her conduct she continues to make further resolutions and plans for Harriet.

The hair was curled, and the maid sent away, and Emma sat down to think and be miserable.—It was a wretched business, indeed!—Such an overthrow of every thing

she had been wishing for!—Such a development of every thing most unwelcome!—Such a blow for Harriet!—That was the worst of all. Every part of it brought pain and humiliation, of some sort or other; but, compared with the evil to Harriet, all was light; and she would gladly have submitted to feel yet more mistaken—more in error—more disgraced by mis-judgement, than she actually was, could the effects of her blunders have been confined to herself (134).

Mr Knightley accuses her of abusing her reason, but although she is uncomfortable with this criticism and finds it disagreeable, Emma “did not repent what she had done; she still thought herself a better judge of such a point of female right and refinement than he could be” (65).

And so when Frank arrives to visit at Hartfield, she once again misreads the circumstances and mistakenly anticipates his intentions. She immediately thinks of him in marriageable terms, convinced that Mr Knightley’s critical appraisals of him “had not done him justice” (197). She allows Frank to stimulate her imagination and persuades herself that his double entendres, which have particular relevance for Jane, are intended only for her, interpreting Jane’s blushes as “reprehensible” (243). Frank is “convinced of her indifference” (438), and surprised that she is “quite without suspicion” (260) as to the reality of the situation. But Emma is completely taken in by Frank’s disingenuity, and even indelicately entertains his criticisms of Jane’s looks. She is surprised that he needs to visit London to have his hair cut, but fails to question this, and also fails to associate the inexplicable arrival of the piano with this visit, preferring to continue in her belief that the gift emanates from Mr Dixon, indiscreetly confiding her convictions in Frank. And Jane’s insistence that she be allowed to collect her own letters from the post office merely reinforces Emma’s suspicions of her illicit relationship with Mr Dixon.

But when Mrs Weston assumes an emotional attachment between Mr Knightley and Jane, because Mr Knightley sends his carriage to fetch her to dinner at the Coles, Emma is at great pains to deny this logical possibility, perceiving “no probability in it” (224), seeing it as “evil” (227), and even “mad” (225).

After the ball at the Crown, however, where Mr Elton slights Harriet, Emma discovers that, despite their earlier differences in opinion, she and Mr Knightley hold similar opinions of Mr and Mrs Elton, and that

Mr. Elton was not the superior creature she had believed him. The fever was over, and Emma could harbour little fear of the pulse being quickened again by injurious courtesy (332).

And so Emma hopes for a happy summer, soaking in Mr Knightley's approval, with Harriet rational, and Frank's ardour for her cooled. But this is not to be. Emma's unhealthy, excitable, manipulative tendencies have not been curtailed, and her behaviour at Box Hill reveals this only too clearly. For at Box Hill, when she finds Miss Bates's conversation dull, she is unnecessarily and unforgivably rude to Miss Bates, who has done nothing to provoke such thoughtless behaviour, and she embarrasses her in front of the others. Moreover she indulges in insensitive and insincere flirting with Frank Churchill, unwittingly also mortifying Jane, causing Mr Knightley to voice his anger in no uncertain terms.

And she continues to meddle in Harriet's affairs, encouraging her in "her admiration and preference of Frank Churchill" (402), blind to Harriet's esteem for Mr Knightley. That plan, however, also fails, leaving Emma feeling "completely guilty of having encouraged what she might have repressed", exclaiming: "Poor Harriet! to be a second time the dupe of her misconceptions and flattery...", appreciating and regretting the influential role she has played in Harriet's emotions, and her lack of common sense, saying, "with common sense...I am afraid I have had little to do" (402).

Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness, had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world (408).

Butler says that the quest for truth is more evident in *Emma* than in any other of Austen's novels. And she observes that by the end of the novel Emma has acquired

that capacity for penetration to the truth which is the real hallmark of Jane Austen's admired characters...Jane Austen depicts even the best minds as continually fallible, under (sic) the pressure of new evidence, and potentially undermined from within by selfishness....Her only constants are abstract qualities – directness, honesty, sincerity, humility – the characteristics striven for by people who care about truth. She

sees perfectibility as a condition of human life, but not perfection....The theme, then, is the struggle towards a fixed and permanent truth external to the individual; and chastening, necessarily, to individual presumption and self-consequence (1975:260).

Butler accordingly attempts to explain Emma's conduct as a form of lying on Emma's part, suggesting that there is "a discrepancy between words on the one hand, truth on the other, which affects not merely speech but also trains of thought" (1975:256). Trilling is more conciliatory saying that Emma's "self-love/hubris leads her to be a self-deceiver" (1965:39). But Tanner draws attention to the qualifications on truth introduced by the narrator (1986:207), who warns: "Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken..." (431).

Emma may often "blunder...most dreadfully" (137), but her virtues outweigh her faults. For although Emma is often wrong, she admits this to herself with her typical overriding honesty. And even Mr Knightley acknowledges her innate capacity for good, so that when Emma asks him what she is to do if her vain spirit ever tells her she is wrong, he advises her to use "[n]ot your vain spirit, but your serious spirit.—If one leads you wrong, I am sure the other tells you of it" (330). Emma is therefore not simply a liar as Butler suggests, but, is rather, as has been mentioned above, a casualty of the combination of her boredom and intellectual solitude, her unhealthy need for sensation and excitement and vicarious gratification, her misjudgement and her efforts to liven up her own dreary environment.

Emma is therefore nowhere near the "perfection" (371) that readers expect of an heroine. Nor does she come close to her own standards, or those set by Mr Knightley. For like all Austen's earlier heroines, Emma needs to confront, acknowledge and understand her weaknesses. Moreover she is required to appreciate that reality and the fulfilment of duty may often be dull, so as to enable her to responsibly adopt the role of usefulness that will be required of her when she eventually marries. However, while her redeeming honesty permits her to admit her faults and her wrongfulness, Emma wilfully and persistently continues to indulge herself in her thoughtless matchmaking, oblivious to the hurt she is causing the participants.

It is, however, her "flash of inconsideration" (Tanner,1986:193), directed at the defenceless Miss Bates at Box Hill that brings her manipulative meddling to a head.

For the events at Box Hill are pivotal, causing Mr Knightley to finally confront her over her egotistical and thoughtless behaviour, by reminding her that Miss Bates deserves her compassion and not her insolence, exclaiming: "It was badly done, indeed" (375). And when Mr Knightley leaves her, "without one word of gratitude, of concurrence, of common kindness" (376), Emma is filled with sincere remorse.

If Emma is so riddled with imperfections, what makes her such an attractive heroine? Both Wiltshire and Tanner agree that the answer lies in "her capacity for mistakes, [and] her capacity to transgress and recover" (Wiltshire, 1992:151). Tanner, however, takes the matter further in his attempt to supply the answer:

It is because of this capacity to learn and see her own mistakes and erroneous perceptions and preconceptions that we are attracted to the meddlesome match-maker, Emma. She knows that she lacks 'common sense'; and, despite her sense of self-importance, and her need for 'being *first*' (particularly with Mr Knightley, but also at a ball or a dinner – anywhere in Hartfield in fact), she can arrive at the realisation – rare in such a privileged and spoiled heroine – that 'I was a fool' (1986;199).

Gard suggests that Emma's attractions lie

in her openness, her *activity*. Every reader is made an expert on her failures – in self-knowledge, in self-control, in discipline, in humility, even in proper assessment of what she grandly dubs 'the yeomanry' (1992:173).

For Gard questions the alternatives that are available to Emma and concludes that, as Emma is in pursuit of the romantic and the exciting, she accordingly needs adultery, alliances, secrecy and mystery. And so he argues that Emma's charm lies in her ability to choose the "*most exciting*" (1992:175) interpretation available to her, combined with the fact that although she is often wrong, often confused and often mistaken, she has the ability, on discovering her mistakes, to suffer for these and to reproach herself. And Trilling observes that Emma is so appealing because most of her wrong judgements are directed towards an engaging end in which she believes: "she wants all around her to be distinguished and vivid" (1965:45).

There is no doubt that despite her many flaws Emma remains a lovable heroine. But while her intelligence distinguishes her from most of the other characters, this attribute is not sufficient for the attainment of heroic status: she is also required to

acquire self knowledge, and to face and remedy her imperfections. Whereas the humiliation brought on by the incident at Box Hill brings Emma to within a degree of clear judgement, feeling remorse, and acknowledging her part in the hurt caused to Jane and Miss Bates, Emma still does not realise the extent to which she is both still manipulating Harriet, and avoiding a confrontation with her own destiny. Accordingly when Mr Knightley questions her about her contribution to the alphabet game, which she plays with Frank at Box Hill at Jane's great discomfort, she lightly dismisses his suspicions with confidence and amusement.

And when Frank's engagement to Jane is publicly announced Emma still fails to acknowledge her misjudgement of the situation, or the damage that her interference in the affairs of others might be causing.

Harriet would be anxiety enough; she need no longer be unhappy about Jane, whose troubles and whose ill health having, of course, the same origin, must be equally under cure.—Her days of insignificance and evil were over. She would soon be well, and happy, and prosperous.—Emma could now imagine why her own attentions had been slighted. This discovery laid many smaller matters open. No doubt it had been from jealousy.—In Jane's eyes she had been a rival; and well might any thing she could offer of assistance or regard be repulsed. An airing in the Hartfield carriage would have been the rack, and arrow-root from the Hartfield storeroom must have been poison. She understood it all... (403).

Her concern is for Harriet's disappointment. But it is only when Harriet confides her interest in Mr Knightley, and confesses her belief that the feelings are mutual that Emma, on reflection, realises the full consequences of her meddling with Harriet's emotions, crying "Oh God! that I had never seen her!" (411)

However, as Mr Knightley frequently notes, Emma has the capacity to change, to acquire insight, and to develop and to grow, even if, as Restuccia suggests, she begins to parrot Mr Knightley, whose relationship with Emma is more familial and paternal than that of a lover (1994:16).

The remedy to Emma's unhealthy misinterpretation of circumstances and her rejection of imagination in favour of truth lies in self-criticism and humility, which bring with them self-knowledge and the ability to love truly. But self-criticism and insight are not reached without a degree of emotional suffering. And consequently, on hearing

Harriet's shocking revelation, Emma is exposed to a degree of suffering that she has never before experienced:

The prospect before her now, was threatening to a degree that could not be entirely dispelled—that might not be even partially brightened. If all took place that might take place among the circle of her friends, Hartfield must be comparatively deserted; and she left to cheer her father with the spirits only of ruined happiness (422).

She realises that “she had been entirely under a delusion, totally ignorant of her own heart” (412), and that perhaps it is too late: “Oh! had she never brought Harriet forward! Had she left her where she ought, and where he had told her she ought!” (413)

With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny. She was proved to have been universally mistaken; and she had not quite done nothing—for she had done mischief (412-3).

She also for the first time understands the role she has unwittingly played in contributing to Jane's unhappiness:

They never could have been all three together, without [Emma] having stabbed Jane Fairfax's peace in a thousand instances; and on Box Hill, perhaps, it had been the agony of a mind that would bear no more (421).

And so with this insight she regrets her friendship with Harriet, perceiving her in her true light as only “an engrossing charge” (403), seeing Jane for the first time as a more suitable companion, and recognising the inherent wisdom of Mr Knightley's criticism.

Had she followed Mr. Knightley's known wishes, in paying that attention to Miss Fairfax, which was every way her due; had she tried to know her better; had she done her part towards intimacy; had she endeavoured to find a friend there instead of in Harriet Smith; she must, in all probability, have been spared from every pain which pressed on her now” (421).

Wiltshire suggests that Emma's feelings at this point “replicate the powerlessness Jane has long endured” (1992:142). For, much like Jane in Highbury, Emma suffers

alone at Hartfield, forced to reflect on her behaviour, to withhold Harriet's confession from her friends and family, bound to silence and secrecy, and ironically fully aware for the first time of her dependence on the conduct of others.

If, however, as Emma asserts, Mr Knightley is to "marry no one but herself" (408), Emma needs "to grow more worthy of [Mr. Knightley], whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own" (475).

For Mr Knightley's gestures to others reveal that he is far more than just a sensible man. He quietly and graciously exhibits his humanity, his generosity of spirit and his appreciation of the difficult circumstances that others experience by lending his carriage to Jane, giving the last of his apples to the Bates, and uncharacteristically offering to dance with Harriet when she is slighted by the Eltons. While he too possesses imagination, he desires only "the simple and the natural" (355), and accordingly his imagination is employed responsibly and in terms that would have been endorsed by Wollstonecraft and More. Because, as Tave says, Mr Knightley's imagination begins with what he sees, and, unlike Emma, he examines what he sees, notes the discrepancies and then sees better, forced into understanding what is beyond himself (1973:234). Accordingly although all the signs point to Frank's involvement with Emma, he consistently sees Frank as double dealing.

And so, under his guidance Emma finally acknowledges the error of her ways and her "blindness" (426), hoping "that the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in the future" (475).

Emma has become Mr Knightley's "own Emma, by hand and word" (433), for Mr Knightley will not allow Emma to shut her eyes to the truth. He asserts: "You hear nothing but truth from me" (430). But despite the insight that Emma has acquired into herself and into her relationship with Mr Knightley, and "the perfect happiness of the union" (484), Emma still has not managed to entirely rid herself of her matchmaking dreams, considering Mrs Weston's baby daughter as "a match for...either of Isabella's sons" (461), even while she simultaneously acknowledges the benefits of a daughter. And she accuses Mr Knightley of misunderstanding Robert Martin's announcement of his impending marriage to Harriet. Perhaps this is because even at this late stage a flawless Emma would be a dreary Emma. It is this that leads Tanner to suggest that there is no complete closure in *Emma*, as although "Emma learns a

lot about herself....that does not mean that she arrives a (sic) total self-knowledge” (1986:207).

Mr Knightley, however, remains ever present at her side “as the standard to which she must return” (Tave,1973:239), forcing her to finally admit: “at that time I was a fool” (474); to acknowledge her blindness, and to arrive at the realisation that the simple truth is something more interesting and more beautiful (Tave:1973:253).

What totally different feelings did Emma take back into the house from what she had brought out!—she had then been only daring to hope for a little respite of suffering;—she was now in an exquisite flutter of happiness, and such happiness moreover as she believed must still be greater when the flutter should have passed away (434).

And so we are left to presume that the happily married couple return after the marriage ceremony to Hartfield where Emma will begin her married life, with the indulgence of her father and Mrs Weston now tempered by Mr Knightley, and her development carefully monitored under his watchful eye, until she is ultimately able to assume the responsibility to which she has been bred.

CHAPTER SIX

PERSUASION

This dissertation focuses on those factors relating to illness, accident and death. But in this novel all these are interrelated, and while they are present in the other novels, they are more intense in *Persuasion*, leading Wiltshire to describe *Persuasion* as “a novel of trauma: of broken bones, broken heads and broken hearts” (1992:165); a novel about the adjustment by its characters to loss of health, hope, career, home, spouse, and even of values (1992:157).

Although all the Austen novels deal with these subjects, this novel differs from the others in its handling of death, illness and accident, in that these issues are both more severe, more complex, more polarised, and perhaps more instructive in function than in the other novels. For while accidents and illness are rife in this book and act as plot determinants, they also perform a cathartic function out of which spiritual and emotional well-being is achieved: illness and accident and their concomitant suffering lead to individual introspection, which in turn enables characters to develop, to grow and to become more worthwhile human beings, who are able to contribute more fully to the larger society in which they find themselves. Moreover illness is not confined to acute physical and psychosomatic illnesses but for the first time also covers chronic disease, and in such instances leads to very different consequences.

In *Persuasion* Austen also executes a most complex feat in balancing and contrasting the rank, age, looks, virtues, wealth and health, and even the marriages of her characters, who are presented as microcosms of the middle and upper middle class societies of Bath and Uppercross. On the one hand males and females, the old and the young, the lovely and the unlovely, the ill and the healthy, the rich and the poor and those of high and low standing are arrayed over a continuum of age, looks, health, wealth and rank, and on the other hand they are also arrayed and contrasted according to their vices and virtues, which range from extreme deviousness, selfishness, vanity, crass stupidity and lack of sensitivity to innocence, sensitivity and selflessness. And all are subjected to the examination and analysis that the passing of time permits.

Austen begins by scrutinising the individuality of each central character in minute detail and projecting this against a multifaceted background tapestry of interwoven traditional social institutions and conventions. Each of these characters, irrespective of his/her age, looks, rank or gender, is then subjected to hardship or loss, which varies in degree, and includes debt, heartache, separation, accident and illness, all of which could be expected to result in personal introspection, and possibly even consequent character changes. And subsequently, unlike in any of her other novels, she exposes her cast to a lengthy passage of time which enables the effects of hardship to be experienced to the full. She finally applies a typically Austenian standard to each of her characters and their relationships, testing them and assessing whether any have acquired either the facility or the will to benefit or learn from their experiences, to examine themselves and to acquire the necessary self-knowledge which anticipates change, to resist coercion and to escape from the social conventions or individual restrictions with which they have previously been burdened.

Thus the Elliot family is presented as an example of extreme selfishness and banality, as exemplified by most of its members, each of whom, other than Anne, is firmly bound within the shackles of his/her class, pride, vanity and self-indulgence. None shows any flexibility or desire to escape the shackles, but reveals rather both an inability and a reluctance to change, inclining more towards satisfaction in the narrowness of his/her world and aspirations. And the passage of time has little effect on these people.

The continuum is also employed to examine, compare and contrast beauty and ugliness. In this case Sir Walter and his daughter Elizabeth are placed at one end of the continuum with Mrs Clay at the other end. And the hospitality and humanity of the sailors and their wives is offset against the selfishness and snobbery of the Elliots, and the sense of entrepreneurship and initiative present in the sailors, against the Elliots' inertia and stasis.

The period during which *Persuasion* was written was characterised by dramatic social transformation, and upheaval, which brought into question the stability of Austen's world. The landed aristocracy was threatened by an up and coming middle class which seemed poised to fill the vacuum left by the failure of the aristocracy in its traditional roles, morality and values. This state of disorder and social mobility is

intimated at in *Persuasion*, with many of the characters metaphorically assuming roles that reflect the threat of turmoil which then hung over English society.

