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“Inheritor” and “Originator”:

Jane Austen’s Feminist Voice as Bridge Between Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf

An Honor Scholar Thesis

Stephanie Hyta

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Introduction

“Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing.”

—Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* (1279)¹

This thesis explores the feminism of Jane Austen’s six novels: *Sense and Sensibility* (published in 1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*, the last two published posthumously in December 1817. Austen’s feminism serves as a bridge between the 18th and 20th centuries: her novels include a critique of the patriarchal system that Mary Wollstonecraft analyzed so judiciously in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792); they also anticipate ideas in Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), a six-part essay that originated as lectures that Woolf gave in October 1928 at two women’s colleges, Girton and Newnham, at the University of Cambridge. Although there is no way of knowing whether Austen read Wollstonecraft’s work or alluded purposefully to its ideas, the novels reflect Wollstonecraft’s analysis of the consequences of patriarchy for women, who suffer from a social construct still largely in place an entire century after Austen’s death when Woolf revisits the consequences of a social order in which men have privileges inaccessible to women.

Because Austen, like Wollstonecraft and Woolf, lived in a world dominated by men, her novels portray a patriarchal society that confines women to dependence, domesticity, and a sense of inferiority. Deprived of professions, women must rely on a father or a husband for financial security, so they become dependent on men not only for their livelihood but for other reasons also. All three authors share an awareness of the confinement patterns of a patriarchal society

¹ All citations of Austen’s work come from *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen*. Penguin, 1983. Because this edition lacks an editor, I will use the abbreviation title of *CNJA* in my six bibliographical references.

and the importance of women's interiority in resisting an oppressive system. In Austen's novels, because women have so few opportunities to make independent decisions, female friendship and marriage become important subjects.

Wollstonecraft's emphasis on women's societal image reveals men's powerful role as evaluators. She critiques men's objectification of women, the mixed benefits of male praise that encourages meekness and intellectual subordination, and the impact of authority figures who confine women to domesticity or slavery. A woman's success is determined by male judgment, which sets unattainable standards and dooms women to inferiority. Wollstonecraft's analysis of male praise provides a framework for the barriers that women face in Austen's novels. The realistic problems of a patriarchal society revolve around male objectification and authority figures—each of the tyrannical forces that drive women's education. Austen's heroines navigate a society built on these oppressive forces, which Wollstonecraft describes in her assessment of 18th-century society. Wollstonecraft's analysis of women's domestic roles and society's enslavement of women bolsters marital trials in Austen's novels and helps to explain the significance of marriage to Austen's heroines. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* draws a detailed picture of women's oppression but extends a possible solution to marriage's confinement: friendship. Wollstonecraft's analysis of a friendship between husband and wife creates an opportunity for equality, and Austen's feminism alludes to the positive consequences of friendship not only between women but also between husband and wife. For the purposes of Jane Austen's feminism, Wollstonecraft's writing defines patriarchal problems prior to women's suffrage and constructs possible solutions for women legally barred from every opportunity.

Wollstonecraft's ideas in the 18th century offer a critical foundation for Austen's patriarchal society that Woolf can only research and imagine as she analyzes the educational and

literary obstacles that women encounter. Centering *A Room of One's Own* on women and fiction in a society liberated somewhat by women's suffrage, Woolf highlights women's isolation in prior centuries and builds a feminist agenda for the 20th century on generations of invisible women in history. Just as Woolf, in her essay, can imagine a new future for women who can acquire 500 pounds a year and a room of their own (88), Austen's novels anticipate Woolf's ideas by imagining new scenarios for women who emerge as complex characters able to survive and even thrive in a 19th-century society that presents them with one challenge after another.

Wollstonecraft blames women's confinement on their limited intellectual education. Even though Woolf had an audience of women at both Newnham and Girton, she gives a scathing indictment of the beadle who chases her away from the library of Trinity College, Cambridge: "A deprecating, silky gentleman, . . . regretted in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction" (7-8). Despite the growth of educational opportunities between the 18th and 20th centuries, Woolf emphasizes the continued barriers women face a century after Austen's death.

The challenges that women writers faced in Woolf's own time make Austen's writing especially impressive and revolutionary. Woolf describes women's existence in fiction versus reality, a sort-of doubled existence. Austen anticipates Woolf's feminism by establishing a female platform in literature, redefining women's values, and challenging women's historical representation. Living in a patriarchal society of the 18th century naturally creates an antagonistic tone in Wollstonecraft's feminism, but Austen's society is similar to Wollstonecraft's and her writing shows no antagonism or bitterness. Austen's unemotional writing is another example of her innovative feminism. Woolf describes women's bitterness and antagonism in writing as a limitation for their genius. Austen overcomes this emotional barrier and does not portray one sex

above the other; rather, she defines the moral flaws of each gender equally and overcomes the bitter aggression associated with women's entrapment. In Woolf's analysis of men's desire for superiority, she argues that they belittle women to establish some sense of confidence in themselves; the consequences of this self-promotion are devastating to the women who begin to feel truly inferior. Austen anticipates this dynamic by creating unequal relationships between both sexes and exposing the danger of this imbalance. Wollstonecraft's feminism serves to define the patriarchal forces invading Austen's reality, and Austen's revolutionary feminism develops from Wollstonecraft's foundation to predict future feminist interpretations, especially Woolf's analysis of women and fiction.

By portraying a wide variety of marriages in her novels, Austen exposes the tyranny of societal image and authority figures, both of which limit women's education and perpetuate women's interiority. I have organized my thesis into three chapters. Chapter 1, "Women's Education: The Tyranny of Societal Image and Authority Figures," discusses three of Austen's novels—*Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Mansfield Park*—and studies Austen's key authoritative figures, General Tilney and Sir Thomas, who manipulate Austen's Catherine and Fanny respectively. This chapter addresses the environment of a patriarchal society in the 19th century, based on Austen's novels and aided by Mary Poovey's assessment of the contradictions that came about with the French Revolution. Poovey argues that women's access to independence during the Revolution created two kinds of feminism: progressive, advocating for women's equality; and conservative, reinforcing women's previous roles (30). Throughout this controversy, power remained in the hands of male authority figures, who continued to hinder women's education and thus to restrict their progress and freedom.

Chapter 2, “Education’s Confinement and Female Interiority as a Form of Resistance,” discusses women’s confinement in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* as I deepen my study of barriers that trap women in the educational environment of a 19th-century patriarchal society. This chapter benefits from insights I have drawn from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, whose argument about interiority as a form of resistance underlies my entire argument, and from Claudia Johnson’s *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. Wollstonecraft depicts women’s interiority as an opportunity to overcome inescapable societal barriers. Austen exemplifies society’s overwhelming effects and its inescapable emotional turmoil in the Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne. By contrast, Anne Elliot interprets women’s emotional constancy as a strength, so in her last novel Austen defends women’s emotions as a possible form of female interiority. Woolf’s concept of “sex-consciousness” (107) and her equal representation for both men and women appear at the end of *Persuasion*. When Anne defends her emotional constancy in her exchange with Captain Harville, Captain Wentworth realizes that Anne still loves him; this overheard conversation prompts him to write the letter in which his own constancy allows him to assert his love and to renew his proposal of marriage.

My final chapter, “Marriage as Liability, Marriage as Liberation,” examines three alternative forms of marriage in *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Pride and Prejudice*. Wollstonecraft’s analysis of women’s vanity in marriage applies to *Mansfield Park*, where Lady Bertram’s wealthy marriage bolsters her vanity and uselessness as a mother and exacerbates her inferiority because of her husband’s control. Her sister, Mrs. Price, marries for love but lives in such poverty that one of her daughters, Fanny, is sent to grow up in Sir Thomas Bertram’s household. *Mansfield Park* illuminates the economic consequences of marriage and women’s

liability because the Ward sisters grow up with an equal educational background but live entirely different marriages. Paralleling the economic consequences of marriage for the Ward sisters of *Mansfield Park*, Austen's two most independent heroines, Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet, enter marriage and either maintain or forfeit their independence. Although Emma manifests her independence by considering herself above marriage, proclaiming herself a matchmaker, and manipulating her friend Harriet, she discovers that she loves Mr. Knightley and succeeds in marrying him. Ironically, however, her marriage robs her of her previous independence as she begins to listen to his advice. In *Pride and Prejudice*, by contrast, marriage does not harm Elizabeth in any way: on the contrary, it challenges conventional stereotypes of marriage as restrictive, financially-driven, and a version of female confinement. For Elizabeth, marriage is a form of liberation. Her internal sense of morality overcomes societal expectations throughout the novel, and she marries Mr. Darcy for love while maintaining her independence.

Critical forms of resistance in Austen's novels center upon female interiority, women's representation in history, and marriage as liberation. Each of my three chapters includes aspects of Wollstonecraft's and Woolf's feminism but also reveals Austen's own feminist voice—both foundational and revolutionary. I view my study as a means of tracing a feminist arc between Wollstonecraft in the 18th century and Woolf in the 20th.

Chapter 1: “Women’s Education: The Tyranny of Societal Image and Authority Figures”

If then it can be fairly deduced from the present conduct of 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 received has only tended, with the constitution of civil society, to render them insignificant objects of desire; mere propagators of fools!

—Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (30-31)

The environment of a patriarchal society in the 19th century limits women’s education and orchestrates women’s lives around societal image and authority figures. Wollstonecraft attributes women’s inferiority to their education and the power that men hold as evaluators of women and as impediments to women’s access to information. A patriarchal society emphasizes women’s appearances over their intellectual capabilities, leading women to bask in male praise. In *Pride and Prejudice*, when Mr. Darcy objectifies women by claiming that unrealistic goals prevent him from finding any accomplished woman at all, Elizabeth challenges his view. Austen addresses women’s societal image and the role played by men in promoting women’s sense of their own inferiority. Although Catherine appears to be a heroine in *Northanger Abbey*, her narrative is constantly checked by men, especially General Tilney, to whose authority she succumbs. Her deluded conclusions about General Tilney’s past limit her independent capabilities, and even Henry Tilney mocks her for her extravagant imagination. Austen highlights authority figures in *Mansfield Park* as well through Sir Thomas’s tyranny. Fanny becomes his most accomplished daughter when he takes credit for her nurture under his roof and blames his own daughters’ ill behavior on their supposed nature rather than on the defects of their education. Nature as a defect becomes blurred when authority figures base their calculation of women’s inferiority on their nature or nurture, whichever reinforces the male evaluator.

Elizabeth Bennet's infallible heroism challenges the idealistic image of a "Proper Lady" (Poovey 3) of the late 18th century. *Pride and Prejudice* follows Elizabeth's central role as she navigates the complicated pursuit of marriage for her sisters, friends, and herself.

Wollstonecraft's feminism addresses women's societal image and blames male regulation of the female image as the driving force of women's weakness. Wollstonecraft's analysis applies to Mr. Darcy's standards of an "accomplished woman" (Austen 245). Mary Poovey's criticism of Jane Austen's feminism during the late 18th and early 19th centuries offers a critical lens for political implications in Austen's feminism. Poovey's historical representation of the "Proper Lady" illuminates the paradoxical structure of feminine confines and describes the controversial environment of women's roles after the French Revolution. Austen's heroines, particularly Elizabeth Bennet, critique a patriarchal society's unreasonable feminine confines, including less progressive approaches to marriage that broaden her audience to conservative supporters as well.

The dialogue between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy frequently reveals Austen's interpretation of controversial, feminine ideals. After traveling to Netherfield to visit Jane, Elizabeth socializes with Mr. Bingley, his sisters, and Mr. Darcy. While Mr. Bingley admires women's accomplishments, Mr. Darcy's high standards counter Mr. Bingley's praise: "But I am very far from agreeing with you of your estimation of ladies in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half-a-dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished" (245). Mr. Darcy's estimation of an accomplished lady is unachievable in many respects, and Austen voices the patriarchal standards of women's societal image through his analysis. During the 18th century, defining femininity is controversial, as Poovey argues: "the late eighteenth-century equation of 'female' and 'feminine' is characterized at every level by paradoxes and

contradictions. The first of many such complexities is evident in the fact that, even though late eighteenth-century moralists described femininity as innate, they also insisted that feminine virtues required constant cultivation” (15). Austen reflects this paradox in Darcy’s contradictory definition of femininity from the 18th century by Darcy’s initial challenge of Mr. Bingley’s admiration. Their contrasting assessments of an accomplished woman reveal the flexibility of a woman’s image. As Mr. Darcy evaluates women’s accomplishments, he determines a woman’s reputation and exemplifies men’s role in women’s societal image. Wollstonecraft challenges men’s role as evaluators, especially male writers, who “have contributed to render women more artificial, weaker characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society” (41). Although Bingley admires women’s accomplishments, he reinforces men’s role as evaluators, and Mr. Darcy’s condescending assessment exemplifies women’s resulting weakness. By attempting to accomplish the endless male requirements, and by supporting men’s evaluation, women will remain inferior.

Austen highlights women’s reinforcement of male evaluators through Miss Bingley, who thrives off the benevolent consequences of male praise and condemns Elizabeth for her resistance. Miss Bingley supports Mr. Darcy’s estimation and reinforces women’s inferiority by opposing Elizabeth. In an effort to support Mr. Darcy, Miss Bingley determines that Elizabeth is “one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex by undervaluing their own; and with many men, I dare say, it succeeds. But, in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art” (246). Miss Bingley’s belief that Elizabeth is “undervaluing” her sex reinforces male evaluators and supports men’s superiority in determining female accomplishment. Austen’s representation of multiple female perspectives extends the controversial idea of an accomplished lady to both sexes. Men’s opinion drives the conversation, but women’s perceptions of

themselves conclude it. Wollstonecraft addresses the positive outcomes women receive, based on their relationships, thereby obligations, to men: “Connected with man as daughters, wives, and mothers, their moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold their own faculties, and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue” (44). Wollstonecraft correlates duty to women’s morality, as Miss Bingley exemplifies when she deems Elizabeth’s actions as a “mean art,” (246) but Elizabeth’s disregard for Mr. Darcy’s opinion challenges male evaluators. Paralleling Wollstonecraft’s analysis of women’s ability to determine their own virtues, Elizabeth identifies the ridiculousness of depending on male opinion for affirmation, especially opinions so unachievable. Elizabeth’s opinion is not an act of undervaluing women; rather, her denial of Darcy challenges his unreasonable assessment of women and supports women’s ability to deem themselves accomplished, based on their own terms.

Austen’s inclusion of alternative female opinions creates her wide female platform in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth’s unconventional defiance contrasts with conservative women’s responses. Differing from Elizabeth, and Elizabeth’s rejection of Mr. Collins’s proposal, Charlotte does not choose to marry for love. Austen addresses a conservative representation of marriage through Charlotte’s acceptance of Mr. Collin’s proposal: “I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins’s character, connection 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” (297). Charlotte views marriage as women’s only choice in life, a choice that will determine a woman’s future, and she desires physical and economic accommodations over a romantic partner. Elizabeth embodies a more independent, passionate happiness than Charlotte’s less idealistic expectations of marriage, as

Austen describes Elizabeth's approach: "She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she had not supposed it to be possible that, when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage" (297). Austen's ironic description of "worldly advantage" resolutely contrasts with women's actual advantages in a patriarchal society, which were extremely limited. Marriage is not always advantageous, and women often became the property of their husbands. Elizabeth's sadness about Charlotte's sacrifice of feeling reflects Elizabeth's unconventional, idealistic desire for love in marriage. Charlotte's marital opinion reflects a conservative approach to marriage, as she seeks a marriage of security; Elizabeth's desire for love and happiness is unconventional. By extending the female platform to include women who find safety and security in conventional female roles, Austen can address a wide female audience. Whether women support progressive or conservative roles, Austen creates a platform for all women navigating the political turmoil of the French Revolution (Poovey 30). Poovey argues that the French Revolution "posed a direct threat to the principle of subordination, of which feminine propriety was a part, and thus brought the issue of 'women's rights' to the attention of men and women alike. On the other hand, this same social and political turmoil generated conservative backlash that eventually buried this issue altogether" (30). Poovey describes the paradoxical reestablishment of women's inferiority after the equal opportunity that the French Revolution temporarily allowed women (30). The resulting political chaos reaffirmed women's conventional roles as a way of establishing security during a tumultuous time. Charlotte's conservative approach to marriage, alongside Elizabeth's progressive independence, establishes an equal representation of all women's opinions, no matter their political polarization.