Sir Walter Elliot, with his petty vanities, his narcissistic tendencies, his selfishness and overindulgences, symbolically reflects many of the worst elements of society. And his complete lack of the traditional values of nobility and chivalry symbolises the decline of the aristocracy, permitting him to be portrayed as the antithesis of the aristocratic ideal, leading Fulford to describe him as “an image of pampered aristocratic womanliness” (1999:186).

But perhaps more importantly, Sir Walter also remains indifferent to important current events such as the Napoleonic wars, causing Fulford to suggest that “his vanity, if repeated amongst his class, would be dangerous to the very survival of the nation” (1999:186), and would lead to the disintegration of moral and social order. For Sir Walter is both indifferent and impervious to the contribution that the Navy has made to the nation, judging its officers only in terms of his own questionable values, saying,

“I should be sorry to see any friend of mine belonging to [the Navy]....First, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of; and secondly, as it cuts up a man's youth and vigour most horribly; a sailor grows old sooner than any other man....becoming prematurely an object of disgust himself....they are all knocked about, and exposed to every climate, and every weather, till they are not fit to be seen. It is a pity they are not knocked on the head at once, before they reach Admiral Baldwin's age” (19-20).

Arguably Sir Walter is one of the sickest, most unpleasant and most dysfunctional of all the characters encountered in Austen's novels. For while he is physically healthy, and at the age of fifty-four still fine to look at, like Dorian Gray, his outer self belies his inner thoughts and moral void, and his health and beauty, which are only skin deep, conceal his inner decay.

The narrator reveals that while Lady Elliot lived, she “had humoured, or softened, or concealed his failings, and promoted his real respectability...”(4), but that without her sensible and moderating influence, and with the passage of time, his vanity, in

combination with his complete deficiency of decency or morality, has finally consumed him. For vanity is

the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character....Few women could think more of their personal appearance than he did; nor could the valet of any new made lord be more delighted with the place he held in society. He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy; and the Sir Walter Elliot, who united these gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion (4).

As such, physical appearance or status has become his only method of evaluating people, and accordingly he looks no deeper than these superficial attributes. Nor are his daughters excluded from his critical observations. Thus, despite the fact that Elizabeth is twenty-nine, and seemingly destined for a barren future, he still forecasts that she will one day achieve a suitable marriage. For he perceives his favourite daughter as

still the same handsome Miss Elliot that she had begun to be thirteen years ago; and Sir Walter might be excused, therefore, in forgetting her age, or, at least, be deemed only half a fool, for thinking himself and Elizabeth as blooming as ever, amidst the wreck of the good looks of every body else; for he could plainly see how old all the rest of his family and acquaintance were growing. Anne haggard, Mary coarse, every face in the neighbourhood worsting; and the rapid increase of the crow's foot about Lady Russell's temples had long been a distress to him (6).

And even at the height of her bloom, because she fails to resemble him, he finds Anne unattractive, condemning her to spinsterhood. For he finds

little to admire in [Anne], (so totally different were her delicate features and mild dark eyes from his own); there could be nothing in them now that she was faded and thin, to excite his esteem. He had never indulged much hope, he had now none, of ever reading her name in any other page of his favourite work (6).

Mary's looks do not deserve a mention. But in his eyes she "had acquired a little artificial importance, by becoming Mrs. Charles Musgrove" (5), even if in Sir Walter's mind she had

merely connected herself with an old country family of respectability and large fortune, and had therefore *given* all the honour, and received none (6).

He tells Anne:

"The last time I saw [Mary], she had a red nose, but I hope that may not happen every day....If I thought it would not tempt her to go out in sharp winds, and grow coarse, I would send her a new hat and pelisse" (142).

Nor are Sir Walter's friends, or even his acquaintances, excluded from his critical observations and his facile preoccupation with appearance. He says of Lady Russell, "[m]orning visits are never fair by women at her time of life, who make themselves up so little. If she would only wear rouge, she would not be afraid of being seen..." (215). And he concerns himself with the appearance of Admiral Croft, remarking that "if his own man might have had the arranging of [Admiral Croft's] hair, he should not be ashamed of being seen with him any where" (32).

From a cursory reading it therefore seems ironic that Sir Walter, who is so obsessed with his own looks and those of others, and who advises Anne to reject Mrs Smith because of her lack of standing and her ill health, ignores the obvious physical failings of Mrs Clay. For Mrs Clay has several unattractive attributes: freckles, "a projecting tooth, and a clumsy wrist, which [Sir Walter] was continually making severe remarks upon, in her absence" (34). Elizabeth comments on these, saying,

[f]reckles do not disgust me so very much as they do him: I have known a face not materially disfigured by a few, but he abominates them. You must have heard him notice Mrs.Clay's freckles (35).

But Mrs Clay, although perceived by Lady Russell as "very unequal" and "a very dangerous companion" (16), is "young, and certainly altogether well-looking, and possessed, in an acute mind and assiduous pleasing manners, infinitely more dangerous attractions than any merely personal might have been" (34). She is scheming, insidious, and conniving, "a clever insinuating handsome woman, poor and plausible"(206), "who understood the art of pleasing; the art of pleasing, at least, at Kellynch-hall" (15).

A deeper reading reveals that it is mostly Mrs Clay's flattery of Sir Walter that renders her attractive to him, counteracting, and even partially concealing those physical features which he so obviously finds unattractive. Furthermore it becomes

evident that the range of this continuum of outer beauty would seem to incorporate an additional link affiliated to inner beauty and inner ugliness. For, typically, this novel describes the outer physical state of health of its characters as more often than not reflecting their inner state of mental, moral and emotional health. Thus Mrs Clay's teeth, wrist and freckles mirror her inner flaws, and interestingly she uses Gowland's Lotion, on Sir Walter's advice, to improve herself, (which Austen confirms in a letter to her niece was also used to treat venereal disease in *Letters*:488).

Sir Walter is moreover in debt. For in the absence of his wife's moderating influence, since her death he has been unable to monitor his finances, maintain any restraint of economy or live within his means. And so his expenses exceed his income, as the Kellynch property is "not equal to Sir Walter's apprehension of the state required in its possessor" (9). And predictably, on being called upon to cut his expenses, and repay his debts, he remains adamant that he has no intention of either compromising his name, taste, pride or dignity by selling off land, nor "relinquishing their comforts in a way not to be borne" (10). Accordingly, instead of reducing their standard of living, the family chooses to "quit Kellynch-Hall" (13), to let it, but to keep these circumstances a "profound secret" (15) because of the "degradation" (15) of being forced into such ignominious circumstances.

To add to his unlovely and unhealthy attributes Sir Walter is also an awful snob, and this is reflected in his attitude towards the officers of the navy, who are returning from war, and who may be interested in renting his home. For he says, "[t]here are few among the gentlemen of the navy, I imagine, who would not be surprised to find themselves in a house of this description" (18). And in a single comment he dismisses the contribution of the navy to the country and his family, showing his own ignorance of the war, and simultaneously establishing his appallingly facile values and social inflexibility:

"I have let my house to Admiral Croft," would sound extremely well; very much better than to any mere *Mr.* — —; a *Mr.* (save, perhaps, some half dozen in the nation,) always needs a note of explanation. An admiral speaks his own consequence, and, at the same time, can never make a baronet look small. In all their dealings and intercourse, Sir Walter Elliot must ever have the precedence (24).

Sir Walter's inner moral failings become increasingly evident when contrasted with the conduct of the naval men, and in particular the achievements of honest Admiral

Croft, self sufficient Captain Harville, the hospitable officers in the naval company, and the virile, active, resourceful Frederick Wentworth, all of whom are, at the inception of the novel, self-made men, who both symbolise the rising middle class and represent the model on which “a stable domestic society could be founded” (Fulford:186).

True to form, when he is first made aware of Admiral Croft, Sir Walter’s only comment, despite the Admiral’s extreme suitability is, “I take it for granted...that his face is about as orange as the cuffs and capes of my livery” (22). And when Admiral Croft visits Bath he says, “I suspect...that Admiral Croft will be best known in Bath as the renter of Kellynch-hall” (166).

On departing from Kellynch-hall for Bath, Sir Walter characteristically bows condescendingly to his tenants. And Bath more than answers Sir Walter’s expectations. For “[t]heir house was undoubtedly the best in Camden-place....Their acquaintance was exceedingly sought after. Every body was wanting to visit them....Here were funds of enjoyment!” (137) The house is moreover “a lofty, dignified situation, such as becomes a man of consequence” (137), to which, even if he has “no inclination to listen to her” (137), he is pleased to welcome Anne, as “[h]er making a fourth, when they sat down to dinner, was noticed as an advantage” (137).

But in Bath his social aspirations, snobbery and self absorption become even more obvious and more exacerbated, with the refrain of “‘our cousins Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret;’ ‘our cousins, the Dalrymples,’ sound[ing in Anne’s] ears all day long” (148), despite the Dalrymples’ obvious lack of “superiority of manner, accomplishment, or understanding” (150).

When Mr Elliot re-emerges from the past, and is able most charmingly to clear up all the misunderstandings that had arisen between himself and Sir Walter as a result of his previous marriage, Sir Walter readily excuses his heir’s earlier extraordinary behavioural lapses, having “not a fault to find in [Mr. Elliot]” (138). For Mr Elliot’s iniquitous conduct becomes justifiable in Sir Walter’s eyes on the premise that Mr Elliot’s wife had been

a very fine woman, with a large fortune, in love with him! Sir Walter seemed to admit it as complete apology, and though Elizabeth could not see the circumstance in quite so favourable a light, she allowed it be a great extenuation (139).

However, when in Bath Anne renews her friendship with an old school friend he exclaims disparagingly:

“and who is Miss Anne Elliot to be visiting in Westgate-buildings?—Mrs. Smith. A widow Mrs. Smith,—and who was her husband....Upon my word, Miss Anne Elliot, you have the most extraordinary taste! Every thing that revolts other people, low company, paltry rooms, foul air, disgusting associations are inviting to you” (157).

In Bath Sir Walter’s self-devouring vanity, narcissism, and his obsession with the appearances of others, also become exaggerated. For there are so many women to look at, and their looks are so disappointing!

The worst of Bath was, the number of its plain women. He did not mean to say that there were no pretty women, but the number of the plain was out of all proportion....he had counted eighty-seven women go by, one after another, without there being a tolerable face among them....there certainly were a dreadful multitude of ugly women in Bath; and as for the men! they were infinitely worse. Such scare-crows as the streets were full of! (141-2)

Elizabeth, Sir Walter’s eldest daughter, is “very handsome, with well-bred, elegant manners” (140). But Elizabeth is no more than a carbon copy of her father, both in her good looks and in her social aspirations. Accordingly “being very handsome, and very like himself, her influence had always been great, and they had gone on together most happily” (5). Elizabeth would have liked to have married Mr Elliot, as “[s]he had liked the man for himself, and still more for being her father’s heir”(8). But this was not to be. And so, while, until recently, she shared Sir Walter’s pleasure in the Baronetage, she now has some misgivings in that regard:

She was fully satisfied of being still quite as handsome as ever; but she felt her approach to the years of danger, and would have rejoiced to be certain of being properly solicited by baronet-blood within the next twelvemonth or two. Then might she again take up the book of books with as much enjoyment as in her early youth; but now she liked it not. Always to be presented with the date of her own birth, and see no marriage follow but that of a youngest sister, made the book an evil (7).

Elizabeth is also just as self-centred as her father. Accordingly when she is asked by her father to reduce their expenses at Kellynch-hall, her only suggestions are to cut back on donations to charities and presents for Anne. And when these insensitive efforts fall short of the desired effect, she, like her father, feels “ill-used and unfortunate...[for neither was] able to devise any means of lessening their expenses without compromising their dignity...” (10).

Furthermore she is as great a snob as Sir Walter, arguing that their cousins, the Dalrymples, were not to be embarrassed by the presence of the Crofts in Bath, suggesting instead that the Crofts be left to find their own level, saying, “[t]here are several odd-looking men walking about here, who, I am told, are sailors. The Crofts will associate with them!” (166)

Appearances are also central to her well-being. Inevitably, when the Musgroves arrive in Bath, Elizabeth is reluctant to display any evidence of the Elliot’s reduced life-style, and so she invites them after dinner: “It was a struggle between propriety and vanity; but vanity got the better, and then Elizabeth was happy again” (219). And it follows that, despite initially ignoring Captain Wentworth, she later gives him an invitation to visit:

The truth was, that Elizabeth had been long enough in Bath, to understand the importance of a man of such an air and appearance as his. The past was nothing. The present was that Captain Wentworth would move about well in her drawing-room (226).

Predictably Sir Walter’s nephew, Mr Elliot, who is the heir presumptive to the baronetcy, and all that goes with it, is equally emotionally dishonest, and more morally corrupt than Sir Walter and Elizabeth. However, as he is a good-looking man Sir Walter is happy to be associated with him:

He did justice to his very gentlemanlike appearance, his air of elegance and fashion, his good shaped face, his sensible eye, but at the same time, “must lament his being very much under-hung, a defect which time seemed to have increased; nor could he pretend to say that ten years had not altered almost every feature for the worse....He did not mean to complain, however. Mr. Elliot was better to look at than most men, and he had no objection to being seen with him any where” (141).

And even Anne observes that Mr Elliot is

as good-looking as he had appeared at Lyme, his countenance improved by speaking, and his manners were so exactly what they ought to be, so polished, so easy, so particularly agreeable, that she could compare them in excellence to only one person's manners (143).

Anne, however, notes and questions the discrepancy between the Mr Elliot that she had encountered years ago at Kellynch-hall, and the Mr Elliot with whom she now renews her acquaintance in Bath, and is unable to reconcile the two disparate manifestations:

"Can this be Mr. Elliot"...Every thing united in him; good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart. He had strong feelings of family-attachment and family-honour, without pride or weakness; he lived...without display....He was steady, observant, moderate, candid; never runaway with by spirits or by selfishness...with a sensibility to what was amiable and lovely, and a value for all the felicities of domestic life, which characters of fancied enthusiasm and violent agitation seldom really possess (146-7).

She remains unconvinced by his easy and superficially charming appearance and manners, apprehensive of the absence of strong passions in him, and his tendency towards superficially appropriate behaviour:

She distrusted the past, if not the present....How could it ever be ascertained that his mind was truly cleansed?....Her early impressions were incurable....Mr. Elliot was too generally agreeable (160-1).

The fact that Mr Elliot has only been a widower for seven months, but is already considering a match with Anne, also raises Anne's suspicions. She realises that his recently renewed connections with her family are linked to his interest in the worth of the baronetcy, even if he is ostensibly sincere in his attentions to her. She examines both his past and present behaviour, looking deeper than his good looks and his charm, questioning why "a very sensible man" (140) with his riches would now be interested in the impoverished Kellynch estate. And she notes, that "[h]is value for rank and connexion... [is] greater than hers" (148), with Mrs Smith confirming that the passage of time has merely elevated "the value of the baronetcy" (206) in his eyes.

But after the revelation of his relationship with his previous wife, and the short period he has allowed for the formal mourning of her death, Anne is shocked. He who “had not been a widower seven months” (147), was making “a very rapid recovery from the awful impression of [his marriage] being dissolved” (148).

Consequently she concludes that Mr Elliot is in fact a “a disingenuous, artificial, worldly man” (208), who is not at all what he appears or seeks to be,

“a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; who, for his own interest or ease would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. He has no feeling for others. Those whom he has been the chief cause of leading into ruin, he can neglect and desert without the smallest compunction, He is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion. Oh! he is black at heart, hollow and black!” (199)

Lady Russell, Lady Elliot’s erstwhile friend, provides a middle ground between the pride and narcissism of the elder Elliots and Anne, assuming a maternal role, in much the same way that the much younger Miss Taylor becomes surrogate mother and adviser to Emma Woodhouse. Lady Russell is not very clever, limited by her sound rather than “quick abilities” (11). Nor is she part of the higher echelons of the aristocracy, being the wife of only a knight. She is, however,

a benevolent, charitable, good woman, and capable of strong attachments; most correct in her conduct, strict in her notions of decorum, and with manners that were held a standard of good-breeding. She had a cultivated mind, and was, generally speaking, rational and consistent—but she had prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them. Herself, the widow of only a knight, she gave the dignity of a baronet all its due... (11).

Lady Russell’s failings are material to the plot of this novel, for her lack of clear perception causes her to buy in to the idea of Elliot pride. Moreover her prejudices, which override her “steady age and character” (5), and so affect and determine Anne’s future, can hardly be called healthy. For being “a woman of the greatest influence with every body!...able to persuade a person to any thing” (103), this

combination of prejudice and ability to influence becomes irresistible and causes great damage.

Her “delicate sense of honour” (11), however, counteracts many of her weaknesses. Unlike Sir Walter Lady Russell believes that

“the person who has contracted debts must pay them; and though a great deal is due to the feelings of the gentleman, and the head of a house, like your father, there is still more due to the character of an honest man” (12).

But in line with her predisposition towards position, she believes that “[i]t would be too much to expect Sir Walter to descend into a small house in his own neighbourhood” (14). And so, despite Anne’s reluctance, she supports the Elliot’s move to Bath in their attempt to pay off their debts.

When Anne first falls in love with Frederick Wentworth, he has no definite prospects of success, and, as a sailor his life was at times in some danger. Lady Russell, with her leanings in favour of rank, however fails to support Anne’s alliance with Wentworth: she believed that Anne, at nineteen,

with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind...[would be throwing herself away] in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him...and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession...a stranger without alliance or fortune (26).

Lady Russell shares a position of privilege with Sir Walter, even if her social standing is somewhat less than his. Yet she is placed at the opposite end of the continuum to Sir Walter. For whereas Sir Walter is completely self-indulgent, and inward looking, preoccupied with his looks, appearance and social status, and whereas his anxieties are strictly self-serving, Lady Russell’s primary concern is for the ongoing welfare and friendship of his daughter, Anne:

To Lady Russell, indeed, she was a most dear and highly valued god-daughter, favourite and friend. Lady Russell loved them all; but it was only in Anne that she could fancy the mother to revive again (6).