Elizabeth's independence extends beyond her marital beliefs and romantic desires as Austen develops an underlying allusion to misinformation by Mr. Darcy and Wickham's past. Austen parallels this political propaganda in a subtle manner by orchestrating information through her male characters. Poovey describes another critical aspect of the "Proper Lady" and the literature that followed this image. Comparing two magazine periodicals on misinformation during the 1790s, the *Lady's Magazine* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Poovey concludes: "Each periodical is affirming its commitment to established English values, but where the *Gentleman's Magazine* explicitly warns its readers of political and cultural menace, the *Lady's Magazine* presents a reassuring picture of stability and continuity" (16). With literature tailored to a specific gender and political influence accessible only to men, women and men did not receive the same information. Rather, women were manipulated into domestic roles, as Poovey argues: "Men, expected to take an active political—if not military—role in England's defense, were aroused by the specter of an alarming foe; women, expected to keep the domestic circle free of such anxieties, were given a picture of national strength and an incompetent enemy" (18). The gender differentiation of periodical information, along with women's conduct literature, produced a clear issue of misinformation in the late 18th century (Poovey 15-16). Although Elizabeth is the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, she obtains information from Wickham and Darcy. Often, Elizabeth is at the mercy of misinformation and deceit, as men hold the power of telling their story. Elizabeth's initial judgment of Darcy provokes her conversation with Wickham, as she attempts to discover the reason behind their antagonistic behavior. When Wickham slanders Darcy's name, he selfishly highlights himself: "I have a warm, unguarded temper, and I may have spoken my opinion *of* him, and *to* him, too freely. I can recall nothing worse. But the fact is, that we are very different sort of men, and that he hates me" (270). As

Wickham has access to the truth, he can manipulate the information he tells Elizabeth, and she immediately believes his side of the story, as it supports her dislike of Darcy, reaffirming public opinion. Wickham's dishonest retelling of his past affiliation with Darcy—a matter that could affect many women by influencing their opinion of both Darcy and Wickham—emphasizes men's control of information in a patriarchal society. Austen highlights the importance of Darcy and Wickham's relationship in the novel, especially by Elizabeth's gradual recognition of Darcy's integrity. The truth lies outside female access, but Elizabeth gradually learns the truth about Wickham from another man—Darcy.

Darcy's letter to Elizabeth, after she rejects his proposal, finally conveys the truth of Wickham and Darcy's relationship, and Austen establishes Elizabeth's masculine independence through her possession of the truth. Elizabeth suspected Darcy of manipulating Jane's happiness and potential marriage to Mr. Bingley. Austen allows Elizabeth further insight into Darcy's manner through another male interpreter, Colonel Fitzwilliam, who confesses: "What he told me was merely this: that he congratulated himself on having lately saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage, but without mentioning names or any other particulars, and I only suspected it to be Bingley from believing him to be the kind of man to get into a scrape of that sort" (330). Again, Elizabeth immediately believes Colonel Fitzwilliam, a man who grew up with Darcy. She is completely at the mercy of male information and relies on male interpretation. Darcy finally grants her access to the male world when his letter brings her into his confidence, and Elizabeth tells Jane the conflict between Darcy and Wickham's story: "Take your choice but you must be satisfied with only one. There is but such a quantity of merit between them; just enough to make one good sort of man; and of late it has been shifting about pretty much. For my part, I am inclined to believe it all Darcy's; but you shall do as you choose"

(352). A “good sort of man” in this sense equates to being honest, straightforward, and not misleading. Unlike Wickham, Darcy reveals his side of the story to Elizabeth and does not manipulate the truth or mislead her for his own personal motives. Austen critiques the patriarchal system by exposing women’s desire for the truth, unfiltered and without any ulterior manipulative intentions from powerful men.

Elizabeth’s independence challenges conventional stereotypes when she gains insight into Darcy and Wickham’s true backstory. Austen moves the usual platform of male superiority to Elizabeth’s control when Elizabeth learns more information than normally available in the domestic sphere. Wollstonecraft describes the limits of women’s education in a society that reinforces women’s appearances over their factual understanding: “how can they attain the vigour necessary to enable them to throw off their factitious character?—where find the strength to recur to reason and rise superior to a system of oppression, that blasts the fair promises of spring?” (118). Elizabeth’s background reflects an education based on appearances, but she is able to gain access to Darcy and Wickham’s superior world of reason. For Wollstonecraft, women’s power does not originate from an interest in themselves; rather, women’s power develops from their ability to entice men, another benevolent consequence: “This cruel association of ideas, which every thing conspires to twist into all their habits of thinking, or, to speak with more precision, of feeling, receives new force when they begin to act a little for themselves; for they then perceive, that it is only through their address to excite emotions in men, that pleasure and power are to be obtained” (118). Darcy’s emotional attachment to Elizabeth encourages him to reveal the accurate information of his past and clear his reputation with Elizabeth. When she realizes Wickham’s deceitfulness and manipulation, she decides not to reveal the information to her family or the public: “it will not signify to anyone here what he

really is. Some time hence it will all be found out, and then we may laugh at their stupidity in not knowing it before. At present I will say nothing about it” (353). Elizabeth’s motives to protect the public revolve around her sense of superiority over others from their ignorance. When she understands Wickham’s deceitfulness, which is unknown to the public, Elizabeth takes on a more masculine role than 19th-century stereotypical women in literature. She holds the power of information in the political affairs of men and can manipulate others in a masculine way: through reason and knowledge.

Whereas Elizabeth portrays masculine traits of political access and misinformation, Lydia represents the stereotypes of women’s silliness and vanity. Austen critiques Elizabeth’s decision to withhold Wickham’s deceitfulness from her family when Lydia decides rashly to run away with Wickham, and Elizabeth painfully declares: “I, who knew what he was. Had I but explained some part of it only—some part of what I learnt, to my own family! Had his character been known, this could not have happened. But it is all—all too late now” (380). Austen transfers the masculine narrative of misinformation to Elizabeth’s control, but Elizabeth makes the mistake of protecting Wickham’s reputation at the cost of Lydia. As foolish as Lydia is, Austen outlines Elizabeth’s faults as well, particularly regarding Wickham. When Elizabeth finally obtains male political information, she considers her family and the public’s knowledge as silly and ridiculous, so she decides to withhold it from everyone but Jane. *Pride and Prejudice* revolves around Darcy and Wickham’s past and current reputations. In the case of misinformation and 19th-century sexist propaganda, Darcy and Wickham’s history serves as critical news for public opinion—especially for women seeking marriages. Austen channels the patriarchal influence of news by withholding the more direct, accurate knowledge of Darcy and Wickham’s past from Elizabeth’s control. Until Darcy decides to release the information,

Elizabeth relies on public opinion and her own general impressions. Austen challenges the injustice of manipulating information to reinforce one's superiority through a female platform. Elizabeth, taking on a more masculine, independent role than other conservative women in the novel, does not trust her family with the knowledge of Wickham's duplicity and assumes control over society's access to information.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* addresses conventional, late 18th-century and early 19th-century female regulations, especially a patriarchal society's depiction of an "accomplished woman" (Austen 245) and women's inability to access political information. Mary Poovey's analysis of women's literature in the late 18th century offers a critical insight into misinformation and society's reestablishment of conservative ideals after the French Revolution. Based on the controversy over women's roles, Austen's feminism addresses progressive opinions through Elizabeth's independence and conservative opinions through Miss Bingley and Charlotte Lucas. Mr. Darcy and Wickham's control of information in the novel highlights political manipulation in women's literature, and Elizabeth's eventual possession of Darcy and Wickham's true story emphasizes her masculine capabilities. Wollstonecraft's assessment of women's education is applicable to Austen's feminism. As Elizabeth gains access to male knowledge, her sense of autonomy increases as she holds the power. Austen's feminism highlights political interpretations of women's progressive versus conservative roles, and Austen paves the way for women to overcome their domestic educational backgrounds and integrate themselves in the seemingly inaccessible affairs of men.

Elizabeth Bennet's independence is more defined than Catherine Morland's in *Northanger Abbey*, where the tyranny of male dominance is more pronounced than in *Pride and Prejudice*. Catherine experiences male tyranny in the form of her love interest, Henry Tilney,

and his father, General Tilney, each of whom limits her heroism and reshapes her innocent view of the world. Catherine is susceptible to societal image and male praise, much like Elizabeth, but her narrative is defined by General Tilney's authority. She imagines Henry's father as a criminal who murdered his deceased wife. Austen alludes to Catherine as an independent heroine, but Catherine's independence becomes as delusional as her imagination; her outrageous conclusion is an opportunity for male authority to check her behavior. Prior to her exploration of Bath, Catherine knows only her family's society. Strong authority figures quickly shape Catherine's perception and educate her previously imagined independence.

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* builds a female narrative that challenges 19th-century society by using a Gothic framework. Austen's narrator labels Catherine Morland as a potential heroine in contrast to conventional assumptions. Although Catherine's narrative seems central to the novel, *Northanger Abbey* concludes with an assessment of General Tilney's actions. Catherine's story begins with her exploration of Bath's society, but she inevitably faces conflict from men such as John Thorpe, General Tilney, and even Henry Tilney. Catherine attempts to join society and marry, but her agency as a potential heroine quickly diminishes when powerful men invade her narrative. Austen organizes the novel around Catherine's narrative, but she exemplifies 19th-century patriarchy by interrupting Catherine's story with male authority and exposing a conflict between her "common life" with her "wild imagination" (1137).

Austen introduces Catherine Morland as an unlikely heroine while also establishing the lack of realism in her narrative. From the first description of Catherine, the narrator questions Catherine's heroic abilities: "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (1005). A heroine usually makes unique and independent decisions. Sarcastically defying Catherine's independence, the narrator describes

Catherine with a surprising tone to illustrate society's perception and challenge her central role. Claudia Johnson describes Austen's alternative interpretation of heroine motifs and Austen's challenge of traditional writing conventions as a new form of artistry (29). Johnson compares Austen's fiction to a "workshop, where the would-be artist first set hand to the tools of her trade, identifying operative structures and motifs, and then turning them inside out in order to explore their artificiality and bring to light their hidden implications" (29). Catherine shows potential as a heroine, and Austen describes the patterned behavior of a stereotypical heroine to create the illusion of Catherine's central role. Ultimately, society defines Catherine's heroic capabilities, and Austen can only allude to her potential as a heroine in the novel. The narrator generalizes Catherine's experience and insinuates that she is merely conventional: "To be disgraced in the eye of the world, to wear the appearance of infamy while her heart is all purity, her actions all innocence, and the misconduct of another the true source of her debasement, is one of those circumstances which peculiarly belong to the heroine's life, and her fortitude too; she suffered, but no murmur passed her lips" (1029). By comparing Catherine to other heroines, Austen diminishes her individuality. Based on the general impression of other heroines' experiences, Catherine's reaction loses its significance. Her strength in hiding her emotions becomes a necessary requirement for her role as heroine. The narrator's definition of a heroine seems to echo women's societal image. Without society's label, Catherine's experience as a heroine becomes moot.

Austen introduces Catherine's heroine role but quickly establishes the power of John Thorpe and Henry Tilney in driving her narrative. Despite the contrast between the two men, they share a similarly authoritative role because they are men. Austen displays male power in Catherine's narrative by describing the different approaches to driving a horse. Thorpe shows

more aggression than does Tilney: “Henry drove so well,—so quietly—without making any disturbance, without parading to her, or swearing at them; so different from the only gentleman-coachman whom it was in her power to compare him with!” (1088). Henry Tilney’s gentler approach is more enticing to Catherine because it symbolizes his marital approach. By driving “so quietly,” Tilney reveals his potential kindness as a husband, whereas Thorpe seems aggressive and domineering. Austen correlates a husband’s conduct with leading a horse to illustrate the men’s powerful narrative, even in Catherine’s story. Holding the reins of every narrative, men manipulate and control women’s lives. Austen describes Catherine’s reaction to Tilney’s power: “To be driven by him, next to being dancing with him, was certainly the greatest happiness in the world” (1088). Comparing Henry Tilney’s driving with his dancing, Austen establishes Henry’s leading role. Every resulting happiness in Catherine’s narrative stems from her position of inferiority alongside a man’s lead. In both dancing and driving, male superiority leads the woman, and she has little to no independence, other than her power of refusal, as Henry outlines: “man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal” (1043). Austen’s emphasis on male power through Tilney and Thorpe’s driving acknowledges female inferiority and their inability to challenge the driver. Pleased to witness how a man uses his power, Catherine decides which skill she appreciates, but she herself cannot drive or formulate her own happiness. By orchestrating men’s power through their approach to driving, Austen establishes the inescapable confines of male authority, constantly driving and controlling a woman’s journey.

Catherine’s narrative holds the most power when she explores Northanger Abbey and imagines General Tilney’s ulterior motives. Austen’s Gothic transition from Bath society seems abrupt and is difficult to assimilate within the overall novel; however, this framework highlights

Austen's transition to the female narrative. Set apart from conventional society, Catherine drives the plot of a Gothic mystery at Northanger Abbey. Until Henry Tilney interrupts Catherine's exploration, Catherine imagines a Gothic tale in which General Tilney killed his deceased wife, and Catherine holds agency over the setting of Northanger Abbey: "she might that morning have passed near the very spot of this unfortunate woman's confinement—might have been within a few paces of the cell in which she languished out her days; for what part of the abbey could be more fitted for the purpose than that which yet bore the traces of monastic division?" (1106). The narrative revolves around Catherine's depictions of Northanger Abbey and the possible crimes she derives from General Tilney's history. Austen moves from "common life" (1137) in Bath to Catherine's imaginative assumptions about General Tilney's crimes. Although Catherine's conclusions are seemingly far-fetched, her determination to navigate Northanger Abbey and explore General Tilney's past contrasts with her previous sense of insecurity and innocence in Bath society. Austen distinguishes Catherine's growth: "Catherine sometimes started at the boldness of her own surmises, and sometimes hoped or feared that she had gone too far; but they were supported by such appearances as made their dismissal impossible" (1106). Austen outlines Catherine's "boldness" in her assumptions of General Tilney's criminal history to emphasize Catherine's unconventional independence as she creates her own conclusions separate from men's influence. Johnson argues that Catherine's sense of independence in the Gothic realm is a result of her misinterpretation of Gothic literature as an escape from modern conventions (35). An imaginative space, such as the Gothic framework, provides more female agency than other literary genres, but the female narrative is always challenged. Austen dramatically describes Catherine's unbelievable conclusions to emphasize the change in narrative and allude to their lack of credibility. Prior to Catherine's exploration of Northanger Abbey, the narrative is male-

driven and normative, contrasting with Catherine's female narrative. A woman can hold agency and truly possess her own narrative only in a fantastical, imaginative world outside of 19th-century society.