However, in her reaction to Anne’s engagement to Wentworth Lady Russell allies herself with Sir Walter, and her response exhibits her commonality with him in the

perception of class. Sir Walter was astonished, cold and silent: "He thought it a very degrading alliance; and Lady Russell, though with more tempered and pardonable pride, received it as a most unfortunate one" (26).

Therefore Lady Russell succeeds in persuading Anne of Wentworth's unsuitability as a partner:

Anne Elliot, so young; known to so few, to be snatched off by a stranger without alliance or fortune; or rather sunk by him into a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence! It must not be, if by any fair interference of friendship, any representations from one who had almost a mother's love, and mother's rights, it would be prevented (27).

In the circumstances prevailing at the time of the engagement, Lady Russell's advice against marriage would have been sound, despite the love that the couple held for each other. However, notwithstanding the passing of eight years, and despite Anne's meaningless existence, Lady Russell's prejudices in favour of position and status continue to operate unchanged, and therefore, when Mr Elliot appears on the scene, she attempts to convince Anne of Mr Elliot's suitability as a husband:

"I own that to be able to regard you as the future mistress of Kellynch, the future Lady Elliot—to look forward and see you occupying your dear mother's place, succeeding to all her rights, and all her popularity, as well as to all her virtues, would be the highest possible gratification to me.—You are your mother's self in countenance and disposition; and if I might be allowed to fancy you such as she was, in situation, and name, and home, presiding and blessing in the same spot, and only superior to her in being more highly valued! My dearest Anne, it would give me more delight than is often felt at my time of life!" (159-60)

Although Wentworth remains committed to the sea, when he reappears in the novel eight years later, his financial prospects and his status have changed materially, and so, with Anne's welfare in mind, Lady Russell is ultimately convinced by Anne to change her mind and her attitude towards Wentworth. Time has revealed the errors in her advice to Anne and the flaws in her initial rejection of Wentworth. And so she realises how gravely she has been misled by appearances, and how she has acted to Anne's detriment as a result of her personal failings:

Captain Wentworth's manners had not suited her own ideas, she had been too quick in suspecting them to indicate a character of dangerous impetuosity....There was nothing less for Lady Russell to do, than to admit that she had been pretty completely wrong, and to take up a new set of opinions and of hopes....But she was a very good woman, and if her second object was to be sensible and well-judging, her first was to see Anne happy. She loved Anne better than she loved her own abilities; and when the awkwardness of the beginning was over found little hardship in attaching herself as a mother to the man who was securing the happiness of her other child (249).

Lady Russell, unlike Sir Walter, has an inherent ability to learn from experience, to acquire insight, and to do right by the people she loves. And with the acquisition of insight, she escapes the limitations of her earlier prejudices, and finally gives the couple the blessing that Anne requires from her.

The continuum of health and illness also explores the extremes of death, which is positioned at the one limit, and psychosomatic illness, which is reflected as its opposite. And once again the connections between real illness and inner worth, and the link between psychosomatic illness and self-centredness become evident.

Mary is the daughter of a baronet, and a very weak man, and, without a mother to guide her, she inherits many of the weaknesses of the aristocracy, which in her case are reflected in the form of hypochondria and dependency:

While well, and happy, and properly attended to, she had great good humour and excellent spirits; but any indisposition sunk her completely; she had no resources for solitude; and inheriting a considerable share of the Elliot self-importance, was very prone to add to every other distress that of fancying herself neglected and ill-used. In person, she was inferior to both sisters, and had, even in her bloom, only reached the dignity of being "a fine girl" (37).

Like the other hypochondriacs we have already encountered, Mary is yet another of Wollstonecraft's "foolish women" (1992:309). And so Mary is

often a little unwell, and always thinking a great deal of her own complaints, and always in the habit of claiming Anne when any thing was the matter....and foreseeing that she should not have a day's health all the autumn, entreated, or rather required her, for it was hardly entreaty, to come to Uppercross Cottage, and bear her company as long as she should want her, instead of going to Bath (33).

Mary is placed at the opposite end of the scale from two highly courageous, self-sacrificing women: Mrs Smith and Mrs Croft. But they are also placed at opposite ends of the continuum from each other. For, while Mrs Croft is exceptionally healthy, as confirmed by her “reddened and weather-beaten complexion” (48), Mrs Smith suffers bravely from her very real illnesses. In contrast Mary succumbs willingly to her imaginary maladies: “her being unwell and out of spirits, was almost a matter of course” (37). Moreover her sore-throats “are always worse than anybody’s” (164).

Interestingly enough Mary’s symptoms are neither meaningless nor fortuitous. For Mary’s illnesses are not merely the result of her chronic hypochondria. Their cause is multiple and complex, partly the result of boredom, partly dependency, partly an inability to entertain herself and partly the result of her belief in her own exalted status. Thus she says,

“it is so very uncomfortable, not having a carriage of one’s own. Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove took me, and we were so crowded....And I think it very likely that my illness to-day may be owing to it” (39).

Max Adler theorised that the retreat into illness is a means of obtaining power, arguing: “Every neurosis can be understood as an attempt to free oneself from a feeling of inferiority in order to gain a feeling of superiority” (in Brown,1977:39). According to Adler’s theory therefore, neuroses such as hypochondria arise out of situations where the individual, who finds himself unable to attain his goals of superiority

by legitimate means develops his symptoms either as an excuse to avoid situations in which he might be shown up as a failure or as a means of gaining control over others by a sort of emotional blackmail (in Brown,1977:40).

Gorman suggests instead that “[t]he fear of death lies in the shadow of hypochondria” (1993:11), and that Mary’s unspecific illnesses protect her from her fears. It seems that the death of her mother at such an early age (Mary was just ten years old when Lady Elliot died) might have stunted her emotional development; and that Mary may have, as a child, unconsciously repressed her fears, only to find them re-emerging in adulthood, transformed into uncontrollable chronic hypochondria. For Mary is neither self sufficient, nor able to participate in or determine the course of

her life responsibly, and her emotional development has remained static, retaining much of the dramatic self-centredness of a ten year old:

“I do believe if Charles were to see me dying, he would not think there was any thing the matter with me. I am sure, Anne, if you would, you might persuade him that I really am very ill—a great deal worse than I ever own” (44).

Wiltshire proposes that Mary’s neuroses are

a psychosomatic substitute for flattery and self-importance, a metaphor for boredom and the sense of ill-usage that corrodes her existence, filling for her those vacuities of the gentlewoman’s life which are experienced too, in their different ways, by her sisters Elizabeth and Anne (1992:197).

Whatever speculative causes underlie Mary’s eccentricities, it is a fact that Mary cannot bear to be alone. She constantly requires the company of others. For “Mary’s ailments lessened by having a constant companion” (46). And so she says, “I am so ill I can hardly speak. I have not seen a creature the whole morning!” (37) She plaintively recalls how ill she was while Charles and the Musgroves were absent, saying, “Charles is out shooting. I have not seen him since seven o’clock. He would go, though I told him how ill I was” (37), and, “though I told [Mr Musgrove] how ill I was, not one of them have been near me” (38). And she unreasonably demands Anne’s presence, complaining, “Anne, I am so very unwell! It was quite unkind of you not to come on Thursday” (38). Inadequate as she is, Mary relies on others for aid and support and her illnesses facilitate this: “I cannot possibly do without Anne’, was Mary’s reasoning” (33):

“I made the best of it; I always do; but I was very far from well at the time; and I do not think I ever was so ill in my life as I have been all this morning—very unfit to be left alone, I am sure. Suppose I were to be seized of a sudden in some dreadful way, and not able to ring the bell!” (37)

Predictably, in the company of family and friends she quickly regains both her good health and her equanimity:

A little farther perseverance in patience, and forced cheerfulness on Anne’s side, produced nearly a cure on Mary’s. She could soon sit upright on the sofa, and began to hope she might be able to leave it by dinner-time. Then, forgetting to think of it, she

was at the other end of the room, beautifying a nosegay; then, she ate her cold meat; and then she was well enough to propose a little walk (39).

Mary has also inherited Sir Walter's self-centred sense of position and affectation. She shares Sir Walter's belief that she is superior to the family into which she has married, and frequently complains about not being given social precedence: "Mrs. Musgrove was very apt not to give her the precedence that was her due" (46). Moreover she looks down on the Hayters, into which family her sister-in-law has decided to marry,

and thought it would be quite a misfortune to have the existing connection between the families renewed – very sad for herself and her children...."I cannot think him at all a fit match for Henrietta....Nothing but a country curate. A most improper match for Miss Musgrove, of Uppercross" (76).

And she confides in Wentworth: "It is very unpleasant, having such connexions! But I assure you that I have never been in the house above twice in my life" (86).

To add to her problems Mary has married a similarly immature and self-centred individual, who "did nothing with much zeal, but sport; and his time was otherwise trifled away" (43).

Charles seems unwilling, but is more probably unable, to give his wife the attention she requires, and this may well lie behind his interest in sport. And so, while it might seem difficult at first to accept that Mary has a happy relationship with her husband, because of the selfishness and immaturity of both, it appears that this is indeed the case. For Charles and Mary are portrayed as two children playing at the game of life and marriage. And, as little more than a child herself, with her selfish whims and needs, it follows that emotionally immature as she is, Mary must therefore also be incapable of assuming any responsibility for her children. And again this is so. Mary finds her offspring exceedingly tiresome and totally unmanageable, despite the fact that the children behave well with both Anne and Mrs Musgrove.

Wollstonecraft argues:

To be a good mother, a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands....I

now only mean to insist, that unless the understanding of woman be enlarged, and her character rendered more firm, by being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have sufficient sense or command of temper to manage her children properly (1992:272).

Mary's family unit consists of nothing more than a group of children lacking parental guidance, and it is clear that the uncontrollable behaviour of the children is directly related to Mary and her husband's renunciation of their parental roles. For, as neither Mary nor Charles has managed to outgrow their childish self-absorption, both are incapable of looking after their own children. Paradoxically their failures as parents aggravate Mary's emotional composure, causing her psychosomatic illnesses. Although this state may well be comic, it also has its serious aspects and consequences, as it seems that Mary might never progress past this infantile phase.

Wiltshire points out that Austen supplies a person who is disabled by injury or disease in each location in which the action in *Persuasion* takes place (1992:165). Thus in Bath Anne renews her acquaintance with Mrs Smith, who, like Mary, is frequently ill. But Mrs Smith is positioned at the other end of the scale from Mary. For although Mrs Smith is crippled by her chronic infirmity, she suffers bravely.

Mrs Smith is a former school friend of Anne's who, as a slightly older pupil, had twelve years previously supplied Anne with the emotional support she had required in order to overcome the death of her mother. But

twelve years had transformed the fine-looking, well grown Miss Hamilton, in all the glow of health and confidence of superiority, into a poor, infirm helpless widow, receiving the visit of her former protégée as a favour (153).

Mrs Smith is now riddled with ill-health of a verifiable, physical nature. Moreover she is beset with financial and administrative difficulties. While she had "married a man of fortune" (152), she has been left widowed and poor.

Her husband had been extravagant; and at his death, about two years before, had left his affairs dreadfully involved. She had had difficulties of every sort to contend with, and in addition to these distresses, had been afflicted with a severe rheumatic fever, which finally settling in her legs, had made her for the present a cripple. She had come to Bath on that account, and was now in lodgings near the hot-baths, living in a

very humble way, unable even to afford herself the comfort of a servant, and of course almost excluded from society (152).

She is completely alienated in Bath, and her situation is utterly cheerless, lonely, and apparently hopeless:

She had been very fond of her husband,—she had buried him. She had been used to affluence,—it was gone. She had no child...no relations to assist...no health to make all the rest supportable. Her accommodations were limited... (154).

In a way Mrs Smith's isolation symbolises what Anne's future might have been. But, despite her physical, financial and emotional difficulties, Mrs Smith is not an unhappy person. She has been dispossessed of husband, home and financial security, but she remains determinedly independent, bearing all her troubles with great fortitude. And her restricted life is filled with "hours of occupation and enjoyment" (154), so that in complete contrast to Mary, when Mrs Smith is faced with such overwhelming difficulties, her

good sense and agreeable manners [prevail]...and a disposition to converse and be cheerful beyond her expectation....[N]either sickness nor sorrow seemed to have closed her heart or ruined her spirits....[H]ere was that elasticity of mind, that disposition to be comforted, that power of turning readily from evil to good, and of finding employment which carried her out of herself, which was from Nature alone. It was the choicest gift of Heaven...designed to counterbalance almost every other want" (153-4).

Like the Elliots, Mrs Smith has been left with financial crises. But, whereas theirs are of their own making, and whereas they attempt to maintain their standard of living and their status, she is the victim of circumstances beyond her control. She, however, reduces her standard of living to fit her income, "living in a very humble way...and of course almost excluded from society" (153).

Mrs Smith's principal virtue is that, despite the very real hardships which she endures, she refuses to accept her fate. And in this respect she is therefore also unlike Anne. She confronts the nature of her illness, rejects her dependence on a patriarchal system, and works through the crippling disabilities with which she has been faced, learning from them, developing and growing, and overcoming their disabling nature. Mrs Smith is therefore, in one way or another, the counterpoint to

all the Elliots. For Mrs Smith is a survivor, who has been able, against all odds, to transform her desperate existence from negative into positive, and to acquire and use her limited skills to advance herself economically.

Conversely that other courageous woman, Mrs Croft, is at the pinnacle of good health. But Admiral and Mrs Croft are not merely physically healthy. Their outer health reflects their inner worth, and the strength of their conjugal bond. Thus, while there may not be any evidence of this in the text, Nina Auerbach suggests that Mrs Croft and her husband are symbols of Jane Austen's utopian vision of a "brave new world", who with feeling, emotion and vision, "governed by nature and by human desire", will threaten and finally dispossess those "who cannot accommodate themselves to these laws" (in Rzepka,1994:1). And in similar vein Cantor describes the Crofts as a political metaphor, representing the rising middle class, who install themselves as careful caretakers of the Kellynch estate when Sir Walter vacates his ancestral home in their favour (1999:133).

Mrs Croft's appearance is at best only agreeable. Although she is

neither tall nor fat, [she] had a squareness, uprightness, and vigour of form, which gave importance to her person. She had bright dark eyes, good teeth, and altogether an agreeable face; though her reddened and weather-beaten complexion, the consequence of her having been almost as much at sea as her husband, made her seem to have lived some years longer in the world than her real eight and thirty. Her manners were open, easy, and decided, like one who had no distrust of herself, and no doubts of what to do; without any approach to coarseness, however, or any want of good humour (48).

And the Admiral is "a very hale, hearty, well-looking man" (22), who is also described as weather-beaten. Their bodies typically exemplify their combined underlying emotional strength, with their visible outer looks simultaneously matching and indicating the degree of exposure, and the trials and tribulations that they have weathered together. Their lives have not been easy, but as a couple they have endured the vagaries of climate and ocean, battles at sea, and survived all, although their experiences have taken their toll on their physical appearances.

Unlike the Elliots in every conceivable way, the Crofts are devoid of vanity, and predictably they quickly and efficiently dispense with the frivolities and vanities of Kellynch Hall, and more particularly all the accoutrements of vanity:

“Such a number of looking-glasses! oh Lord! there was no getting away from oneself. So I got Sophy to lend me a hand, and we soon shifted their quarters” (128).

And so, just as *Mansfield Park* metaphorically assumes and reflects the emotional health of its residents, and *Pemberley*, the dignity and taste of its incumbents, Kellynch-hall also takes on the tenor of its various inhabitants, mirroring the state of each family’s psychological well-being.

But more importantly perhaps, the Crofts operate as a metaphor for a healthy marriage, and their hearty looks epitomise this achievement, negating and contradicting the self-indulgence of the Elliots and the Charles Musgroves, and at the same time signifying the possibility of something more than Anne has as yet been exposed to, offering her the example of a foundation on which her own marriage may be built. For by setting the Crofts up as the standard against which the marriages in *Persuasion* are measured Austen makes it clear that, despite the ever-present threat of war, if Anne and Wentworth are able to achieve a relationship similar to that of the Crofts, their marriage will be successful, as the regard that Anne and Wentworth feel for each other is matched only by the felicity of the Crofts’:

They brought with them their country habit of being almost always together. He was ordered to walk, to keep off the gout, and Mrs. Croft seemed to go shares with him in every thing, and to walk for her life, to do him good....Knowing their feelings as she did, it was a most attractive picture of happiness to [Anne]. She always watched them as long as she could; delighted to fancy she understood what they might be talking of, as they walked along in happy independence... (168).

Thus *Persuasion* may also be read as a treatise on marriage. Every character is either married, hoping to be married or widowed, and typically for this novel, marriages and relationships range from the most healthy, happy and functional to the most barren, dysfunctional and unhappy, with the most happy and healthy at one extreme and the balance of failed relationships, lonely widows, and Sir Walter and his unhealthy relationship with Mrs Clay, positioned at the other end. And, if the proposition holds, that the characters reflect the aristocracy then in decline and the

middle class on the ascent, it must follow that the marriages of the aristocracy would be revealed as the most unhealthy and unhappy, and that those of the class waiting to succeed it as the most purposeful. And this is indeed so.

Sir Walter's marriage was unhappy, with his wife ultimately indifferent to her death. And his heir's marriage, which has also been terminated by death, seems to have been even more unhappy. Moreover it appears as if neither Sir Walter, nor Elizabeth or Mr Elliot has much chance of contracting a happy marriage in the future. And therefore it comes as no surprise that "Sir Walter, like a good father, (having met with one or two private disappointments in very unreasonable applications) prided himself on remaining single..." (5).

The novel begins with an index of births and deaths meticulously recorded in the Baronetage, and the reader is immediately informed that Elizabeth, the wife of Sir Walter Elliot, died in 1800, some sixteen years after her marriage, leaving three daughters of sixteen, fourteen and nine years old.

Lady Elliot, the wife and mother, who, as has been mentioned, was "not the very happiest being in the world herself, [although she] had found enough in her duties, her friends, and her children, to attach her to life" (4), is referred to only very briefly. While she lived, married, gave birth to three children, and lived long enough to bring her children up, her husband makes only a single reference to her life in his most important book, "inserting most accurately" (3) her date of death, and in this way he erases all evidence of her life. Not even her birth date is entered, the cause of her death is unclear, and she is thereafter condemned to oblivion.