Returning to reality, Catherine's narrative is interrupted by Henry Tilney, as an example of male power and an authority figure. Henry's interceding voice in Catherine's narrative deconstructs her delusional moment of agency and reestablishes his influential role. Austen overturns Catherine's moment of agency through Henry's insertion of reality: "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 observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them?" (1111). Henry's judgment of 19th-century society includes nationality, religion, education, and government—human inventions that each bolster the patriarchal system. From a religious standpoint, Christian values should inhibit criminal acts of murder and the mistreatment of wives. But religious associations do not defend women's independence or provide a platform for the female narrative in 19th-century society. Education is not as easily accessible to women as it is to men, and laws protect men over women. All of these aspects of 19th-century society bolster male superiority and diminish the female narrative. Austen formulates Henry's argument to include these societal constructs as a way of explaining each realm of society that supports men over women. Religion, government, and education, as critical elements of the patriarchal society, bolster the male narrative and categorize Catherine's as merely "wild imagination" (1137). Catherine's momentary agency in *Northanger Abbey* formulates unacceptable conclusions that portray General Tilney in a negative, potentially murderous light: "the probability that Mrs. Tilney yet lived, shut up for causes unknown, and receiving from the pitiless hands of her

husband a nightly supply of coarse food, was the conclusion which necessarily followed” (1106). Catherine’s concluding assessment of General Tilney is ludicrous and imaginative, but when Catherine puts General Tilney’s reputation in question her conclusion becomes unacceptable in society, especially by its challenge to male authority. Based on the societal ramifications Henry outlines, General Tilney’s good reputation as a powerful figure is protected by the patriarchy and will be accepted by society, no matter Catherine’s assessment.

Catherine’s “wild imagination” (1137) represents a woman’s narrative and the “common life” (1137) represents society’s accepted reality, usually developed by men; *Northanger Abbey* is only a brief exploration of Catherine’s imagination before she must return to reality and return to Henry. When Henry Tilney and Catherine reunite at the end of the novel, Henry’s explanation diminishes Catherine’s individuality. Henry’s feelings for Catherine arise from the attention she grants him, and Austen describes the artificiality of their love: “I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought” (1137). The artificiality of Henry and Catherine’s attachment correlates with Catherine’s central role as heroine: in both cases, Catherine is common, not individual. Austen positions Catherine’s relationship with Henry in context with other stereotypical heroines: “It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of a heroine’s dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own” (1137). In the “common life,” Catherine’s “wild imagination” constructs a marriage based on genuine feelings. Austen’s mockery of and condescension towards women’s genuine feelings call attention to men’s perception of women, as silly, naïve, and ridiculous. The narrator of Catherine’s story critiques fictional marriages as delusional—similar to Henry’s opinion of Catherine. In this way, the

narrator ironically mocks women's imagination from a male perspective, revealing the narrator's condescension toward an independent heroine in fiction. Austen challenges women's existence in reality and fiction. Marriage based on artificial intentions becomes a common societal outcome, and a marriage of genuine love becomes an imaginary depiction of the female narrative. Henry lacks the admirable qualities of a true hero in the novel, but his influence exceeds Catherine's role as potential heroine.

Austen addresses General Tilney's actions at the conclusion of the novel to further exacerbate the delusion of Catherine's independence and role as heroine: "I leave it to be settled, by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (1142). Catherine's assessment of General Tilney's past challenges his authority and initiates the conversation of "parental tyranny." Rather than describing Catherine's personal accomplishments, Austen highlights General Tilney's capabilities as a tyrannical male figure: running Catherine away from Northanger Abbey, ruining the union between Henry and Catherine, and eventually condoning their marital union. The narrator distracts Catherine's agency as a heroine by analyzing General Tilney's actions and finding them justified. Catherine's significance relies on General Tilney's role in the novel; therefore, Austen's depiction of a heroine's tale becomes less imaginative and unrealistic. In a realistic representation of 19th-century society, the female narrative has no agency.

Northanger Abbey introduces the potential for a female narrative, but Austen's Gothic framework, correlated with men's powerful roles in the novel, illuminates the imaginative interpretation of a female narrative existing in 19th-century society. Catherine serves as a moving piece in a story actually defined by men, as Henry Tilney critiques her assumption of General Tilney's guilt and General Tilney controls Henry and Catherine's marriage. The implausible

Gothic framework of *Northanger Abbey*, driven by female agency, bolsters Austen's ironic depiction of heroine ideals. When Catherine navigates Bath society, explores Northanger Abbey, and eventually marries Henry Tilney, men will forever dominate her story.

Like General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* looms as an oppressive authority figure. But Catherine's exposure to both Bath society and General Tilney's authority occurs after an innocent childhood spent with her family and after she arrives in Bath, where her inexperience in making friends and forming relationships places her at a disadvantage. By contrast, Fanny grows up away from home, Sir Thomas having taken responsibility for her childhood education, her transition into society, and her future marriage plans. Because Sir Thomas exerts more authority on Fanny's life than the male Tilneys do on Catherine's, *Mansfield Park* highlights Sir Thomas's hypocrisy. Fanny's supposedly flawed nature absolves him of responsibility for her behavior, but hypocritically, he associates his own daughters' flaws with their nature, not their education, and does not recognize that education has benefited his niece but harmed his daughters. In this way, Austen critiques the male authoritative figure's power and unreasonable assessment of women.

Austen first establishes Sir Thomas Bertram's power over the women in his household and the extent to which he dictates their lives: "About thirty years ago Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady" (449). Even before Fanny's arrival at Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas is influencing Lady Bertram's relationship to her sisters, supplying wealth and monetary comforts. As a wealthy, respectable man, Sir Thomas must reinforce his reputation by producing successful children as examples of his good authority. Austen highlights the male reputation in

parenting as Sir Thomas creates an innate divide between his children and Fanny: “I should wish to see them very good friends, and would, on no account, authorize in my girls the smallest degree of arrogance towards their relation; but still they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations will always be different” (453). Sir Thomas’s children must be successful, proper members of society as they have both nature and nurture to their advantage. Brought up in Sir Thomas’s household, Fanny benefits from advantages that counter her birth in an impoverished home. His children’s success is an example of his parenting and Sir Thomas becomes a tyrant, especially over his daughters, Maria and Julia: “Their father was no object of love to them; he had never seemed the friend of their pleasures, and his absence was unhappily most welcome” (466). Fanny also feels Sir Thomas’s overbearing demeanor: “Fanny’s relief, and her consciousness of it, were quite equal to her cousins’; but a more tender nature suggested that her feelings were ungrateful, and she really grieved because she could not grieve” (466). Austen connects Sir Thomas’s tyrannical parenting with his daughters’ and Fanny’s behavior to portray women’s social inferiority as authority figures determine their success and failures.

Austen outlines Sir Thomas’s unattainable standards for his daughters and Fanny by highlighting each woman’s flaws, based on both nature and nurture. Sir Thomas’s assessment of each daughter exacerbates his arrogance. The Bertram sisters put Fanny at a disadvantage, as she lacks their exposure to genteel education, but Sir Thomas invests in Fanny as an opportunity to boost his elite reputation. Sir Thomas gives himself far more credit as a parent than he deserves: “Sir Thomas, meanwhile, went on with his own hopes and his own observations, still feeling a right, by all his knowledge of human nature, to expect to see the effect of the loss of power and consequence on his niece’s spirits, and the past attentions of the lover producing a craving for their return” (658). Austen criticizes male arrogance in a patriarchal society when she describes

his mistaken assumption that he can adjust his parenting to consider Fanny's nature as well.

Austen connects Fanny's coming-out ball with Sir Thomas's education and a three-month visit to the Price family. He portrays Fanny as a symbol of his own success during Fanny's coming-out ball: "Sir Thomas himself was watching her progress down the dance with much complacency; he was proud of his niece; and without attributing all her personal beauty, as Mrs. Norris seemed to do, to her transplantation to Mansfield, he was pleased with himself for having supplied everything else: education and manners she owed to him" (606). Although Mrs. Norris's assessment of Fanny's beauty attributes her nature to Mansfield, Sir Thomas claims her nurturing as his success. He reestablishes Fanny's nature by sending Fanny home to the shambles of the Price family. When Mr. Crawford visits Fanny's childhood home, Austen dichotomizes Fanny's origins with high society. Mr. Crawford's unpredicted entrance emphasizes Fanny's shame: "She might scold herself for the weakness, but there was no scolding it away. She was ashamed, and she would have been yet more ashamed of her father than of all the rest" (677). By sending her home and evoking Fanny's shame, Sir Thomas reaffirms Fanny's indebtedness to him. Austen contrasts Fanny's societal transition with her family's poverty to outline Sir Thomas's vast power and his influence on Fanny's lowly origins. Without his influence, she would be residing in her family's uncouth, cacophonous home.

Despite Fanny's successful assimilation into Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas manages to disapprove of her approach to marriage. Austen establishes women's flaws as subjective: for Sir Thomas, Fanny's desire to marry for love is a critical female flaw. Fanny defies Sir Thomas by rejecting Mr. Crawford's proposal. In challenging Sir Thomas's authority she loses his regard: "Self-willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful. He thought her all this. She had deceived his expectations; she had lost his good opinion. What was to become of her?" (630). Sir Thomas's

quick reassessment of Fanny reveals the unattainable standards of a patriarchal rule, which constantly reinforce women's inferiority by limiting their success. Fanny—malleable and appreciative—constantly reflects Sir Thomas's opinions and teachings. Her only source of independence lies in her emotions, particularly love. Austen criticizes the 19th-century system that bolsters patriarchal figures, such as Sir Thomas, and confines women to diminutive, constantly suppressed roles. Fanny's independence is particularly offensive to Sir Thomas, as he laments, "I had thought you peculiarly free from willfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence" (629). The repeated phrase "even in young women" emphasizes Sir Thomas's belief in women's inferiority. Fanny's success in overcoming her "independence of spirit" does not change his opinion of women's willfulness; rather, he gives women no credibility and expects Fanny to revert to her supposedly disrespectful nature. Austen challenges the patriarchal suppression of women's independence, revealing Fanny's only flaw, in Sir Thomas's opinion, as her obstinate indulgence in her own emotions. Gathering that Fanny's feelings do not align with his own, he is arrogant enough to think that he can change them. Sir Thomas outlines Mr. Crawford's obvious intentions to Fanny: "You must have observed his attentions; and though you always received them very properly (I have no accusation to make on that head,) I never perceived them to be unpleasant to you. I am half inclined to think, Fanny, that you do not quite know your own feelings" (627-28). Sir Thomas's insistence on controlling every aspect of Fanny, even her emotions, exposes his own desperation to maintain his superiority by marrying Fanny off to a wealthy suitor. Austen denounces this arrogance through Fanny's silent plea: "she was willing to hope, secondly, that her uncle's displeasure was abating, and would abate farther as he

considered the matter with more impartiality, and felt, as a good man must feel, how wretched, and how unpardonable, how hopeless, and how wicked it was to marry without affection” (632). Austen’s repetition emphasizes Fanny’s desperation and hope for independence, as marriage is her only available decision in a patriarchal world. By refusing to obey Sir Thomas’s wishes, Fanny liberates herself from his tyranny. Her only flaw is her wish to marry for love.

Austen emphasizes independence as a necessary evil for circumventing the patriarchal rule, not just for Fanny but for the Bertram sisters and Mary Crawford as well. While Maria’s actions are not entirely admirable, she marries without love to escape her father’s tyranny: “She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed. The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely necessary. She must escape from him and from Mansfield as soon as possible, and find consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world, for a wounded spirit” (563). Fanny is dissuaded from a marriage without feeling, but Maria cannot endure her overbearing father and uses marriage as an opportunity for freedom beyond Mansfield Park. Maria’s decision is different from Fanny’s when she chooses to marry Mr. Rushworth to escape her father’s tyranny. After Maria’s infidelity, Julia’s decision to elope with Mr. Yates results from a similar fear of her father’s anger in response to her sister’s offense. Dreading her father’s likely increased “severity and restraint,” she decides to escape “such immediate horrors at all risks” (716). Both Julia and Maria desire freedom from their tyrannical father and view marriage as a solution. Although Julia and Maria approach marriage differently from Fanny, Austen critiques the system that forces women to escape the grasp of one powerless relationship and succumb to a new authority, the husband. By describing Julia and Maria in a negative light, Austen reaffirms 19th-century society’s perception of women, built on the opinions of men. In answer to Julia’s and Maria’s faults, Sir Thomas’s arrogance develops into

an obstinate refusal to blame himself for his daughters' ill-advised discipline. He attributes their behavior to nature, rather than his education: "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" (714). Sir Thomas's initial emphasis on his daughters' superior nature ironically becomes his reason for their flaws. Austen challenges society's perception of women as the problem by outlining Sir Thomas's subjective reasoning. As his authority fails with his two daughters, he finds blame in their natures to maintain his superiority. In a patriarchal world, the oppressors will never view themselves in the wrong. Sir Thomas's hypocritical reasoning symbolizes men's perception of women in 19th-century society.

Sir Thomas attributes Maria's and Julia's faults to their nature and does not take personal responsibility for his role in their education. Austen, by contrast, uses Fanny's and Edmund's assessment of Mary as a means of blaming women's education for their behavior. Edmund believes that Mary Crawford's flaws result from her education and mar her natural excellence. Initially in the novel, everyone admires Mary Crawford's ladylike behavior: "In the drawing-room Miss Crawford was also celebrated. Her merit in being gifted by Nature with strength and courage was fully appreciated by the Miss Bertrams; her delight in riding was like their own; her early excellence in it was like their own, and they had great pleasure in praising it" (487). Austen emphasizes "Nature" in Miss Crawford to create a divide between her and Fanny: the former is naturally gifted, but Fanny has gained gifts through nurture. Austen accentuates Mary's natural gifts when Edmund confesses to Fanny: "She does not *think* evil, but she speaks it, speaks it in playfulness; and though I know it to be playfulness, it grieves me to the soul" (601). Supporting his opinion, Fanny adds that Mary's behavior is the "effect of education" (601). Whereas both

Fanny and Edmund believe that education limits a woman's success, Sir Thomas blames his daughters' faults not on their education but on their nature. Associating the true source of women's flaws with men's inescapable authority, Austen supports Edmund and Fanny's opinion by concluding that Julia's education, not her nature, is to blame: "The politeness which she had been brought up to practice as duty made it impossible for her to escape; while the want of that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of her own heart, that principle of right, which had not formed any essential part of her education, made her miserable under it" (500). The contest between nature and nurture represents the irrational formulation of women's worth in a patriarchal society. Sir Thomas believes that his daughters' behavior absolves him of any responsibility for their actions, whereas Edmund admires Mary's nature but blames her behavior on her education: "To hear the woman whom—no harsher name than folly given! So voluntarily, so freely, so coolly to canvass it! No reluctance, no horror, no feminine, shall I say, no modest loathings? This is what the world does. For where, Fanny, shall we find a woman whom nature had so richly endowed? Spoilt, spoilt!" (709). Austen presents Edmund's view as more reasonable than Sir Thomas's, but Edmund blames Mary's father more so than he does Mary. This opinion reinforces the objectification of women, merely portraying the successes or failures of their fathers, the tyrants. Absolving women of blame, as Edmund does for Mary, reinforces a system built on men's control and authority.