While it is stated that Lady Elliot's existence was not to her satisfaction, one is left to speculate that there was probably much in her life that she was forced to overlook, and that possibly she had only lived for as long as she believed that her children needed her. For although she would have been inextricably bound by the conventional social, domestic and marital structures which surrounded her, she appears to have been aware of the strictures of her life, and the selfishness around her.

Similarly Mr Elliot's marital future seems marked for disaster. For as the heir to the baronetcy and all that it stands for, he has allied himself with the worst of the patriarchal and conventional values of the aristocracy, rejecting Elizabeth in his

search for pleasure and riches and purchasing his independence “by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth” (8). He had only “one object in view—to make his fortune, and by a rather quicker process than the law. He was determined to make it by marriage” (200):

“Money, money, was all that he wanted. Her father was a grazier, her grandfather had been a butcher, but that was all nothing. She was a fine woman, had had a decent education, was brought forward by some cousins, thrown by chance into Mr. Elliot’s company and fell in love with him; and not a difficulty or a scruple was there on his side, with respect to her birth. All his caution was spent in being secured of the real amount of her fortune, before he committed himself” (202).

And, having achieved his aim, “[h]e was very unkind to his first wife. They were wretched together. But she was too ignorant and giddy for respect, and he had never loved her” (211).

The aspirations of this “disingenuous, artificial, worldly man, who has never had any better principle to guide him than selfishness” (208), so closely resemble those of Sir Walter that it would seem that his marital future is destined to run parallel to Sir Walter’s. He appears to be genuinely involved with Anne, saying,

“[t]he name of Anne Elliot...has long had an interesting sound to me. Very long has it possessed a charm over my fancy; and, if I dared, I would breathe my wishes that the name might never change” (188).

But he is unsuccessful in his pursuit of Anne, losing her to a more worthy suitor. Consequently, he, who “cannot bear the idea of not being Sir William” (207), disappears from the scene, together with the equally scheming and unhealthy Mrs Clay, leaving the reader to guess at the healthiness of any alliance that this couple might dream up!

Positioned at the opposite end of the scale from the Elliots, the naval marriages seem to incorporate most, if not all of Wollstonecraft’s prerequisites for a solid marriage. For the officers are everything that Sir Walter is not. And their friendliness, their brotherliness, their openness, their uprightness, convince Anne that

sailors hav[e] more worth and warmth than any other set of men in England; that they only knew how to live, and they only deserved to be respected and loved (99).

It follows, in applying the metaphorical continuum, that just as the marriages of the aristocrats are depicted as unrewarding and unwholesome, those holding the highest positions in the navy stand to have the most rewarding marriages. And once again this is so. For while the marriages of the naval class are uniformly “the picture of repose and domestic happiness” (98), the marriage of the rear admiral and his wife seems the happiest.

Separation is untenable to the Crofts. Mrs Croft confirms this, saying that

“the happiest part of my life has been spent on board a ship. While we were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared....as long as we could be together, nothing ever ailed me, and I never met with the smallest inconvenience” (70-1).

Accordingly Mrs Croft even acquires blisters in her steadfast attempts not to be separated from with her husband.

Unsurprisingly, in a tone which to some small degree evokes Mary’s fear of loneliness and her consequent psychosomatic illnesses, Mrs Croft mentions that the only time that she has been ill, was during a period when she was forced to remain on land, separated from her sea-going husband:

“Thank God! I have always been blessed with excellent health, and no climate disagrees with me. A little disordered always the first twenty-four hours of going to sea, but never knew what sickness was afterwards. The only time that I ever really suffered in body or mind, the only time that I ever fancied my self unwell, or had any ideas of danger, was the winter that I passed by myself at Deal, when the Admiral (*Captain* Croft then) was in the North Seas. I lived in perpetual fright at that time, and had all manner of imaginary complaints from not knowing what to do with myself, or when I should hear from him next; but as long as we could be together, nothing ever ailed me, and I never met with the smallest inconvenience” (71).

The Crofts are childless and have therefore been left free to arrange their lives together. The result is an authentic lifestyle that nullifies all that the genteel society of Bath espouses. For, despite the patriarchal relationship that prevailed during the period, they have put together a marriage “that represents the union of traditionally male and female spheres” (Rzepka,1994:4). Ignoring conventional marital roles, complementing each other, lending a hand to the other when necessary, their

marriage is a partnership in which neither the Admiral nor Mrs Croft overshadows or dominates the other. Mrs Croft is the Admiral's rational, participatory, managerial and equal partner, exemplifying, both Wollstonecraft's and Austen's apparent view of "the ideal married relationship as a site for the limited integration of the spheres....rather than....a rigidly "bipolar" sexual stereotype" (Rzepka,1994:12). For, the Crofts together challenge the traditional idea of gender-specific roles, being as happy on ship together as doing the chores at home. And this balanced relationship is reflected in their driving:

by coolly giving the reins a better direction herself, they happily passed the danger; and by once afterwards judiciously putting out her hand, they neither fell into a rut, nor ran foul of a dung-cart; and Anne, with some amusement at their style of driving, which she imagined no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs, found herself safely deposited by them at the cottage (92).

Admiral Croft may well be the master of his ship when at sea, but Mrs Croft is the mainstay of their marriage on the domestic front, calling the Admiral into line when she believes he is wrong, dispensing with all illusions in regard to marriage and establishing its realities, saying, "none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days" (70). And it is also she who espouses the value of equality in marriage, and who demonstrates the values of the navy as completely at odds with those of the aristocracy, in the sensible criteria that she establishes for marriage:

"I would rather have young people settle on a small income at once, and have to struggle with a few difficulties together, than be involved in a long engagement....or an uncertain engagement; an engagement which may be long. To begin without knowing that at such a time there will be the means of marrying, I hold to be very unsafe and unwise, and what, I think, all parents should prevent as far as they can" (230-1).

Wollstonecraft argues that if only women would become "helpmeet" to their companions, men would find them "more observant daughters" "more affectionate sisters", "more faithful wives", "more reasonable mothers" and "better citizens" (1992:268-9). It seems that Mrs Croft embodies all these qualities.

The "kindly hospitable" (98) Captain Harville is a step down from the Crofts in naval status. Yet he mirrors the Admiral's "goodness of heart and simplicity of character" (127), evidencing "such a bewitching charm in a degree of hospitality so uncommon,

so unlike the usual style of give-and-take invitations, and dinners of formality” (98). And he echoes their ideas of what constitutes a happy and healthy relationship, in his discussion with Anne about devotion, saying significantly, “I speak, you know, only of such men as have hearts!” (235) For he says,

“I believe in a true analogy between our bodily frames and our mental; and that as our bodies are the strongest, so are our feelings; capable of bearing most rough usage, and riding out the heaviest weather” (233).

Another naval couple, Captain Benwick and Fanny Harville, have waited in vain for favourable circumstances in which to marry. But their prudence is what Mrs Croft warns against, and accordingly their barren liaison parallels Anne and Wentworth’s interminable wait for each other. In *Persuasion* it seems as though those who either adopt the wrong reasons for marriage or who delay their relationship to meet the circumstances are destined for unhappiness. And so inevitably their love for each other does not survive the wait:

They had been a year or two waiting for fortune and promotion. Fortune came, his prize-money as lieutenant being great,—promotion, too, came at *last*; but Fanny Harville did not live to know it. She had died the preceding summer, while he was at sea (96).

The Musgroves, who neither belong to the naval fraternity, nor emanate from an aristocratic background, fit comfortably somewhere near the centre of the continuum, on the one hand affiliated to the navy through their deceased son, and through Louisa’s impending marriage to Captain Benwick, and on the other to the aristocracy through their son Charles’s marriage to Mary. And so it appears that along with both these social classes, they too are in a state of transition. They,

like their houses, were in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement. The father and mother were in the old English style, and the young people in the new. Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove were a very good sort of people; friendly and hospitable, not much educated, and not at all elegant. Their children had more modern minds and manners (40).

Not only do the Musgroves form part of the up and coming self-made middle class, but their values also run parallel to those held by the naval officers, showing little or no evidence of either vanity or arrogance. Accordingly Mrs Musgrove confides in

Anne “how nonsensical some persons are about their place” (46). And she voices her approval of Henrietta’s intended marriage to Charles Hayter, saying, “[i]t would not be a great match for her; but if Henrietta liked him,—and Henrietta *did* seem to like him” (74). Wentworth notes that their honourable and kindly conduct and parental anxiety to promote Louisa’s comfort is all “much, very much in favour of [Louisa and Benwick’s] happiness” (182). And Anne, somewhat enviously, compares the attitude of her family attitude towards her marriage with that of the Musgroves towards their daughters, extolling their many parental virtues:

“They do every thing to confer happiness....What a blessing to young people to be in such hands! Your father and mother seem so totally free from all those ambitious feelings which have led to so much misconduct and misery, both in young and old!” (218)

With this background in mind, one can only ponder on the direction that Mary’s apparently dysfunctional marriage will take, given time to moderate her childish tendencies and those of her husband. For although Mary is surrounded by the virtuous and emotionally healthy Musgrove family, she still retains her link to the aristocracy, and with this she inherits their intrinsic flaws, as reflected in her self-indulgent hypochondria, her devotion to appearances and her inherent snobbery.

It would seem, however, that through her marriage to Charles, and her reluctant allegiance with the Musgroves, and all they stand for, her marriage stands some small chance of succeeding, even if her hypochondriacal tendencies at times undermine this and affect her usefulness as a mother. For despite trifling his time away, Charles has inherited his parents’ inherently sound values: Charles “without benefit from books, or any thing else ...had very good spirits, which never seemed much affected by his wife’s occasional lowness” (43). He acknowledges Mary’s psychosomatic weaknesses and seems intent on dealing with them, asking Anne to “persuade Mary not to be always fancying herself ill” (44), and he also attempts to counteract Mary’s inclination towards pretentiousness. Charles is not at all influenced by status or position. Thus when Mary begs him to accept Elizabeth’s invitation to meet Mr Elliot and the Dalrymples he says,

“I am not one of those who neglect the reigning power to bow to the rising sun. If I would not go for the sake of your father, I should think it scandalous to go for the sake of his heir” (224).

And when Mary is not around he even makes an attempt to exert the necessary authority over their children:

As to the management of their children, his theory was much better than his wife's, and his practice not so bad.—“I could manage them very well, if it were not for Mary's interference...” (44).

Furthermore, despite their complaints and pleas to others for support, Charles and Mary “might pass for a happy couple. They were always perfectly agreed in the want of more money...” (44).

Louisa, it would seem, stands a stronger chance than Mary of contracting a healthy marriage, by virtue of her birth into the Musgrove family, and her marriage into the naval fold. For Anne confirms that both Louisa and Captain Benwick embrace sound values, “good principles and good temper” (182).

And so, mirroring her adherence to principles established by Mrs Croft, Louisa declares:

“If I loved a man, as she loves the Admiral, I would be always with him, nothing should ever separate us, and I would rather be overturned by him, than driven safely by anybody else” (85).

While her resolution and willpower in the end cause her physical injury, she voices her refusal to be influenced by suggestion, saying, “I have no idea of being so easily persuaded. When I have made up my mind, I have made it” (87). And Wentworth applauds her determination, saying,

“*yours* is the character of decision and firmness, I see....It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on.—You are never sure of a good impression being durable. Every body may sway it; let those who would be happy be firm....My first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm” (88).

Consequently, with the benefit of reflection made possible by her long convalescence, Louisa chooses to spend the rest of her life with Captain Benwick, and it seems as if this marriage will be mutually rewarding:

They had been thrown together several weeks...and Louisa, just recovering from illness, had been in an interesting state, and Captain Benwick was not inconsolable....He had an affectionate heart. He must love somebody. [Anne] saw no reason against their being happy. Louisa had fine naval fervour to begin with, and they would soon grow more alike (167).

Much like Mr Elliot's, Mrs Smith's marriage exhibits the destructive elements that result from a marriage lived solely in the pursuit of enjoyment: "The husband had not been what he ought" (156), and the Smiths had been ruined by Mr Elliot's self-gratification, "prompting and encouraging expenses, which could end only in ruin....The husband had died just in time to be spared the full knowledge of it" (209).

But time and illness again play their roles. And so Mrs Smith says, looking back on this period, "I think differently now; time and sickness, and sorrow, have given me other notions" (202).

Death also plays an important role in this novel, for just as a critic has described bodies piling up in an earlier novel, so do they in *Persuasion*. But in *Persuasion* the deaths do not merely serve as plot determinants, but typically balance and contrast, elucidating characters and often evincing instructive elements.

It has been noted earlier that many mothers die in the Austen novels, and that in each case these deaths have serious consequences. The death of Lady Elliot is no different. For despite the not insignificant contribution that Lady Elliot has made to Sir Walter's life, as a consequence of her mother's death Anne loses the only person in her family who might have offered her support and guidance during the suggestible years of her adolescence. And so, like Emma Woodhouse, Anne is left motherless at a most impressionable age. And if reference is made to Catherine Morland's plight in *Northanger Abbey*, or Georgiana Darcy's in *Pride and Prejudice*, this partially orphaned state is clearly considered by Austen to be one in which young girls without maternal support find themselves most alienated, exposed and defenceless in the predominantly patriarchal society of the day, and consequently most vulnerable.

While all three daughters have lost their mother, neither of her sisters is left as defenceless as Anne: Elizabeth appears to have become her father's favourite as a

result of her fortunate good looks, and Mary seems sustained by the support and attention that her various ailments bring her, whereas Anne's "word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;—she was only Anne" (5).

If one applies Kristeva's precept that one needs to *kill* the mother to become an individual in one's own right, (in Restuccia,1994:17), it appears as if Anne, in contrast to her sisters, has internalised her mother's death, as there is nothing in the novel which appears to indicate otherwise. She neither relies on the support of her father, as Elizabeth does, nor the prop of her illnesses as Mary does. Nor does she compensate for her mother's death with unhealthy obsessions such as Emma's matchmaking and reluctance to marry. Rather Anne was ready to fall in love with Wentworth at the age of nineteen, and has steadfastly pined for her thwarted love for some eight years.

It would seem that Anne's only youthful dilemma has been her inability to deal with Lady Russell's persuasiveness, and that here a mother's support might well have assisted her. But time has resolved that issue and has lessened both her dependence on, and her confidence in, Lady Russell's judgement. Accordingly at the age of twenty-seven years Anne has clearly established herself as her own person with her own views:

It was now some years since Anne had begun to learn that she and her excellent friend could sometimes think differently; and it did not surprise her, therefore, that Lady Russell should see nothing suspicious or inconsistent, nothing to require more motives than appeared, in Mr. Elliot's great desire of reconciliation (147).

There are also lessons to be drawn from the other deaths referred to in the novel. Richard Musgrove, Fanny Harville, Mrs William Elliot and Mr Smith are never present, but are merely referred to by way of anecdote. Moreover they assume no heroic status. Nevertheless the death of each both contributes to the rich textural progress of the narrative, and at the same time assumes instructive implications.

Fanny Harville had been engaged to Captain Benwick, who, when we first encounter him is still "mourning her loss" (96). She had died the previous summer and Benwick becomes a satisfactory mourner adopting a "melancholy air, just as he ought to have" (97). But at Uppercross Benwick begins to look about him and sees Louisa's attractions, switching his attentions from Anne to Louisa.

And so besides illustrating Mrs Croft's point that lovers ought not to delay their marriages unnecessarily, this death allows Benwick to pursue a new romance with Louisa and to remove her as an obstacle to Anne and Wentworth's relationship. But more importantly it facilitates a most significant debate between Anne and Captain Harville on constancy, and the relative fickleness of males and females. For Captain Harville insists that Fanny "would not have forgotten [Benwick] so soon....It was not in her nature" (232).

And Anne agrees, empathising with women who have been abandoned, and comparing their predicament with that of men:

"It would not be the nature of any woman who truly loved....We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions....Your feelings may be the strongest...but the same spirit of analogy will authorise me to assert that ours are the most tender. Man is more robust than woman, but he is not longer-lived....It would be too hard indeed" (with a faltering voice) "if woman's feelings were to be added to all this" (232-3).

Captain Harville emphatically defends the constancy of men:

"No, no, it is not man's nature. I will not allow it to be more man's nature than woman's to be inconstant and forget those they do love, or have loved" (233).

This discussion about Fanny's death and Benwick's emotional handling of it, and the couple's futile wait for each other, opens Wentworth's eyes to Anne's worth and to her devotion to him. But it is the debate on constancy which crucially reveals the depth of Anne's suffering and fidelity, that causes Wentworth to finally declare his love to Anne.

What conclusion can be drawn from poor, extravagant Mr Smith's death? Or is this death merely a tool in the further development of the plot? Mrs Smith throws light on this in an unambiguous manner, informing Anne that

it was not till [Mr Smith's] death that the wretched state of his affairs was fully known....Mr. Smith had appointed him the executor of his will; but Mr. Elliot would not act, and the difficulties and distresses which this refusal had heaped on her, in addition to the inevitable sufferings of her situation, had been such as could not be related without anguish of spirit... (209).

Thus if Mr Smith had not died, Anne would never have become acquainted with the full immorality of Mr Elliot's character. Accordingly it is essential that he too expires! Perhaps too there is some lesson to be learned from a life lived purely in the achievement of pleasure.

Similarly Mrs Elliot's death, and the circumstances surrounding it, elicit information about Mr Elliot's character, while also explaining Mr Elliot's earlier lack of interest in the incumbents of Kellynch Hall. It is essential that Mr Elliot be removed as a rival to Wentworth in Anne's affections, and the facts that Mrs Smith relates about Mr Elliot and his first wife, their lifestyle, and his subsequent treatment of his wife are not the most edifying. Therefore, Mrs Elliot's death, and the telling of it, also reveal themselves as central to the development of the plot. And the tale of Richard Musgrove's death exposes the depth of Wentworth's unaltered compassion and sensitivity, and the superficial sentimentality of Mrs Musgrove's parental concerns.

It is no coincidence that *Persuasion* is so obviously divided into two volumes separated by an accident that has life-changing consequences for most of the characters. But this is not the only accident in the novel. Mary and Charles's son also meets with a mishap:

His collar-bone was found to be dislocated, and such injury received in the back, as roused the most alarming ideas. It was an afternoon of distress, and Anne had every thing to do at once—the apothecary to send for—the father to have pursued and informed—the mother to support and keep from hysterics—the servants to control—the youngest child to banish, and the poor suffering one to attend and soothe....they suspected great injury, but knew not where; but now the collar-bone was soon replaced, and though Mr. Robinson felt and felt, and rubbed, and looked grave, and spoke low words both to the father and the aunt, still they were all to hope the best, and to be able to part and eat their dinner in tolerable ease of mind... (53).

Fortunately the child suffers no ill effects: “no injury had been done to the spine” (55). But the incident and the after-care that is required illuminate the immature and selfish attitudes of both parents:

The child was to be kept in bed, and amused as quietly as possible; but what was there for a father to do? This was quite a female case, and it would be highly absurd in him, who could be of no use at home, to shut himself up (55).

Mary, who is no more successful than Mrs Bennett “at using illness symptoms to compel respect from her husband” (Wiltshire,1992:198), deserted by Charles, complains to Anne:

“So! You and I are to be left to shift by ourselves, with this poor sick child—and not a creature coming near us all the evening! I knew how it would be. This is always my luck! If there is any thing disagreeable going on, men are always sure to get out of it, and Charles is as bad as any of them. Very unfeeling! I must say it is very unfeeling of him, to be running away from his poor little boy; talks of his being going on so well! How does he know that he is going on well or that there may not be a sudden change half an hour hence....I am sure, I am more unfit than any body else to be about the child. My being the mother is the very reason why my feelings should not be tried. I am not at all equal to it. You saw how hysterical I was yesterday....I hope I am as fond of my child as any mother—but I do not know that I am of any more use in the sick-room than Charles, for I cannot be always scolding and teasing a poor child when it is ill....I have not nerves for the sort of thing....I was dreadfully alarmed yesterday, but the case is very different to-day....I am no use at home—am I? and it only harasses me” (56).

Charles “wished so much to be introduced to Captain Wentworth” (55). Predictably, and significantly, it is agreed that Anne, who Mary contends has not “a mother’s feelings, [is] a great deal the properest person” (57) to care for the sick child. Anne accordingly chooses to remain home to nurse the child, and in this manner she avoids meeting Wentworth, when the Musgroves meet with the Crofts and Wentworth at Kellynch-hall for dinner.

This incident is most instructive, highlighting as it does how the Charles Musgroves perceive Anne’s role in the family, and how she in turn sees her role. Because of her unmarried position, the loss of her mother and the nature of her family she has, other than for her usefulness, become a non-person, virtually invisible to the rest of

the family, and more alienated than any of Austen's other heroines. Her word carries no weight, even if her principles on the "indispensable duty to clear away the claims of creditors" (12) do effect the decision of the Elliots to move to Bath. Anne has become a mere adjunct to Mary's family, valued only in terms of her usefulness to others.

Whereas Elizabeth indulges herself in ceaseless socialising, and is supported by an indulgent father, and whereas Mary has some inconsistent support from her husband, Anne stands alone as the moral and sensible core of the family. She is the only responsible and practical adult amongst all the Elliots, the person who remains sensible in the face of emergencies, and the one who may be relied upon not to panic. But despite her emotional and moral strengths her solitary, single status, frequently regarded as bearing some autobiographical similarities to the author's, is portrayed as vulnerable. For Anne's position mirrors that of every single, indigent female of the period, including that of the author. She is totally dependent on others for financial, social and other domestic support, and in return she is expected to either assume a subordinate role with certain familial obligations, or to move out and fend for herself.

Wiltshire suggests that while this role of nurse that Anne has assumed is a female and maternal role, it is fundamentally sexless and marginalised, as it is only ancillary to the essential female roles in *Uppercross* and *Lyme*. But in becoming a substitute mother for Mary's children, Anne acquires value both to others and to herself. For "nursing gives Anne a pretext for a semi-permanent adoption of that role of bystander to which she has consigned herself, and in which she takes both comfort and pride" (1992:168-9). However, Anne's role is not one that she has assumed entirely voluntarily: it has been cast on her as a result of her single and unsupported status. Yet paradoxically it is through that marginalised role, that, despite her attempts to avoid Wentworth, she eventually becomes noticed by him, and re-establishes her sexuality.

Over the eight years that have passed since she rejected Wentworth, she has lost all hope of a fulfilling love, and as an unmarried woman she has lost position. But this emotional loss has also taken its physical toll, and she has lost her bloom. Consequently Anne is set to fade into obscurity. Something has to change dramatically to enable Anne to transform her status from maiden aunt into heroine.

This pivotal life-changing event occurs in the form of another accident. The first half of the novel has established the personalities of the principle characters, their interrelationships with each other and the effects (and non effects) of eight years on them. But in chapter twelve of the first volume, at the centre of the novel, a cataclysmic incident occurs, destroying the peaceful social and domestic fabric that has so carefully been created. And it is this accident that gives Anne the opportunity to escape the traditional role for which she has up to now seemingly been destined.

Anne, at twenty-seven years, is older, more elegant, more cultivated and more mature than the inexperienced, young and flirtatious Louisa Musgrove. But Louisa is determined and headstrong; the antithesis of everything that Anne now stands for. She is the embodiment of Wentworth's "beautiful glossy nut" (88) which as a consequence of its "original strength" (88), seems destined to survive all life's storms, which,

"blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn. Not a puncture, not a weak spot any where.—This nut...while so many of its brethren have fallen and been trodden under foot, is still in possession of all the happiness that a hazel-nut can be supposed capable of" (88).

And so Louisa, who is unsusceptible to persuasion, impulsively jumps from the high point of the Cobb, to prove her assertiveness:

[A]ll were contented to pass quietly and carefully down the steep flight, excepting Louisa; she must be jumped down them by Captain Wentworth. In all their walks, he had to jump her from the stiles; the sensation was delightful to her. The hardness of the pavement for her feet, made him less willing upon the present occasion; he did it, however; she was safely down, and instantly, to shew her enjoyment, ran up the steps to be jumped down again. He advised her against it, thought the jar too great; but no, he reasoned and talked in vain; she smiled and said, "I am determined I will:" he put out his hands; she was too precipitate by half a second, she fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and was taken up lifeless! There was no wound, no blood, no visible bruise; but her eyes were closed, she breathed not, her face was like death.—The horror of that moment to all who stood around! (109)

Ironically Louisa's determined impetuosity has almost fatal consequences. But it is also this fall that pushes her into an understanding of her true emotions, changing her personality and her future.

Wiltshire suggests that Wentworth's failure to catch Louise metaphorically indicates his inability to respond to her advances (1992:188). On the other hand Steele argues that Louisa's precipitate jump is no accident, but rather an echo of Louisa's earlier pronouncement that "when I have made up my mind, I have made it" (87). For Louisa is as intractable as the hazel-nut that Wentworth finds in the hedgerow, and, as Steele so aptly puts it, the lack of visible injury emphasises and echoes Wentworth's description of the hazel-nut and encapsulates the metaphor, as "the hard-headed little Louisa lies unconscious on the stones" (1982:154).

It has been pointed out in several of the earlier chapters that Austen's heroines are not permitted to lose consciousness. Anne remains true to type, for, Gorman argues that,

just as Louisa's fall signals her weakness, impetuosity, dependency, and immaturity, so does Anne's reaction here and throughout *Persuasion* signal her strength, her independence and maturity (1993:38).

While Louisa lies lifeless on the quay amidst the noise and hysteria of her friends, and the clamour of the onlookers, Anne characteristically remains in control of her emotions, exhibits her self control, and retains her presence of mind. Taking command of the fraught situation and remaining calm, she immediately issues composed, terse instructions.

This scene not only draws a comparison between Louisa and Anne, but also reinforces all that Austen has had to say about the other characters in previous chapters: poor ineffectual Charles hangs over Louisa "with sobs of grief" (110); Mary descends into typical, stereotyped hysteria, screaming "[s]he is dead! she is dead" (109), reducing her husband to a state of complete immobility, and Henrietta faints. Only Benwick, the emotional romantic, retains his senses and is able, together with Anne, to catch Henrietta. And surprisingly, even Wentworth, the sailor who has remained courageous in the face of storms and shipwreck, loses his composure. For at this point Wentworth realises how isolated he is in his "agony of silence" (109). He staggers against a wall for support, calling out randomly: "Is there no one to help me?" (110), blaming himself for encouraging Louisa's impulsiveness: "It had been my doing—solely mine. She would not have been obstinate if I had not been weak" (183).

Anne cannot bear to see Wentworth's pain. Accordingly she urges Benwick: "Go to him, go to him...for heaven's sake go to him" (110), and she "tried, at intervals, to suggest comfort to the others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth. Both seemed to look to her for directions" (111).

Persuasion emphasises the distinction between "the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind" (242). Accordingly Anne's assumption of authority brings Wentworth to his senses, opening his eyes to the difference between Louisa's wilful intractability and the quiet resolution which Anne epitomises. He recognises that there is "no one so proper, so capable as Anne!" (114), and that Anne's qualities, which he had admired as a young man, have remained unaffected: "A few days had made a change indeed!" (123)

The accident is also pivotal in Louisa's life. Fortunately "Louisa's limbs had escaped. There was no injury but to the head" (112). And so Lascelles comments that "[Louisa] has fallen on her head; but it had never been a very good one, and the blow seems to have cleared it" (1939:78). But, Louisa, although

"very much recovered; ... is altered; there is no running or jumping about, no laughing or dancing; it is quite different. If one happens only to shut the door a little hard, she starts and wriggles like a young dabchick in the water; and Benwick sits at her elbow, reading verses, or whispering to her, all day long" (218).

It is clear that her impulsiveness on that day has been more than adequately repaid, affecting "her health, her nerves, her courage, her character to the end of her life, as thoroughly as it appeared to have influenced her fate" (167).

Anne on the other hand has only gained from this pivotal incident. She has exhibited authority in the face of great trauma, something which has been acknowledged and admired by Wentworth, and from that moment she has begun again to exist on another plane in his mind. It is almost as if the positive elements of Louisa's vivacity have been transferred to and absorbed by Anne, as with this influx of vitality her looks begin to change. She recovers her bloom, and her outer, visible self now typically mirrors the inner emotional changes that have taken place.

Both Anne's suitors, Wentworth and Mr Elliot, are good looking and eligible. Both have ambitions and both have made money, one through honest travail, the other through a calculatedly advantageous and cruel marriage. They are also both men whose paths have previously crossed those of the Elliot family. But in everything Mr Elliot stands "opposed to Captain Wentworth" (212). Time has no effect on him, other than increasing his desire for the baronetcy, and he remains unaffected by the unhappiness he has caused, learning nothing, seeking only to consolidate his position through yet another successful marriage, and the hereditary baronetage.

In complete contrast, time has had significant effects on Wentworth. Anne and Wentworth had once agreed to marry:

He had nothing to do, and she had hardly any body to love....They were gradually acquainted, and when acquainted, rapidly and deeply in love. It would be difficult to say which had seen highest perfection in the other, or which had been the happiest; she, in receiving his declarations and proposals, or he in having them accepted (26).

He had no fortune but

he was confident that he should soon be rich;—full of life and ardour, he knew that he should soon have a ship, and soon be on a station that would lead to every thing he wanted (27).

While his confident assurances were sufficient for Anne to believe in him, they were, however, not good enough for Lady Russell who "saw it very differently" (27):

His sanguine temper, and fearlessness of mind, operated very differently on her. She saw in it but an aggravation of the evil. It only added a dangerous character to himself. He was brilliant, he was headstrong.—Lady Russell had little taste for wit; and of anything approaching to imprudence a horror. She deprecated the connexion in every light (27).

And so Anne had yielded to Lady Russell's apparent better judgement, convinced by her that the engagement was "indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success" (27), but also believing it was for Wentworth's good, "for *his* advantage" (28).

Miller observes that Wentworth, at the beginning of the book, is uncertain and shadowy. He, much like Anne, is consigned to the past. The reader knows nothing of

him other than through “Anne’s memory and the naval registry, available only through recollection and rereading”. But, with the passage of time, Wentworth re-emerges from the shadows, “as if reanimated for Anne” (2002:78), and by Anne. And so, with his arrival at Kellynch-hall, the past and present fuse for Anne, enabling her at her first meeting with Wentworth to see that

the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages. She had seen the same Frederick Wentworth (61).

Eight years before he had been “a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy” (26), and time has done nothing much to change him for her. However, whereas Anne sees no change, Wentworth remains fixed in the past, comparing the person that he sees before him with the girl that he remembers, recollecting her refusal of his proposal, and suffering still from pride and rejection:

He had thought her wretchedly altered, and, in the first moment of appeal, had spoken as he felt. He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity. He had been most warmly attached to her, and had never seen a woman since whom he thought her equal; but, except from some natural sensation of curiosity, he had no desire of meeting her again. Her power with him was gone for ever (61).

He arrives at the Crofts, hoping to find a wife, with a heart available “for any pleasing young woman who came in his way, excepting Anne Elliot. This was his only secret exception...” (61). And so at their first meeting, while he politely acknowledges Anne’s presence, he adopts a strictly formal approach towards her, with the result that “Anne did not wish for more of such looks and speeches. His cold politeness, his ceremonious grace, were worse than any thing” (72). But Anne is not omitted entirely from his thoughts when he qualifies his requirements, saying that the woman he would choose needed “a strong mind, with sweetness of manner” (62). However, time and Louisa’s accident typically take their toll:

Time had changed him, or Louisa had changed him. There was consciousness of some sort or other. He looked very well...but yet it was Captain Wentworth not comfortable, not easy, not able to feign that he was (176).

During their long separation Wentworth has been exposed to the hardships of warfare, and unseaworthy ships. But in Lyme Wentworth is exposed to a type of hardship different from every thing that he has experienced at sea, and this forces him to re-examine both his emotions and the situation in which he finds himself.

In the original ending to *Persuasion* it is revealed that it is only after the accident at Lyme that Wentworth acquires insight, that he begins

to understand his own sensations;—that at Lyme he had received Lessons of more than one kind;—the passing admiration of Mr Elliot had at least *roused* him, and the scenes on the Cobb & at Capt. Harville's had fixed her superiority.—In his preceding *attempts* to attach himself to Louisa Musgrove, (the attempts of Anger & Pique)—he protested that he had continually felt the impossibility of really caring for Louisa, though till *that day*, till the leisure for reflection which followed it, he had not understood the perfect excellence of the Mind, with which Louisa's could so ill bear a comparison, or the perfect, the unrivalled hold it possessed over his own.—There he had learnt to distinguish between the steadiness of Principle & the Obstinacy of Self-will, between the Darings of Heedlessness, & the Resolution of a collected Mind—there he had seen everything to exalt in his estimation the Woman he had lost, & there begun to deplore the pride, the folly, the madness of resentment which had kept him from trying to regain her, when thrown in his way. From that period to the present had his penance been the most severe....”How could I look on without agony?—Was not the very sight of the *Friend* who sat behind you?—was not the recollection of what *had* been—the knowledge of her Influence—the indelible, immoveable Impression of what *Persuasion* had *once* done, was not it all against me?” (264-7)

At Uppercross though, he becomes aware of Anne, attempting to alleviate her physical suffering by removing her nephew from her back when he “began to fasten himself upon her, as she knelt, in such a way that, busy as she was about Charles, she could not shake him off” (80). And, after a long walk, noticing her exhaustion, he hands her into the carriage:

Captain Wentworth, without saying a word, turned to her, and quietly obliged her to be assisted into the carriage. Yes,—he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it

to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to give her rest....She understood him. He could not forgive her,—but he could not be unfeeling. Though condemning her for the past, and considering it with high and unjust resentment, though perfectly careless of her, and though becoming attached to another, still he could not see her suffer, without the desire of giving her relief. It was a remainder of former sentiment; it was an impulse of pure, though unacknowledged friendship; it was proof of his warm and amiable heart... (91).

At Lyme, however, he is forced to do far more than touch Anne. He is compelled to compare Anne with Louisa, to look deeper than their overtly disparate appearances, and to distinguish between obstinacy and resolution. And so this accident, and the way in which Anne handles the aftermath, leads him to an awareness of Anne's virtues, to acknowledge her as she is, and to perceive her less critically, with more discrimination and greater understanding. He concludes that, despite his original misgivings, Anne has not altered, and "could never alter" (243), and he begins to appreciate that, but for his pride, eight years of unhappiness might have been avoided. And as a consequence of this insight, he informs her,

"I was proud, too proud to ask again, I did not understand you. I shut my eyes, and would not understand you, or do you justice. This is a recollection which ought to make me forgive every one sooner than myself. Six years of separation and suffering might have been spared" (247).

Anne, at the time of the original engagement had been a very pretty girl, with "gentleness, modesty, taste, and feeling" (26). But while only "a few months had seen the beginning and the end of their acquaintance" (28), with the loss of love the suffering had lasted eight and a half years. And this had taken its toll on Anne:

Her attachment and her regrets had, for a long time, clouded every enjoyment of youth; and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effect (28).

Since then she has never been tempted "to enter a state for which she held her to be peculiarly fitted by her warm affections and domestic habits" (29). Accordingly, eight years later when she and Wentworth meet again, he finds a lonely woman who is devoid of bloom and bereft of love and sensuality: "they were as strangers; nay, worse than strangers, for they could never become acquainted. It was a perpetual estrangement" (64).

Wentworth appears cold and unresponsive to Anne, remarking that time makes many changes, saying, “[i]t is a period, indeed! Eight years and a half is a period!” (225). But Anne denies that time has had much effect on her, crying, “I am not yet so much changed, ...fearing she hardly knew what misconstruction” (225).