Jane Austen's portrayal of nature versus nurture in *Mansfield Park* highlights the central issues of a 19th-century patriarchal society. In the hands of a tyrannical rule, women are constantly perceived as guilty and inferior to bolster the superiority of men, who view themselves as blameless in comparison. Austen establishes a range of objectionable behavior from women in the novel, stemming from the reserved heroine to the more villainously

perceived Maria, Julia, and Mary. Sir Thomas serves as an emblem of male tyranny that renders women guilty and attributes women's faults to either nature or nurture. *Mansfield Park* reflects women's unattainable standards in a patriarchal society and outlines the faults of a system built by male power and male respectability.

Austen shows that societal image, male evaluators, and authority figures contribute to women's education and confirm Wollstonecraft's argument that women's education creates their inferiority and limits their capacity for reason. Using Wollstonecraft's feminism as a historical framework for Austen's writing illuminates the historical barriers women faced in the 18th and 19th centuries when women could not achieve independence but did desire it. Based on their education, women's only capacity for success was dependence and subordination. A patriarchal society does not nurture women's intellectual abilities and equates appearance to worthiness. Men's education nurtures their intellect and creates them into authority figures and evaluators. Wollstonecraft's feminism highlights these central issues of a patriarchal society, and Austen's portrayal of the patriarchy emphasizes women's education in a similar light.

Chapter 2: “Education’s Confinement and Female Interiority as a Form of Resistance”

I thought how unpleasant it was to be locked out; and I thought how it was worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking, of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and the insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of the writer, I thought at last it was time to roll up the crumpled skin of the day, with its arguments and its impressions and its anger and its laughter and cast it into the hedge.

—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (24)

This chapter explores female confinement and interiority in *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility*. As a result of women’s education in the 18th and 19th centuries, women faced different forms of confinement: psychological, physical, and social. Educated to fulfill certain societal standards, eventually marry, and always follow male authority, women were trapped. Austen outlines women’s confinement in *Persuasion* through Anne Elliot, when she defends women’s constancy to Captain Harville. In this debate, Anne contrasts male opportunity with women’s domestic entrapment. Gilbert and Gubar outline the rules of etiquette pervading society and bolster Austen’s portrayal of social confinement for women. As Austen describes education’s confinement of women, she alludes to female interiority as a form of resistance (Gilbert and Gubar 16). Women’s constancy and emotional capabilities are a form of female interiority that can grant women strength. As Marianne and Elinor Dashwood navigate their relationships, Austen highlights female interiority as a crucial form of resistance for overcoming external circumstances. Both Wollstonecraft and Woolf establish the importance of female interiority in resisting a patriarchal society. Despite the different societies that Wollstonecraft and Woolf understand, they each view female interiority as a possible solution to women’s confinement.

Austen portrays Anne Elliot’s emotional captivity in her conversation with Captain Harville towards the end of the novel. In this scene, Austen contrasts male opportunity with

female confinement. Anne describes women's confinement, based on her personal experience, and defends women's constancy as a result of women's entrapment at home: "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" (1278). Austen uses "we" as an illustration of Anne's speaking on behalf of all diminished women, who are unable to speak for themselves. Women's constancy seems inescapable by Anne's use of fate. Rather than describing the "majority" of women, or "many" women as emotionally constant, Anne argues that it is "our fate," a dramatically inescapable form of captivity. In one form of confinement, women must remain at "home" (1278)—a physical confinement. Another form of confinement is women's psychological captivity: women must remain "quiet" (1278). Because society offers men opportunity outside of domesticity, men cannot understand women's confinement. Anne contrasts the constrictions in women's lives with men's freedom: as she tells Captain Harville, "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" (1278). Anne contrasts women's diminution and entrapment in the domestic sphere with male opportunity. Harville's conversation with Anne broadly establishes the difference between women's fate and men's lack of understanding. Anne's emphasis on domesticity as women's fate reveals the inescapable barriers of a patriarchal society.

Based on Anne and Captain Harville's conversation, Gilbert and Gubar's *A Madwoman in the Attic* explains women's confinement in a patriarchal system, offering interiority as an escape from women's captivity. Austen describes women's confinement in a physical sense as Anne voices her sense of entrapment within the domestic sphere, but Gilbert and Gubar describe female captivity within the 19th century as a constant societal expectation: "For Austen, the

domestic confinement of women is not a metaphor so much as a literal fact of life, enforced by all those elaborate rules of etiquette governing even the trivial morning calls that affect the females of each of the novels” (124). Alongside women’s trapped position in the home, societal obligations and etiquette restrict women from socializing freely. Because women’s opportunities beyond their homes are so rare, socialization seems like a potential escape, but an escape from domestic obligation leads to women’s trapped roles in society. Gilbert and Gubar describe the requirements and restrictions of socialization that women must follow. Rules of etiquette are more excessively prohibitive for women than for men, just as men have more opportunities outside of the home. Austen expresses women’s captivity in a variety of contexts, equating male opportunity with women’s lack of freedom. Gilbert and Gubar’s analysis of Harville and Anne also concludes that men create such unattainable standards, resulting in constant forms of confinement for women, because women possess an internal resilience men will never access: “her speech reminds us that the male charge of ‘inconstancy’ is an attack on the irrepressible interiority of women who cannot be contained within the images provided by patriarchal culture” (179). Austen uses Anne’s voice to portray the patriarchy’s exploitive power, as society forces women into the tiniest imaginable corner of existence—diminished and yet, still maintaining an internal defiance that men cannot oppress.

Captain Harville and Anne Elliot’s conversation introduces written history as another condition of female captivity in 19th-century society. Historically, women lack representation and are depicted only through male authorship. Harville argues with Anne and describes women’s image in history: “Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman’s fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men” (1279). Austen highlights her experience as an author when Anne defends women’s voicelessness and men’s authority in literature. Gilbert and Gubar address

Austen's societal limitations as an author: "Austen attempted through self-imposed limitations to define a secure place, even as she seemed to admit the impossibility of actually inhabiting such a small place with any degree of comfort. And always, for Austen, it is women—because they are too vulnerable for the world at large—who must acquiesce in their own confinement, no matter how stifling it may be" (108). Cornered within the physical home and unable to escape through socialization, women were confined to invisibility in history as well. History is recorded mainly from male authorship, and women are completely disregarded or depicted as a shadow, irrelevant within the masculine story. Woolf praises Austen's writing, as Austen uses her confinement as an opportunity to represent women: "If Jane Austen suffered in any way from her circumstances it was the narrowness of life that was imposed on her. It was impossible for a woman to go about alone. She never travelled; she never drove through London on an omnibus or had a luncheon in a shop by herself. But perhaps it was the nature of Jane Austen not to want what she had not. Her gift and her circumstances matched each other completely" (71). Austen's circumstances allowed her to voice women's experience in history. If she lived differently, with more opportunity and freedom, perhaps Austen could not have represented diminished, forgotten women in literature, praising their strengths and ability to endure hardship. Austen's novels, particularly *Persuasion*, reveal her creative flexibility and feminist brilliance as she navigates a 19th-century, patriarchal audience. From a superficial reading of *Persuasion*, the novel reflects Anne's marital journey and union with Captain Wentworth, but upon further analysis, Austen interweaves her own voice in a subtle way that manipulates the patriarchal system.

Persuasion introduces the consequences of women's education in a patriarchal society as Anne Elliot defends women's capabilities despite multiple forms of confinement. Constant subordination reduces women's external lives to insignificance, but a woman will forever

possess an internal capacity ruled only by her. Wollstonecraft and Woolf emphasize women's minds as their own, a resistant form of sanctuary from the rules and obligations that society imposes on women. Marianne and Elinor encounter different forms of heartbreak in *Sense and Sensibility*, but Austen constructs female interiority as a possible solution. Elinor describes female interiority in her philosophy, frequently encouraging Marianne to think for herself. Austen creates female interiority as a solution to overcoming uncontrollable circumstances and emotional captivity.

Sense and Sensibility outlines women's inability to hold property as another form of confinement. R. B. Rose's argument, in "Feminism, Women and the French Revolution," describes women's brief independence that enabled women to hold property in 1790 during the French Revolution. Although property laws briefly changed, men still maintained the most power. Very rarely, in Austen's novels, do women hold power over their own property: Lady Catherine de Bourgh, in *Pride and Prejudice*, is an obvious example, and Marianne loses Willoughby because, as he explains to Elinor, his hoped-for inheritance from Mrs. Smith has dictated his matrimonial future (187).

Austen's novel begins with an anonymous "old gentleman's" death and the passing of his property Norland, to the next determined kin. Claudia Johnson addresses this gentleman's anonymity when she describes the convention of male ownership: "Austen ushers the story in a generation early and describes her venerable patriarch with such unwontedly obtrusive abstraction in order to highlight what would otherwise be unremarkable: the succession of property through sons" (51). Rather than presenting women unrealistically as property owners, Austen formulates her critique around the traditional patrilineal inheritance as an example of the injustice. Noting the "distinctive dubiety" (52) of Austen's writing, Johnson does not view the

novel as “a dramatized conduct book partly favoring female prudence over female impetuosity, as if those qualities could be discussed apart from the larger world of politics” (50). Austen’s opening description of Norland and the Dashwood family supports Johnson’s argument that Austen critiques the 19th-century practice of male inheritance. Because the Dashwood sisters are clearly less significant than their half-brother, Austen critiques the gluttonous tradition of male inheritance by describing the widow and her daughters’ impoverished state: “for their fortune, independent of what might arise to them from their father’ inheriting that property, could be but small. Their mother had nothing, and their father only seven thousand pounds in his own disposal’ (9). Women’s inferiority and poverty are as traditional as the societal practice of male inheritance. By portraying 19th-century women realistically as male possessions rather than people and by giving priority to male Dashwood descendants, Austen’s first chapter critiques the unjust patriarchal system that confines the two Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne, to leave their childhood home.

Where does Austen’s critique of the patrilineal system originate? Rose suggests that historical strides in feminism during the French Revolution may explain Austen’s focus on male inheritance and property laws. Austen describes the familial relations in Mr. Dashwood’s inheritance in a convoluted manner that lumps in-laws and half-relations together and mentions women only when they hold value to the male descendants as when Austen notes that Mr. Henry Dashwood’s inheritance had dwindled so much that “ten thousand pounds, including the late legacies, was all that remained for his widow and daughters” (10). This passage emphasizes male lineage, as does yet another sentence about Mr. Dashwood’s disappointment that his inheritance, bypassing “his wife and daughters,” went to “his son, and his son’s son a child of four years old” (9). According to Rose, women acquired the right to inherit property.: “In 1790” (197). This

temporary equality bolsters Austen's critique of male inheritance and amplifies the injustice of restricting women's ownership. Rose concludes that the Enlightenment ideals, "which set out to make a better world for women," did not last long; the Napoleonic Code, which followed, restored the "old patriarchal code" (199) and returned women to a position of inferiority and confinement.

Austen first establishes the framework of early 19th-century society to express women's lack of freedom. A patriarchal society reduces female ownership to women's personal thought. Elinor explains the importance of women's independent thought to Marianne: "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 to conform to their judgment in serious matters?" (60). Marianne and Elinor's dynamic relationship explores the concept of female interiority. Two alternative scenes emphasize the importance of internal freedom: Marianne's reaction to Willoughby's departure and Elinor's reaction to Edward's. Austen describes Marianne's lack of control: "This violent oppression of spirits continued the whole evening. She was without any power, because she was without any desire of command over herself" (54). Marianne's emotional turmoil is so overwhelming that she loses autonomy over herself. Societal barriers cause her lack of control, and her dependence on the patriarchal system is frustrating. Without Willoughby, Marianne is completely devastated and incapable of thinking for herself. In this sense, Willoughby represents everything the patriarchal system can provide Marianne, and her desolation implies her loss of comfort and stability within the system. Willoughby's departure is disheartening for Marianne based on her romantic attachment to him and the loss of opportunity Willoughby's marriage represents. Marianne's loss so overwhelms her that she loses confidence in herself and loses her sense of interiority; she no longer has power or freedom over

herself. Austen opposes Marianne's lack of interiority with Elinor's more resilient reaction to Edward's departure, although Elinor still attempts to find an escape: "Her mind was inevitably at liberty; her thoughts could not be chained elsewhere; and the past and the future, on a subject so interesting, must be before her, must force her attention, and engross her memory, her reflection, and her fancy" (67). Facing the same cultural implications as Marianne, Elinor navigates Edward's departure by assigning herself physical tasks to escape her internal pain. Elinor's thoughts "could not be chained elsewhere" (67). This description alludes to the chains that restrict women in a patriarchal culture. Although Elinor and Marianne are chained to their emotions in a similar way to Anne Elliot, Austen highlights women's need to respond to a loss of opportunity with internal authority. External factors, Willoughby's and Edward's departure, create uncontrollable circumstances for Elinor and Marianne who, overwhelmed and disheartened, face the captivity of their emotions.

Wollstonecraft highlights a critical aspect of women's freedom as she bolsters the necessity of independent thought. Arguing that the goal of a patriarchal system is to diminish women's opinions and considerations, Wollstonecraft reveals the flaws of assimilating educational equality in a societal structure that will still limit women's capabilities: "It may then fairly be inferred, that, till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education. It is, however, sufficient for my present purpose to assert, that, whatever effect circumstances have on the abilities, every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason" (40). Feminist progress, for Wollstonecraft, is a woman's ability to exercise her reason. A translation of Wollstonecraft's feminism is apparent in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* when Elinor argues for women's interiority. When Willoughby and Edward depart, leaving Marianne and Elinor devastated, Austen critiques women's dependence on men by illustrating female

interiority as a possible solution to uncontrollable circumstances. Although the system places Elinor and Marianne in a position of inferiority, Wollstonecraft and Austen conclude that resolution rests upon women's independent thought, separate from men's power. Wollstonecraft conveys female dependency and summarizes its impact on the patriarchal system: "Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing" (42). Women's dependence on marriage and their pursuit of suitors feeds into society's desire for women's "blind obedience" (42). Marianne and Elinor are devastated by lost opportunity, and male superiority relies on this female complacency. In answer to lost opportunity, Austen's heroines become "slaves" (Wollstonecraft 42) to their thoughts and are trapped by emotional captivity. To resist this confinement, Wollstonecraft and Austen emphasize women's internal authority, no matter their overwhelming emotions. Critiquing a system of plentiful barriers for women, Austen asserts women's interiority as a crucial form of resistance—one of women's limited options for independence.

In the early 19th century confinement for women manifests itself in two ways addressed in Austen's novels: in women's inability to possess property and the way the patriarchal system turns women into possessions for men. Austen's writing unveils the systematic diminution of female thought along with feminist strides towards women's independence and interiority. While describing women's dependence on men, Austen constructs the repercussions for realistic heroines, who resist the status quo by having minds of their own. *Sense and Sensibility* illuminates a new interpretive lens of female confinement and establishes a societal framework that encourages female freedom.

Austen creates female interiority as a solution that provides a link between Wollstonecraft and Woolf. *Sense and Sensibility* explores the power of emotions, especially on the way to marriage, but *Persuasion* describes emotional constancy as a potential form of internal authority, as women's emotions are inaccessible to men. As Anne Elliot defends women's emotional constancy in the face of multiple forms of confinement, she challenges history's representation of women by pointing out the limitations of male authorship. In Anne's eloquent defense of women's constancy, she anticipates Woolf's call for women writers by pointing out the drawbacks of literature when only men have wielded the pen. A century later, Woolf points out that men's authorship does not develop a female platform in fiction. Just as male authors do not accurately portray women in fiction, female authors limit their genius with emotional bitterness in their confinement. Woolf praises Austen's genius for overcoming emotional antagonism and introduces the idea of "sex-consciousness" (107) as a limit for analyzing gender; Austen's writing ascends to a level of genius, unfettered by confinement when she provides a shared platform for both Anne and Captain Wentworth at the conclusion of *Persuasion*. Female interiority in writing becomes crucial for freeing female authors, as Austen reveals through Anne and Captain Wentworth's emotional freedom. Austen highlights Lady Russell as a powerful, female authority, and Austen grants both Anne and Wentworth an equal platform for telling their narratives. Wollstonecraft highlights the necessity of education for women's independence, and Woolf establishes equal gender representation as critical for feminist credibility.