Critics interpret Anne’s “ghostly insubstantiality” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:175) and the recovery of her bloom differently. Wiltshire suggests that Anne’s prolonged suffering has left her devoid of energy, and that she has therefore become marginalised within a family of bullies (1992:156). Young argues that Anne’s loss of bloom equates with her loss of sexuality (2003:83), and that with Wentworth’s touch elements of the past are restored and she once again becomes “altered beyond his knowledge” (60), looking “something like Anne Elliot again” (104). For, Anne’s sexuality has been reawakened, she is back in bloom, and love will survive.

Gilbert and Gubar agree that, having lost her bloom, Anne has become a “pale vestige” (1979:175) of what she has been. But they suggest that the removal from the oppressive atmosphere at Kellynch to the curative breezes of Lyme and Bath permits Anne some respite from “patrilineal descent” (1979:180), where she can discover

an egalitarian society in which men value and participate in domestic life, while women contribute to public events, a complementary ideal that presages the emergence of an egalitarian sexual ideology. No longer confined to a female community of childbearing and childrearing, activities portrayed as dreary and dangerous in both Austen’s novels and her letters, Anne triumphs in a marriage that represents the union of traditionally male and female spheres (1979:181).

Whatever the reasoning of the critics, it is a fact that at Lyme Anne is exposed to more than the benefits of the sea air: at Lyme she receives another chance to establish herself in Wentworth’s consciousness, and with this her despondency lifts, and her outer looks begin to reflect her inner state of hopefulness:

She was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion, and by the animation of eye which it had also produced (104).

Consequently in Lyme Mr Elliot pauses, to look at Anne in admiration, and through his eyes Wentworth sees the old Anne Elliot. And her attractions are enhanced further by Captain Benwick's admiration. He sees only her "[e]legance, sweetness, beauty,' 'Oh! there was no end of Miss Elliot's charms'" (131).

On her return to Bath, Anne does not just replace Lady Russell's persuasion with Mrs Smith's sound advice. She also replaces the snobbish and selfish Sir Walter with the dashing and romantic Wentworth, and a life of stasis with a life of enterprise and excitement, rejecting all that Sir Walter stands for, and much of what Lady Russell represents, substituting their dysfunctional and unhealthy values and life-style with those of the middle class which she so admires, reaching a type of closure through her acquisition of independent reasoning – her capacity to know her own mind.

The narrator emphasises that the past can be changed to allow for a second chance, and even "a second proposal" (Miller,2002:79), and Dames suggests that it is this opportunity that enables both Anne and Wentworth to travel from their respective states of immobility in the absence of love to a future filled with mobility (2001:117-143). For Anne's faithfulness has finally been rewarded: whereas "[s]he had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (30):

Anne saw nothing, thought nothing of the brilliancy of the room. Her happiness was from within. Her eyes were bright, and her cheeks glowed,—but she knew nothing about it. She was thinking only of the last half hour....all declared that he had a heart returning to her at least; that anger, resentment, avoidance, were no more; and that they were succeeded, not merely by friendship and regard, but by the tenderness of the past; yes, some share of the tenderness of the past. She could not contemplate the change as implying less.—He must love her (185).

And just as with time and experience Anne rejects the persuasiveness of the prudent attitudes which have so influenced her life, so Wentworth finally admits to the "blindness of his own pride, and the blunders of his own calculations" (243) and to his constancy:

He persisted in having loved none but her. She had never been supplanted. He never even believed himself to see her equal....he had meant to forget her, and believed it

to be done. He had imagined himself indifferent, when he had only been angry....till that day, till the leisure for reflection which followed it, he had not understood the perfect excellence of the mind with which Louisa's could so ill bear a comparison... (241).

Even Lady Russell is persuaded to accept Wentworth who, with the passing of time

was no longer nobody. He was now esteemed quite worthy to address the daughter of a foolish, spendthrift baronet, who had not had principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him... (248).

And Sir Walter is also persuaded of Wentworth's personal claims. He believed that Wentworth's

superiority of appearance might be not unfairly balanced against her superiority of rank; and all this, assisted by his well-sounding name, enabled Sir Walter at last to prepare his pen with a very good grace for the insertion of the marriage in the volume of honour (248-9).

But surprisingly, Anne, loyal as ever, maintains her support of Lady Russell's original act of persuasion, justifying this, saying,

"the case so different, and my age so different. If I was wrong in yielding to persuasion once, remember that it was to persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk" (244).

And with this provocative statement, Anne raises the question that the narrator leaves unanswered: has persuasion operated as a positive or negative force in this novel? Molan argues that Austen has penetrated "the intrinsic doubleness of persuasion, its ability to destroy and fashion, its ineradicable presence in all human dealings, and the riskiness of deciding one's lot by something uncertifiable" (in Bloom, 2004:108). But Anne clarifies her stance, saying,

"I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. It was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides; and for myself, I certainly never should, in any

circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice. But I mean, that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience. I have now, as far as such a sentiment is allowable in human nature, nothing to reproach myself with..." (246).

The story has completed its circle, beginning and ending with new entries in the Baronetage. The difference is, however, that, despite the difficult circumstances that have been placed in the way of Anne and Wentworth's relationship, their love and constancy have been shown to have withstood the test of time. For as Wentworth asserts "A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman!—He ought not—he does not" (183). But the outer appearance of the love that has survived, like that of the protagonists, is not the same as it was eight years ago: Anne and Wentworth are no longer "boy and girl, to be captiously irritable, misled by every moment's inadvertence, and wantonly plying with [their]...happiness" (221). Rather, as a result of its exposure to time, pain and suffering, their love for each other has altered, yielding to a more mature, more endurable love, which emulates that of the Crofts:

There they returned again into the past, more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their reunion, than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth, and attachment... (240).

And so Wentworth proposes to Anne once again, saying,

"I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant" (237).

And with his steadiness and naval values, and her rejection of the negative aspects of her background, there is every prospect that their marriage will be both as happy and healthy as the Crofts's.

But despite the promise of future marital and domestic felicity, and "always the knowledge of his being there!" (246), the narrator characteristically concludes with a cautionary proviso, introducing a subtle qualification of naval life, warning, that while

[Anne] gloried in being a sailor's wife...she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance (252).

CHAPTER SEVEN

MINOR WORKS

While this chapter is headed Minor Works, it does not include all of the works which are incorporated in Chapman's volume entitled *Minor Works* because some of these works have already been dealt with in earlier chapters. And, while some of Austen's minor works may have been omitted altogether, the works that are dealt with in this chapter have been selected for discussion because of their relevance to the themes of illness, accident and death.

Lady Susan, which was not published during Austen's lifetime, takes the form of a complete epistolary novel, consisting of forty-one letters and a conclusion.

Chapman believed that the story was written during 1805. But Southam's studies indicate that it was written some time between 1793 and 1794, at about the same time as *Sense and Sensibility* was first drafted. However, it bears more resemblance to Richardson's *Clarissa*, both in form and content, and even to the *Juvenilia*, than to any of the completed novels.

The story rather characteristically starts with the death of Lord Frederick. This death is pivotal to the plot in that it releases his beautiful widow, Lady Susan, back into society to attempt a further suitable marriage. She is a remarkably evil, conniving woman, who stops at nothing to get her own way, even placing her daughter in a boarding school to force her into complying with her mother's demands.

The only other reference to illness, accident or death is to the gout of Mr Johnson, which determines Lady Susan's whereabouts in London. Thus in both instances the themes of death, health and ill health are employed by Austen solely in order to develop the plot rather than to effect or aid in character development.

There are frequent references to the lack of education of both Lady Susan and her daughter, and there are also references to the recurrent theme of marriage as a means of attaining economic dependence. But neither of these topics is developed

either as thoughtfully or as thoroughly as in Austen's published novels. Nor are any of Austen's other recurrent themes evident in this novelette.

The Watsons was written during 1804 and left incomplete. This fragment was written in the gap between the early versions of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*, and *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*, and comprises a delightful description of Emma Watson's first ball and the ensuing events. It unfortunately breaks off before the direction of Emma's romantic inclinations is established.

What is interesting about the work is the recurrence of certain characteristic themes: this story too begins with a pivotal death which determines the plot. Emma has lived with her aunt and uncle since she was seven years old, but when her uncle dies, he leaves his entire estate to his wife, failing to provide for Emma financially. Emma's aunt remarries rather unwisely, and as a result Emma is forced to return home to her father and sisters.

Typically Emma's father is a widower, who retreats from his paternal duties to his many unmarried daughters. For, as "he was sickly" (315) and frequently in "immediate pain" (348), he is often not well enough to come down stairs.

Mr Watson is a character-type with whom we have become familiar. Cast in the mould of Mr Woodhouse, he is another invalid who enjoys his frailty, saying "everybody paid me great attention, & seemed to feel for me as an Invalid" (344). Accordingly Emma, on her return home, is left to the rather arbitrary supervision of her sister Elizabeth and the infrequent care of Mrs Edwards, with no one else to guide her through this troublesome period between girlhood and marriage.

And once again the question of marriage as a means of economic necessity is raised, as Mr Watson is unable to provide his unmarried daughters with any degree of financial independence, causing them to worry about "growing old &...poor & [being] laughed at" (317). Thus, even if Emma's older sister Elizabeth says, "I would rather be Teacher at a school (and I can think of nothing worse) than marry a Man I did not like" (318), another sister, Penelope, is engaged in the pursuit of "rich old Dr Harding" (317), merely "for the sake of situation" (318).

And, the aristocrat, Lord Osborne echoes Darcy in his arrogance and aloofness, and his “air of Coldness, of Carelessness, even of Awkwardness” (329) while his friend Mr Tom Musgrave is cut out to be yet another unreformed rake, evoking Willoughby and Wickham, “very vain, very conceited, absurdly anxious for Distinction, & absolutely contemptible in some of the measures he takes for becoming so” (342). Furthermore the uncaring attitude of rich, young Mr Robert Watson and his wife toward his unmarried sisters mirrors that of Mr and Mrs John Dashwood.

Even bearing in mind that *Sanditon* remained incomplete and unrevised at Austen’s death, the “exuberant, outlandish and terrifically animated text” (Wiltshire, 1992:199), themes and tone are somewhat puzzling, differing so entirely as they do from those of the other novels, and presenting a somewhat dark view of a world filled with hypochondriacs. Moreover, as the book and its plot remain so unfinished it is difficult to draw any conclusions as to how the story might have developed. There are, however, echoes of characters to whom we have previously been introduced, as well as a number of themes presented in this fragment, with which we have become familiar.

Furthermore, although *Sanditon* is only approximately sixty pages long, it is a litany of psychosomatic illnesses. But although hypochondriacs such as Mrs Bennet, Mary Musgrove and Mr Woodhouse feature in the other novels, none is dealt with as severely, or as satirically, as the Parker sisters. And although Willoughby and Mr Elliot could be described as speculators of a kind, there is no-one in the earlier novels similar to Mr Parker, or indeed Lady Denham, his partner in speculation.

And once again the marital and patrilineal priorities of the aristocracy are raised: Sir Edward who “had not a very clear Brain...& talked a good deal by rote” (398) “*must* marry for Money” (400), and must “get a young Heiress” (401), as an heiress is required to contribute both to *Sanditon*’s and Sir Edward’s welfare. Lady Denham summarises the position most succinctly:

“Now if we could get a young heiress to be sent here for her health—(and if she was ordered to drink asses’ milk I could supply her)—and as soon as she got well, have her fall in love with Sir Edward!”....“And Miss Esther must marry somebody of fortune too—She must get a rich Husband. Ah! young Ladies that have no Money are very much to be pitied!” (401)

Miss Lambe, who is both “sickly & rich” (422), turns out to be exactly the right person to sustain the whole community. For Miss Lambe is not only in possession of a “large Fortune” but she is also “in delicate health” (419).

And, just as in *Persuasion* Sir Walter symbolises the aristocracy in decline, and Admiral Croft the admirable qualities of the navy, so also in *Sanditon* do many of the characters act as metaphorical images, mirroring the society to which they belong, its attitudes and values, and reflecting the effects of change.

The narrator argues that every town needs a great lady, and Lady Denham is the closest person to aristocracy that Sanditon can offer. She is both titled and monied, but, inheriting neither through birth, she has made a point of acquiring both. For “she had so well nursed & pleased [her elderly husband] Mr Hollis, that at his death he left her everything—all his Estates, all at her Disposal” (375). And after Mr Hollis’s death she had “been induced to marry again. The late Sir Harry Denham, of Denham Park...had succeeded in removing her & her large Income to his own Domains” (375).

With her inheritance of title and wealth, Lady Denham has to some extent infiltrated the aristocracy. But it seems that with these she has also succeeded to the questionable and frequently unhealthy outlook and attitudes of the nobility to which reference has already been made. For although she is wealthy, she is also exceedingly mean.

She has a fine active mind, as well as a fine healthy frame for a Woman of 70, & enters into the improvement of Sanditon with a spirit truly admirable—though now & then, a Littleness *will* appear (376).

And, much like the Elliots, she is singularly lacking in charity, protesting that she is

“not the Woman to help any body blindfold.—I always take care to know what I am about & who I have to deal with, before I stir a finger.—I do not think I was ever over-reached in my Life; & That is a good deal for a Woman to say that has been married twice” (399).

She “takes alarm at a trifling present expence, without considering what returns it *will* make her in a year or two” (376), with the result that a noteworthy act of generosity

on her part is to give Sir Harry Denham's gold watch to his nephew. For as she says, "[c]harity begins at home" (402). Thus Charlotte notes that Lady Denham "is very, very mean", saying, "I can see no Good in her", drawing the conclusion that "[r]ich People are Sordid" (402). It follows that, as an investor, Lady Denham's only wish is to have "the Place fill faster" (392), to enable her to realise the profits on her investment.

The tone, however, is set, and the themes determined, in the first paragraph of *Sanditon*, which describes the overturning of the Parker's carriage. For "being induced by Business to quit the high road, & attempt a very rough Lane, [the Parkers] were overturned in toiling up its' long ascent half rock, half sand" (363-4). Their vehicle is damaged and Mr Parker "in the course of the extrication sprained his foot" (364).

Mr Parker is a developer and a speculator, a self-made entrepreneur whose principal interest is the development of the sleepy resort of Sanditon into a fashionable watering place, which will be able to compete with Bath. And so, just as Lady Denham symbolises the changes taking place in the aristocracy, Mr Parker also operates metaphorically, representing a new order of emerging middle class industrialists, typical of the early nineteenth century. For, as Tanner points out, established society, with its "secure, stabilising modes and procedures" (1986:251), is, like Mr Parker's carriage, in the rapid process of being overturned. Mr Parker is thus depicted as

a cameo of society wilfully, mindlessly, leaving the prescribed and proper road – and crashing: an admonitory token of a society which is in the irresistible and determined process of quite literally overturning itself, or...going off the rails. And with all possible speed (1986:251).

Mr Parker hopes to entice the rich and famous to the newly developed spa of Sanditon, and it is in this pursuit that he meets with an accident. He and his wife are *en route* to Willingden in their search for a surgeon for the resort. But the Parkers, in characteristic "hurry and confusion" (367), have neglected to ascertain which of two Willingdens they intend visiting and so, on making "a breif enquiry" (367), find themselves travelling on "a wild goose-chace" (368) in an unsuitable vehicle, down a road on which "no wheels but cart wheels could safely proceed" (364) to the wrong destination.

This ill-judged and impulsive act and “abominably stupid Blunder” (367), much like Louisa Musgrove’s ill-judged and precipitous jump, has its consequences, predictably leading in typical Austenian style to a chain of events, initiated by the accident. And so, rather ignominiously “Mr Parker was therefore carried into the House, and his Carriage wheeled off to a vacant Barn” (370).

Characteristically the accident not only elicits information about the Parkers, but also provides Austen with the opportunity of weighing up and contrasting both the healthy, rurally-based Heywood family of Willingden with the sophisticated, urban, opportunistic, accident-prone, impetuous and hypochondriacal Parker family of Sanditon, and the genuine hamlet of Willingden with the artificial construction of Sanditon, while at the same time leaving it open to debate as to whether the Parkers would be able to survive in a rural area, which has taken on the nature of hostile territory for them.

On the one hand the Heywoods seem to encapsulate Austen’s romantic ideals and values, representing a truly organic community, stable, secure, healthy and more or less static, within the confines of Willingden, with Mr Heywood, “a well-looking Hale, Gentlemanlike Man” (365), travelling “no farther than his feet or his well-tried old Horse could carry him” (373), and likely to be found in the fields, labouring alongside his haymakers. On the other hand the Parkers are portrayed as completely and utterly displaced in these rural surroundings, limping, alienated, uncomfortable and without transport “in a place, a world, where indeed they no longer have any ‘standing’” (Tanner, 1986:252).

And Sanditon, is compared with ancient Willingden, and also with established, popular, stylish spas such as Bath and “that paltry Hamlet” (369) of Brinshore, with its brackish water, poor tea, “insalubrious Air” (369), and detestable roads, where the moneyed, the genteel and the elegant collect.

Whereas Willingden has a single, authentic cottage “romantically situated among wood” (364), inhabited by a shepherd who is resident in one half, and three old women in the other half, and whereas Sanditon village, which is “too remote from the Beach” (383), has some shops, “Lodgings to let” (383) and “a small cluster of Fisherman’s Houses” (383), the new Sanditon is where the “Modern” (384) begins, with its recent houses, unfinished buildings and bathing machines. And so, just as Mr

Parker, the up and coming businessman, is metaphorically offset against Mr Heywood, the pastoral gentry, so too is Sanditon metaphorically set off against Willingden, suggesting the emergence of an aggressive, new, social order, based on a new affluence, fashion and consumerism which threatens an earlier, established, old world. For only in Sanditon can trendy “Blue Shoes, and nankin Boots” (383), “Straw Hats and pendant Lace” (389), other “consumeable Articles...[which must] bring...Prosperity” (392), and “all the useless things in the World that cd not be done without, &...so many Pretty Temptations” (390) be purchased. The countryside with its idyllic, organic, natural, romantic charms and the attractions it once held, has given way to industry and business. And as a result of the transformation of an economy based on agriculture to one based on industry, the road that previously had conveyed and assisted in the movement of people from the countryside to the cities has become disused, a relic of old times, “a very rough Lane” (363).