Captain Harville's conversation with Anne illustrates a critical feminist interpretation of women and fiction and builds a foundation for Woolf's analysis of women in history. In answer to Anne's defense of women's emotional constancy, Harville argues: "I was saying, we shall

never agree, I suppose, upon this point. No man and woman, would, probably. But let me observe that all histories are against you” (1279). Captain Harville’s argument describes women and men as completely different, and he attempts to elevate men’s capacity for emotional constancy over women. Harville’s bias is a critical flaw, according to Woolf’s feminism, and she emphasizes the importance of equality for both sexes: “All this pitting of sex against sex, of quality against quality; all this claiming of superiority and imputing of inferiority, belong to the private-school stage of human existence where there are ‘sides’” (110). Woolf describes the opposition of sexes as an immature structure of the past. Harville’s bias towards male superiority supports Woolf’s analysis of immaturity, as Harville remains in his “private-school stage” (110). By declaring the inevitable disagreement between opposite sexes as reinforced by men’s education, Harville represents the ingrained mentality of a patriarchal society. Anne patiently explains to Captain Harville the history of women’s education and its hindrance to female independence. Woolf displays a similar tone when she describes men’s detrimental education: “They too, the patriarchs, the professors, had endless difficulties, terrible drawbacks to contend with. Their education had been in some ways just as faulty as my own. It had bred in them defects just as great” (38). Despite Captain Harville’s attempts to praise one sex over the other, Austen does not aggressively attack Captain Harville; rather, she creates a calm debate of equal representation. Austen uses Harville’s historical defense to highlight women’s confinement in history and shapes her argument of women’s internal freedom, despite their lack of representation and emotional captivity. Woolf’s assessment of women’s confinement is applicable to Anne and Captain Harville’s conversation, as Woolf defends women’s interiority in education: “Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind” (79). Education is clearly a central issue for feminism, and

Austen's portrayal of women and fiction highlights the barriers of female authorship, attributing education's impact on men and women's behavior in society. To escape external forces and education's confinement, Woolf and Austen portray women's interiority and internal autonomy as a solution for escaping oppression.

Educational opportunities reinforce men's independence in a patriarchal society and limit women's capabilities, placing women in a constantly dependent, inferior position. As mothers and wives in a patriarchal society, women are trapped in their duties and incapable of finding new opportunity. Wollstonecraft's feminism highlights women's domestic roles as an opportunity for women to become better mothers and wives. She imagines a different world where mothers raise their children and have greater success in their domestic roles: "We should then love them with true affection, because we should learn to respect ourselves; and the piece of mind of a worthy man would not be interrupted by the idle vanity of his wife, nor the babes sent to nestle in a strange bosom, having never found a home in their mother's" (146). Austen establishes female confinement in the domestic sphere, while Wollstonecraft's feminism challenges women to use their domestic roles as a way of improving society. Wollstonecraft's feminism also highlights the negative atmosphere of domesticity without education and seeks to improve female education for women's current familial roles, as the current systemic process oppresses women to a form of enslavement: "The duty expected from them is, like all the duties arbitrarily imposed on women, more from a sense of propriety, more out of respect for decorum, than reason; and thus taught slavishly to submit to their parents, they are prepared for the slavery of marriage" (152). Wollstonecraft's emphasis on propriety and women's enslavement is embedded in Anne's sense of confinement. Not only bound to their duties as wives and mothers, women in the early 19th century were also bound to their emotional captivity. Because women's

emotional constancy results from their domestic entrapment and women are able to understand their own emotions without men's influence, Anne challenges Captain Harville's position on women's emotions. Wollstonecraft's hope for women focuses on improving their lives in the domestic sphere—an environment Anne describes as suffocating and restrictive. Wollstonecraft views women's domestic roles as a potential strength, similar to Anne's admiration of women's emotional constancy. Anne describes women's emotional constancy as a form of confinement, but her argument also extends beyond women's captivity to declare women's emotions as their own. Captain Harville cannot understand or determine women's emotions, as Austen argues: women's emotions are beyond men's control. Austen outlines Anne's desire for opportunity while also realistically outlining women's poor state in the domestic sphere. Women are trapped in the domestic sphere and chained to their emotions, but men cannot control women's interiority.

Austen connects women's emotions to men's and creates an equal platform between both sexes. Overhearing Anne's discussion with Captain Harville, Captain Wentworth learns about Anne's continued emotional attachment and quickly responds with a love letter. While bolstering women's emotional freedoms, Austen does not limit men's emotions, as Wentworth writes: "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. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone, I think and plan" (1281). Wentworth's deeply genuine unveiling of his love for Anne supports Austen's equal representation of both genders. Although women are capable of emotional constancy, Austen does not elevate women's emotional freedom over men's. Austen's equal representation bolsters her establishment of a female platform in literature; she does not treat men as inferior to elevate

women. Because Austen represents both genders in this way and creates a female platform built without aggression, Woolf compares Austen's writing to Shakespeare's: "I could not find any signs that her circumstances had harmed her work in the slightest. That, perhaps, was the chief miracle about it. Here was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching. That was how Shakespeare wrote, I thought" (70). Woolf argues that writing with hate and bitterness limits women's genius, but Austen overcomes this emotional antagonism. Without losing her personal creativity, Austen realistically emphasizes men and women's emotional capabilities and does not attempt to praise women over men. Anne's emotional attachment to Wentworth never wavers; neither does Wentworth's love for Anne, but until the pivotal moment when Anne defends women, Austen limits Wentworth's personal confession. By illustrating their love in this way, Austen accentuates gender equality. Austen establishes Anne's freedoms before Captain Wentworth's emotional expression, but Captain Wentworth still has the opportunity to tell his side of the story: "I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me. You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice when they would be lost on others" (1281). As Wentworth listens to Anne's voice, Austen creates the importance for all women to be heard. By this correlation, Austen concludes that women's independence can influence men positively—men just have to listen.

Anne's voice and the platform Austen creates for women bolster Anne's resistance as a heroine, and Anne's initial submission to Lady Russell's authority also reinforces women's power. After affirming her love for Wentworth, Anne defends her choice to follow Lady Russell. Until Anne uses her voice, Captain Wentworth misunderstands her initial rejection of his proposal. Anne defends herself: "If I was wrong in yielding to persuasion once, remember that it

was to persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk. When I yielded, I thought it was to duty, but no duty could be called in aid here” (1286). Despite Anne’s emphasis on her duty to Lady Russell, Captain Wentworth only views her actions as disappointing: “I could think of you only as the one who had yielded, who had given me up, who had been influenced by any one rather than by me” (1286). Anne’s decision to listen to Lady Russell’s advice is admirable for a young woman with no experience navigating marriage—especially considering marriage’s liabilities. Women’s only decision revolves around choosing a husband, and the consequences for a misguided choice could be dire. Captain Wentworth believes that Lady Russell, a woman with power in a patriarchal society, is not a true pillar of authority or a superior, and consequently, Captain Wentworth views Anne’s submission as wrong. Austen challenges the patriarchal construct of women’s duties to men in society. Submission to authority, at a young age, is acceptable, but a patriarchal society outlines women’s duties to male authority over women. Purely because Captain Wentworth is a man, he considers Anne’s duty to himself as more important than Anne’s presumed duty to Lady Russell. Austen critiques this mindset by limiting Captain Wentworth’s success in procuring Anne’s hand until Anne tells her side of the story. Austen’s establishment of Lady Russell’s authority challenges patriarchal values and is applicable to Woolf’s analysis of authority: “The whole structure, therefore, of the early nineteenth-century novel was raised, if one was a woman, by a mind which was slightly pulled from the straight, and made to alter its clear deference to external authority” (77). Woolf’s assessment of 19th-century literature highlights the influence of masculine values on writing. The “external authority” of society manipulates female authorship and enforces barriers around the female narrative. Solidifying her genius, Austen does not succumb to external authority and

highlights women's capacity for leadership roles. Because the novel begins with Lady Russell's authority, Austen orchestrates the unfolding narrative from a platform of female empowerment.

Woolf's admiration of 19th-century female authors parallels Anne's blameless submission to Lady Russell. Woolf highlights the constant barriers surrounding female authors in patriarchal societies and outlines the inspiring brilliance of those who surmounted them: "But how impossible it must have been not to budge either to the right or to the left. What genius, what integrity it must have required in face of all that criticism, in the midst of that purely patriarchal society, to hold fast to the thing as they saw it without shrinking" (77). Austen's creative genius emphasizes feminism in a narrative untouched by masculine values or society's confinement, which she endured. In a similar society, Anne's decision to submit to Lady Russell is unsupported by Captain Wentworth or patriarchal values. Challenging Captain Wentworth's opinion, Anne says: "I have been thinking over the past, and trying impartially to judge of the right and the wrong, I mean in regard to myself; and 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" (1287). Despite years of loneliness and her belief that she lost Captain Wentworth forever, Anne's conscientiousness prevails. Austen creates Anne's resilient self-confidence despite trials constantly challenging Anne's decisions—trials even from Captain Wentworth. By revealing a sense of security in herself, Anne embraces Lady Russell's ability to hold an empowered role in society and criticizes a purely male-dominated structure as she tells Wentworth, "I have now, as far as such sentiment is allowable in human nature, nothing to reproach myself with; and if I mistake not, a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion" (1287). Austen describes women's sense of duty in Anne's defense and reaches a male-dominated audience, garnering respect for Anne's heroism even as she challenges her future

husband. Wentworth's self-reflection reveals the consequences of pride: "But I too have been thinking over the past, and a question has suggested itself, whether there may not have been one person more my enemy than that lady? My own self" (1287). Wentworth eventually reproaches himself for not reaching out to Anne again. Austen orchestrates Anne's self-confidence without jeopardizing Wentworth's own freedom. He is still entitled to his own opinions, but he does regret not reuniting with Anne. Austen's feminism bolsters the heroine, Anne, without limiting the freedoms of others.

Wollstonecraft emphasizes the need for women's education, and Woolf admires Austen's genius as a writer. Although *Persuasion* centers upon female confinement, Austen allows Anne to protest it and therefore to achieve the release that Wollstonecraft championed. By condemning a male-written history, Anne gives women a voice, anticipating Woolf's call for conditions that would allow women to write. Anne's moment of emotional truth serves as a double liberation because it results in Captain Wentworth's own emotional freedom and thus secures freedom for both genders. Anne's emotional and intellectual independence offers further proof that women's most powerful asset for resistance from the 18th through the early 20th centuries remains women's interiority.

Chapter 3: “Marriage as Liability, Marriage as Liberation”

But above all, above respect and esteem, there was a motive within her of good will which could not be overlooked. It was gratitude. —Gratitude, not merely for having once loved her, but for loving her still well enough, to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying her rejection. He who, she had been persuaded, would avoid her as his greatest enemy, seemed, on this accidental meeting, most eager to preserve the acquaintance, and without any indelicate display of regard, or any peculiarity of manner, where their two selves only were concerned, was soliciting the good opinion of her friends, and bent on making her known to his sister.

—Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (373)

This chapter studies three alternative examples of marriage. A patriarchal society offers women few decisions, but marriage is a major opportunity for a woman to exercise choice. Austen describes the economic consequences of marriage in her portrayal of the Ward sisters in *Mansfield Park*. Although Lady Bertram and Mrs. Price are educated in the same home, their marriages have contrasting financial consequences because Lady Bertram marries for wealth whereas Mrs. Price faces a life of impoverishment. Yet Lady Bertram’s wealth gives her neither independence nor happiness: she becomes relatively useless as both mother and wife. Wollstonecraft would label her an inferior mother and a victim of women’s problematic education. Marriage, for Wollstonecraft, should be based on equality, and the best marriages form around friendship. While the Ward sisters’ marriages exemplify the liabilities of bad marriages, Austen’s most independent heroines, Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet, marry for love without taking their suitor’s wealth into consideration even though they do marry the wealthiest bachelor in their respective novels. Emma’s wealth, superior social status, and freedom cause her to insist that she does not wish to marry anyone: she views marriage as a restriction of her power as mistress of Hartfield and a way of abandoning her helpless father. To maintain her independence, she has no desire for marriage. Emma’s relationships display aspects

of Woolf's feminism because Woolf insists that for a woman to thrive as a writer, she needs financial security and "a room of her own" (98)—both of which Emma has by birth. And yet Emma, feeling confident about own power, does not realize that her habit of manipulating others betrays her insecurity. Austen challenges Emma's independence when Emma marries Mr. Knightley for love and forfeits her independence. Her financial status does not change, but her independence diminishes when she realizes that Mr. Knightley has much to teach her. Emma's marriage does, therefore, contrast with Elizabeth Bennet's liberating marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*, where Elizabeth's sense of interiority and morality forges her independence. Always desiring a marriage of love, Elizabeth never sacrifices her own happiness: she maintains her independence when she marries Mr. Darcy.

The Ward sisters form marriages that explain the importance of considering a financial perspective. Lady Bertram's successful marriage to Sir Thomas secures her status as his possession and shapes her idleness in a way that contrasts with Mrs. Norris's activism. Lady Bertram lounges luxuriously at Mansfield Park, useless and merely symbolic as a wife. She becomes less of a person than an idealistic representation of women from a patriarchal perspective, as Austen describes Lady Bertram's vain idleness: "She was a woman who spent her days in sitting, nicely dressed, on the sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty" (458). Austen highlights Sir Thomas's wealth by Lady Bertram's fashionable clothing and bolsters Lady Bertram's artificiality by her lack of natural beauty. Austen's emphasis on Lady Bertram's idleness establishes the patriarchal desire for a malleable wife, as Lady Bertram easily subscribes to Sir Thomas's opinions. Lady Bertram's decision to marry Sir Thomas is society's only requirement of her, and her successful marriage becomes the highlight of her life: "All Huntingdon exclaimed on the greatness of the match, and her uncle, the lawyer,

himself, allowed her to be at least three thousand pounds short of any equitable claim to it” (449). From the moment of her well-chosen union, Lady Bertram loses all influence as she becomes a wife and her husband’s possession. Lady Bertram contrasts with her sister, Mrs. Norris, who remains an outspoken woman after her husband dies and requires more maintenance than Lady Bertram. Austen emphasizes Mrs. Norris’s burdensome behavior: “As far as walking, talking, and contriving reached, she was thoroughly benevolent, and nobody knew better how to dictate liberality to others; but her love of money was equal to her love of directing, and she knew quite as well how to save her own as to spend that of her friends” (452). Mrs. Norris offers her opinion frequently and quickly establishes herself as a hindrance to others. Austen highlights her selfish love of wealth—even if it’s acquired from her family. Compared to Lady Bertram’s acquiescence, Mrs. Norris’s outspoken view is unhindered by a lawful male force, as her husband dies in the beginning of the novel. Austen reveals the effects of a patriarchal society by outlining the Ward sisters’ different behaviors—Mrs. Norris’s outspokenness and Lady Bertram’s indolence.