It is inferred that Sanditon, which is intended to become the fashionable meeting place of the middle class, will eventually triumph over Bath, the renowned meeting place of the upper class, and will most certainly replace Brinshore. For as Tanner argues, not only is Sanditon the complete antithesis of Bath and everything that it stands for, but the

discourses, names, consumer goods, and so on, [also] suggest a society in a state of increasing disarray and giddy frenzied uncertainty, collapsing distinctions and category confusions...(1986:274).

And so *Sanditon*, like *Persuasion*, suggests that, not only is the aristocracy under threat, but that even the landed gentry and their values are in a state of decline and threatened, and that, with the upsurge of a newly rich, brash and mercenary middle class, both will at best be forced to give way to the new mode, become irrelevant or sink into oblivion.

Much like in *Emma*, where the conversation in Hartfield and Highbury reflects far more than the nature, views and concerns of the individuals expressing them, often constituting a comment on the society at large, and in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, where the homes of the heroines echo the temperament and characters of the owners, so too in Sanditon do the houses both mirror the dramatic changes taking place in old Sanditon Village and new Sanditon, and reflect the characters of the inhabitants in their architecture and interior décor. Thus in Sanditon House the

life-size portrait of Sir Henry Denham, who by marriage conferred the title on his wife, dominates the miniatures of Mr Hollis in the sitting room of what had been Mr Hollis's house. And Mr Parker, in one simple statement, exchanges his heritage for speculative gain, negating all the traditional, functional and practical considerations of architecture in his quest for a view and proximity to the sea, when he speaks disparagingly of his old family home, saying, "[o]ur Ancestors, you know always built in a hole....without Air or Veiw" (380). It follows that characteristically moving with the times, he chooses the name Waterloo over Trafalgar for his new house.

Lawlor and Suzuki note that during the eighteenth century disease, and more especially consumption, had become almost a culture, or as Butler would have it, an "over-sophisticated society's obsession with its bodily health" (1975:286). For during that period consumption was associated "with refined cultural values and aesthetic pleasures" (Lawlor and Suzuki,2000:475), and for that reason held certain attractions for its victims, as both sufferers and their care-givers perceived the illness, which was regarded as a disease of the nerves, as beautifying its victims. As a result consumption became fashionable, formulated in terms of sensibility and delicacy of feeling, which in turn gave way to a means of defining the self through nineteenth century invalidism (Wiltshire,1992:219).

In the absence of any recognisably viable treatment for the disease, the recommended therapy for consumption was travel and change of air, and Lawlor and Suzuki suggest that these remedies went hand in hand with attempts by medical people to create, capitalise on and further this culture. This resulted in the creation and rapid escalation of a medical service industry linked to sanatoria, bathing places, hotels, hydros, health resorts and spa towns which "mushroomed in and outside Britain" (2000:470), with doctors specialised in the disease putting together treatments for the nerves, and "a package of medical-treatment-cum-luxury-tourist-brochure in which they promised that the patients would be pampered with refined pleasure" (2000:475). For the first time in the history of man, sickness and its treatment were marketed as commodities linked to capitalism and commerce.

Tanner suggests that

if you want to sell the seaside as a cure, you must also 'sell' the notional illnesses which need curing. The invention and promotion of Sanditon is inseparable from the invention and promotion of sickness (1986:262).

And it seems that with its unique attributes, nature has designed Sanditon as “the resort of the Invalid” (369):

“Nature had marked it out—had spoken in most intelligible Characters—The finest, purest Sea Breeze on the Coast—acknowledged to be so—Excellent Bathing—fine hard Sand—Deep Water ten yards from the shore—no Mud—no Weeds—no slimy rocks—Never was there a place more palpably designed by Nature for the resort of the Invalid—the very Spot which Thousands seemed in need of.—The most desirable distance from London! One complete measured mile nearer than Eastbourne” (369).

Accordingly Sanditon has in its own way become a herald of the new age, with opportunists such as Mr Parker and Lady Denham recognising the inherent possibilities in capitalising on and commercialising illness and invalidism, and marketing Sanditon as a location where these could be treated with some success.

Sanditon,—the success of Sanditon as a small, fashionable Bathing Place was the object, for which [Mr. Parker] seemed to live. A very few years ago, & it had been a quiet Village of no pretensions; but some natural advantages in its position & some accidental circumstance having suggested to himself, & the other principal Land Holder, the probability of its’ becoming a profitable Speculation, they had engaged in it, & planned & built, & praised & puffed, & raised it to a Something of young Renown—and Mr Parker could now think of very little besides (371).

And so, in this predominantly health-oriented climate, Sanditon, as a contemporary, seaside resort offering medical cures, cannot be anything but a commercial success, even if Mr Heywood questions this, pragmatically saying:

“Every five years, one hears of some new place or other starting up by the Sea, & growing the fashion.—How they can half of them be filled, is the wonder! *Where* People can be found with Money or Time to go to them! —Bad things for a Country;—sure to raise the price of Provisions & make the Poor good for nothing – as I dare say you find, Sir” (368).

Fortunately, after his accident, Mr Parker finds himself in good hands in Willesden.

The Heywoods were a thoroughly respectable family, & every possible attention was paid in the kindest and most unpretending manner, to both Husband and wife. He

was waited on & nursed, and she cheered and comforted with unremitting kindness—and...every office of Hospitality and friendliness was received as it ought... (370-1).

Mr Parker is, however, more than just lost and injured in the countryside. He is also confused. For being a man of “more Imagination than Judgement” (372), despite his adherence to everything modern, when he sprains his ankle and calls futilely for the local surgeon, he also ironically points to the rural cottage as his hope for a “cure” (364). Paradoxically, while he in some ways denies his links to nature, perceiving it only in entrepreneurial terms, he relies on it for his own healing. Accordingly when Mr Heywood offers him his “common remedies for Sprains & Bruises” (367), Mr Parker still insists on natural cures, saying,

“we have our own remedy at hand you know.—A little of our own Bracing Sea Air will soon set me on my feet again.—Depend upon it my Dear, it is exactly a case for the Sea. Saline air & immersion will be the very thing” (367).

If Mr Parker has anything to do with it, Sanditon is destined to become the sea resort of the future.

[N]o person could be really well, no person, (however upheld for the present by fortuitous aids of exercise & spirits in a semblance of Health) could be really in a state of secure & permanent Health without spending at least 6 weeks by the sea every year.—The Sea air and Sea Bathing together were nearly infallible, one or the other of them being a match for every Disorder, of the Stomach, the Lungs or the Blood; They were anti-spasmodic, anti-pulmonary, anti-sceptic, anti-bilious & anti-rheumatic. Nobody could catch cold by the Sea, Nobody wanted Appetite by the Sea, Nobody wanted Spirits, Nobody wanted Strength.—They were healing, softing, relaxing—fortifying & bracing—seemingly just as was wanted—sometimes one, sometimes the other.—If the Sea breeze failed, the Sea-Bath was the certain corrective;—& where Bathing disagreed, the Sea Breeze alone was evidently designed by Nature for the cure (373).

But if Sanditon and its sea breezes can indeed cure all ills, as claimed by Mr Parker, the obvious questions arise as to why the restorative air of the place cannot cure his sisters, and why Mr Parker feels the need for a surgeon in Sanditon, especially when Lady Denham in her impecunious manner bewails the fact that Mr Hollis had to pay fees to “the Man...who sent *him* out of the World” (394), asking,

“what shd we do with a Doctor here? It wd be only encouraging our Servants & the Poor to fancy themselves ill, if there was a Dr at hand.—Oh! pray, let us have none of the Tribe at Sanditon. We go on very well as we are. There is the Sea & the Downs & my Milch-Asses...” (393).

Would a doctor’s presence attract more people, or is Mr Parker perhaps not as sure of Sanditon’s natural curative claims as he seems to be? Or is he perhaps seeking to cover all contingencies with the reassurance that a belt and braces attitude can offer? It soon becomes clear that his interest in a doctor’s presence lies in the credibility that a doctor would bring to Sanditon. For he remains

convinced that the advantage of a medical Man at hand wd very materially promote the rise & prosperity of the Place—wd in fact tend to bring a prodigious influx;—nothing else was wanting. He had strong reason to beleive that one family had been deterred last year from trying Sanditon on that account—& probably very many more—and his own Sisters who were sad Invalids, & whom he was very anxious to get to Sanditon this Summer, could hardly be expected to hazard themselves in a place where they could not have immediate medical advice (372).

Drabble argues that while Austen approves of sea air, she does not necessarily endorse all the curative claims made on its behalf by Mr Parker (in Austen, 1974:25). For despite so energetically marketing his own version of the sea and its curative properties, Mr Parker, with time, eventually recovers the use of his ankle in the countryside, without either medical intervention or saline immersion, suggesting that the countryside retains certain inherent curative capabilities of its own.

In any event, having recuperated in the countryside only for as long as is needed to recover the use of Mr Parker’s foot and his customary mobility, the Parkers dash back home, blinkered by speculation and opportunism, with Mrs Parker, who lacks the “capacity to supply the cooler reflection which her own Husband sometimes needed” (372), significantly looking backwards “with the fondness of regret” (380), and Mr Parker enthusiastically looking forward. Neither Parker is fixed in the present. They are continually on the move, and accordingly, much like the Musgrove family of Uppercross, together represent a society at the brink of change. And like Willesden and Sanditon, and Sanditon and Bath, Mr and Mrs Parker each represent opposing forces on the continuum of commercial change: Mrs Parker clings to the comforts of her old home and fertile and productive vegetable garden; Mr Parker is attracted only

by those locations that can offer that which is up-to-date and man-made, sacrificing shady trees in favour of canvas awnings and parasols.

In *Sanditon*, just as in her earlier novels, Austen also uses illness to further plot, to define characters and to reveal a metaphorical connection between mind and body. Thus healthy minds and bodies unite in the Heywoods, whose only interest, like the Morlands, that other characteristically rural family, is in raising their fourteen children well. For, as Mr Heywood says,

the maintenance, Education & fitting out of 14 children demanded a very quiet, settled, careful course of Life—and obliged them to be stationary and healthy at Willingden. What Prudence had at first enjoined, was now rendered pleasant by Habit. They never left home, & they had a gratification in saying so (374).

The narrator's comments would seem to indicate that Charlotte Heywood is destined to be the heroine of the story, when she says "I make no apologies for my Heroine's vanity" (395).

Charlotte is a strong girl, and, like Catherine Morland and Emma Woodhouse, in "excellent health" (374). But Charlotte, at twenty-two, is rather stolid, lacking both Catherine's naïvety, youthful imagination and enquiring mind and Emma's liveliness. For Charlotte "was a very sober-minded young Lady, sufficiently well-read in Novels to supply her Imagination with amusement, but not at all unreasonably influenced by them..." (392). Thus, although she expects to find signs of Clara's persecution, she, unlike Catherine and Emma, examines the evidence before her, and deduces that Clara and Lady Denham are in fact on good terms.

It is interesting that once again Austen provides us with a heroine devoid of a mother. For, like Fanny Price and Catherine Morland, Charlotte is removed from her home and family, arriving in Sanditon with no connections other than the Parkers, whom she barely knows, and who, in much the same vein as General Tilney and Mrs Allen, constitute dubious substitutes for the healthy maternal care that she has left behind in Willingden, leaving the reader to wonder what the consequences of this absence might be.

While Charlotte possesses many of the typical characteristics of an unsophisticated and inexperienced young girl, she is a different type of heroine from those previously

encountered in Austen's novels: Charlotte shows none of the emotional vulnerability of Fanny, the excitability of Catherine, the sensibility of Marianne, or even the imperfections of Emma. Like Anne Elliot she is somewhat older than most of these heroines, but her age is not sufficient to render her ineligible for marriage, and one can presume that she still possesses her bloom.

Tanner suggests that Charlotte is different because, although she is displaced from her original home, she is only on holiday: "Her roots, security and values are still firmly located at home" (1986:263). Moreover, he observes, it soon becomes evident that

[s]he is simply an observer...a relatively disinterested and uninvolved spectator....the most reliable judge to follow. We do not worry *about* her: she has no stake in the game (1986:263).

And so Drabble notes that Charlotte, with "the calmness of amused curiosity" (in Austen, 1974:25), watches the antics of the visitors to Sanditon, acting as a mirror which reflects and compares their idiosyncrasies and foibles. For it is Charlotte who, on arrival, sees Sanditon as nothing more than a "miscellaneous foreground of unfinished Buildings, waving Linen, & tops of Houses, to the Sea..." (384). It is Charlotte who admires the Parker's "honest old Place" (380), which has been abandoned in favour of a new house with an updated and modern name, and compares it with Willingden. It is Charlotte who strides it out on the beach, while Arthur huddles before his midsummer fire, and Charlotte who remains active, while Arthur is at all times immobile. It is also Charlotte who appreciates and exposes the pretentious ignorance of Sir Edward, even if at the same time she appreciates how Sir Edward's "[t]ittle did him no harm" (395).

Sir Edward aspires at being a "Man of Feeling" possessed as he is with a "Mind of Sensibility" (396), "Sublimities of intense Feeling", "Energies of Reason" and "Germ[s] of incipient Susceptibility" (403); and enraptured by "high-toned Genius", "Coruscations of Talent" and "illimitable Ardour" (398). For Sir Edward is an "indiscriminate Novel-Reader" (403) even if he contemptuously dismisses the "Trash of the common Circulating Library" (403). He, like Isabella Thorpe "had read more sentimental Novels than agreed with him" (404), and has been compromised by his unhealthy reading habits, "not having by Nature a very strong head" (404). Accordingly he pictures himself as a "dangerous Man—quite in line of the Lovelaces"

(405), whereas Charlotte pragmatically thinks him “downright silly....with not a very clear Brain” (398).

It is also Charlotte who expresses her astonishment at the behaviour of the Parker sisters: “Unaccountable Officiousness!—Activity run mad” (410), and who

suspect[s] a good deal of fancy in such an extraordinary state of health.—Disorders & Recoveries so very much out of the common way, seemed more like the amusement of eager Minds in want of employment than of actual afflictions & releif (412).

And finally, it is a very mature Charlotte who perceives that “[n]ature can lead the individual back to health, at least when the individual suffers from imagination-inspired and medicine-induced debility” (Gorman,1993:90), prompting Tanner to state that Charlotte’s perceptions and thoughts indicate “that she and Jane Austen share the same discourse, speak with one voice, as it were” (1986:284), permitting Charlotte to assume in part the role of the omniscient and ever-present narrator.

Gorman has argued that

[t]hroughout her works, Austen employs the language of illness in order to expose behavioural as well as physical debility, and in order to suggest both overtly and obliquely the proper components of both physical and emotional health (1993:1).

But although illness seems to dominate this work there is no real physical illness in *Sanditon*, apart from Mr Parker’s sprained ankle. Many critics offer explanations for this paradox in light of Austen’s treatment of the Parker sisters and their psychological illnesses.

Wiltshire notes that the various psychosomatic symptoms described in the novel are merely the products of whim, fantasy and frustrated energy (1992:204). And Gilbert and Gubar take this further, commenting that “Austen was fascinated with the sickness of her social world, especially its effect on peoples excluded from a life of active exertion” (1979:183). And indeed, the invention and promotion of sickness reveals itself as a major and very complex theme in this book, which, as a result of “self-absorption” (Gorman,1993:63) becomes an object of satire. For as Gorman suggests, “in *Sanditon*, illness is palpable, visible, and real in ways Austen has not

employed before, and hypochondria forms part of an epidemic of neurosis” (1993:85).

Gorman's point is interesting, as in Austen's earlier novels, with the exception of *Northanger Abbey*, hypochondria is explored by her progressively in greater and greater depth, both in a medical context and as an involuntary illness. Thus while Marianne Dashwood is inclined towards sensibility, Mrs Bennet and Lady Bertram exhibit and reflect the hypochondriacal tendencies that later become aggravated and exaggerated in Mrs Churchill and Mr Woodhouse, and Mary Musgrove shows an early proclivity towards becoming another Mrs Bennet. Staunton notes that none of these hypochondriacs either improves or changes, as all, other than Mrs Churchill, remain static yet not stable. She suggests that in this respect they constitute a discourse of stasis (1997:43), and that in this way they provide a link to *Sanditon*, hinting at a possible conclusion of the novel wherein balance is restored to the commercialised town of Sanditon and to the “disease of activity” (1997:67).

However, even although hypochondria is a theme common to most of her novels, Austen's often savage and satirical treatment of Diana, Susan and Arthur is very different from her treatment of invalids in her earlier novels. On the one hand Austen's tone is tongue in cheek and amusing, with her characters assuming qualities of the burlesque. On the other she is harshly critical, and even cruel. And yet, overriding all is an element of admiration, or perhaps astonishment, at the fact that despite the regular, damaging and self destructive remedies to which the two sisters so voluntarily submit themselves, they are able to physically overcome the side effects, and even to recover from their improvised treatments. For they feed off their illnesses, enjoy them, and voluntarily expose themselves to the most hazardous, bizarre and painful treatments in their belief that they are not well. Moreover, despite the intense physical suffering that they endure from these treatments, they rise again, like the phoenix, seemingly fortified, only to subject themselves yet again to further painful, self-inflicted cures.

Wiltshire observes that the Parker siblings

are presented with an amazing inventiveness, brio and zest. There is not just one ‘sad invalid’ here, but at least three, a trio of health-obsessed peoples whose activities, whilst absurd and selfish are regarded with more gaiety and equanimity in this text...because they seem to do harm to no one but themselves....The Parkers do

not tax the energies of others, and their illnesses are not a form of social domination, or the covert, indirect, exercise of domestic power. Here instead, their own bodies have become the grounds of inventiveness and energy, preoccupying their imaginations and becoming the source of sufficient activity to direct the conduct of every hour of the day (1992:198).

Having no careers of their own, and like Emma Woodhouse, with plenty of time on their hands and little to do, the sisters need to fill their time. And in this pursuit they have made careers out of their illnesses:

they must either be very busy for the Good of others, or else extremely ill themselves. Some natural delicacy of Constitution in fact, with an unfortunate turn for Medecine, especially quack Medecine, had given them an early tendency at various times, to various Disorders;—the rest of their sufferings was from Fancy, the love of Distinction & the love of the Wonderful (412).