Despite her similar upbringing to her sisters, Fanny’s mother, Mrs. Price, highlights the effects of marriage and male objectification in poverty. Fanny contrasts Lady Bertram with her mother when she revisits her childhood home. Similarly bound by the consequences of marriage, Lady Bertram and Mrs. Price are each useless possessions of their husbands, but Mrs. Price’s poverty creates a more detrimental way of life for her than her sister’s wealth: “Her disposition was naturally easy and indolent, like Lady Bertram’s; and a situation of similar affluence and donothingness would have been much more suited to her capacity than the exertions and self-denials of the one which her imprudent marriage had placed her in” (671). Where Lady Bertram married for wealth, Mrs. Price married for love. Despite this context, they have both become

malleable and acquiescent to their husbands. Austen critiques a social system that entraps a woman's previous autonomy and produces a belittled replica, a wife. For women, marriage determines everything and can determine a woman's comfort for the rest of her life. Even for two sisters of the same background, marriage can alter their future. Austen establishes the stark physical difference between the two sisters—although their marriage has diminished their worth, poverty has led to Mrs. Price's radical faded appearance, where Lady Bertram's appearance reveals the wealth and grandeur of her marriage to Sir Thomas. Fanny recognizes the alternative dispositions of her mother and Lady Bertram: "It often grieved her to the heart to think of the contrast between them; to think where nature had made so little difference, circumstances should have made so much, and that her mother, as handsome as Lady Bertram, and some years her junior, should have an appearance so much more worn and faded, so comfortless, so slattern, so shabby" (682). Ultimately, Austen challenges a system that emphasizes women's appearances and cultural barriers that allow marriage, and men, all the power. Lady Bertram and Mrs. Price are sisters, but marriage has transformed them sufficiently enough for Fanny to feel a sense of heartache. Mrs. Price's only wrongful decision, which changed her previous beauty, was marrying her husband for love. Lady Bertram chose to marry for wealth, rising in status and successfully achieving a life of luxury. Austen's representation of marriage in this context devalues women's previous autonomy and can completely transform their appearance. In essence, Lady Bertram and Mrs. Price exemplify the effects of a social system that supports male independence and categorizes women as their husband's property.

Austen establishes marriage as a form of entrapment for women, much as Mary Wollstonecraft does. Wollstonecraft's feminism in 1790 emphasizes marriage's influence on women's rights, especially through male objectification and women's developed sense of vanity

(139-46). Wollstonecraft portrays women's weakness even in advantageous marriages: "Women are, in common with men, rendered weak and luxurious by the relaxing pleasures which wealth procures; but added to this they are made slaves to their persons, and must render them alluring that men may lend them his reason to guide their tottering steps aright" (142). Even in a wealthy and comfortable household, women themselves are not independent. Wollstonecraft highlights a married woman's necessary beauty to attract her husband's attention and procure his advice. Lady Bertram's inability to make her own independent decisions validates Wollstonecraft's definition of married women. Sir Thomas frequently saves Lady Bertram from indecisiveness: "Lady Bertram soon found herself in the critical situation of being applied to for her own choice between the games, and being required either to draw a card for Whist or not. She hesitated. Luckily Sir Thomas was at hand" (584). Even in a trivial social event, such as playing card games with friends, Lady Bertram is unable to make a decision and must ask for her husband's advice. The irony of this supposedly "critical situation" resonates with Wollstonecraft's depiction of women's "tottering steps" (142) and ultimately depicts marriage as a form of entrapment.

Unable to make their own decisions, or in Lady Bertram's situation—anxious when presented with the opportunity for any decision—women are completely influenced by the decisions of men. Wollstonecraft's feminism accentuates the societal impact of male decisions, particularly regarding women's vanity, which Austen illustrates by Lady Bertram's obsession with her pet pug. Wollstonecraft describes an unidentified "woman" (167), whose spoiled pet replaces her neglected children: "she was quite feminine, according to the masculine acceptation of the word; and, so far from loving these spoiled brutes that filled the place which her children ought to have occupied, she only lisped out a pretty mixture of French and English nonsense, to

please the men who flocked around her” (167). Because Lady Bertram cannot make her own decisions, she plays no role in her children’s education, which she entrusts to Sir Thomas. Much like the example given by Wollstonecraft, Lady Bertram spends her time “thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter when it did not put herself to inconvenience, guided in everything important by Sir Thomas” (458). According to Wollstonecraft, a patriarchal society produces the vanity of these mothers: “The wife, mother, and human creature, were all swallowed up by the factitious character which an improper education and the selfish vanity of beauty had produced” (167). Austen highlights society’s impact on motherhood through Lady Bertram’s vanity, laziness, and uselessness. Although Lady Bertram forms an advantageous marriage, her role slips to selfishness, ingrained by male objectification. Austen emphasizes society’s impact by relating Lady Bertram and her sister, Mrs. Price, in their similarly selfish, lazy roles—despite their different marriages.

Austen juxtaposes marital consequences for Lady Bertram and her sisters, but ultimately the Ward sisters serve background roles and support Austen’s subtle, ingenious portrayal of feminism. Austen connects Lady Bertram’s lack of influence in her children’s education with Sir Thomas’s aggressive, tyrannical role but highlights Sir Thomas’s mistakes as well. In each of the Ward sisters’ marriages, Austen highlights negative outcomes without completely blaming the husband. Austen’s inclusion of flaws in both men and women generates aspects of Woolf’s feminism. Woolf admires Austen’s feminism, particularly how Austen describes women and creates a female platform: “It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen’s day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman’s life is that; and how little can a man know even of that when he observes it through the black or rosy spectacles which sex puts upon his nose” (86). Woolf

depicts Austen's feminism in a separate, defining category from other representations of women in fiction. Austen's world, according to Woolf, outlines women's lives without the necessity of male interpretation and vice versa. Drawing attention to women's trapped, domesticated roles, Austen describes three sisters' different experiences navigating a patriarchal society, diluting the spotlight from men's monotonous authority roles in fiction. When women become their husbands' possessions, men determine the state of their lives, and Austen challenges men's influence by representing marriage's consequences for women, creating a female platform. Sarah Morrison analyzes women's relationship to men and agrees with Woolf that Austen creates a different world, "a world of different proportions to instead offer a balanced view of life's inherent limitations and the modest possibilities afforded individuals whose lives are necessarily bound to others" (342). Woolf describes Austen's genius in highlighting women's lives, despite women's invisible representation in literature and constant association with men. Morrison describes women's irrevocable dependence on men and argues that Austen's writing realistically highlights women's lives within marriage, defining women's importance despite their dependence on men. Both critics illuminate Austen's unconventional depiction of the female narrative and Austen's representation of women, regardless of their obligation to men. Woolf bemoans women's constant relationship to men, while Morrison recognizes that women are "necessarily bound" to men. Essentially, Austen depicts women within the confines of their male oppressors, while highlighting the flaws of both men and women to create a realm of female voices not previously presented in literature.

The Ward sisters' alternative marriages produce different consequences for each sister, but Austen also critiques their husbands in the process. Woolf's feminism highlights a duality between superiority and inferiority, not embracing one sex over the other. Austen's feminism is

similar to Woolf's in that she writes without bias and highlights the consequences of everyone's actions. Although the masculine influence of a patriarchal society limits women's independence, Austen's portrayal of married women in *Mansfield Park* is not consistent praise. Lady Bertram is lazy to a fault; Mrs. Price is a "slattern" (671), incapable of caring for her children; and Mrs. Norris's constant nagging is irksome. Sir Thomas's aggressive authority and Mr. Price's embarrassing manners are faults as well. Woolf addresses flaws in all people's existence: "It is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman" (108). Austen's equal emphasis on women's and men's flaws illustrates Woolf's feminism and her critical focus on both genders. By praising neither women nor men, Austen portrays societal consequences for all flaws as Woolf does when she argues: "Life for both sexes—and I looked at them, shouldering their way along the pavement—is arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle" (35). To respond to such a challenge Woolf theorizes that a patriarchal society reduces women to inferiority: "Without self-confidence we are babes in the cradle. And how can we generate this imponderable quality, which is yet so invaluable, so quickly? By thinking that other people are inferior to oneself" (35). To protect their own privileges, men make women inferior, but Woolf also describes the human desire for superiority from both genders' perspectives. Austen creates flawed women and men, the Ward sisters and Sir Thomas, as a foundation for Woolf's equal gender representation. As a crucial aspect of feminism in *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram's actions are equally fallible. Austen outlines the flaws of women and men to critique both genders. Morrison argues that Austen's feminism "succeeds (where others do not) in making woman the normative center" (343), and Austen does not view "society from a militant feminist perspective" (343). Morrison's

depiction of feminism in *Mansfield Park* reinforces the assimilation of Woolf's feminism in Austen's novels. A more aggressive, hostile approach would limit Austen's credibility and change the female narrative, driving the focus once more to male oppressors in 19th-century patriarchal society.

Austen's *Mansfield Park* combines aspects of both Mary Wollstonecraft's late 18th-century and Virginia Woolf's early 20th-century feminism. The Ward sisters, Fanny's mother and aunt, provide contrasting portrayals of marriage based on financial outcomes: Lady Bertram gains wealth but loses her independence when she becomes her husband's property, and Mrs. Price is too poor to raise all her children, so she entrusts Fanny to her brother-in-law's care in the Bertram household. Austen organizes these marital unions as a background to Fanny's story and registers both male and female flaws in a subtle, ambiguous form of feminism that reflects Woolf's analysis of both sexes. Austen's use of feminism in *Mansfield Park* is centuries ahead of her time.

Although the Ward sisters' marriages in *Mansfield Park* establish marriage as a liability, Emma's union with Mr. Knightley brings her no financial consequences. Initially, Emma has more wealth and independence than Austen's other heroines. As mistress of Hartfield, Emma is free to control her one remaining parent, her father, instead of being controlled by him. She exerts her power on others as well: Harriet serves as a malleable friend whom Emma can mold and educate, reinforcing Emma's sense of superiority in the process. Woolf's portrayal of superiority in relationships and Wollstonecraft's depiction of friendships as a source of equality are applicable to *Emma*. When Emma manipulates other people, she illustrates a masculine freedom inaccessible to most women; all of the friendships she forms, therefore, are unequal as she promotes her own self-confidence. Wollstonecraft's feminism highlights friendship in

marriage as a way of securing women's equality. Challenging marriage as another form of confinement and a husband as another oppressor, marriage built on friendship secures a woman respect and equality. When Emma marries Mr. Knightley, she forfeits her independence and marries for love. Austen formulates Emma's marriage to exemplify women's dependence in love and loss of freedom, another liability.

In Ruth Perry's analysis of female friendships in *Emma*, she emphasizes Emma's inability to form an ideal friendship with Jane Fairfax despite her social opportunity (189). Perry attributes Emma and Jane's failed relationship to their pursuit of marriage, but marriage is not the only hindrance to Emma and Jane's friendship. Because Emma is so desperate to maintain her superiority and bolster her own self-image, she creates unequal friendships with her governess, Mrs. Weston, and Harriet Smith, a lower-class friend of unknown parentage.

Emma's friendship with Mrs. Weston, while amiable and heartfelt, is still inevitably divided by societal position and originally based on Emma's education. Hired to serve as governess, she becomes a friend but reinforces Emma's sense of superiority: "She had been a friend and companion such as few possessed: intelligent, well-informed, useful, gentle, knowing all the ways of the family, interested in all its concerns, and peculiarly interested in herself, in every pleasure, every scheme of hers—one to whom she could speak every thought as it arose, and who had such an affection for her as could never find fault" (724). Mrs. Weston cares for Emma, as a mother and eventually as a friend, because her position requires it, but she can never be on an equal ground with Emma and is meant to serve her. Emma's superior class, therefore, is reinforced through her relationship with Mrs. Weston, but Mrs. Weston marries, Emma feels bereft and insecure. As a solution, Emma takes unjustified credit for engineering Mrs. Weston's marriage, as she boasts to her father: "I made up my mind on the subject. I planned the match

from that hour; and when such success has blessed me in this instance, dear papa, you cannot think that I shall leave off match-making” (727). Ironically, even though Emma plans marriages for others, she does not consider marriage a viable option for herself. Maintaining a comfortable superiority at Hartfield allows her to establish an unrealistic sense of control. Mrs. Weston’s marriage alters her relationship with Emma, who claims credit for her supposed role as matchmaker. Therefore, Emma deludes herself by believing that Mrs. Weston’s departure is based on Emma’s decision. The loss of Emma’s governess, especially one who does not discover Emma’s faults, leaves a hole in Emma’s life: “Mrs. Weston was the object of a regard which had its basis in gratitude and esteem. Harriet would be loved as one to whom she could be useful. For Mrs. Weston there was nothing to be done; for Harriet every thing” (735). Emma’s “gratitude” and “esteem” for Mrs. Weston do not evoke a sense of equality in their female relationship. Austen’s more formal consideration of their dynamic magnifies the class divide between them, and Emma values Mrs. Weston’s usefulness more than she does her friendship. When Mrs. Weston leaves, Emma imitates this connection with the innocent, easily manipulated Harriet Smith by taking a position as Harriet’s educator under the guise of female friendship.

Austen highlights Emma’s superiority in her manipulation of Harriet Smith’s marital pursuits to exacerbate the unequal relationships Emma develops in the novel. As Austen depicts Emma’s desperation for superiority, she portrays Emma as a masculine figure. Emma’s overruling tendencies and defense of Harriet’s lineage reflect Woolf’s feminism, when Woolf highlights confidence as a critical struggle for humanity. Emma’s insecurity after Mrs. Weston’s departure originates from Emma’s lack of confidence. Woolf’s example of an unidentified professor applies to Emma’s resulting insecurity, as Woolf concludes that when the patriarchal professor “insisted a little too emphatically on the inferiority of women, he was concerned not

with their inferiority, but with his own superiority” (34-35). The efforts of establishing one’s superiority, for Woolf, reflects people’s internal struggle for confidence. Emma’s superficiality and manipulation attest to her similar desire for superiority. Emma is a vastly different heroine from others in Austen’s novels because of Emma’s freedom and obliviousness, but Austen creates Emma’s frankness to illuminate her more masculine traits in a patriarchal society—prior to her marriage with Mr. Knightley, who eventually overrules her. The insecurity Emma feels because of Mrs. Weston’s absence drives her to form a new friendship with Harriet Smith, whose unknown parentage reinforces Emma’s sense of superiority. Austen moves from Emma’s world to describe Harriet’s adoration of Emma: “Miss Woodhouse was so great a parsonage in Highbury, that the prospect of the introduction had given as much panic as pleasure; but the humble, grateful little girl went off with highly gratified feelings, delighted with the affability with which Miss Woodhouse had treated her all evening, and actually shaken hands with her at last!” (734). Harriet’s immaturity dramatically contrasts with Emma’s status and reinforces Emma’s “kind designs” (735) for educating Harriet. Emma’s wealthy status and illustrious image grant her power over Harriet’s malleable, uneducated mind, and Emma’s previous insecurity from Mrs. Weston’s departure is healed by her new friendship with Harriet. Mrs. Weston’s role as governess fulfilled some requirements of Emma’s education, but Mrs. Weston’s failure to reprimand Emma has given her mind a mistaken sense of superiority. With Mrs. Weston’s absence, Emma desires a replacement: someone equally capable of adoration. Emma selfishly develops a friendship with Harriet because she needs an inferior friend to bolster her own image.

Woolf describes men’s tendency to protect their superiority and self-image, and Emma reflects this masculine habit. Emma uses Harriet’s accomplishments as a reflection of her own superiority and success. Austen portrays this layered relationship through Harriet’s portrait

scene. When Emma shows her previous artistic work to Mr. Elton and Harriet, Austen hints at their mutual love of Emma rather than Mr. Elton's love of Harriet: "had there been much less, or had there been ten times more, the delight and admiration of her two companions would have been the same. They were both in ecstasies. A likeness pleases every body; and Miss Woodhouse's performances must be capital" (746). Austen's description of "Miss Woodhouse" outlines the narrative's transition to an outsider perspective of Emma, as her reputation precedes her artistic work. Before Emma begins drawing Harriet, Mr. Elton's and Harriet's praise of Emma's previous artistic creations bolster her sense of superiority and reaffirm Emma's status. Mr. Elton observes Emma intensely as she draws Harriet: "There was no being displeased with such an encourager, for his admiration made him discern a likeness almost before it was possible. She could not respect his eye, but his love and his complaisance were unexceptionable" (747). Emma's, Harriet's, and Mr. Elton's delusions in this scene result from their self-absorption: all read each other with their own self-interest in mind. Emma views Harriet's beauty as an extension of her own, not really caring if Mr. Elton loves Harriet, because a successful match between them would confirm Emma's superiority. Mr. Elton watches Emma's work and admires her artistic capabilities, praising her portrayal of Harriet, because he loves Emma and desires a match with her. Harriet's and Mr. Elton's admiration of Emma reflects Emma's self-worth, much like Woolf's description of men in a patriarchal society: "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of a man at twice its natural size" (35). Woolf describes the objectification of women in a patriarchal society as a way of bolstering a masculine ego. Austen's masculine depiction of Emma and Emma's manipulation of others reveal similarities to Woolf's "looking-glasses." Emma dramatizes Harriet's beauty in her portrait to emphasize Emma's own influence, and Mr.

Elton's compliments of Harriet's portrait reinforce Emma's success. Emma's reaffirmed superiority in her chosen friendships highlights her insecurities and masculine tendencies, especially her aversion to Jane Fairfax's friendship, a relationship of equal status.

Emma's potential friendship with Jane would establish an equal relationship that challenges Emma's insecure need for superiority. Equal friendships between women are more viable than between women and men as men in a patriarchal society are superior in their freedoms, and women depend on men. Wollstonecraft highlights a perfect world when she emphasizes the formulation of friendship to bypass women's dependence in marriage: "Weakness may excite tenderness, and gratify the arrogant pride of man; but the lordly caresses of a protector will not gratify a noble mind that pants for, and deserves to be respected. Fondness is a poor substitute for friendship!" (46). Wollstonecraft describes dependence as another influential trait of unequal relationships. Inferiority, for Wollstonecraft, is dependence. Austen's multi-faceted feminism centers on Emma's faults, especially her masculine traits. In this manner, 19th-century society in *Emma* is realistic in its depiction of unequal relationships, as Emma circumvents the equal friendships Wollstonecraft imagines. Austen alludes to Jane and Emma's potential friendship (Perry 189), as Mrs. John Knightley admires Jane Fairfax during a visit to Hartfield and responds to Emma's new friendship with Harriet: "I am most happy to hear it—but only Jane Fairfax one knows to be so very accomplished and superior!—and exactly Emma's age" (782). Despite their equal status, societal image, and their similar ages, Emma and Jane never form an equal friendship. A female friendship between them would fulfill Wollstonecraft's requirements for friendship, especially Wollstonecraft's emphasis on mutual respect. Ruth Perry's analysis of female relationships in *Emma* describes marriage and societal influence as critical limitations in Jane and Emma's friendship: "This social pressure effectively divides

women from one another even if they are not in direct competition for economic subsistence—for it directs women to find their comfort in submission to a benevolent husband rather than in equal intercourse with others of their own sex” (195-96). Perry argues that the marriage plot of *Emma* is important to consider, but Austen’s emphasis on Emma’s masculine traits is crucial to Jane and Emma’s unachieved friendship. Austen criticizes the unavoidable inequality in marriage based on Emma’s avoidance and competition with Jane. Prior to marriage, Emma is independent, wealthy, and superior to many people as she reigns from Hartfield. Austen makes clear that Emma does not desire marriage, until she must consider it—and eventually, of course, she does marry. In the years before she relinquishes her freedom, Emma is desperate to maintain a sense of fragile superiority, and if she were to form a friendship with an equal, she would no longer have the same independence or power. Rather, she would have a mutual sense of respect for someone else. In this way, Emma’s avoidance of friendship evokes similar aspects of Wollstonecraft’s depiction of friendship in marriage. Sacrificing superiority for a friendship of equals is no easy task.

Emma resembles no other heroine in Austen’s novels. Whereas other heroines challenge patriarchal expectations from an inferior position, Emma’s initial superiority and wealth, combined with her selfish, manipulative tendencies, embellish masculine traits from a female perspective. Austen’s formulation of female friendships in the novel explores women’s opportunities for equal relationships in a patriarchal world, and Emma’s choices reflect aspects of male superiority and present masculine power from a female lens. Woolf’s depiction of inferiority, partnered with Wollstonecraft’s emphasis on women’s dependence, describes the key factors of unequal relationships between the late 18th and early 20th centuries. Emma’s masculine traits are especially prevalent through her female friendships. Woolf’s description of the

correlation between money and women's freedom applies to Emma's independence as does Woolf's analysis of relationships. By contrast to Austen's other heroines, Emma has no monetary worries, so she has complete freedom in choosing whom to marry or whether to marry at all. This freedom anticipates those of the 20th century when a new era of professions for women allows Woolf to prophesy a new future for women writers.

Different from other heroines in Austen's novels, Emma navigates 19th-century society without any financial constraints and does not view marriage as a requirement. A defining moment of Emma's dismissal of marriage stems from her arrogant claims: "Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield" (770). Austen solidifies Emma's unique capability of making her own decisions by holding a position of power without a man's influence. From a historical perspective, women in Austen's time often lacked the freedom of Emma's position, as Cy Frost argues: "For many nineteenth-century women, the compulsion to acquiesce to patriarchal standards of propriety proved overpowering and so became as enervating as the deprivation of educational, financial, and legal opportunity" (255). Women chose marriage for a sense of financial security, as they had little opportunity to work for themselves, and Frost's assessment of the confining rules of propriety for most women illustrates the unique opportunity Austen creates for Emma. She has both financial security and power as mistress of Hartfield, a role that requires supporting her father's health and respectability in the community. Emma's role as mistress exemplifies an outlandish feminist desire for the early 19th century and one that challenges traditional societal positions. According to Claudia Johnson's assessment of Emma's father, "the intellectual, physical, and even moral frailty of this paternal figure necessitates a dependence upon female strength, activity and good

judgement” (124). Austen defines Emma’s maturity and her independence from a young age, as Emma grows up without a mother or a reliable father. In spite of societal perceptions, Emma can rule as mistress and take care of her father without the assistance of a husband. She can even perform these tasks in a dignified, admirable manner, while also considering the independence of her female friends, such as Harriet.

Austen emphasizes Emma’s identification of Harriet’s inferior class and education as both a critique of England’s marital system and a feminist rendition of women’s objectification during the early 19th century. During an argument between Knightley and Emma over Harriet’s rejection of Robert Martin, Emma defends herself: “I am very much mistaken if your sex in general would not think such beauty, and such temper, the highest claims a woman could possess” (757). Emma’s defense of her friend’s virtues reveals Mr. Knightley’s obliviousness, and Austen subtly portrays Emma’s defense of Harriet’s rightful independence. Initially, Mr. Knightley’s condescension evokes a belief in Emma’s immaturity, because it falls within the bounds of society’s expectations. Frost argues that Austen’s skillful integration of an alternative meaning in this passage is a necessary requirement for early nineteenth-century women writers: “The formidable social and subliminal barriers . . . required an extraordinary degree of psychological maneuvering to reconcile the desire for self-expression with the necessity of contending with prevailing standards of propriety” (255). Frost offers an explanation of Austen’s artfully crafted argument between Mr. Knightley and Emma, as Mr. Knightley outlines an agreeable economic assessment of marriage and considers Emma naïve. But upon closer reflection, Austen establishes Mr. Knightley as a vessel for men’s perception of women and outlines men’s view of women as objects for an advantageous marriage, regardless of their virtues. Austen critiques the engrained perception of Emma’s immaturity and illustrates the

institutional boundaries of women in society and their complete lack of independence: without wealth or class, regardless of personality or manner, women will not marry well. Somehow, unbelievably for the receiving audience of the 19th century, Emma morally assesses Harriet and identifies a crucial flaw in society's objectification of women to develop more rational assessment than Mr. Knightley, a man. Kirkham addresses women's historical objection to their "inferior status as spiritual and moral beings" (4) and argues that "feminist moralists, even in the Age of Reason and Enlightenment were generally rather more aware of the irrationality of human nature and human society than men" (4). Kirkham's assessment of feminist rationality applies to Emma's analysis of Harriet's situation. Although Mr. Knightley's position seems rational at first, Emma's argument introduces a critical feminist idea. The question arises from Emma's argument: as Harriet is a rational woman, albeit of lesser status, why can't she marry whom she wants? Emma outlines the irrationality of society that confines Harriet to a lower class in spite of her praiseworthy virtues, according to Mr. Knightley's societal claims. Austen's feminist genius stems from her delicate portrayal of the seemingly immature, unreasonably selfish Emma as right.

Austen establishes Emma's independence and her defense of Harriet before Emma's marriage to Mr. Knightley at the conclusion of the novel. From this organization, Austen unveils Mr. Knightley's domineering influence on Emma's previous independence. Prior to Emma's marriage, Emma forms her own opinions and frequently challenges Mr. Knightley, but after their marriage, Emma no longer argues with him. Johnson depicts Mr. Knightley's move to Hartfield as a relinquishment of power: "the guarantor of order himself cedes a considerable portion of the power which custom has allowed him to expect. In moving to Hartfield, Knightley is sharing *her* home, and in placing himself within her domain, Knightley gives his blessing to her rule" (143).

By moving to Hartfield, Mr. Knightley gives up more power than Emma does, but from an intellectual lens—the more influential consequence—Emma relinquishes her opinion. Austen describes Emma's reaction to Harriet's union with Robert Martin: "The joy, the gratitude, the exquisite delight of her sensations may be imagined. The sole grievance and alloy thus removed in the prospect of Harriet's welfare, she was really in danger of becoming too happy for security.—What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own" (997). Emma's careful happiness around Mr. Knightley illuminates her lack of emotional freedom and her new attempts to subordinate her views to Mr. Knightley's. She now supports Harriet's marriage to Robert Martin, when previously she did not. Marriage seemingly grants security, but Emma sacrifices her personal opinions to follow Mr. Knightley's judgment. Emma loses her personal desire and only attempts to please her Mr. Knightley, "whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own" (997). Although the materialistic implications of Emma's marriage are important to consider, Austen establishes a woman's intellectual possession as infinitely more important to female independence than material wealth. A historical analysis of women in the early 19th century reveals that education and intellect were a form of freedom unattainable to women in many cases. Kirkham addresses the repercussions of uneducated women in society: "Women had, in orthodox moral discourse, been commonly consigned to a special consideration with slaves, the unlettered and lunatics" (4-5). Holding such a lowly position, women are easy to manipulate and control. Why would society ever condone women's intellectual advancement? Although Austen highlights Emma's intellectual decline from her marriage, she does not blame marriage specifically; rather, an unequal marriage causes Emma's intellectual decline. Mr.

Knightsley controls Emma's intellectual capacity. After her union with Mr. Knightsley, Emma is still mistress of Hartfield, but she is no longer mistress of her own intellectual self.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf argues that women's intellectual freedom depends on their access to wealth and their right to privacy. Austen anticipates Woolf's feminism by depicting Emma's freedom in her privileged life and Charlotte's ability to withdraw to a small, private room at the back of the parsonage in *Pride and Prejudice*. Financial security bolsters Emma's manipulation of others and complete disregard for marriage, and her intellectual freedom before her marriage solidifies her independence. For Woolf, a woman's independence rests on key conditions: "Give her another hundred years, I concluded, . . . and give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak her mind" (98). As mistress of Hartfield, Emma has many rooms of her own and more than enough money to sustain her independence. Before marrying Mr. Knightsley, Emma could speak her mind as well. When Austen creates a marriage for Emma that results in the loss of her intellectual self, Austen places emphasis on women's capacity for unrestricted thought. When Emma marries Mr. Knightsley, she forfeits her intellectual freedom and her love for Mr. Knightsley clouds her previous judgment. Emma begins to think of Mr. Knightsley as her superior, so as she looks to him for moral advice, she no longer speaks her mind.

The marriages in Austen's novels all differ from one another. They include the mismatched Bennets in *Pride and Prejudice* and the well-matched Crofts who serve as a model for Anne in *Persuasion*. In a confining patriarchal society, Austen defines marriage as an opportunity for women but also as a possible liability. This concept is clear from the Ward sisters' alternative circumstances in *Mansfield Park* and Charlotte's economic approach to marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*. Although Charlotte does not marry for love, Elizabeth

recognizes Charlotte's comfortable home when she visits Mr. and Mrs. Collins at Rosings: "It was rather small, but well built and convenient; and every thing was fitted up and arranged with a neatness and consistency of which Elizabeth gave Charlotte all the credit. When Mr. Collins could be forgotten, there was really a great air of comfort throughout, and by Charlotte's evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten" (314). Charlotte's marriage is different from Emma's because she lacks Emma's financial security, but when Charlotte marries Mr. Collins, she creates a room of her own—an achievement that Elizabeth herself recognizes. Although Charlotte has chosen to marry for financial security, she has created for herself a measure of independence that Woolf will go on to recommend a century later. From these marital examples, Austen establishes the significance of marriage beyond love. Women can use marriage as a means of security, but even a marriage based on love, as in Emma's case, does not guarantee a woman's intellectual freedom. Marriage can be a form of liberation but usually becomes a liability in some way to many of Austen's heroines. Elizabeth Bennet alone manages to achieve financial security, marry for love, and maintain her independence.

Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy's marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* is the most genuine example of love and independence in Austen's novels. Austen represents women in literature as people capable of love and affection, more than just objects in a male-driven plot. Virginia Woolf highlights the difference between women's fictional existence according to men and women's actual lives (45). Austen's feminism also addresses this problem and redefines women's fictional existence. Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* maintains Elizabeth's independence as she decides to marry for love. By maintaining Elizabeth's independence and describing Elizabeth's progressive approach to marry for love, Austen redefines women's fictional existence. Male writers create fictional women as objects of

affection, but Austen challenges this perception by creating a heroine who holds her own power and creates a life of autonomy, following her heart.

Woolf describes the contrast between women's existence in literature and their existence in reality. Women are frequently the subject of male writers, and men base their definition of women's fictional existence on how their perceptions of women. Woolf argues that male writers create fictional women of extremes: "Indeed, if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater" (45). Women in fiction are subjective, according to Woolf. Depending on a male writer's interpretation, fictional women are either idealized or vilified in a male-driven plot. Women's contrasting traits in literature highlight their subjective existence in a patriarchal society. Male writers describe women as they perceive them: inferior and existing for the pleasure of the male gaze. Woolf describes the importance of grounding fiction in a believable environment: "for fiction, imaginative work that it is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground, as science may be; fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so slightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners" (43). A patriarchal society labels women as inferior beings and men as powerful rulers. Male writers existing in these societies reflect this patriarchal ideology. Despite the contrasting images of women in literature, women hold a more prevalent role in fiction than in reality. Woolf describes women's dual existence: "A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically, she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she is the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring on her finger" (45). Although women are significant in fiction, reality

presents them with oppression and an ever-existing dependence on men. Even women's fictional existence presents an issue: male writers define them. Woolf addresses women's representation, in fiction and reality, as a factor for women's continued oppression in a patriarchal society.