And so Mr Parker tells Charlotte,

“And you must know, [Sidney] will have it there is a good deal of Imagination in my two Sisters’ complaints—but it really is not so—or very little—They have wretched health, as you have heard us say frequently, & are subject to a variety of very serious Disorders.—Indeed, I do not beleive they know what a day’s health is;—& at the same time, they are such excellent useful Women & have so much energy of Character that, where any Good is to be done, they force themselves on exertions which to those who do not thoroughly know them, have an extraordinary appearance” (385).

Despite their considerable array of illnesses, which makes them “hardly able to crawl from [their beds] to the Sofa” (386), the sisters have dispensed with doctors, saying,

“[w]e have entirely done with the whole Medical Tribe. We have consulted Physician after Phyn in vain, till we are quite convinced that they can do nothing for us & that we must trust to our own knowledge of our own wretched Constitutions for any relief” (386).

It is not indolence that causes the psychosomatic illnesses from which the sisters suffer, as has been suggested as the cause of hypochondria in earlier novels. On the contrary these sisters are excessively energetic. Thus Diana tells her brother “upon no account in the world, shall you stir a step on any business of mine” (411),

asserting further that she hates “to employ others” (409) when she is able to do something herself, and acknowledging that “we are not all born to equal Energy” (409).

Tanner proposes that the sisters are possessed by “a hyperactivity which at the same time is a deranged activity, or motion and activity without a stable organising centre” (1986:272), and that

[t]hey are also all in the grip of perverted, disfigured or debased discourses to the extent that, as we now say, they do not really speak the discourses, but the discourses speak them – endlessly (1986:280).

For as Diana writes,

“the Sea air wd probably be the death of me....I doubt whether Susan’s nerves wd be equal to the effort, She has been suffering much from the Headache and Six leaches a day for 10 days together releived her so little that we thought it right to change our measures—and being convinced on examination that much of the Evil lay in her Gum, I persuaded her to attack the disorder there. She has accordingly had 3 teeth drawn, & is decidedly better, but her Nerves are a good deal deranged. She can only speak in a whisper—and fainted away twice this morning on poor Arthur’s trying to suppress a cough” (387).

And she expands on Susan’s condition, saying

“Susan has born it wonderfully. She had not a wink of sleep...and as this is not so common with her as with me, I have had a thousand fears for her—but she had kept up wonderfully.—had no Hysterics of consequence till we came within sight of poor old Sanditon—and the attack was not very violent—nearly over by the time we reached your Hotel—so that we got her out of the Carriage extremely well, with only Mr Woodcock’s assistance—& when I left her she was directing the Disposal of the Luggage, & helping old Sam uncord the trunks....And as for poor Arthur, he wd not have been unwilling himself, but there is so much Wind that I did not think he cd safely venture,—for I am sure there is Lumbago hanging about him...” (407).

Arthur on the other hand is “too sickly for any Profession” (388), afraid of everything and most afraid of damp: “I am not afraid of anything so much as damp” (415). And much like Mr Woodhouse, the weather, exercise, and even toast causes him

concern: “a very bad thing for the Stomach...hurt[ing] the Coats of the Stomach....It irritates & acts like a nutmeg grater” (417). He confides in Charlotte:

“I am very fond of standing at an open Window when there is no Wind – but unluckily a Damp air does not like *me*.—It gives me the Rheumatism.—You are not rheumatic I suppose?....But perhaps you are nervous....I am very nervous.—To say the truth Nerves are the worst part of my Complaints in *my* opinion. My Sisters think me Bilious, but I doubt it....If I were Bilious...you know Wine wd disagree with me, but it always does me good.—The more Wine I drink (in Moderation) the better I am.—I am always best of an Eveng.—If you had seen me today before Dinner, you wd have thought me a very poor Creature....I am very subject to Perspiration, and there cannot be a surer sign of Nervousness” (415).

Charlotte, the omnipresent observer, responds most rationally, saying, “I am so fortunate...as never to know whether the air is damp or dry. It has always some property that is wholesome and invigorating to me” (415).

Charlotte’s rational observations are, however, not restricted to Arthur and Sir Edward. She also observes the sisters, commenting most astutely that “their Measures seem to touch on Extremes” (388).

Miss P—whom, remembering the three Teeth drawn in one day, Charlotte approached with a peculiar degree of respectful Compassion was not very unlike her Sister in person or manner—tho’ more thin & worn by Illness and Medicine....& excepting that she sat with salts in her hand, took Drops two or three times from one, out of the several Phials already at home on the Mantelpeice,—& made a great many odd faces & contortions, Charlotte could perceive no symptoms of illness which she, in the boldness of her good health, wd not have undertaken to cure, by putting out the fire, opening the Window, & disposing of the drops & the salts by means of one or the other. She had had a very considerable curiosity to see Mr Arthur Parker; & having fancied him a very puny delicate-looking young Man...was astonished to find him quite as tall as his Brother & a great deal Stouter—Broad made & Lusty—and with no other look of an Invalide, than a sodden complexion....Susan...bringing two heavy Boxes herself....Diana...who, by her own account, had not once sat down during the space of seven hours, confessed herself a little tired. She had been too successful however for much fatigue... (413-4).

There are further paradoxes here. The sisters are ostensibly strong and apparently physically well as even Diana is “delicate looking rather than sickly” (407). Yet, like

Mr Woodhouse, they proudly assert their right to call themselves invalids. But, unlike any of the earlier hypochondriacs who obsessively avoid situations that they consider potentially harmful, and manipulate others with their invalidism, these people harm no-one other than themselves. Diana attempts to explain their predicament:

“Invalides indeed.—I trust there are not three People in England who have so sad a right to that appellation!—But my dear Miss Heywood, we are sent into this World to be as extensively useful as possible, & where some degree of Strength of Mind is given, it is not a feeble body which will excuse us—or incline us to excuse ourselves.—The World is pretty much divided between the Weak of Mind & the Strong—between those who can act & those who can not, & it is the bounden Duty of the Capable to let no opportunity of being useful escape them.—My Sister’s Complaints & mine are happily not often of a Nature, to threaten Existence *immediately*—& as long as we *can* exert ourselves to be of use of others, I am convinced that the Body is the better, for the refreshment the Mind receives in doing its’ Duty.—While I have been traveling, with this object in veiw, I have been perfectly well” (410).

On their arrival in Sanditon the sisters begin their fast.

“Susan never eats I grant you—& just at present / shall want nothing; I never eat for about a week after a Journey—but as for Arthur, he is only too much disposed for Food. We are often obliged to check him” (411).

And because Arthur’s “enjoyments in Invalidism were very different from his sisters—by no means so spiritualized” (418), he gluts himself on any food but tea, which has most serious effects on him:

“[Tea] acts on me like Poison and would entirely take away the use of my right side before I had swallowed it five minutes...The use of my right Side is entirely taken away for several hours!” (418)

What can Austen be saying in this extraordinary and atypical handling of her characters? And why does she so ironically place the Parker sisters and Arthur in a geographical area which is well known for its health-giving benefits? For Susan and Diana are beyond redemption. Unlike Miss Lambe, neither Lady Denham’s asses’ milk nor the curative seaside air of Sanditon can possibly help them!

Tanner suggests that their discourse has enveloped them

so that what should be in a normal person a reasonable concern for health becomes an entirely unreasonable obsession with *unhealth*, which creates the sickness it purposes to be concerned with curing (1986:268).

Charlotte, however, has her own views on the subject of the Parker's neuroses, and suggests that all that is needed is some fresh air and less treatment. But the sisters are hardly likely to employ such reasonable remedies when even tea is seen as a source of illness.

While Wiltshire says, "*Sanditon* is the logical culmination of Jane Austen's exploration of health and body through the novels, and especially the three later novels..." (1992:218), this statement would seem to be rather too reductive and too objective, as *Sanditon* also appears to reflect Austen's personal, practical and satirical attitude towards illness. As such the novel cannot be properly appreciated or interpreted without regard being had to the conditions surrounding the writing of the twelve chapters.

Sanditon was begun in January 1817, with the last entry made during March. Austen died on 18 July of the same year. It is generally believed that she died of Addison's disease. She had been ill for at least a year before her death and hence for the whole period of writing this book. In order to try and understand the tone of the novel it is necessary to be familiar with some aspects of this disease.

Addison's disease was only first identified as a disease of its own in 1855 by Thomas Addison. At that time, as in third world countries today, the disease arose out of complications of tuberculosis affecting the adrenal gland, even if nowadays it is usually identified as an auto-immune disease in western countries. The symptoms may take months and even years to appear and only emerge once most of the adrenal cortex has been destroyed. In advanced cases the symptoms include skin pigmentation, "severe fatigue and weakness, loss of weight...faintness and low blood pressure, nausea, vomiting, salt cravings and painful muscles and joints" (Baker,Google:2006).

It is well documented by Austen in her letters to her sister Cassandra over the period 1798 to 1817 that Austen's mother was a hypochondriac and as such a source of

impatience (and sometimes tolerant amusement) to her. For virtually every letter to her sister contains some reference to her mother's indifferent health:

It began to occur to me before you mentioned it that I had been somewhat silent as to my mother's health for some time, but I thought you could have no difficulty in divining its exact state—you, who have guessed so much stranger things, She is tolerably well—better upon the whole than she was some weeks ago, She would tell you herself that she has a very dreadful cold in her head at present; but I have not much compassion for colds in the head without fever or sore throat (*Letters*:58).

And

Now my Mother will be unwell again. Every fault in Ben's blood does harm to hers, & every dinner invitation he refuses will give her an Indigestion (*Letters*:329).

An earlier chapter describes the most common physical manifestations of hypochondria as including headache, fatigue, upset stomach and loss of appetite. We know that Austen was interested in psychosomatic diseases and the interlinked relationship of mind and body, and that she presented many of her characters as hypochondriacs. But at the time of writing *Sanditon*, Austen had a more particular reason to interest herself in this disease, in that she had herself begun to experience symptoms similar to those of hypochondria. But she was almost certainly aware that hers was not a psychological illness, or one which her mind could cure, but a very real physical one, one which was clearly visible, causing her to become severely pigmented. And for this reason it has been suggested that the way she deals with the hypochondriacs in *Sanditon* was her method of dealing with the anxieties that her own illness induced (Lockhart,1993:47).

For it seems that in light of her mother's chronic hypochondria, which had pervaded most of her childhood and adult life, Austen, at a time when she was suffering very real, unabated, uncontrollable and life threatening symptoms of her own, takes out her frustrations on the Parker sisters, and that in this manner she gives vent to her extreme exasperation at her mother's hypochondria, with its imaginary or self invoked symptoms.

This theory would seem to be borne out by the contents of some of those letters written to her family in the last few months of her life, in which she consistently down

plays her own very real illness. The fact that she made a will on 27 April 1817 indicates that she must have had some insight into her condition and even possibly have been aware of her approaching death. Yet one month later (and only 6 weeks before her death) she continues to adopt a courageous and uncomplaining stance towards her health telling her brother James on 27 May 1817 that

I will not boast of my handwriting; neither that, nor my face have yet recovered their proper beauty, but in other respects I am gaining strength very fast. I am now out of bed from 9 in the mornng to 10 at night (*Letters*:496).

And even in her last letter, written at the end of May, she continues to adopt an uncomplaining stance, writing:

I have been out once in a sedan-chair, and am to repeat it, and be promoted to a wheel-chair as the weather serves....But I am getting too near complaint (*Letters*:497).

CONCLUSION

This research was begun in the hope that it would offer an explanation for the numerous references to accident, illness and death in Jane Austen's novels. What in fact was discovered was that, instead of there being any logic behind all these incidents, there was rather a pattern, a larger more logical progression evident in the novels, which led to an explanation of Gorman's observation that Austen does not permit her heroines to faint.

The *Juvenilia*, which were written by Austen between the ages of twelve and eighteen years, are filled with dramatic stories of very young girls whose brazen, immoral and irresponsible behaviour repeatedly leads them into situations which they can neither resist nor control, often reducing them to tears, convulsions and "perfect insensibility" (Austen, 1954:V1:114), and frequently causing them to resort to fainting fits, suicide and even murder.

But in *Love and Freindship*, which is virtually the last of Austen's youthful stories, Sophia who has fallen victim to consumption, with prophetic foresight before dying, warns Laura to

"beware of fainting-fits...they will in the end, if too often repeated & at improper seasons, prove destructive to your Constitution...One fatal swoon has cost me my Life...Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint—" (102).

Subsequently none of Austen's heroines or lesser characters faints, other than those exceptions which have been noted. And an examination of Austen's works reveals that the *Juvenilia* handle illness, accident and death in a manner that is very different from the early novels, and that the handling of these topics in the early novels differs from the later ones.

It is interesting that in at least three of Austen's novels the age of each of the heroines corresponds more or less with the author's age at the time of writing the novel. While it is virtually impossible to date the final revisions of any of Austen's completed novels, the age of each heroine is indisputable and even though some of the novels were amended on many occasions, the ages of the heroines do seem to

accord with the development of Austen's own maturity. Catherine Morland and Marianne Dashwood, (and even Fanny Price), are younger than Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, and Anne Elliott stands alone in her maturity.

Catherine and Marianne's youthful exuberance and inexperience echo the tendencies and inclinations depicted in the *Juvenilia*. For both of these very young girls evince a predictable lack of maturity, accompanied by a degree of hysteria which is reflected in the heroines' youthful excesses of overexcited imagination and extreme sensibility which frequently leads them to the brink of fainting. But, like Sophia, they realise that this is not an acceptable option. However, while neither succumbs to this temptation, it, and its underlying causes, concomitantly and unsurprisingly exact their toll on each girl, leaving Marianne both physically and psychologically ill, and Catherine to experience her own form of depression.

Fanny Price occupies a unique situation when compared with the other two youthful heroines, in that, whereas they are both physically healthy until tested, her delicate state of health exists in early childhood, and persists throughout the novel. Accordingly Fanny never reflects the vital exuberance of Marianne or Catherine, even if, like them, she is occasionally tempted to faint. Rather Fanny's physical inadequacies force her to adopt a consistently watchful position, and to subdue her natural inclinations, which eventually emerge, revealing themselves in her own distinctive type of depression.

It is thus fitting that *Mansfield Park* falls somewhere between the *Juvenilia* and the two early novels on the one hand and the later novels on the other hand. For as Austen's heroines mature, the exuberant excesses exhibited by Catherine, Marianne and the heroines of the *Juvenilia* vanish. And, whereas the dominant theme in each novel remains love, respect and marriage, youthful excesses are instead replaced with deeper, age-related concerns such as pride, prejudice, overconfidence, persuadability, patriarchy and manipulation. Each of these proves to contain negative elements, equal to the intemperance of the younger heroines, and each has to be overcome to ensure the appropriate development of the heroine, and the assumption of the maturity which will enable her to meet the criteria demanded during that era of the good wife, responsible mother and useful citizen.

A careful reading of the early novels and stories revealed that death, accidents and illnesses are mostly directly related to the plot – that is, it became evident that unless

the illness, accident or death took place, the plot could not proceed. Jane Bennet's cold in *Pride and Prejudice* and Mrs Churchill's death in *Emma*, are examples that spring to mind.

Moreover it was noted that the illnesses depicted in the early novels assume a more physical manifestation than those illnesses described in the subsequent novels, which include emotional and psychological imbalance. Furthermore while hysterical and hypochondriacal tendencies were found to occur in equal abundance in both the early novels and stories, and in the later novels, close examination indicated that the underlying reasons for these illnesses are different in the later novels, where the outer physical well-being (or debilitation) often mirrors, and thus reflects the inner emotional state of the character concerned.

But what was especially intriguing was the close similarity in the expression and causes of the illnesses depicted in *Persuasion* to the later theories on hypochondria and hysteria posited by Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts, which could even be regarded as an anticipation of these theories. For, at this stage, the physical illnesses of Austen's characters could not be separated from the experiences that they had undergone.

Persuasion deals with illness in a very different manner from what has gone before. It calls attention to illnesses that play little role in furthering the plot, and at the same time reflects the positive aspects that may exist within a framework of illness. An obvious example is Mrs Smith's chronic disability. For Mrs Smith's ill health demonstrates Austen's attitude to illness: Mrs Smith exhibits no evidence of hysterical or hypochondriacal tendencies, and shows virtually no self-pity despite the severity of her condition. Yet her poor health contains important lessons for Anne Elliot. Moreover while Mrs Smith's life may not have been exemplary to start with, illness and death bring about significant changes in Mrs Smith's personality and outlook on life, enabling her to emulate Wollstonecraft's precepts of a useful citizen despite her difficulties, and more importantly, to pass the benefit of her experience on to Anne.

Wiltshire has commented that

Sanditon brings to a climax Jane Austen's concern with illness as a cultural phenomenon. The body had always been disposed in Austen's texts as a focus and

site of social and economic power relations. Hypochondria is the hostile name given to the manifestations of illness as they present themselves within a leisured, middle-class environment, and manipulation within the domestic sphere is perceived to be hypochondria's object....Austen saw illness in the light of this production: the body was not a kind of ultimate, a final cause, self generating its illness or health, but illness and health were to be read in relation to social circumstances (1992:220).

Sanditon is incomplete, and has also been included by Chapman in his volume entitled "*Minor Works*." But *Sanditon*, as pointed out before, is remarkable in more than one respect: not merely for the degree of psychological illness that it depicts, but more particularly for the depth of understanding that it reflects. It draws together the threads of hysteria and hypochondria, emphasising the very thin line that divides the two neuroses, their link to physical symptoms and conditions, and to social circumstances, while at the same time examining their effects on society. Thus while *Sanditon* may well constitute the work of a very ill and highly satirical author, and while it may not have been destined to have become one of Austen's great novels, it is the culmination of a life spent in close observation of the foibles and inadequacies of the people who surrounded the author and of a highly developed understanding and mature outlook.

And so *Sanditon* assists and supports the proposal that Austen, with the wisdom that time brings, progressively in her more mature years, brought her highly perceptive and intelligent approach to bear on her writing, using both the emotional and psychological frailties and the ill-health of her characters not only to develop her plots, but more to exemplify her characters, and to instruct her readers.

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