Woolf identifies women's fictional representation as a critical part of women's existence, and Austen's portrayal of fictional women creates women's capacity for independence, a ludicrous idea for a patriarchal society. Austen's feminism in *Pride and Prejudice* challenges women's fictional existence through Elizabeth Bennet's rejection of Mr. Darcy's first proposal. Austen highlights the class differences between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth when Elizabeth considers Mr. Darcy's proposal from a societal perspective: "In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection, and though her intentions did not vary for an instant, she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive" (332). Determined to marry for love, Elizabeth boldly rejects Mr. Darcy's first proposal, even though by societal standards, he is the ideal husband: wealthy, of high class, and physically attractive. Because of Elizabeth's embarrassing family, she is socially inferior to him, despite her own respectable manners. Her initial rejection of Mr. Darcy's proposal highlights her bold independence as a heroine and her insistence on marrying for love. For Elizabeth, marriage is not based on societal standards of wealth, class and appearance; rather, marriage is based on love. Elizabeth first describes her briefly flattered reaction before she rejects him: "It is natural that obligation should be felt, and if I could *feel* gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot—I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry to have occasioned pain to any one. It has been most unconsciously done" (332). By refusing the most eligible bachelor in the entire novel, Elizabeth Bennet challenges previous depictions of women in literature. For male writers, women are predictable in their evil or

graciousness, but Elizabeth Bennet is not predictable. Her emotional and intellectual capabilities are not as hollow as women previously presented in literature. Elizabeth maintains her desire for love in marriage, despite her approach's unconventionality, and she matures from her previous actions, recognizing her own faults.

After reading Darcy's letter of explanation, Elizabeth reflects on her perception of him; understanding the wrongness of her prejudice against him, she breaks free of ignorance according to Wollstonecraft's feminism. Initially, Elizabeth believes that Darcy wronged Mr. Wickham and maliciously destroyed her sister's happiness: "Had not my own feelings decided against you, had they been indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?" (333). Elizabeth's opinions of Mr. Darcy originate from her view of him as proud and ill-mannered, whereas Wickham's charm has tricked her into trusting him. Elizabeth's views of both Darcy and Wickham support public opinion. Wollstonecraft's feminism describes prejudice as an ideal reinforcement for women's oppression. When women do not question or criticize through their own free will, Wollstonecraft argues that there will be no change: "Behold, I should answer, the natural effect of ignorance! The mind will ever be unstable that has only prejudices to rest on, and the current will run with destructive fury when there are no barriers to break its force" (38). Austen challenges Elizabeth's prejudice when Elizabeth reflects on her previous opinion of Darcy, listens to Darcy's explanation, and reassesses her own actions. Elizabeth recognizes her own faults: "She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. –Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (342). Elizabeth's self-reflection arises from her own sense of morality, not based on society's perception or her family's perception. She is

not governed by an influential authority figure, and her personal sense of morality overcomes her blind prejudice. Austen outlines Elizabeth's independence by the recognition of her faults and Elizabeth's strong sense of self.

Austen highlights Elizabeth's independence by her ability to reflect and understand her own culpability. Wollstonecraft describes prejudice in relation to women's oppression, and she includes both pride and vanity as critical traits that reinforce a patriarchal society. Austen's fictional heroine overcomes prejudice and pride, two symptoms of oppression in Wollstonecraft's feminism. Elizabeth's ability to feel shame absolves her initial sense of pride: "When she came to that part of the letter in which her family were mentioned, in terms of such mortifying, yet merited reproach, her sense of shame was severe. The justice of the charge struck her too forcibly for denial" (Austen 343). Darcy's mention of her inferior status offends Elizabeth's pride, but upon later reflection, she recognizes the justification of Darcy's assessment. Austen frequently presents Elizabeth's shame as a contrast to her selfish pride. Wollstonecraft's feminism highlights pride as a male fault: "What nonsense! When will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject!" (43). Austen bolsters Elizabeth's independence when Elizabeth overcomes her pride, a male fault in Wollstonecraft's feminism. Elizabeth's ability to overcome her sense of prejudice and pride accentuates her drive for female interiority, despite outside influences. Drawing on real problems of women's inferiority, Austen symbolically creates Elizabeth Bennet as an example of how women's ability to improve. Wollstonecraft describes women's desire for an easy life as a hindrance to women's sense of self: "They may try to render their road pleasant; but ought never to forget, in common with man, that life yields not the felicity which can satisfy an immortal soul" (43). For Wollstonecraft, a true feminist act is

understanding one's soul. Society cannot determine female interiority, and a woman's personal sense of morality will overcome societal limitations. As Elizabeth reflects on her prior admiration of Wickham and her prejudice against Mr. Darcy, she focuses most on her morality, and by extension her soul: "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" (343). Austen describes Elizabeth's introspection as a matter of greater importance than either man's reputation. Elizabeth's ability to change, which is Austen's formulation of a dynamic woman in fiction, confronts fictional women's hollowness. Male writers define women in concrete, unchangeable boxes that reflect their own misguided notions of women as objects. Elizabeth strives to discover her sense of self and embraces moral insights that strengthen her soul.

Austen maintains Elizabeth's independence when Elizabeth accepts Mr. Darcy's second proposal, because Elizabeth knows that she loves Darcy and that her previous feelings have dramatically changed. Austen alters women's fictional image by presenting Elizabeth's realistic capacity for love in marriage. In a patriarchal world full of male writers, women's genuine feelings are rarely accessible or acknowledged. Austen, as a woman writer, is able to create fictional women based on real emotions. Woolf describes the solution for women's "monstrous" (46) existence, in literature and reality, as rooted in fact: "But these monsters, however amusing to the imagination, have no existence in fact. What one must do to bring her to life was to think poetically and prosaically at one and the same moment, thus keeping in touch with fact" (46). Women living in a patriarchal society are inferior to men in every aspect of life. By considering themselves superior to women, male writers are unable to interpret women's emotional capacity

and base their view of women on outward appearances. Austen can take Woolf's "monsters" and produce realistic women in fiction, releasing women from the ignorance of male writers.

Although Elizabeth recognizes her prior faults, she never loses her passionate approach to marriage. Austen creates Elizabeth as a dynamic fictional woman, capable of changing based on a personal sense of morality, but Austen also outlines Elizabeth's resilient passion, despite the oppression of a patriarchal world. When Lady Catherine attempts to dissuade Elizabeth from marrying Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth responds: "You have widely mistaken my character, if you think I can be worked on by such persuasions as these. How far your nephew might approve of your interference in *his* affairs, I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject" (427). Lady Catherine cannot hinder Elizabeth's self-respect, and Elizabeth makes clear that Lady Catherine has no right to involve herself in Elizabeth's emotional affairs, despite Lady Catherine's superior class. Ultimately, Austen portrays marriage beyond society's influence. If marriage is one of the only opportunities a patriarchal society offers, women have a right to marry for love. Elizabeth frequently defends her love for Darcy after his proposal, and when her father asks if she likes Darcy, she sincerely answers: "'I do, I do like him,' she replied, with tears in her eyes, 'I love him. Indeed he has no improper pride. He is perfectly amiable. You do not know what he really is; then pray do not pain me by speaking of him in such terms'" (438). Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage is based on love, and she is able to solidify her independence through her personal morals and passionate approach to life. Marriage does not hinder Elizabeth's independence as she recognizes her feelings for Darcy and views marriage as an opportunity for her own romantic happiness.

Pride and Prejudice redefines women in literature. Elizabeth recognizes her own self-worth and prioritizes her personal sense of morality over societal influences. Wollstonecraft outlines pride and prejudice as traits that reinforce an oppressive system, and she highlights women's internal morality as a solution for challenging men's power. Austen's feminism assimilates aspects of Wollstonecraft's argument: Elizabeth recognizes her own faults, both those of pride and prejudice, in an effort to improve and understand herself. Austen challenges the previous representation of fictional women, those that limit women and objectify them in a man's story. Austen creates a fictional woman who is independent and possesses an emotional capacity inaccessible to male writers. Woolf identifies women's representation in literature versus reality as a problematic result of patriarchal society, but Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* releases fictional women from their oppressors, representing real women's capacity for affection and independence.

Conclusion

“[B]ooks have a way of influencing each other. Fiction will be much the better for standing cheek by jowl with poetry and philosophy. Moreover, if you consider any great figure of the past, like Sappho, like the Lady Murasaki, like Emily Brontë, you will find that she is an inheritor as well as an originator, and has come into existence because women have come to have the habit of writing naturally; so that even as a prelude to poetry such activity on your part would be invaluable.”

—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (113)

This thesis explores Jane Austen's novels as a bridge between two centuries of feminist thought: Wollstonecraft's in the 18th century and Woolf's in the 20th. I argue that Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* reveals Austen's possible inspiration for her heroines. Wollstonecraft's view of female interiority as a form of resistance to societal barriers in women's education underlies Austen's realistic portrayal of a patriarchal society. In their shared interpretations of women's confinement, they anticipate Woolf's feminist agenda in *A Room of One's Own*. By understanding Wollstonecraft's feminism as it applies to Austen, I recognize Austen's foundational ideas and can differentiate her unique feminist slant as she creates solutions beyond her time, anticipating Woolf's feminism a whole century later. Glorifying Austen's writing, Woolf considers the generations of invisible women in history and invents Judith Shakespeare as a brilliant sister for her more famous brother. In Woolf's imagination, Judith had no education and no opportunity to thrive in any profession: although she “never wrote a word,” (117) Woolf resurrects her for the 20th century: “She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed” (117). Judith Shakespeare lived in Austen when she faced societal limitations and educational restrictions, yet Austen did write about her life and other middle-class women's lives in the 19th century, creating a new literary world where women can finally reside in history. Austen's internal authority overcomes external forces when she

embraces women's disregarded story, and her reimagining of women and fiction inspires Woolf's feminism in the 20th century. As the bridge to centuries of feminism, Austen's writing garners a historical and literary significance that can never be expressed or analyzed enough: her feminism inspires women even today, in the 21st century, as they write their senior theses and consider brilliant female authors of the past. Perhaps Austen imagines a future society completely different from her own, one in which women are encouraged to write, to adventure, and to seek opportunity—a different civilization where women can sail away from their confinement.

Austen imagines women's capabilities as equal to men's. Mrs. Croft does more than just envision a life of freedom and opportunity in *Persuasion*: she secures her independence when she joins her husband at sea and creates an idealistic life for herself that includes a happy marriage of equals. Mrs. Croft objects to her brother's lack of support when he shows his distaste for women at sea: "I hate to hear of women on board, or to see them on board; and no ship, under my command, shall ever convey a family of ladies any where, if I can help it" (1183). By reporting Captain Wentworth's chivalric opinion, Austen unveils the consequences of society's so-called protection and chivalry's dehumanization of women. Captain Wentworth believes that women would threaten his "command" (1183) if they intruded on masculine spaces. Unable to disregard societal etiquette, Wentworth attempts to secure his authority over women and reinforce their inferiority by protecting them, but Austen challenges this attitude when his sister glorifies her time at sea with her husband. What if, as Mrs. Croft attests, women can reside in a society that deems them capable of protecting themselves?

Austen presents Mrs. Croft as an inspirational female figure—both on land and at sea—when she confronts Wentworth's aggressive stance: "But I hate to hear you talking so, like a

fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days” (1183). Austen describes “a fine gentleman” in this context to criticize the antagonistic ordinances of gentleman-like behavior. Rather than supporting and protecting women, gentleman-like etiquette limits and dehumanizes them, making them inferior to their male counterparts. Mrs. Croft’s argument illuminates women’s pathetic portrayal under men’s proper societal treatment when she emphasizes women as “rational creatures” (1183). The expectation that women only endure “smooth sailing” reveals another patriarchal perspective: women’s confinement as a benevolent action. Mrs. Croft challenges women’s cultivated experience and defends women’s ability to withstand tumultuous situations. If women can endure centuries of the damaging psychological effects of female captivity, they most certainly have the ability to join men at sea.

In analyzing Austen’s scene between Captain Wentworth and his sister, Claudia Johnson centers on Austen’s portrayal of women as landbound: “Landed life is not taken to task simply because it promotes mediocrity or ignorance, but rather because its insularity is psychologically damaging, especially for women” (158). A woman’s domestic, stationary life free from decisions appears “mediocre” (158), as Johnson argues. Male opportunities at sea, by contrast, require decisive thought and constant change with little room for “mediocrity” or “ignorance” (158). These two depictions of women’s landbound traits are strikingly interrelated. How can a woman ascend beyond ignorance without the opportunity to learn? How can a woman achieve more than the mediocre without an educational background that allows her to succeed? By acknowledging the psychological confinement women face and men’s unattainable standards, Johnson assesses the negative implications of Wentworth’s chivalry based on Mrs. Croft’s naval opportunity: “Mrs. Croft appears never to consider robustness and self-confidence an oxymoronic violation of

her feminine nature, and she could bid farewell to the age of chivalry without worrying much about the future of the civilized world” (153). Johnson proposes a critically important aspect of women’s societal expectations during the 19th century: femininity equates to frailty. Considering this lens, Austen’s formulation of confident, determined women defies the patriarchal regulations of what women should be, especially Mrs. Croft’s open attack on societal etiquette. Johnson describes the “civilized” world and insinuates that Admiral Croft’s life at sea is an uncivilized life beyond the patriarchal system, and, by extension, a different life for women. An uncivilized society at sea seems to limit chivalric tendencies and leaves no room for feminine frailty. If civilization causes such detrimental effects for women, an uncivilized life at sea seems a prime opportunity for freedom.

Austen envisions a future society, perhaps similar to the freedom found at sea, that supports Mrs. Croft’s independence and her marriage to Admiral Croft. Future societies could educate women to respect themselves and aspire for relationships that originate in mutual support and happiness, as Anne recognizes in Mrs. Croft’s marriage: “With the exception, perhaps, of Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who seemed particularly attached and happy, (Anne could allow no other exception even among the married couples) there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved” (1180). Despite the difficult circumstances people face every day, a marriage between equals can create a domestic sanctuary rather than another duty or obligation. If marriage were not women’s only opportunity, and if women did not become the property of their husbands but became their equals, marriage could create relationships that offer mutual protection from a turbulent, unpredictable world—a safe harbor to find peace. Austen imagines marriages like Admiral and Mrs. Croft’s, hoping for society’s reinforcement of equality among both sexes and understanding

of shared hardship. When approaching her novels, Austen not only saw the toll incurred by patriarchal society but also imagined the possibilities that both men and women could create for themselves, seeing the world as a potential kaleidoscope of opportunity that overcomes preconceived notions and blurred lenses.

Calling “any great figure of the past an inheritor as well as an originator” (113), Woolf has inspired the title for my thesis. The feminist voice I hear in Austen’s novels allows me to see her work as a bridge between Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792 and Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* in 1929. Woolf praises Austen’s achievement and beseeches women writers to live in the present but also to reimagine the world: “when I ask you to earn money and have a room of your own, I am asking you to live in the presence of reality, an invigorating life, it would appear, whether one can impart it or not” (114). If Mrs. Croft, a secondary character in *Persuasion*, can serve as a model for Anne; if women, who now wield the pen, can vindicate their predecessors’ unrepresented, oppressed lives and emerge undaunted from every storm, perhaps Austen’s vision—along with Wollstonecraft’s and Woolf’s—is finally close at hand.

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